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The RED Revolution from the Perspective of Visual Cultural Studies: A New Chapter in Art, Commerce and Corporate Social Responsibility

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Macalester College

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**Title: The RED Revolution From the Perspective
of Visual Cultural Studies: A New Chapter in Art,
Commerce and Corporate Social Responsibility**

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The RED Revolution from the Perspective of Visual Cultural Studies

A New Chapter in Art, Commerce and Corporate Social
Responsibility

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Abstract

This honors project is a critical examination of Project RED, a corporate campaign designed to heighten the appeal of a set of consumer products to a transnational youth demographic by associating these products with the eradication of HIV/AIDs in Africa. The project seeks to understand Project RED in the context of visual cultural studies in the tradition of the Birmingham School, and also of critical work on the use of culture as a tool for corporate growth. The project rests on a close reading of visual texts, including a HBO documentary and a set of advertisements, that constitute Project RED.

Purpose

This honors project is a critical examination of Project RED, a famous corporate campaign by a set of consumer product firms designed to heighten their appeal to a highly desirable, transnational youth demographic by associating their products with good works, namely the eradication of HIV/AIDs in Africa. This honors project seeks to understand Project RED in the context of critical work on the growth of transnational consumer products firms and their use of culture as a tool for growth. In particular, it argues that Project RED represents a new moment in the development of transnational branding practices, in which the corporation seeks to displace the governmental and nongovernmental institutions that have traditionally controlled charity and human rights work. Key to this new moment is the ability of corporations to deploy sophisticated methods of visual representation that draw on the world of art as well as the world of commerce, specifically advertising. The argument supporting my thesis that sophisticated forms of visual representation are central to the new branding practices represented by Project RED is presented in four sections.

The first section, which immediately follows this introduction, discusses the theoretical and methodological concepts I used to interpret the visual images of Project RED. In section two, the thesis turns to a consideration of the historical and industrial framework within which these images were produced. Section three presents a close reading of the form and content of a documentary and a set of exemplary advertisements that make up the visual repertoire of Project RED. Finally, in section four, this honors project reflects on what the privatization and corporatization of charity, including its use

of sophisticated visual iconography, may portend about the role of popular movements and institutions not only in charity and human rights work, but in democratic governance more generally.

The Theoretical and Methodological Framework

In this thesis, I rely on an academic movement, known broadly as British Cultural Studies, that views culture, including visual culture, as a product of socially embedded human creative practices. Pioneered by British artists and social theorists, especially Stuart Hall and his students at the Birmingham School, this academic movement refuses the tendency of more traditional art and social criticism to see creativity as the product of individual genius, and therefore apolitical and autonomous. It assumes that all representation is socially and politically significant, even when it pretends that it is not. Two of the most prolific areas of academic work in this tradition have been in studies of disease and of visual culture, and because both of these areas are central to my project, this section presents a review of relevant studies in these areas that fit with the British Cultural Studies tradition.

Arguments that focus on diseases as not only physical and biological, but also cultural and political phenomenon, in other words, arguments that fit within the framework of British Cultural Studies, are widely accepted by scholars across the disciplines these days. Humanists, social scientists, and physical scientists agree that the framing of a physical phenomenon as “pathological” is fundamental to our notion of “disease.” This argument has been made in relation to diseases ranging from cancer to HIV/AIDS. My study of media representations of HIV/AIDS begins with a review of

scholarly and other intellectual arguments about the culturally and socially constructed nature of that disease.¹

I especially draw on *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*² to frame the main arguments of my project, described in the section above, about how the media represent HIV/AIDS through the advertising campaign for Project RED. This book of essays by literary theorists Paula Treichler is framed by the idea that AIDS is cultural and linguistic as well as biological and biomedical. This assertion comes from one of her underlying arguments that even during its initial appearance, AIDS was operating in a pre-existing cultural setting with set social and political agendas that relied on tropes of sexual oppression and white racial superiority.

Language is the primary way we communicate. It allows us to make sense of the world, including the physical and biological world, despite claims that the physical world is fundamentally "objective" and immune to human meaning-making activities.³ For example, during the initial appearance of AIDS, there was a lot of confusion among physical and biological scientists about what exactly the epidemic was and how the virus had entered the human population. In this climate of scientific confusion, preexisting notions about homosexual inferiority led the way to homophobic medical language. The

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The literature about the social construction of disease is vast, and is especially prolific on the question of cancer and HIV/AIDS. See, e.g., Jackie Stacey. *Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer* (International Library of Sociology), 1997.

² Treichler, Paula A. *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of Aids*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. Print

³ Donna Haraway, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, makes one of the most widely cited arguments in support of this position.

Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.

term GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency) was initially used by some to describe the disease,⁴ and even as scientists began to understand the complexities of the AIDS virus, medical terminology still sometimes framed the emerging research through a homophobic lens.⁵

In fact, as Treichler demonstrates, the virus went through a long signification process as scientists tried to name it in a way that accurately stated what it was. The naming process became especially contested as scientists from around the world joined the effort to investigate the epidemic. Initially due to lack of information, the virus had several names signifying different aspects of the disease. As evidence for the virus became more concrete, there were fewer names. The frantic search for the correct set of signifiers led to questions about what was actually being signified. Examining AIDS as a linguistic construction exposes the ways this cultural process works.⁶

Much of what we witness through the early part of the AIDS epidemic is the illusion of scientific control as the biological community projected the idea that they understood the virus. This applies not only to the clinical side but also to the national narrative about what it means to be "normal." Treichler examines physician Robert E. Gould's article in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which illustrated the general understanding that healthy "normal" women could not contract the virus. According to him, a normal healthy woman has a "well-lubricated vagina"⁷ in which "penetration is not rough and

⁴ Treichler 27

⁵ In New York Hospitals, the disease was informally called Wrath of God Syndrome Treichler 27

⁶ Treichler 26-31

⁷ Treichler 236

does not cause lacerations,” and also asserts that “the genitals of both partners are healthy and intact.”⁸

These processes of normalizing what is a fundamentally heterosexual discourse on gender in the HIV epidemic, one that focuses on such things as vaginal penetration, were present not only in the popular platforms such as *Cosmopolitan*, but also in scientific and medical journals. John Langone, in an article in *Discover*, argued the virus could not penetrate the “rugged vagina” but a “fragile urethra” and a “vulnerable anus” were more susceptible to transmission.⁹ In the *Journal of the American Medical Association*¹⁰ female-to-male transmission among German prostitutes was represented a “quasi-homosexual” transmission in which men were infected by contaminated semen.¹¹ In both the popular and medical literature, there seems to have been no recognition of the way gender operates outside the male-female binary. Yet issues of biological fluidity in gender as well as sexuality are meaningful in determining transmission and treatment.

The construction of identities in relation to the epidemic played a significant role in who was omitted or included in the popular narratives as well as in the clinical discourses. Pre-existing narratives and identities that focused on “women” and “men” as the main actors in the epidemic significantly limited the subject positions, narratives and identities that observers could deploy in their explanations. Furthermore, even the gender

⁸ Treichler 239

⁹ Treichler 17

¹⁰ Redfield, RR, PD Markham, SZ Salahuddin, DC Wright, MG Sarngadharan, and RC Gallo. “Heterosexually Acquired Htlv-Iii/lav Disease (aids-Related Complex and Aids). Epidemiologic Evidence for Female-to-Male Transmission.” *Jama : the Journal of the American Medical Association*. 254.15 (1985): 2094-6. Print. <accessed from Treichler>

¹¹ Treichler 23

binaries that the initial observers used were organized in a hierarchy within which men occupied the central positions. Sometimes women were not even present as statistical identities, even when they were clearly part of the larger story. For example, they were at times categorized as "other" or "undetermined," categories that do not translate to recognizable identities. Even when they were not "others" and "undetermined," women were frequently identified by their occupations or relationships. The lack of female subjects as autonomous beings in these surveys meant that women who read these studies may not have been aware of themselves as a group at risk. Unlike their male counterparts, who were surveyed and who also received check ups, many women only considered the possibility that they were subject to AIDS transmission once they already had it.¹²

These heteronormative discourses were especially striking in representations of HIV/AIDs in the West. By contrast, articles about HIV/AIDS outside the United States tended to focus on women, albeit as victims rather than perpetrators. Women's powerlessness, the result of oppression, became the cause of the spread of AIDS.¹³ In the popular culture and in the medical field, women of color inside, especially those in the Global South, were exoticized and infantilized, specifically in relation to representations of white subjects in the West. These women were stripped of their agency and treated as sexual "others." Much of the research initially could not explain why a larger heterosexual community in the Global South was affected by the epidemic than in the

¹² Treichler 257

¹³ Treichler 225

US. Injecting colonial rhetoric of superiority and unusual sexual behavior into the discourse helped explain these discrepancies.

The media played a major role in sustaining these fantasies because of its ability to produce representations of AIDS in the Global South and sustain their acceptance as true. In the 90s several news outlets circulated an image that became iconic, of an Ugandan woman with the HIV/AIDS virus sitting with her child in her arms. Those represented as not at risk were within the (white) heterosexual community. Thus, Whiteness came to signify, at least in representations of the epidemic in the Global South, normality, and especially health. Both in the medical and popular arenas, the default, uninfected images of people in representations of the AIDS/HIV epidemic excluded people of color, poor people, people using drugs, and people outside the United States.

Treichler urges her readers to think of the difficulties seeing beyond the existing discourse about HIV/AIDS. Thus the question that stands as the title of her book: what is the role of theory in an epidemic? While discussing media, Treichler uses Foucault's term "regime of truth," which describes the circular relationship between truth and power, to explicate the structure and importance of AIDS/HIV discourse. In the case of HIV/AIDS, she writes, truth is power. Theory or the process of intellectualizing the epidemic is important, she argues, because it allows one to understand not what is truth but what are the pre-existing ideologies that help structure, sustain and reflect constructed ideas of truth. Cultural theory illuminates the crevasses that have an incredible impact in biomedical as well as cultural understanding.

African American Community

The cultural studies paradigm has also been very important in thinking about the AIDS/HIV epidemic in the West, especially among racially and sexually marginalized populations. While the epidemic was initially framed within a deeply homophobic discourse, many communities of color -- heterosexual as well as homosexual -- were absent from a legitimate conversation about HIV/AIDS at the beginning. This was due to preexisting economic and political agendas as well as politics of representation during this time. Cathy Cohen's cultural and political analysis of the epidemic within the African American community in *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*,¹⁴ is important because it raises these issues of what the epidemic meant in racially marginalized communities. She argues that the power dynamics within the black community did not allow at first for open discussion of the epidemic. Lack of knowledge greatly affected communication and dissemination of information, just as it did the larger American society. Furthermore, it was gay and lesbian publications that were most active in covering the epidemic, and these publications were all but invisible as sources of information in the Black community. At the same time, major black publications such as *Essence*, *Jet* and *Ebony* did not cater to the largest Black demographics facing the disease, which included poor women, gays, lesbians and injecting drug users.¹⁵

It is also important, according to Cohen, to acknowledge that Black investment in group identity and group representation limited reaction to the epidemic. Structures of

¹⁴ Cohen, Cathy J. *The Boundaries of Blackness: Aids and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Print.

¹⁵ Cohen 248

power around patriarchy, class, gender, and sexuality affect identity and group representation within the black community. To many, middle class heterosexual men are representatives of the community and markers of progress. Often their challenges are at the center of mainstream black political agenda. Consequently, gendered systems of oppression that confront young black women are not discussed by community members or the general public but are instead examined by scholars because these issues are not understood as part of the public struggle for survival in the way that black male struggles are. People who have power to make policy thus emphasize the issues that enhance the group's images while controlling and making other issues invisible.¹⁶ Among the issues that were initially rendered invisible was the fact that Black women were disproportionately affected by the virus, and even when statistics began to suggest that AIDS was affecting a significant population of color, there was still no activism by the black community. Images in the general media of white people as AIDS victims contributed to the slow reaction, implying that AIDS was not a concern at the community, state or national level.

To illuminate why the discussion of AIDS/HIV in the Black community was initially so constricted, Cohen explores the tension within the black church between community service and theology. Initially, as in the larger society, AIDS was associated with homosexuality and drug addiction, making it more difficult to discuss, especially given the importance in the Black community of patriarchal and heteronormative religious doctrines. The church's involvement improved once people who were seen as

¹⁶ Cohen 27

passive in the transmission -- such as women, children and hemophiliacs -- became ill, but there was still little desire overall to transform people's consciousness in regards to AIDS and expansive definitions of sex that included homosexuality. The Black church, along with many other institutions, is part of the process within which distribution of power within society are normalized. At the same time, inclusion is an important part of church politics, and this includes church members with multiple identities. This ethic of inclusion produces some forms of address by the church to lesbian and gay populations, but even in the presence of church members with multiple identities, gay and lesbian people as well as those infected by AIDS had to negotiate the terms of their presence to conform to a conservative ideological space. Pastors preached against "sinful behaviors," while combating the presence of AIDS in the community with various gay and lesbian organizations, but there was little desire to transform people's underlying consciousness in regards to AIDS or homosexuality. Cohen examines the African American community as a marginal group that continues to suffer from imposed segregation, isolation and exclusion, which limits its tendency to be bold when it comes to acknowledging alternative sexualities.¹⁷ She writes, "to discuss AIDS in black communities is to discuss a multiplicity of identities, definitions of membership, locations of power, and strategies for political, social and economic survival of the community,"¹⁸ factors that affect the spread of the disease and are heightened during this time of crisis.

