One Night in Paris (Hilton): Wealth, Celebrity, and the Politics of Humiliation THOMAS FAHY

For many Americans, Paris Whitney Hilton washed up on the shores of celebrity in the September 2000 issue of *Vanity Fair*. The article, "Hip-Hop Debs," presents Paris and her sister, Nicky, as the new generation of media-hungry Hiltons. Modeling themselves after their great-grandfather, Conrad Hilton, who built the hotel empire and forged a public persona based on his association with celebrities (from L. A. showgirls to his second wife, Zsa Zsa Gabor) and their grandfather, with his short-lived yet highly publicized marriage to Elizabeth Taylor, the Hilton sisters seem to be extending this family tradition with e´lan. Of course, they have been making appearances at high-society events and parties since the late 1990s, but their debut in *Vanity Fair* marked a new beginning of sorts—an attempt on the part of their family to catapult them into the upper stratosphere of celebrity and to shape the ways in which the media would interpret them.

In many respects, "Hip-Hop Debs" accomplished these goals, albeit ironically. It moved the sisters, particularly Paris, from "Page Six" to cover story material. Yet much to the Hilton family's dismay, Nancy Jo Sales's sardonic text and David LaChapelle's controversial images helped establish the terms that would continue to characterize Paris Hilton as a vapid, narcissistic, spoiled, and highly sexualized figure who desires one thing above all else—fame. Sales reports one anonymous friend as saying that "all [Paris] wants to do is become famous . . . to wipe out the past, to become somebody else."1 Certainly the accompanying photographs of the nineteen-year-old heiress reinforce this notion. But just like the glaring contradictions between Paris Hilton's ostentatious public image and the ways in which she tries to characterize herself as "a normal kid,"2 a tension underlies her celebrity status and her privileged place in America's hereditary aristocracy.

Celebrities must continually negotiate the public's desire to both elevate and denigrate the famous. As Leo Braudy explains in *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History,* "modern fame is always compounded of the audience's aspirations and its despair, its need to admire and to find a scapegoat for that need."3 Paris Hilton, a celebrity who is both desired and despised, would seem to fulfill these needs. Unlike public figures who achieve recognition from acting, performing, writing, athletics, and/or politics, however, Hilton's fame hasn't come from any discernible talent or skill. It is inherited, like her wealth, and this complicates how we read and understand her image. Not only is there less to admire about Paris Hilton, but she also fails to embody the typical promise of modern-day celebrity—that anyone can achieve the

same. If celebrity is a function of birth, it is as exclusive as we've always feared, and supremely undemocratic. Cultural historian P. David Marshall explains the promise in terms of individuality: "Celebrities are icons of democracy and democratic will. Their wealth does not signify their difference from the rest of society so much as it articulates the possibility of everyone's achieving the status of individuality within the culture." 4 Yet in the case of Paris Hilton, wealth *does* signify an important difference. The inherited privilege that she enjoys distinguishes her from the general public and