¹⁷ Cohen 40

¹⁸ Cohen 8

The Global South

A set of studies more recent than Cohen's and Treichler's extend their insights about the importance of cultural studies when it comes to understanding representations of HIV/AIDS to situations in the Global South. As with other marginalized communities in the United States and the larger Western World, until recently there had been little work grounded in cultural studies about the ways the epidemic affected the peoples of Africa. The Fourth Wave online forum published by UNESCO and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) fills some of this void, by examining cultural and social aspects of the epidemic outside of the West. UNESCO and SSRS are interested in developmental issues; thus, many of the authors explore questions about economics, gender and socialization in the Global South in order to understand the culture of response and intervention.

Hakan Seckinelgin's chapter "Colonial Silences, Gender and Sexuality: Unpacking International HIV and AIDS Policy Culture," analyzes the ways in which international HIV/AIDS relief policy reinscribes dominant norms of gender and sexuality.¹⁹ By looking at the ways international policy culture frames the conversation about AIDS, Seckinelgin concludes that this conversation silences issues of sexuality and pleasure by prioritizing reproductive health and framing sex in gendered technical/biomedical terms.

¹⁹ Seckinelgin, Hakan. *Colonial Silences, Gender and Sexuality: Unpacking International Hiv and Aids Policy Culture*. UNESCO, 2009. Archival material.

The emphasis on reproductive health marginalizes forms of sexual activity that do not lead to procreation, reproducing patterns that increase vulnerability of non target groups (sexual activity outside the normative family structure). She claims that the response to mother-to-child- transmissions has certain colonial undertones due to its categorization of women's bodies as reproductive vessels. AIDS/HIV resources are also often tied to predetermined identities such as faith, gender or sexuality. The international community is thereby denied the opportunity to think about other cultural factors and formations that enable AIDS/HIV transmission, including pleasure, violence against women, and local social and cultural attitudes.

In South Africa, although women are less politically empowered in terms of representation in government, they are more likely to access HAART (highly active antiretroviral treatment) resources than men. One argument of the SRCC collection is that "The main reason for the underrepresentation of men in HAART programmes is that constructions of masculinity militate against accessing care for all illnesses."

Nicoli Nattrass in "AIDS, Gender and Access to Antiretroviral Treatment in South Africa," states that cultural specific societal norms encourage certain types of masculine behavior that increase the society's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.²⁰ In South Africa, sex is closely tied to manhood and multiple partners are tied to masculinity. Numerous sexual partners are a product of low socioeconomic status reinforced by the need for men to migrate to work areas far from their families. In Malawi, social

²⁰ Nattrass N. *AIDS, Gender and Access to Antiretroviral Treatment in South Africa*. UNESCO, 2009. Archival material.

responsibility tied to a polygamous lifestyle is seen as part of economic mobility. These norms affect the effectiveness of HAART and other aid relief programs.

For men, pursuing medical help is seen as feminine, which is tied to weakness, making it more difficult for men to seek HAART resources. Relief policy assists this trend by providing gender specific (especially reproductive) services. These programs should recognize that societal norms affect the way medical help is sought. It is important to analyze and address insecurities tied to African livelihoods (medical, climate, economic, infrastructural etc), in order to create relevant programs and effective policy. Kelly Hallman²¹ explores the ways community facilitate sexual encounters and finds, through her work in South Africa, that young men and women who participate in sports and religious groups were far less likely to be involved in non-consensual sex. Women were more likely to use condoms and both genders were less likely to have multiple sexual partners.

Marriage culture in Uganda is examined in "Sleeping With My Dead Husband's Brother!: The Impact of HIV AIDS on Widowhood and Widow Inheritance in Kampala, Uganda."²² Norms around widows and their support is disrupted when a spouse passes due to AIDS. Widows are alienated and the disease is projected onto their bodies by

²¹Hallman, Kelly. *Social Exclusion: The Gendering of Adolescent HIV Risk in South Africa*. UNESCO, 2009. Archival material.

²²Nyanzi, Stella. *Sleeping With My Dead Husband's Brother!: The Impact of HIV AIDS on Widowhood and Widow Inheritance in Kampala, Uganda*. UNESCO, 2009. Archival material.

fellow community members. Robert Lorway²³ in Namibia explores homosexuality in that nation and the role that Western ideas of identity affect conversations around sexuality there. His ethnographic research reveals the ways that feminine males who pursue violent male sexual partners complicate (Western) mainstream ideas about sexuality and gender. Their interactions are complicated by local gender and power inequalities as well as class, since most feminine men pursue successful men. Issues of AIDS and who is vulnerable to contract the disease are often gendered as in the idea stated by some fems in the study that men feel “safer” having sex with other men in that they don’t have to worry about children or contracting HIV. Perceptions about gender are challenged throughout the SRCC forum. For example, Cynthia Buckley’s²⁴ work challenges perceptions about migrating men who contract HIV in the workplace and pass it to their wives by acknowledging the role migrant wives and children play in HIV exposure.

Intellectual work that fits into the cultural studies tradition continues to be produced about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, even as many suggests that science is about to conquer the epidemic. For example, *Tinderbox: How the West Sparked the AIDS Epidemic and How the World Can Finally Overcome It* is a narrative of the virus by journalist Craig Timberg and AIDS researcher Daniel Halperin. The book details the history of the virus, the spread of the virus and how international aid organizations overlooked simple solutions that could cap the spread of the virus. In an interview on

²³ Lorway, Robert. *Beyond the New Geography of Dissident Gender-Sexual Identity Categories: Masculinities, Homosexualities and Intimate Partner Violence in Namibia* Nyanzi, Stella. UNESCO, 2009. Archival material.

²⁴ Buckley, Cynthia. *HIV, Male Labor Migration and Female Risk Environments in the Southern Caucasus* UNESCO, 2009. Archival material.

"Fresh Air" on NPR, Timberg explains the origins of the virus and each specific strain of the virus, which can now be determined using computer algorithms, due to technological advances in math and science.²⁵

They argue that humans came into contact with the virus when a man was butchering a chimpanzee, and that it spread due to colonialism. The virus spread, they say, when Germans went to villages in the German territory of Cameroon and forced the villagers to perform labor, leading to unprecedented mobility throughout the territory. From there, the virus spread to the Belgium territory of Congo, where the presence of factories and railways was accompanied by a rise in labor migration and prostitution. Thus, the transmission of the HIV virus, according to this account, is organically tied to European colonialism.

It was also at the height of European colonialism that colonial doctors began to track various sexually transmitted diseases that spread as a result of colonial economics, trade and new modes of transportation. In the 1960s, when the Congo became independent, the nation went through an economic crisis. At that point, Haitians were flown to the Congo by the United Nations to be used as French speaking ambassadors to the local population, and AIDS and the virus was then transported to the US and later to the rest of Europe by means of these Haitian interlocutors. Timberg states that the virus at that point disproportionately affected hemophiliacs, Haitians, drug users and the homosexual community. Since the disease was initially seen as a gay American disease

²⁵ Dave Davies and Craig Timberg. "Tinderbox: How The West Fueled The AIDS Epidemic" Fresh Air, February 27, 2012. *NPR*. Accessed 28 February 2012

<<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/27/147491878/tinderbox-how-the-west-fueled-the-aids-epidemic>>

and was not frequently seen or acknowledged in the general population. Timberg states he and others came to believe that AIDS was uncommon in the American heterosexual community. Thus, it was shocking when statistics on Africa showed that heterosexual community there was very vulnerable to the disease. Nevertheless, the normative assumption was that AIDS was a homosexual disease, and that Africa and Haiti as geographic spaces were exceptions to the general rule.²⁶

Tinderbox also addresses the political, social and cultural processes through which the virus was otherized within nations, continents and transcontinentally. Many African leaders such as Mobutu, the dictator of Zaire (now Congo), denied that the virus was from Africa. Indeed, he denied the very existence of the epidemic, even when the evidence of its presence was right before his eyes. However, in other countries, such as Uganda, there was a push to change sexual practices as a way to curb the spread of the virus. For example, President Yoweri Museveni ran a public campaign to discourage multiple sex partners within the Ugandan population. But even with these efforts to deal fully with the epidemic were limited because international aid policies and messages restricted conversations on HIV, choosing to embrace the Western tactics of focusing on condoms and testing rather than safer sexual conduct. Furthermore, these initiatives took away agency from the countries that wanted to fight the epidemic, as they now had less control over the content and methodology of their efforts.

²⁶ Dave Davies and Craig Timberg. "Tinderbox: How The West Fueled The AIDS Epidemic" Fresh Air, February 27, 2012. *NPR*. Accessed 28 February 2012

Lisa Ann Richey is one of many scholars who has used a Cultural Studies approach to discuss the ways in which the RED campaign constructs gendered and racialized images of AIDS in Africa that do not challenge preexisting notions about the subject.²⁷ The RED campaign, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, is a corporate project to raise money for AIDS/HIV prevention and treatment in Africa. This thesis will examine that project in much more detail in section 4, but for the moment, it is important to point out the way the SRRC group and others in the larger policy and academic community have framed the project. Richey, for example, is concerned about the way The RED project constructs a donor-recipient relationship between corporations and consumers, on the one hand, and AIDS/HIV victims on the other, that allows contributors to participate in “saving lives.” But, Richey says, this transaction is secured by making ARVs the only form of sanctioned treatment. By framing HIV/AIDS and ARVs as independent from social, economic and other factors that affect the recipients conditions, the RED strategy precludes other forms of interventions that do not fall within the model followed by Project RED, such as the inclusion of women in policy making, or those that acknowledge forms of treatment that go beyond ARVs. Richey is also interested in what she calls the “familiar globality” of RED, as illustrated in its Vanity Fair issue. She argues that this “familial globality” works to destabilize who is African through genetic mapping, which traces everyone back to their “African roots.”²⁸ The sense of community

²⁷ Richey, Lisa A. *Representations of African Women and AIDS in Bono's RED*. UNESCO, 2009. Archival material.

²⁸ Richey 7-9

created by this genetic mapping may bring the consumer "closer" to the cause by helping them create a sense of agency, but it takes away the recipients' subjectivities.

In its close examination of RED's visual images, this honor's project echoes some of the conclusions reached by the cultural theorists who contributed to the SRRC volume. In particular, this project agrees with those who contributed to the SRRC in seeing Project RED as part of "colonialist narrative of modernity" that focuses on the idle rich aiding the sick Africa. This brand identity leads the RED Project to focus on a few distinct "before" and "after" images of RED's African recipients. In particular, the project privileges the "Lazarus Effect," in which African subjects are literally risen from the dead. These circulated images construct a heteronormative Western life for those recovering from AIDS. In the "after" images, the imagined closures do not account for the ways in which real life social norms and economic situations and in fact Western-African relations fracture the happily-ever-after aura of the Lazarus narrative. In major advertising campaigns, these few representations of AIDS victims saved from the deathbed are replaced by more familiar faces such as "blackface" Kate Moss on the cover of the Independent. Other models in the campaign are posed as Western stand-ins for the nearly dead Africans. Richey suggests that RED allows the private sector to mediate much of the public/mainstream conversation about AIDS in ways that suppress the voices of African subjects, hence a critical examination of RED is crucial.

This is especially true because the major actors in the corporate project have been given to very shallow and facile statements about the meaning of Africa. "Africa is sexy," Bono stated, "and people need to know that." In an effort to bring sex appeal to

Africa, the campaign deploys subtle yet significant racial and gender tropes. RED uses sex appeal constructed through ad campaigns to attract consumers to participate in AIDS relief. Richey notes this is somewhat problematic, especially when one considers the project's effort to sexualize RED and the relationship between the problem of exchanging sexual services for consumer goods within the context of African societies.

In addition to the cultural studies of HIV/AIDS reviewed above, this honor's project is also grounded in a body of literature that looks at the way consumer capitalist systems, such as the one that exist in the United States, have deployed culture to build identities as charitable actors concerned about such things as AIDS. Before turning to a consideration of the literature about the industrial and economic context within which Project RED can be understood, this thesis will first present a brief note on the methods it uses to do a close reading of RED Advertising.

A Brief Note on Methods

As an interdisciplinary field, British Cultural Studies relies on a variety of methods culled from the humanities and the social sciences, including focus groups, surveys and other kinds of field studies to gather information on producers and audiences, and textual analyses that rely on semiotics, discourse analysis, formal analysis of visual images, and aesthetic analysis to gather information on media texts. This honor's project relies heavily on semiotics, discourse analysis, and formal analysis of visual images, in line with two of the most important studies of advertising in the British Cultural Studies tradition. These studies include Judith Williamson's much cited semiotic analysis of print advertising, *Decoding Advertising*.

Williamson's work draws on a long tradition of semiotic analysis in linguistics and literary studies to provide a way of thinking about the sign systems -- visual, verbal and meta-structural -- that create meaning in print advertisements. These sign systems include such things as colors, shapes and captions. She defines a sign as a thing + meaning (or a combination of signifier + signified). She deploys the idea of metastructure to identify the ways in which advertisements can signify different things for producers and audiences. She points to the importance of consumers' referent system as the source from which producers try to appropriate their images so that the advertisements will have maximum sign value.

The second text this thesis relied on for methodological guidance was Goldman and Papson's *Sign Wars: Advertising in the Age of Accelerated Meaning*,²⁹ which built upon Williamson's work by providing a visual vocabulary for understanding advertising. They note that ads have become more stylized and visually arresting as the media became more and more dominated by television and other media that rely on moving images, but that they are also more subject to ambiguity. This thesis returns to these terms in Section 3, which contains a close reading of RED's print advertising and its long-form video branding vehicle, *The Lazarus Effect*. First, however, the thesis reviews literature about the cultural and industrial systems within which the RED Project has been produced.

²⁹ Goldman, Robert, and Stephen Papson. *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising*. New York: Guilford Press, 1996. Print.

A Industrial and Cultural Framework for Understanding Project RED

Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times is a collection of scholarly work examining the link between consumer culture and activism.³⁰ In the introduction, editors Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser claim that social activism is an integral part of consumerism in contemporary American culture. Social activism is a marketable commodity utilized by celebrities such as Bono and Angelina Jolie, brands such as Gap and Toyota Prius, and corporations such as American Express and Microsoft. The introduction to the book lays out a general history of the rise of commodity activism as a method to challenge, support and re-imagine the political and social dynamics of corporate and anti-corporate power.³¹

Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser argue that consumerism and a fair, equal market are an important part of citizenship, particular in a period when consumption has supplanted production as the central way that the masses of people connect to the capitalist system. Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser argue that in this period, the struggles of marginalized peoples, such as immigrants or African Americans, lay in the promise of collective consumer ability to effect changes in the market as a way to deliver social acceptance and democratic rights.³² In neoliberal times, culture plays a crucial role in consumer-driven economic systems as well as in the social and individual spheres. Conventional notions of culture as an autonomous sphere of meaning making have been abandoned as it continues

³⁰ Mukherjee, Roopali, and Sarah Banet-Weiser. *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*. New York: New York University Press, 2012. Print.

³¹ Banet-Weiser 3

³² Banet-Weiser 7

to become more integrated into social, political and economic life. These evolving notions of culture affect the role of business as well as the role of the state. Individual rights are mediated by the consumer market and by trade rather than through the state. Although this challenges economist Milton Friedman's classic, hegemonic logic of older systems of capitalism,³³ the bottom line for business is the current period is that increasing revenue requires some control over consumer desire, and cause related marketing is a very important way to control consumer desire. Thus, corporate efforts to align a brand with social justice are done in order to make more money under this scenario, not for purely altruistic purposes. Consumer activism blurs the line between "doing good" and "being good," between consumer and producer, and between consumption and donation. It is also important to remember that this regime of consumer capitalism is not eternal or fixed, but has evolved from a system dominated by production to one dominated by consumption over the course of a century marked by transnational business growth and increased intervention by businesses in politics and culture.

Since at least the turn of the 20th Century, the leaders of multinational corporations have viewed the world as one unit capable of integrated production. In their book *Global Reach*, Richard Barnet and Ronald Muller³⁴ investigate the increasing power of the multinational corporations in the period after World War II, a period when corporations experienced unprecedented transnational expansion. However, the tendency

³³ Friedman, Milton "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits" *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1970.

³⁴ Barnet, Richard J, and Ronald. Miller. *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. Print.

toward this expansion across borders has been present since the turn of the 20th century. Indeed, since that time, the increasingly autonomous and transnational nature of corporations has made them very similar to, if not more powerful than, nation states. It is now well known, through both case studies and empirical analyses, that corporations have become powerful enough to dominate governments and their economies. Furthermore, the entire system is woven together by a transnational money market that allows banks and corporations to have a significant influence on the value of national currencies.

At the level of production, advancements in technology have allowed for greater centralization, while at the same time the work itself has been dispersed across the globe to take advantage of low wage labor sites. Thus, this period has witnessed the rise of a global factory system, largely unregulated by nation states and free of the potentially countervailing power of a global labor movement. Corporations can now produce or have products produced abroad much more cheaply than before, with a predictably deleterious impact on workers' standards of living. In such a world, where corporations came to power outside of popular democratic institutions, corporations have understandably tried to create mechanism of their own to legitimize themselves in the eyes of local, national and global influentials. On the policy side, corporations began to work with other institutions to produce a discourse of fear, in which anti-corporate policies, rather than the corporations themselves, were depicted as the things that lowered standards of living. Thus, the austerity programs often imposed on the Global South by the International Monetary Fund came to be seen as progressive policies, and resistance to those programs

was represented as backward and reactionary. The vision of transnational corporations and not governments or local institutions as the source of progress made corporations central to global wealth, and not just the wealth of particular nations. Indeed, in many ways, corporations tried to produce a discourse in which the nation state could be seen as obsolete. For example, they took over many functions that had traditionally been carried out by public entities, especially nation states, such as infrastructure construction and regulation, schooling and charity. Especially in the period after the Vietnam War, corporations tried to take a leading role in providing charity and infrastructure to the Global South. In addition, the rise of this globally integrated system was accompanied by an explosion in consumption as the basis for corporate power.³⁵ Many critics, such as John Kenneth Galbraith³⁶, began to warn that this new regime, with its dependence on the manipulations of advertising and its production of consumer waste, had many downsides, despite the seeming affluence it brought to the middle-class in the West.

Of course, these moves did not go unchallenged. Corporate growth across national boundaries, and particularly the corporate penetration of the Global South, produced many critics who argued that corporate activities, especially charity and public works, actually destroyed local economies, lowered local living standards, and produced dependency rather than development. One of the most recent such critics, Naomi Klein, is especially noteworthy because she is young, and her critique of corporate transnationalism begins not at the end of World War II, as Global Reach did, but in the

³⁵ Barnett and Muller 124-131

³⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 1958

aftermath of the rise of the global financial institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, that enabled corporatization during the 1980s. Her books, *No Logo*³⁷ and *Shock Doctrine*³⁸ are also departures from earlier critical work in another sense, namely they focus not just on politics and economics, but also on culture. Specifically, Klein focuses on the way corporations have deployed cultural institutions, especially advertising and branding, to advance their project of economic domination at home and abroad. Klein details the process and evolution of what is called lifestyle branding, a process that has been central to transnational corporate growth. This process works by making brands into cultural icons that represent a way of being in the world, rather than a product. In this system, the brand itself becomes the commodity that defines the consumer. For example, consumers become “Apple people” or “Nike guys,” rather than mere consumers of computers and tennis shoes. The rise of branding as a cultural practice has ramped up the importance of aggressive marketing strategies, channeling more and more money into advertising agencies and other cultural institutions. Ironically, the increased visibility that branding brings to corporations has also meant more and more privatization and therefore, less genuinely “public,” non-commercial space.³⁹

Naomi Klein locates the growing importance of branding in the flexibility of production across national lines, otherwise known as “outsourcing.” When products began to be assembled, produced, and created abroad, or across national boundaries,

³⁷ Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. New York: Picador, 2000. Print.

³⁸ Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007. Print.

³⁹ Klein *No Logo* 182

corporations needed to find a way to bracket the public's general fear regarding this outsourcing. Thus, the main focus of corporation advertising became branding. Although branding began as a way to normalize flexible production, or production overseas, it soon began to serve another purpose.⁴⁰

In *No Logo*, Klein looks at the ways that the idea of branding transformed a simple representation of a product (visual representations that ameliorated people's concerns regarding the anonymity of packaged goods), to the packaging of ideas. In the 80's brands were created with particular identities and emotional ties. Quickly, they became the primary mode creating corporate identities. Brands and the visions packaged in the brands gained more worth than actual products, and the monetary value of a brand (e.g., Nike) became worth more than the product (the shoe). This is the ultimate purpose that branding serves. Brands that are well established are able to evoke a feeling, concept, or value in consumers. They help to produce a myth that captures the imagination of many, according to *Global Reach*'s Richard Barnet. Brands and corporate marketing soak up cultural identities and reflect them back (such as when Apple in the early nineties used images of MLK and Ghandi). Effective branding makes consumers associate their goals and sense of self with a brand; thus, they buy the brand rather than the product.

Successful branding mass produces a myth, idea, or goal that captivates the minds of many. The culture's identification with and relation to the brand adds value to the brand.

In *Shock Doctrine*, Klein shifts her attention away from cultural institutions and back to the political nature of multinational capitalism, but she doesn't leave culture

⁴⁰ Klein *No Logo* 4

altogether. In this book, she introduces what has now become a very influential framework for looking at the mechanisms that corporations use to grow transnationally and dominate the public spheres, both at home and abroad. This is the notion of the Shock Doctrine, in which corporations, with the cooperation of governments, use disasters as key moments to grow transnationally, and also to privatize public services and public space. By moving to disassemble the public sphere during a tragedy, disaster capitalism deflects public attention away from realizing what these corporate policies are and what their real effects will be on societies. Klein uses 911, the invasion of Iraq, the aftermath of Katrina and South America's various regime changes to illustrate her point.

While Klein's work is much cited by anti-corporate forces today, it is important to understand that corporations also use today (and have always used) other methods that seem more benign to secure domination, including charity and the other key institutions of a socially responsible societies. In *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State*,⁴¹ historian and left journalist James Weinstein tracked the ways in which banks and businesses used liberal ideology to maintain and reinforce social hierarchy by giving limited support to the needy and limited support to workers rights. He called this practice of corporate social welfare "Corporate liberalism." Corporate liberalism has been especially effective, according to Weinstein, because it has enabled corporations to accommodate and eventually neutralize their political opponent, who most frequently

⁴¹ Weinstein, James. *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968. Print.

chose to abandon calls for radical change in favor of accepting corporate charity and aid.⁴²

Thus, corporate sponsored organizations such as the National Civic Federation thrived by intervening in and shaping a limited welfare state designed to mitigate the worst excesses of capitalism without changing the system in fundamental ways. He demonstrates how policies during the Progressive Era under the liberal government were greatly influenced by the most powerful businessmen at that time. Corporations came to be understood as vital parts of society, and the collaboration between big business and the government became even more evident as the Taft Administration asked the NCF to draft bills. The work of Weinstein and others demonstrates that corporate support for social welfare initiatives, the kind of support reflected in RED, go back a long way, to at least the turn of the 20th Century, and that they do not necessarily mean that corporations are a progressive force.

Accordingly, Weinstein and others argue that corporate support for social welfare initiatives, the kind of support reflected in RED, does not necessarily mean that Corporations are progressive. Neoliberalism as described by David Harvey and others, is a more recent articulation of these ideas about corporate liberalism that Weinstein articulated regarding the industrial era. Neoliberalism is based on a political and economic theory that privileges privatization and individual freedom for both citizens and businesses, with as little government intervention as possible,⁴³ unless, of course, the

⁴² Weinstein 47

⁴³ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neo-liberalism*

intervention benefits business. On the surface, neo-liberalism seems to contradict the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In particular, CSR in some ways mirrors the kind of charity that corporations championed in the industrial era. The Neo-liberal critique of State action, along with the rise of corporate power, helped legitimize multilateral, multinational, corporate financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the Global Fund, both of which embedded anti-social, individualistic Neo-liberal practices into their lending policies. The influence of Neo-liberalism spread as nations not directly involved with global financial institutions fell under the power of economists trained by Milton Friedman, who exported Chicago School economics to the Global South. From the viewpoint of critics like Harvey, Neoliberalism is intensely anti-social and individualistic, and can be seen as a form of Neo-colonialism, a formation that Nkrumah once denounced as the last stage of imperialism.⁴⁴ In fact, this intensely critical perspective gave rise to a vigorous transnational social movement, as expressed in events like the Battle in Seattle, the famous mass demonstration that occurred during the 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle. Within this body of criticism, RED can be seen as a cultural development that helps further a neoliberal project by using corporate profits to shift social services and social uplift to the private sector, rather than leaving it to the government as required under a Keynesian or Marxist or Socialist system. These kinds of anti-government ideas, which have always operated below the surface, came out of the closet and gained great currency during the Reagan era.

⁴⁴ Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. New York: International Publishers, 1966. Print.

The critique of State action, along with the rise of corporate power, helped legitimize multilateral, multinational, corporate financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the Global Fund, both of which embedded neoliberal practices into their lending policies. The influence of conservative economic paradigms that valued corporations over states also spread in other ways. Economists trained by Milton Friedman, who imported their mentor's monetarist ideas from the Chicago School economics to the Global South, frequently influenced Nations not directly involved with global financial institutions. Many of these economists were themselves from the Global South, but after training in the United States, they returned to their home countries to exercise "economic shock therapy." Neoliberalism is then in a sense the latest iteration of a long line of conservative economic paradigms, and also a political theory, taking the form of neocolonialism, or the last stage of imperialism, as least from the viewpoint of critics such as Harvey. And it is not surprising that increasing corporate domination of the global economy gave rise to a vigorous social movement, as expressed in the WTO Battle in Seattle and associated events.

Ironically, an emphasis on multiculturalism and social justice has been one of neoliberalism's most effective tools to use against its radical critics. With the increasing number of anti-corporatist movements, corporations used their commitment to inculcating a more liberal and open consumer culture to make themselves seem

enlightened and to validate their existence.⁴⁵ It is in this context that one can see how RED helps further a neoliberal project. RED uses corporate profits to do essentially what the public sector – the government or private charities -- is expected to do under a Keynesian or Marxist or Socialist system. That is, the large corporations involved in RED distribute life-saving antiviral medication. But unlike the government or private charities, the corporations do it in a way that benefits the system of private profit, arguing that what's good for capitalism is also good for the world, even in matters of life and death.

Ironically, Neoliberalism and corporate liberalism have also been enabled by the growing presence of NGOs and GROs in the global south, the very groups it seeks to displace, because these groups mobilize constituencies outside of the state to bring about social transformation. RED is an example of the way corporations have benefited from the work of NGO's and GRO's. Both corporations and NGO's/GRO's work in large measure outside the state system, which means that they appear to have no political ties or hidden agendas, lending legitimacy to their social welfare work. If RED were visibly connected to a profit motive, its work could more easily be seen as a matter of managing and manipulating crisis in the interest of profit. RED does not stand alone in this position. Charity is increasingly being embedded in capitalist institutions in ways that screen out corporate self-interest. From Green Marketing to support for indigenous production, corporations like Starbucks and the Body Shop have perfected the practice of

⁴⁵ Some examples include Nike Grants for school and communities to Coco Cola scholarships. There are numerous texts and articles that advocate for cause-related marketing, corporate social responsibility and corporate philanthropy.

Benioff, Marc R, and Carlye Adler. *The Business of Changing the World: Twenty Great Leaders on Strategic Corporate Philanthropy*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007. Print.

making profit-oriented consumption seem like an act of social solidarity and uplift. Starbucks for example has branded itself so that the act of buying a cup of coffee is a socially aware act in solidarity with indigenous coffee farmers. Consumers are then left with the feeling of having accomplished an ethical duty as they contribute to Starbucks' bottom line. RED essentially aims to have the same effect.

Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci's theory of the struggle for hegemony as part of a "war of position" provides one way of talking about the way RED fits into the Neo-liberal project. Gramsci uses trench warfare as a metaphor for explaining how the bourgeoisie and its allies struggle to maintain its social and political power against the possibility of class revolutions. He states that the bourgeoisie is constantly adjusting its position in response to attacks and counterattacks from its enemies. In this sense, hegemony (or domination) is never secure. It is always unstable, under attack by enemies, and it must be won over and over again.⁴⁶ Using this framework, corporations can be seen as employing the RED brand in a "war of position" with critics of neo-liberalism, such as the people who attacked corporations during the Battle in Seattle. The idea of corporate social responsibility is, in this scenario, merely a position taken by the ruling class to deflect or neutralize unfavorable publicity and allegations of unethical conduct that emerge under Neo-liberalism. As a proactive project, RED frames the corporations as ethically sound, positioning them as socially aware subjects committed to social justice ahead of any allegations to the contrary. And

⁴⁶ Gramsci, Antonio, and Joseph A. Buttigieg. *Prison Notebooks*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. Print

since RED is a freestanding entity, one that stands for the eradication of AIDS and other diseases that are ravishing large parts of the global South, RED positions the branded companies as friends of the oppressed, in a kind of solidarity (real or imagined) with other corporations, with consumers and with the people of Africa.

It would be a mistake to think of such interventions as wholly imposed from outside, however. In 1981, the World Bank published a report on Africa's economic standing entitled *Accelerated development for Sub-Saharan Africa: an Agenda for Africa*. This report highlighted their process of dealing with inflation, stabilizing Africa's economy and so forth. All these measures eventually led to pushing African states towards unleashing African markets to the world economy. The report stated that much of Africa's issues were due to corrupt governments. The states were not capable of controlling their economy or managing their resources. Blair's Commission for Africa stated, "Africa's history over the last fifty years has been blighted by two areas of weakness. These have been *capacity*—the ability to design and deliver policies; and *accountability*—how well a state answers to its people."

This mentality about African states is the beginning of a new form of economic, political and human rights imperialism. The concept of human rights as understood today was politically established at the end of WWII. Eleanor Roosevelt, head of UN Human Rights Commission, among others, framed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The general idea was that humans, by the mere fact of their humanity, have "natural rights." It is based on a concept found in numerous other civilizations (Greeks, Romans) as well as other well recognized documents such as that of John Locke and of

course the United States Bill of Rights. The UDHR included cultural, political and economic rights as well, claiming that all these were intertwined. Since then, the United Nations has adopted several other documents covering other specific aspects of these rights. The UDHR, drafted by Canadian lawyer John Humphrey and French lawyer Rene Cassin, had major Western influences. In terms of health, article 25 of the document states

" Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

The UN Security Council assures that these rights are enforced. Still the question of who is responsible for enforcing these rights is still largely an open question, since the Security Council actually doesn't have the resources to do the job.

RED gives its proceeds to the Global Fund, an organization founded in 2002 which functions within the previously mentioned general understanding of human rights and healthcare adopted by the United Nations. According to their 10 year anniversary video, the organization came about after a collective group of organizations and individuals witnessed the neglect of the Global South by wealthier nations. "There was an accident of geography. Longitude and latitude. Where you were born decided whether

you would live or die” Bono says.⁴⁷ In their “about” video in which they state that good health is an essential part of human life. The commonality of human nature, our need for good health in order to grow as individuals, communities, and nations, is the general idea behind The Global Fund. This video represents the various venues through which the Global Fund receives its funding, featuring representatives from the private sector (Bill Gates), the UN (Ban Ki-moon) and the public sector (Kofi Annan).⁴⁸ “No one can fight the epidemic alone,” Michel Kazatchkine, the executive director, says in the video, “not the ministry of health, or the public sector of the private sector of the civil society or the international organizations.” The Global Fund is a “unique, public-private partnership and international financing institution dedicated to attracting and disbursing additional resources to prevent and treat HIV, AIDS, TB malaria.”

The “public-private” partnership idea is an explicit acknowledgement of governments’ lack of the resources needed to produce good health. The Fund’s claim that it is “Dedicated to attracting and disbursing additional resources” refers to attracting philanthropy. Although countries are given much more control over the resources, the Global Fund naturally functions as an outlet for Western influence much like the IMF and World Bank. This is a western capitalist venture and thus using it as a device for health relief in Africa is still *using* Africa.

⁴⁷ <http://youtu.be/OA-31xD0log> “The Global Fund: 10 Years of Impact”

⁴⁸ <http://youtu.be/5LdXy7nZXY4> “The Global Fund: Together We Can Do Great Things - long version” March 2011

2010 marked the second year mark of the significant drop of AIDS funding from the world's wealthiest countries. President of International AIDS Society Dr Julio Montaner pointed out that the lack of funding for better health was due mainly to lack of priority. While weak economic states receive unprecedented funding, health issues in general are usually pushed to the sides. In addition to decreasing funds, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) make it difficult for many African states to acquire necessary and effective medicine. Strong IPR protection exacerbates the existing disparity among nations. By embedding the ideas of human rights into their brand, The Global Fund and RED use the same branding and marketing techniques used by Nike, Gap, and Apple. One interesting parallel to this strategy is that it mirrors the military's approach to calming and subduing populations in the global south. As Lieutenant General William B Caldwell IV stated in the 2009 US army stability operations field manual:

"We will ... defeat insurgency, assist fragile states and provide vital humanitarian aid to the suffering ... to promote participation in government, spur economic development and address the root causes of conflict among the disenfranchised populations of the world ... [with] a comprehensive approach to stability operations that integrates the tools of statecraft with our military forces, international partners, humanitarian organizations and the private sector.

These similarities expose the roots of corporate and military humanitarianism in a larger project of imperialism and domination, of the sort that primarily benefit Western nations and multinational corporations.

A Study of the Visual Culture of RED, or a Visual Study of the Corporate Branding of HIV/AIDS

What is RED?

The idea for RED was first introduced by U2's Bono during the 2006 World Economic Forum (a multilateral neoliberal economic organization based in Davos, Switzerland). The website that was set up for the brand's launch stated that one of its goals is to "transform our incredible collective power as consumers into a financial force to help others in need,"⁴⁹ and in particular, those suffering from HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in Africa.⁵⁰ The brand's architects sought to produce this charitable giving by permitting corporations to tag their products with the RED logo, under the condition that these corporations donate at least 1% of the profits to RED. The profits are then donated to a Global Fund that helps provide medicine for those infected with AIDS/HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria in Africa.

The campaign has achieved widespread acceptance among the liberal elite of transnational capitalism, and has been hailed by the world's most successful businessmen. Bill Gates, for example, proclaimed it to be next frontier in global economic social activism a mere two years after its launch.⁵¹ The underlying goal of RED is to create an arrangement that benefits companies by broadening their consumer base, as well as helping the countries receiving the aid. The initial corporate beneficiaries

⁴⁹ <http://www.joinRED.com/FAQ>

⁵⁰ Part of RED's branding technique is formulating a monolithic Africa.

⁵¹ <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/speeches-commentary/Pages/bill-gates-2008-world-economic-forum-creative-capitalism.aspx>

of the campaign were American Express, Gap, Converse, which is owned by Nike, and Giorgio Armani. Its base has since expanded to include Dell, Apple, Starbucks, Bugaboo, and Hallmark. Cultural icons and political world leaders, including Oprah Winfrey, President Obama, Kate Moss, Chris Rock and Nelson Mandela, have embraced and supported RED. To date, the campaign has channeled aid to 7.5 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa and raised more than \$180 million.⁵²

For Western consumers, RED has become a way of validating expensive purchases while simultaneously gaining credibility as a concerned global citizen by purchasing on behalf of the poor. The RED consumer can not only afford elite brands, but can also see themselves as socially conscious and ethical. Furthermore, RED helps justify what Thorstein Veblen, the economist and sociologist, called conspicuous consumption.⁵³ These are not your average Wal-Mart shoppers. They value particular brands, and RED products are very distinctive. There is no household product included in RED marketing, nor are any regularly consumed products that everyone has to buy. Its products are computers, iPods, sunglasses, and concerts, products purchased only occasionally. This, of course, narrows its consumer base to those with relatively high disposable incomes, and considerably narrows possible opportunities for "donation." As a consequence, RED is the perfect demonstration of the possibility that a high-end, affluent consumer can also be committed to bettering the world.

⁵² <http://www.joinRED.com/static/lazarusEffect/#lazarusEffect> Accessed March 19 2012

⁵³ Veblen, Thorstein, and Stuart Chase. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: Modern library, 1934. Print.

One difficulty that RED faces in doing this dance is that the market is saturated with brands, and consumers are well trained to tune out new branding pitches. What this means is that any new branding project must do something that stands out in a very crowded universe of signs. As Naomi Klein, among others, points out, this constant collision of signs has made us in many ways immune to advertising. Thus, corporations now look for new modes of product differentiation that make them stand out in a crowd, and this need for differentiation is clearly evident in the branding strategy followed by RED, particularly in its use of fast moving images valuing cultural difference and framed as works of art.

It is important to understand that RED branding is a proactive project. It is a tool allowing corporations to redirect present and future attention from accusations that its corporate affiliates are behaving unethically or solely in pursuit of profit. As a proactive project, RED frames the corporations as ethically sound, in opposition to their image in various anti-corporate movements. This is particularly important because those movements draw from the same "aware" youth demographic that operates as RED's consumer base. Bono is a favorite across these categories, appealing to corporate and anti-corporate youth alike. This proactive approach has certain cultural implications, but most importantly, it softens the images of large corporations. RED as a branding tool allows the post-national corporation to position itself as a friend of the oppressed, producing a kind of solidarity (real or imagined) among the corporation, the consumer and the Global South. Since RED is a freestanding entity, one that stands for the

eradication of AIDS, it positions the branded companies as primarily opponents of AIDS in Africa, and not as the money making machines that they are.

In the literature of business schools, RED shows up as a case study of how CSR works. The schools often teach that CSR is an ancient institution in ruling class life. From the great Greek philanthropist Atticus, to Henry Ford to Bill Gates, giving back has long be understood as part of accumulating wealth. Today, philanthropy is an essential part of businesses and a way for top companies to survive. Capitalist intellectuals acknowledge that corporate philanthropy can serve several purposes and comes in many forms, including a category known as "cause related marketing." It is widely acknowledged that cause related marketing improves the image of a company, including company's otherwise considered predatory, and attracts or redirects media attention, as well as providing highly valuable tax breaks.⁵⁴

RED is an important model to investigate because it represents a new era in corporate social responsibility. It demonstrates the importance of corporate practices designed to brand corporations as benign entities that can claim responsibility for improving the lives of their workers, the environment, and shareholders. Ironically, there is abundant evidence that corporations actually represent the opposite of socially responsible entities. With the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the last three decades, corporations have in many ways become less "socially responsible" to their consumers and workers, as evident by the aggressive campaigns many have waged

⁵⁴ Varadarajan, P R, and Anil Menon. "Cause-related Marketing: a Coalignment of Marketing Strategy and Corporate Philanthropy." *The Journal of Marketing*. 52.3 (1988): 58-74. Print.

against unionization, the dramatic shift to outsourcing among some corporations, and widespread corporate reductions in health and pension benefits. Hence, the rise in CSR can have a obscurantist impact, since it has deflected mainstream attention away from outsourcing, benefit cuts and other actions that are not seen as “socially responsible” by corporate critics. RED pushes the boundaries of CSR by playing both sides in the conversation about corporate social responsibility. By positioning itself as a charitable enterprise, RED’s visibility and commercial viability as a brand proactively produces positive press.

The notion of corporate social responsibility is rather interesting in this context since most, if not all, of the corporations involved with RED, have had some allegations of unethical practices placed against them as previously discussed. In 1999, Gap was among 18 other manufacturers charged with human rights violation in its manufacturing buildings.⁵⁵ In 2002, it was one of the manufacturers that contracted with factories in Thailand and Lesotho (a nation which receives funding from RED that threatened union leaders. After realizing the detrimental effect this had on its public image, Gap issued its first social responsibility report in 2003 after being pressured by several advocacy groups such as Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and Education and Action. That same year, the firm terminated business with several documented human rights violators. In 2008, Gap once more was caught in another scandal as Jin Shun, located in Queens, a factory associated with Gap, was found to be paying its workers less than minimum wage and forcing them to work overtime. Nike, one of the largest corporations in the world, has

⁵⁵ <http://www.globalenvision.org/library/8/639/>

also been tied to several human rights violations. The most well known eventually led to the case in which Marc Kasky filed suit against Nike⁵⁶ stating that they falsely advertised their factories working condition and thus violated sections of the California Business and Professions code.⁵⁷ Although the case was eventually settled out of court, Nike became the symbol for what large corporations were doing abroad. Allegations such as those faced by Nike and Gap had not only to be settled financially, but also, and most importantly, they had to be taken seriously as a stain on the corporations' public image. RED is thus a tool through which these corporations can construct an image of social responsibility rather than concretely address their critics on specific allegations of irresponsible corporate behavior. RED has built its brand using celebrities, politicians and activist who have reputations as good global citizens, so a company co-branding with RED becomes a good global citizen as well, no matter what the facts on the ground might be. The growing importance of charity to multinational corporations serves the ends of modern capitalism quite well. For both the corporation and the consumer, charity is a path toward redemption from the anti-social aspects of capitalist operation and the excesses of capitalist consumption. Corporations such as Starbucks rely on the idea that one buys not only coffee but also ethics when one consumes their product.

Corporate social responsibility evolved to a hybrid of consumption and charity in the early 1980s, under the leadership of American Express, a multinational financial services corporation that promised to donate one percent of each transaction to the

⁵⁶ Kasky v. Nike Inc No. 02-575. Supreme Ct. of California. 26 June 2003.

⁵⁷ A code of conduct for businesses

restoration of the Statue of Liberty. This seemingly unprofitable maneuver actually increased revenue and led to a 45% increase in the number of new credit seekers,⁵⁸ and thus this was the birth of cause-related marketing (CRM), the commercial merging of a brand with a charitable cause. As seen above, there can be strong economic incentives for companies to embrace CRM. RED arguably ushers in a new stage in CRM by consolidating existing CRM practices with the brand itself. Because it operates as a co-brand and not a company that produces products or services, and because it exists only through companies that do produce products and services, RED becomes a corporation that challenges Milton Friedman's notion that corporations exist simply to maximize profit.⁵⁹ Precisely because of its "united" multi-branding but simultaneously non-economic social presence, it has been extremely effective in terms of marketing and cultivating mega-brand partnerships. What's more, its complicated positioning in the worlds of commerce and charity allows RED to create a section of capitalist society that obscures companies' ethical and humanitarian infractions. RED consolidates multiple marketing techniques (philanthropy, CSR, CRM) in the service of relocating both charity and commerce in a universe composed primarily of brands rather than things.

Slavoj Žižek, a well-known Slovenian critical theorist, identifies corporate charity campaigns as part of a trend toward cultural capitalism, and he argues that it not only merges charity and privatization, but also merges consumption and anti-capitalist

⁵⁸ Polishchuk Leonid, Firsov Evgeny, "Doing Well by Doing Good: An Industrial Organization Perspective of Corporate Philanthropy"

⁵⁹ Friedman, Milton; "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits" The New York Times Magazine, September 13, 1970

ideology.⁶⁰ For example, in buying fair trade coffee, one buys not only the coffee, but in the act of buying coffee, recognizes the farmers and supports their endeavors because it is fair trade. Also, in the consumerist act of buying a product, Žižek states, consumers can simultaneously buy their redemption from being *just* a consumer.⁶¹ Corporations such as Starbucks employ this ideology to the benefit of their images as well as their profits. Starbucks is built on the idea that one not only buys coffee in its establishments, but also they buy into a community that has a foundation in morality, including Starbucks' commitment to ethical practices in its relationships with coffee producers. Indeed, most corporations that embrace the RED brand try to position themselves as the producers of moral and ethical communities. Much like Starbucks' green marketing, which supports indigenous production, RED embodies the idea that profit-oriented consumption can also be an act of social solidarity and uplift.⁶²

⁶⁰ Žižek, Slavoj "First as Tragedy, then as Farce" Lecture from Royal Society of Arts, San Francisco, CA, November 24 2009

⁶¹ Žižek, Slavoj "First as Tragedy, then as Farce" Lecture from Royal Society of Arts, San Francisco, CA, November 24 2009

⁶² The video of Žižek's talk can be found on the RSA website (thersa.org) and youtube channel. The full video can be found here: <<http://youtu.be/cvaka-DF6Hc>>

A Visual Analysis of Project RED: The Faces, Voices and Places of RED

The RED initiative came about as an effort to bring attention to the issues of health and disease on the continent of Africa. However, the campaign is actually directed at a Western audience, with little direct participation from Africans and little regard for them as subjects. Its website has monthly updates on the RED events happening in the United States and around the world, but all these events give little attention to the people the project purportedly helps. This campaign centers on setting up an identification between Western consumers and glamorous celebrities, rather than keeping these Western consumers informed about the real issues of the continent from the viewpoint of its own population. The one exception to this is the RED documentary, *The Lazarus Effect*, which was produced by HBO. But even that is visually problematic, as will be argued below.

As with any other branding operation, the faces that are chosen to represent RED are crucial to its success. U2 singer Bono, who started four other charitable organizations and who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, knighted by the Queen of England and named Person of the Year by *Time Magazine*, is the face of RED. Bono is not only popular in the sense of appealing to a very large audience, he also occupies the status of a serious artist and intellectual. Numerous other U.S. celebrities also represent the campaign, but Bono is especially crucial in the construction of RED's appeal to high end, high quality consumers. Further buttressing this appeal to high end consumers is the decision to feature RED's advertisements primarily in highbrow Western media. One of the most noted moments in the campaign, for example, was its appearance in *Vanity*

Fair's Africa issue. This publication included internationally recognized stars and leaders such as Jay-Z, President Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Brad Pitt and Madonna. And it is especially revealing that only four Africans (Iman, H.M. Queen Rania of Jordan, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Djimon Hounsou) were among the twenty-one celebrities who appeared in this issue. Of course, the specific celebrities featured in the Vanity Fair issue allowed RED to position itself as progressive, rather than as the instrument of money-grubbing capitalist. But it is important to note that none of these featured celebrities are critics of capitalism, and none have spoken out on global issues. They are not members of the WTO inspired culture jamming group the Yes Men, or anti-corporate intellectuals like Naomi Klein.

As mentioned already, this campaign is dominated by Western voices. Even Africans featured in the issue are for the most part educated in the West and live in Western environments. All the interviewers are Americans and are celebrities rather than journalists or scholars. For example, Brad Pitt conducts the interview with Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The Africa issue is really just a series of mini-quotes and speeches from rich and powerful Westerners to the West. Their true connection to Africa is, for the most part, imaginary, in the sense that they speak on the basis of mediated and distant images of Africa, rather than from direct, informed and nuanced experience.

One of the many indicators of their distance is the tendency of the speakers to talk about "the African people," a formulation that treats the vast continent, in all of its diversity, as a single entity. One celebrity states that "the dignity of the African people simply will not be dismissed... for having slavery as the main export...they are human

beings, and nothing human can be alien to me." Chris Rock's connection is simply that he went to visit Nelson Mandela. George Bush gave money to help the AIDS epidemic. Though these celebrities are involved with Africa in some sense, and most likely have some economic interest in the continent, it seems none of these people are truly connected to African states in a concrete and informed enough way to represent Africa, as they seem to do in the Vanity Fair issue. Even if it did have the resources required to critically engage in the topic, Vanity Fair's spread is not the space for that. As this magazine shows, along with many of the other venues chosen for the campaigns, RED is more about image than substance.

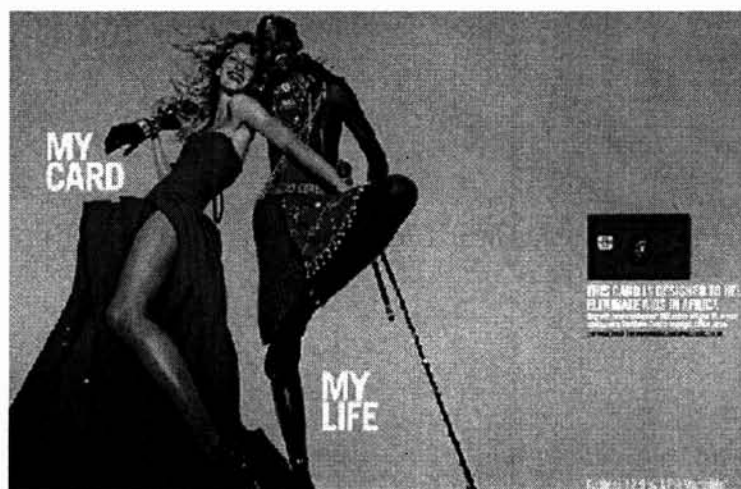
Recently, RED has to some degree done a better job of promoting the voices of Africans in their campaign. This is especially true in the HBO video, *The Lazarus Effect*. Filmed in Zambia, this documentary tracks several patients as their health improves thanks to antiviral drugs. Most of the medication goes to women and children, and a lot of screen time is given to an African woman who is one of RED's most prolific direct service providers. But the video is narrated by Bono, an arrangement that plays into old narratives about Whites as healers and saviors. This is in lieu of letting the Africans speak for themselves.

RED's Images: Contrasting Africa and the West

Judith Williamson in *Decoding Advertisements* speaks of the larger role advertisements play in society. She argues that advertising no longer simply sells products (as stated previously, many large corporations don't even *make* products). Advertisements now serve as a modern capitalist tool that hails people to take the subject position "consumer." These subjects are interpellated, in the words of theorist Louis Althusser, as exemplars of the consumer lifestyle and products of consumer brands. Williamson is one of a long line of theorists who make this argument about advertising, although her work is especially important because it is also a groundbreaking contribution to British Cultural Studies.

Williamson examines the semiotics of advertising, treating them as texts that produce meaning through a process of combining signs. She shows how advertising is a process of combining signs that mark products on the one hand, and signs that specify what those products mean or do on the other. For example, a Disney ad works by associating Disney's products – theme parks, cartoon characters, and so forth – with escape, fun or family values. The most important thing about this approach to understanding advertising is that it treats the relationship between signs (between the object and what it means) as arbitrary and malleable. So at any time, the signification process can be changed to associate Disney with other things, which is what the creators of South Park once did when they represented Mickey Mouse as a gangster who

terrorized the Jonas Brothers.⁶³ In any case, Williams treats the process of signification as an exchange in which consumers as well as producers play active roles. Producers combine signs to produce meaning, but that the consumer doesn't have to read the combination in the way that the producer intends. Furthermore, the system works best when consumers and producers share enough historical and conceptual space to take some things for granted. These are some of the principles that govern the semiotics of advertising that I used to construct the analysis below.



The image above is of supermodel Gisele standing next to a Maasai (who is from Kenya/Tanzania, neither of which is a country RED supports) warrior who is unnamed on the RED website, but whose name is Keseme Ole Parsapae.⁶⁴ These two bodies can be decoded to represent the relationship between Africa and the West in project RED. The West is modern, lighter; Africa is darker and more exotic, the connection between these

⁶³ "The Ring" *South Park*. By Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. Hollywood, Calif: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2010 March 11 2009

⁶⁴ <http://annansi.com/blog/2007/03/maasai-herdsmanmodel-talks-gisele-bundchen-american-express-and-maintaining-maasai-culture/>

entities is commerce in the form of the American Express card which is at the bottom between them. Both exist symbiotically, her dress symbolizing capitalist modernism compared to his traditional cloth symbolizing traditionalism (non-capitalist). She, on the other hand, represents capitalist artificiality, while he represents unspoiled beauty and nature. However, the relationship between the two isn't one of merging or coming together. Even though their faces are next to each other, their bodies are not facing each other. One of the things that tie the body together in a discourse of commerce and identity is the color RED, which is used on both the bodies and the credit card. As Williamson argued in her classic work, color and color matching is one of the most important sign systems that advertising deploys as part of its meaning making activity.

The words "My Card" on her side and "My Life" further articulates the idea behind RED; that capitalism is lifesaving and humane. As Williamson also argues, the words that are deployed in advertising also interpellates subjects, including the models, to certain pre-existing capitalist identities. The implication of the use of the personal pronoun "my" is very important in the ad above. It implies that the White Western model's consumerism is the thing keeping the indigenous Black subject alive, and it also suggests that the Black subject should be grateful for the White models intervention. Furthermore, this "My Card" "My Life" differentiates not only between a 'regular' consumer and the consumer who buys RED, but also between the two people in the ad who are forming a connection. The card allows the models to share that moment of laughter while still maintaining their distance, as referenced by "My." RED's slogan, "When you buy any RED product, you get what you love while people with HIV in Africa

get the medicine they need to live” here is embodied in the photos staying true to the us versus them theme. This is not, of course, the only reading that is possible for this ad, nor is it necessarily the preferred reading of the ads’ producers. As generally emphasized in British Cultural Studies, and especially in Williamson’s work, various readings of an ad are always possible, depending on the reader or producers pre-existing knowledge and the interpretive communities to which he or she belongs. For example, anyone who is familiar with the work that Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl did with the Nuba in Sudan might notice similarities between her fetishizing gaze on the African male body and the images in the RED ads above.⁶⁵



The Project RED magazine cover above, which graces *The Independent's* Africa issue, spurred much controversy in many communities. The photo of English supermodel Kate Moss in blackface was part of 2006 RED campaign. The issue was guest designed

⁶⁵ <http://www.leni-riefenstahl.de/eng/dienuba/1.html>

by Giorgio Armani. The phrase "NOT A FASHION STATEMENT" by Moss insinuates that RED is more than just a fashion identity, but rather a way to eradicate AIDS in Africa. However, this very statement is contradicted many ways in the ad itself. First, this image of a supermodel in a high fashion shot undermines the very statement it aims to make. Secondly the statement can be read two ways. Either RED is indeed not a fashion statement or RED (the color of the word NOT and thus the brand RED) A FASHION STATEMENT" thus once more being contradictory. But as Williamson writes, this is precisely the effectiveness of the image. By being RED, the consumer can both be fashionable and/or ethical. The two are not mutually exclusive.

A contradiction also occurs in Kate Moss's presence. Her body conjures photos of sick Africans because the lighting makes her body look ultra thin, and she has a stunned and unnatural look on her face. Simultaneously, the audience knows this is Kate Moss (it's also stated on the lower right hand corner). She is a sign of high fashion, luxury and Hollywood. Here she becomes a stand-in for the suffering AIDS stricken African woman. Much like the words next to her, the consumer is asked to participate in the deciphering of the contradiction between the two, the general ideas of who Kate Moss is and what/who the image presented. And if Kate Moss can be both a luxurious person and the face of RED (and thus what it stands for) so can the consumer.

Kate Moss's image is part of a long line of similar images in RED and elsewhere in which white women embody Africa. This representation endures because it articulates three dominant Western discourses. First, it circumvents the Western concern with compassion fatigue, which comes from the pervasive and spectacular representation of

diseased Black bodies in Western culture. Passion fatigue occurs when a representation of bodies in pain or in the throes of death is so pervasive that it loses its power to evoke empathy and becomes a mere spectacle.⁶⁶ As a celebrity, Kate Moss can trade on her star persona to complicate the representation and keep the process of compassion fatigue from happening.

Secondly, the cover shot privileges the position of the consumer over all other positions. Kate Moss is first of all a brand that is consumed by the transnational audience for Hollywood film. She does not appear in “art” films, and she is a central part of the kind of commercial celebrity culture exemplified by *People Magazine*. Finally, and this is really a product of the first and second discourse, she brings in an audience from a commercially desirable demographic to the pages of the *Independent*. And this is as much about Moss’ race as it is about her position in the culture industry. World-renowned African Models such as Sudan’s Iman and Alek Wek or Somalia’s Liya Kebede may have been more appealing to the people actually affected by HIV/AIDs in Africa. But these people play a secondary role in the campaign. They are the props to be used in a system of Western charity that makes a profit off of White guilt. So Black models would not have been appropriate.

⁶⁶ Moeller, Susan D. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.



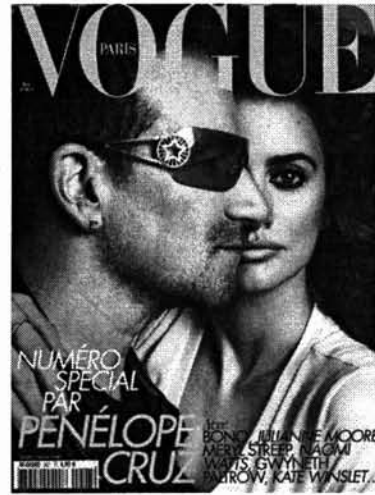
The two advertisements above represent three values that the RED campaign hopes to promote. These values are morality, cleansing, and unity, which the ad suggests will be realized by helping RED earn profits and funds for charity and by posting information on Facebook; The ad also encourages consumers to internalize the idea that contributing to AIDS work through RED is “the right thing” to do. Yet these ads, like the others, are actually designed for Western consumers, ones who see themselves as both consumers and global citizens. In other words, this campaign allows Western consumers to fulfill the obligations of global citizenship through consumption. Williamson writes about the ways in which brands and products can contain so many signifiers that eventually, the brand/product can by itself be a sign. The three ads realize this. RED now can be consumed without having any product attached to it. RED has thus become a form of moral currency.



As is typical of contemporary advertising, the production aspects of the RED project are rendered invisible in this campaign. The written material for this campaign does not say, for example, where the products it is promoting are produced, nor does it talk about the political issues that shape the decisions of pharmaceutical companies that deal with the global South. Nor is there any mention of the agencies that produce the RED ads. In other words, Images of production are invisible. In the ad pictured above, the words are used in the same way as the photos of Giselle and Keseme, and that is to separate the two camps (Africans and consumers) while uniting them individually. “One color unites us” as either consumers or recipients of aid. Also, much like the words by Kate Moss on the cover of *The Independent*, RED the color and RED the campaign function interchangeably. Once more, this connection requires the consumer to make the transaction.



Above is the May 2010 *Vogue* Paris with three covers guest-edited by Spanish actress Penelope Cruz. The RED campaign is even more clearly pitched to White subjects in *Vanity Fair*, where people of African descent are completely absent. There is, however, a strong female presence in these black and white photographs, representing once again the old colonial tropes about Africa as a feminine space, and Bono is allowed to be part of that only because, at least in the images, he is literally part of Penelope Cruz. The feminization of the campaign works on many levels, owing in part to the fact that RED's charity work mainly concerns women and children, who are widely depicted as the most charity worthy victims of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The *Vogue* material is, however, more cosmopolitan (and less U.S. -centric) than other elements of the RED campaign, largely because the spread was produced by *Vogue* Paris, but also because Cruz is the campaign's only model who is not a product of either the United Kingdom or United States. If anything, her nationality, language and culture makes her a desirable cosmopolitan figure, through which the audience can consume the RED magazine.



Once more in this *Vogue* issue, the reader isn't consuming the image of a product. The photo above was part of the *Vogue* spread featuring Naomi Watts and Penelope Cruz dressed and positioned (like in many of the other photos in the spread) in a provocative manner. They are presented for a male gaze. In all the photos, at least one woman is engaging the audience, looking right at the audience. In the case of Bono, the one photo he does appear in, Bono isn't looking at the audience. In fact, his eyes are shielded even from the audience's gaze by his glasses. Rather, he invites us to look not *at* him but at Cruz, who in this case is a metaphor for the brand. In this whole issue, the consumer is asked to make several transactions at the same time, some of which required previous knowledge. First they are asked to think about the individual meanings and associations of each celebrity (Penelope Cruz is understood to be sexy, Meryl Streep is funny, Bono is socially aware). Then there is *Vogue* in itself, which can be seen as the beginning of fashion and now RED. Naomi Klein states that the success of a brand is based on its flexibility, its ability to be associated with different products. As seen in this and the following campaign, RED's success stems from its ability to stretch across different

social settings such as Vogue, The Independent and Vanity Fair, as well as different personalities, such as the socially aware, fashionable and so forth.



Just as the “Do The RED Thing” references a famous Spike Lee movie, Change the World references a popular (Gap) ad campaign, in which most of the models were joyous celebrities. The split framing in the ad, in addition to the practice of showcasing the celebrities, is an invitation to the audience to identify with one of the “personalities.” Are you strong, calm, nutty, soulful or perhaps all the above. A divided self (or society) is united by the brand. Although unity is suggested by the fact that all are wearing RED products, the page as a whole only becomes meaningful once the audience unites the models across the split screens. This ad also suggests a kind of individuality in the models, and since the phrase is directed at the audience, *you* “Do The RED Thing,” the consumer as well. However, this individuality is defined totally in relation to consumption.



Anne Hathaway's photograph, *Can the shirt off your back change the world? Yes it can.*, visually associates charity with consumption, i.e. the shirt on your back, which you literally purchased through RED. Hathaway is clinging to the shirt, in contrast to the celebrity models in the other ads that are posed in more natural and relaxed ways. Also, the photograph makes Hathaway appear thin and frail, which the lighting of the photograph highlights, and the arc of her back evokes images of sickness, or at the very least, frailty. The lighting makes her look pale and lifeless. Similar to the *Vogue* photographs, these photographs feminize Africa and AIDS/HIV by presenting the White female body as a metaphor for Africa, just as does Kate Moss' *Independent* cover shows.

These images illustrate how the signifiers of project RED, including its colors, page designs and words, works in its advertising. In this figure, the consumer is invited to identify with the regular looking figure purchasing the iPod. Thus does the consumer become part of the RED universe, and not a mere consumer. The caption below the picture identifies both the consumer reading the text and the consumer pictured in the text

as a “Smart Shopper” for buying the RED iPod, and it also implies that one who doesn’t choose a RED iPod isn’t very smart or ethical.

A growing trend in the RED campaign is its continuing representation of Africa as one entity. Besides the fact that RED doesn’t support all of Africa, this practice affirms the uneducated but widely embraced notion that Africa is a country, not a continent. Furthermore, the campaign is treating Africa as an empty place for insertion of goods, ideas and people. This speaks not only to the ways in which popular RED advertisements erase bodies, but also the way they erase political entities.

RED's Moving Images

Hallmark RED commercial.

<http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.individual&videoid=27411126>

The Hallmark for RED that I have linked to above suggests even more explicitly that consumption is what connects Africa to the West. This commercial features an American girl who buys a card and sends it. RED ribbons follow the card to its recipients and then across the ocean to an ambiguous place where the ribbon then surrounds a young African boy and his mother. In attempting to show how a simple thing such as a card can unite two people, the ad does just the opposite. At the end of the commercial, we see the two children that have been pulled by the hand, slowly turning their heads back to face each other, then going their separate ways. The only words on the screen are "Is it a card?" followed by "Or a way to eliminate AIDS in Africa," a question answered within the ad itself, since it implies that the card does both. At the end, the ad asks us to "See how far a card can go."

The images of the U.S. are those of cars, roads, tall buildings, well-trimmed trees, all illustrating progress and order. Africa is represented by images of freely roaming wild animals in a bare desert area, illustrating a free and untamed continent. This ad, in other words, introduces the old colonial trope that the West represents civilization, while Africa represents nature, and that the West is developed while Africa is primitive. The image at the end, of the two children parting, creates the illusion, as many of the RED campaigns do, that charity and consumption are the only ways for the West to connect to Africa. It once more dodges all the complexities of the West/Africa relationship.

Starbuck commercials

< <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rXLWa3V8LU&feature=channel>>

The Starbucks ad demonstrates the tendency of RED to find brands that are primarily appeals to adopt a consumer lifestyle rather than a product, ala Naomi Klein's critique of contemporary branding practices. The ad emphasizes consumption driven charity as a process akin to running a marathon. It suggests that big challenges/goals are achieved by first making small steps; It says, "to run a marathon, start with a morning walk." The last message, "to cure AIDS in Africa, start with a cup of coffee," directly conflates consumerism with charity, but also personalizes the issue of doing AIDS/HIV work by constructing it as the achievement of personal goals.

< <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkC5qYH0ln0&feature=related>>

The similar Starbucks commercial for RED that I link to above places more emphasis on consumer's personal connection to Africa. "What if I were not separated from everyone else but connected" the commercial asks. This implies that American consumers and everyday Starbucks coffee drinkers are primarily connected to Africa by transnational corporations and the patterns of consumption that keep them going.

< <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbDGX3pQ6jI&feature=channel>>

This commercial begins with the image of a fractured world. It does this by emphasizing the many religious, political and geographical divisions among people. Then it asks them for unity, if even for one moment, through the universal idea of love that is embodied in the Starbuck Love Project.

Motorola commercials

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w46xB3fj0-M&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJCWASMK7T8&NR=1>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssIyEca2ahU&NR=1>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWlyQ4oXBnE&feature=related>

Finally, I want to talk about a set of RED ads that connect corporations to African charity by deploying tropes and figures of racial difference in the United States. “Use RED, nobody’s dead” is a phrase that riffs on standard African American word games (e.g., the dozens).⁶⁷ This phrase is voiced in one of the Motorola RED commercials by African American comedian Chris Rock. Alongside Chris Rock in the Motorola series were two other African American celebrities, Kanye West and Chester Bennington, urging consumers to think about charity as a corporate practice. The message is: buy Motorola and save lives. Japanese R&B singer Misia complicates this racialization of RED even more in a commercial endorsing the phone in Japan

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GERnFiBSmXM&feature=related>>

The most interesting example of the way the Motorola ads racialize RED actually never appeared on television. This ad was directed by Jonathan Glazer, and featured two naked black bodies in poses that are more characteristic of the art world than the world of

⁶⁷ Gates, Henry L. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Print.

commerce. The opening shot is of a hunk of brown clay that shapes itself into a black man, then into a black clay woman emerging from the man, and ends with the bodies in a tangled, naked embrace. The whole time, the clay/bodies are spinning, as they become more comprehensible as human beings. The lighting of the commercial is dark and shadowy, but the two black bodies are literally on a platform where they are clearly a spectacle. The grease on their bodies highlights their muscles and makes their movements seem extremely flexible. Their sexuality and ability to reproduce are the main focus, and the commercial ends by saying, "There is a phone designed to help eliminate AIDS in Africa. Please buy it." The ad brings to mind dominant Western discourses about Africa as the "cradle of life" and deploys them to promote consumption (and charity).

This is a dramatically different representation of RED. It does not use celebrities, instead using two non-famous black people as the image of RED for the Western charity and consumption. This ad does not provide a space within the ad in which whiteness can be constructed or reflected. The two bodies exist independent of whiteness and, we are led to assume, shall continue to do so. Like other RED ads, this commercial does not give Africans voice, but it is different from the others in that it constructs them as objects of desire rather than as diseased bodies. It is also important to understand the importance and visual logic of the logo that was at the foundation of the RED campaign. The RED logo occupies physical space in affiliates' stores and on products. As a branding tactic, this has certain social and ethical values that produce monetary results. The most important space RED logo occupies is the imagination. It may not be as ubiquitous as the Golden Arch or the Swoosh, but the RED logo is widely recognized as the logo for the

global citizen with good taste. Thus, the RED logo is crucial in helping corporations creates the illusion that high-end 21st century consumerism is the best way not only combat AIDS in distant nations, but the most effective form of contributing to society. By embedding their ideologies (of privatization) into every day consumerism, rather than channeling charity through governments as in the Progressive Era, corporations are pushing the process of privatization to new extremes. Indeed, I would argue that RED transcends the very basic ideas of branding. The incorporation of various sectors in addition to its “bundled” package of consumption and charity completely privatizes compassion.

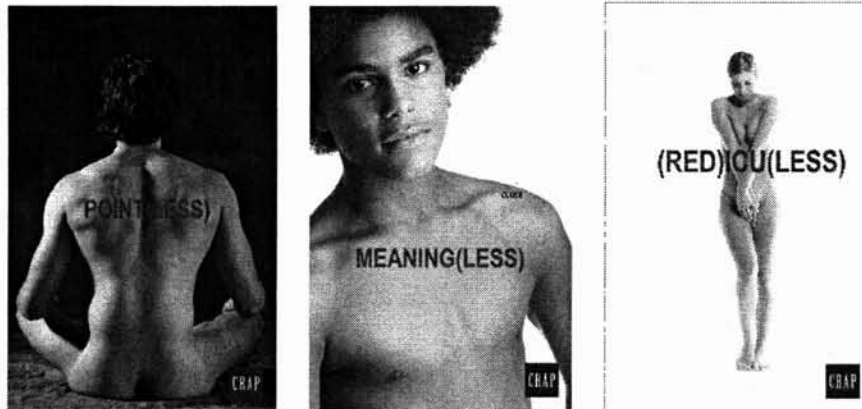
As RED continued to flood the media there was a lot of criticism about the organizations ethics and finances. In March 2007, Advertising Age stated that while RED campaign raised \$18 for the global fund, companies had spend up to \$100 million on advertising.⁶⁸ There was no transparency by RED or companies on revenue or total distributions.⁶⁹ The question as to who the real beneficiaries of Product RED were, the businesses or African people, began to linger.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Frazier, M. March 05 2007 <http://adage.com/article/news/costly-RED-campaign-reaps-meager-18-million/115287/> [accessed March 15 2012]

⁶⁹Nixon, R. February 6 2008 http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/business/06RED.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=bottom+line&st=nyt&oref=slogin [accessed March 15 2012]

⁷⁰ <http://www.thebody.com/content/art45031.html>

Furthermore, many questioned whether RED ideology is the best way to address the health issues in Africa.⁷¹ Buy (Less) Give More, whose domain name is Buylesscrap.org was created as a reaction to RED campaign. They “(reject) the ti(RED) notion that shopping is a reasonable response to human suffering.” In an open letter to CEO Bobby Shriver, they ask the organization for transparency about donation amounts and easier ability to donate directly to Global Fund on their website. Ben Davis, founder of “Buy(less),” believes that increased consumption is not the answer and people should give directly give charities.⁷² The organization’s imagery is a direct reaction to gap advertisements.



At this point, Product (RED) needed a way to validate their cause, their ethics and their finances. The RED campaign tried pushing back against the criticism by stating that RED

⁷¹ Frazier, M. March 05 2007 <http://adage.com/article/news/costly-RED-campaign-reaps-meager-18-million/115287/> [accessed March 15 2012]

⁷² Feb. 6 2008 <http://philanthropy.com/blogs/philanthropytoday/the-product-RED-campaign-shakes-off-criticism/14490> [accessed March 14 2012]

didn't pay for advertising and that they did in fact donate almost of the money to Global Fund. However, they needed to make a strong statement about the impact this business model was having on the lives of aids recipients.

The RED campaign's most effective pushback against its critics came in the form not of advertising, but of a documentary video produced by HBO, a relatively high-brow cable network known for its appeal to high taste consumers. *The Lazarus Effect*⁷³ is a short film about the impact of Antiretrovirals (ARVs) in Zambia as a result of the RED Campaign. The film was produced by Spike Jonze, who directed *Where the Wild Things Are*,⁷⁴ and directed by Lance Bangs, who is best known as a producer of music videos. The HBO documentary follows the lives of several AIDS patients as they are transformed from skeleton forms overcome by HIV/AIDS to thriving members of their community, all because they have undergone ARV treatment. The film premiered on May 4 2010 at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City.

The film reflects a changing narrative about AIDS that followed the introduction of ARVs in 1987.⁷⁵ Initially viewed as a ravaging epidemic and a certain sentence of death during the early 1990s, it is no longer seen that way. Indeed, *the Lazarus Effect*

⁷³ Bangs, Lance, Spike Jonze, Sheila Roche, Danielle Peretz, and Steve Golin. *The Lazarus Effect*. New York, NY: Cinema Guild, 2010.

This film can also be accessed via youtube at <<http://youtu.be/l16YH6xCN4c>>

⁷⁴ Jonze, Spike, Dave Eggers, Tom Hanks, Gary Goetzman, John Carls, Maurice Sendak, Vincent Landay, Thomas Tull, Jon Jashni, Scott Mednick, Bruce Berman, Lance Acord, Max Records, Catherine Keener, Mark Ruffalo, Lauren Ambrose, Chris Cooper, Paul Dano, James Gandolfini, Catherine O'Hara, Forest Whitaker, K K. Barrett, Eric Zumbunnen, James Haygood, Casey Storm, O Karen, Carter Burwell, and Maurice Sendak. *Where the Wild Things Are*. Burbank, CA: Distributed by Warner Home Video, 2010.

⁷⁵ <http://www.avert.org/aids-history87-92.htm>

focuses on specific cases where HIV/AIDS sufferers who are losing their battle with the disease are brought from the brink of death by ARVs.

The film begins by acknowledging the clear Biblical reference that frames its narrative, namely the reference to the Judeo Christian story of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. A woman suffering from AIDS refers to this story at the very beginning of the film. Western religion is an important aspect of this documentary, although it is never named as such. Neither are we encouraged to think about alternative possibilities for framing, as in the possibility that the story could be framed in indigenous Zambian religious terms. From the title to the supporting ideals, Western religion helps shape the morality of those in the film, while the indigenous religious possibilities are left unexplored.

The connection between Christianity and morality in the film seems to be based in colonial frameworks, although not as an expression of intentionally hegemonic or malevolent intent. Throughout the mainstream AIDS discourse, the disease has long been framed as a connection between morality and health. Treichler, for one, explores this connection and the ways in which AIDS/HIV, as a species of heteronormativity, was framed in part in a religious context. In the 80s and early 90s, the medical field needed to find ways to reconcile the fact that heterosexual people in the Global South were being affected by the epidemic.

Despite this repression of Black voices in dominant representations of HIV/AIDS, the film's decision to let the subaltern speak serves an important strategic function. This film functions as a intermediary between donor and recipients. Lance Bangs the director

state that he “Didn’t want to use Western commentator and outside narrators to get in the way.” But the western presence creeps in throughout the film. It is obvious, for example, in the Beetles sweater and Dalmatians shirt worn by two women in one of the first scenes. It is also present, as mentioned above, in the constant use of Christian iconography. Like the advertising campaign and the whole concept behind RED, this film hails a Western consumer.

The film tries to make an effort to centralize the story on the Zambians affected by the disease. It does so specifically through a wide array of close ups on the subjects. Focalizing the film in this way allows the viewer to essentially look into the subjects eyes. The subject’s vulnerability and emotions are evident throughout the camera shots reaffirm the narrative and helps give subjectivity to the men, women and children.

The film emphasizes the ways the epidemic disrupts the societal structures. Women cannot care for their children. Children do not attend school and husbands do not work. At the film’s premier, Michel Kazatchkine, the executive director of the Global Fund, stated that aid is about people once more being economical and social participants. He states the developmental impact happens when medication “restores the human capital that is being eroded by the epidemic.” This is evident in the film as Concillia Muhau for example is transformed from immobile to healthy. The film shows her shopping for her daughter as she becomes an economic actor in her community.

The Lazarus Effect was made by white men (Bono, Spike Jonze and Lance Bangs) for western consumers and businesses about the “other.” African peoples are constructed around their difference and differentiated from the Western subject. Gayatri Spivak’s

“Can the Subaltern Speak?” allows us to think specifically about *The Lazarus Effect* and to what degree those featured can speak for themselves. In the piece, Spivak uses Gramsci’s term subaltern to describe a position which is economically disposable and lacks agency within the larger narrative, a position that is in relation to and outside of the dominant power structure. Spivak critiques intellectuals who pursue the voice and the knowledge of the subaltern. She concludes that investigating the “other” is part of the colonial project because of the power structure and the hegemonic vocabulary tied to the project.

During these attempts to connect with the subaltern, the Westerner remains the subject. In the RED project, human relationships and conditions become objectified and commodified as they are consumed. Spivak concludes that the subaltern cannot speak because when they attempt to speak, they must step out of their positionality and assume that of the West. They must insert themselves within this framework and thus they are no longer speaking for themselves. In this film we see an attempt to make the voice of the subaltern resonate with the consumer. Furthermore, they are mediated in their attempt to speak. For instance, we see the interviews are conducted in or translated to English.

The West invests in the subaltern with economic or political incentives. In addition to the business incentives of partnering with RED, there are other incentives driven by Western ideology. As seen through Concillia Muhau and many of the other people, ARVs allow those with AIDS to take part in the general capitalist system. Children go back to school in hopes of joining a future workforce, adults partake in the

free market and keeping in mind the neoliberal framework, corporations (via RED and Global Fund) continue to provide government services.

Marketing and advertising become malleable as the organization encourages its audience to participate in the representations of RED. Upon launching the AIDS Free by 2015 campaign, RED enlisted several artists to spread the message through various illustrations.⁷⁶ In March 2012 Sid Lee, an advertising agency in Montreal, decided to host a competition to create the next RED advertising campaign.⁷⁷ The Sid Lee and RED Boot Camp will host eight programmers and designers in their workshop. In December 2011, RED launched 2015 Quilt,⁷⁸ a digital quilt featuring celebrities, brands and political figures as well as the general public. The site invites users to create their own panels and share them on other social media sites. Most of the panels pledge to join ONE,⁷⁹ give a RED product during the holiday season and invite their friends to do the same.

As the RED project continues to evolve, it becomes a more multi-platform campaign. RED has a strong political presence, numerous magazine endorsements and celebrity partners as previously discussed. They depend on consumers as well as professional agencies for their artistic direction, as seen in the 2015 Quilt as well as the art house film directors behind the Motorola ad. RED continues to widen its platform through various modes of outreach. "RED nights" are a series of concerts by popular artists who donate a portion of their tickets to the campaign. On World Aids day 2011,

⁷⁶ <http://blog.joinRED.com/2010/11/aids-free-generation-is-due-in-2015.html>

⁷⁷ <http://blog.joinRED.com/2012/03/calling-all-creatives-worldwide-RED.html>

⁷⁸ <http://www.2015quilt.com/#>

⁷⁹ ONE is an organization founded by Bono to help fight poverty and preventable diseases in Africa.

RED Landmark Lightings made over three dozen landmarks including the Empire State Building, Sydney Opera House in Australia and The Table Mountain in South Africa “turn RED” for the second year in a row.⁸⁰

RED continues to focus on consumption in most of their campaign. Currently, their most visible campaign is the AIDS free generation by 2015. This aims to get the number of children born with the virus down to zero by providing antiretroviral drug regimens for HIV-positive pregnant women, treatment during and after labor, and infant feeding guidelines in order to block mother-to-child transmission. ONE and RED ask people to be involved in two ways: by joining the ONE campaign and buying RED products.⁸¹ In the same year, ONE and RED hosted a discussion on “The Beginning of the End of AIDS.” During the event President Obama stated the US government will provide the funding needed for the 2015 goal.

⁸⁰ <http://blog.joinred.com/2010/12/on-world-aids-day-world-turned-red.html>

⁸¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/million-moms-challenge/2011/11/07/RED-buying-an-hiv-aids-free-african-future/>

Conclusion

The works of Paula Treichler and SSCR and UNESCO's Fourth Wave forum situates RED and the Global Fund within the framework of the cultural studies approach to the study of disease. Treichler investigates the ways in which initially, biomedical language around HIV/AIDS was constructed through a heteronormative white male Christian cultural and political lens. Her critical examination about the representation of HIV/AIDS as the disease of the "other" situates this disease as a part of a larger narrative rather than an isolated phenomenon immune to preexisting notions of morality and superiority.

The rise of corporations, both before and after WWII, as addressed by Barnett and others, illustrates the ways in which corporations colonized charity and philanthropy in order to secure economic and political power nearing that of many nations. Naturalizing corporate social responsibility and philanthropy in the business world helped validate the increasing power of these corporations.

Visual representations of Project RED use codes of color, design and language to embody both the domestic political constructions of HIV/AIDS and the neoliberal ideology embedded in multinational corporate charity. Utilizing the theoretical and methodological framework of Stuart Hall and his students at the Birmingham School, this honors thesis situates the visual representation of Project RED within the larger structure of multinational corporate charity and philanthropy. Corporate branding as explored by Naomi Klein means that corporations are more invested in securing brand names than in making products, and that they use the visual and aesthetic codes of the art world as well

as the world of commerce to do so. The use of edgy visual and aesthetic coding is especially important in the era of RED, given that the acceleration and oversaturation of advertising makes it more difficult for corporations to distinguish themselves in the marketplace. Furthermore, U.S. firms are under constant pressure in their transnational labor markets to create more jobs and produce more value for their hosts, as evidenced by data on the growth of these markets from the US Economic Commerce department.⁸² Project RED helps validate the existence of multinational corporations within their host nations by deflecting attention away from the issues of jobs and other issues of material value, and onto their philanthropy. This thesis has sought to illustrate that advertising has played a significant role in Project RED, and that production and consumption of these ads has deployed a particular set of societal and cultural assumptions that are not neutral, but that are deeply political. For example, the assumption that Africa is a monolithic entity is an ongoing theme of the brand. The American Express campaign features a Maasai man from a nation which RED does not support. And there are other examples that embody the assumption that Africa is monolithic. In using the constant imagery of the continent without any national boundaries or cultural variations, RED takes part in the legacy of Western culture's assumptions about Africa.

Throughout the visual representations of RED, there is a constant differentiation between the West and Africa, both aesthetically and politically. From the Hallmark commercial with the two children parting ways, to RED's American Express print ad, the transaction is the only recognized relationship between Africa and the West. There is no

⁸² <http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2011/04/19/jobs-at-big-u-s-firms-move-overseas/>

acknowledgement of the other relationships the West has with the continent. The visual representations of RED, even those that also include aural codes, especially the documentary *The Lazarus Effect* and various examples of television advertising, rarely include the African voice. There is a tendency for famous white women to represent African people, as seen on the cover on *The Independent* with Kate Moss and Anne Hathaway's Gap photograph. The presence of women in general in many of these advertisements contrast the presumed fertility of celebrities such as Penelope Cruz and Naomi Watts with the infertility that comes with being infected by HIV/AIDS. However, since RED rarely uses diseased African bodies as part of their ad campaigns, and instead uses Western celebrities, this differentiates them from many organizations that rely upon empathy and compassion for donations. By using celebrities, RED hopes to provide sex appeal to RED, echoing Bono's statement that "Africa is sexy," rather than using the tropes deployed in the 80s and 90s of the diseased African body.

Through a close reading of a set of advertisements, it becomes apparent that Project RED perpetuates a dichotomous relationship that constructs Africa and the West as engaged in a recipient/donor relationship. This perceived relationship is dehistoricized and doesn't acknowledge the role Western structures, neoliberal policies and colonization contributes to the continents vulnerability to the virus. Project RED's emphasis on the "Lazarus Effect" is part of a savior narrative that allows the consumer to take part in this dichotomy. The rise of a White Savior Industrial Complex, according to Teju Cole,⁸³

⁸³ Cole, Teju. "White Industrial Savior Complex" *The Atlantic* March 21 2012
<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>

provides an emotional experience for the West rather than striving for justice. This is seen in the way Project RED centers the consumer and actively engages them in every aspect of the campaign. Print ads deploy personal pronouns to interpellate subjects as Western consumers and also to call these consumers to action. It encourages consumer to shop ethically and to “do the RED thing.” Thus charity becomes a lucrative part of multinational corporations as they situate themselves in the age of Occupy movements and the Battle in Seattle.

Many of the latest RED images stating “AIDS free generation by 2015”⁸⁴ represent corporations as the solution. In this visual in particular, the RED logo and message are saturated with corporate logos. But nowhere does this blog mention the medical advancements that make an AIDS free generation possible outside of the philanthropic sphere. This honors project explores the ways in which Project RED creates symbolic meaning through images that may seem contradictory (i.e., Africa is sexy) or simply coincide with pre existing narratives of Africa/West relations. These images hail the Western consumer, Western lifestyle and Western celebrities while ignoring African peoples, cultural and societal diversity and agency.

An issue worthy of further research is the way RED and similar projects are or are not pushing the boundaries of racial representation. Most of RED’s imagery are multiracial and if not, they constitute only white faces. Very few of these representations are dominated by non-Whites. The few exceptions include *The Lazurus Effect* and

⁸⁴ <http://blog.joinred.com/2010/11/aids-free-generation-is-due-in-2015.html>

Jonathan Glazer's Motorola commercial, which aren't as accessible as many of the RED visuals.

Project RED centers the black body as the spectacle. At least one cultural theorist, Anthony Paul Farley, finds these kinds of spectacular representation evidence of some of the tensions that have accompanied the development of a more multiracial regime of representation, not only in the United States, but also on a transnational scale. In *The Black Body as Fetish Object*, Farley writes that "In our colorblind world, the white body is the form of desire and the black body is the form of pleasure."⁸⁵ This is in part what makes Glazer's commercial interesting. Not only is it dominated by Black bodies but also it constructs those black body as sites of pleasure and desire, and as suggested before, it does not allow for the construction of Whiteness within the text. Farley argues that Whiteness creates pleasure by objectifying the black body and that a White identity is dependant on the constant disdain of black bodies. He claims that pleasure can arise from anything, including suffering.

He uses sexuality as a foundation for talking about race, stating "race, like sexuality is a way of feeling good about and in one's body." The pleasure of Whiteness is "satisfied through the production, circulation, and consumption of images of the not-white." This is seen throughout Project RED as it constructs Africa and the West. Two visual texts previously discussed, the American Express Maasai/Giselle poster and the Hallmark card, are clear examples.

⁸⁵ Farley, 458

Farley writes that one of the key factors of race is the denial of black fertilization by Whiteness. He states the “whites create a culture in which they are both masters and innocents.” Project RED participates in the process of situating the West as the masters and the innocent by equating their buying power with the ability to save lives. In *The Lazarus Effect*, power becomes much more clearly associated with the West through the Judeo-Christian references that equate RED recipients to Lazarus and the ARVs to the Jesus. Western consumers are innocent as they allow for the Global South to access medical resources and become economically dependent.

Within the larger international framework that provides aid for the Global South and African specifically, national and international amnesia is a continuous theme. Problems in Africa are seen as signs of inferiority rather than symptoms of a colonial history. In this paper, I briefly allude to this when looking at The World Bank’s *Accelerated development for Africa: an Agenda for Africa* as well as Tony Blair’s *Commission for Africa*. Both documents deflect responsibility and participate in the act of forgetting which, Farley argues is a product of race.⁸⁶ He writes:

The racist creates his inferiors but the racist cannot admit that his inferiors are the product of oppression and not nature without destroying the illusion of natural inferiority upon which his pleasure is based. The culture of the colorline is comprised of “silent adjustments” which allow such denials. These denials, in

⁸⁶ Farley, Anthony P. “The Black Body as Fetish Object” *Organ Law Review* Vol. 76 1997 461-187

turn, produce the very same pleasures and humiliations as the original aggression.”⁸⁷

The process of denial, pleasure and humiliation corresponds to some of the ways that Naomi Klein and David Harvey are formulating their arguments about the ways capitalism and neoliberalism destroy economic and social structures in the Global South only to impose the same systems in various ways through such things as international loan policies. This framework is helpful in understanding the ways in which RED actively masks the role of multinational corporations and international aid organizations in the economic and social conditions of sub Saharan Africa. RED does so by dehistoricizing the relationship between the West and Africa and by simplifying the discussion of HIV/AIDS. Comments such as “Buy RED and NoBody’s Dead”⁸⁸ and the RED calculator naturalize the economic and social hierarchy. RED produces pleasure for the Western consumer “Buy RED Feel Good.” By objectifying African bodies and commodifying their experiences, RED partakes in the humiliation process Farley mentions.

The black body is at the center of the Western imaginary and its constructions of the West and Africa. These constructions are produced through metaphorical and physical transactions among consumers, producers, and corporations. As I hope that my visual analysis demonstrates, RED creates two kinds of black subjects that mirror post civil rights representations of the black subject in a globalizing society.. The “civil rights

⁸⁷ Farley, Anthony P. *The Black Body as Fetish Object* 467

⁸⁸ Chris Rock Motorola commercial <<http://youtu.be/wJCWASMK7T8>>

subject” as described by Herman Gray is successful, articulate and is “an exemplary consumer and citizen.”⁸⁹ This image is hypervisible in the media and helps construct myths of post racism. It is juxtaposed to representations of black people as homeless, teenage parents and drug dealers, what Sasha Torres call the “civil rights subject undone.” These dichotomous representations reinforce each other.⁹⁰ In RED, comparable civil rights subjects are most evident in the major advertising campaigns. Celebrities such as President Obama, Chris Rock, Mary J Blige, Don Cheadle, Oprah Winfrey embody the Civil Rights subject. These predominantly black Western subjects are hypervisible and help establish the myth of a post racial West.

The equivalent of the civil rights subject undone is (post)diseased black body such as that in *The Lazarus Effect*. The benefactors of RED are virtually invisible to the overall campaign. When they do surface such as in the documentary, these representations reinforce the “geography accident” mentioned by Bono⁹¹ in that the issue isn’t about race or structural inequality, its about geography since the Western black subjects are successful and well-educated.

When discussing the politics of representation, its important to be aware of the voices that are excluded from the larger narrative. As HIV/AIDS is assigned to Africans on the continent, US poor people of color are excluded from the discussion. Other groups that are excluded include Africans whose sexual and gender identities lie outside of

⁸⁹ Torres, Sasha. *Black, White, and in Color: Television and Black Civil Rights*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print. 89

⁹⁰ Torres 87-90

⁹¹

“The Global Fund: Together We Can Do Great Things - long version” March 2011
<http://youtu.be/5LdXy7nZXY4>

heteronormativity, such as gay, lesbian and trans-gendered people and also sex workers. As discussed by Treichler and Cohen, representations of poor people of color and possibilities of intervention in these communities has been very limited

A fruitful direction for further study of Project RED and similar efforts would explore the effect of the rise of corporate branding and corporate charity on the work of NGO's. For example, *Tinderbox* suggest that increased corporate funding, enabled by sophisticated corporate branding and advertising regimes, negatively affected how some African nations dealt with HIV/AIDS infections by overwhelming indigenous efforts to deal with the disease. Other issues to be explored include the ways in which the simplification of the AIDS epidemic by efforts such as RED affect governments policies around the complicated set of issues, such as domestic abuse, women's rights, economic inequality and other factors, that contribute to the epidemic.

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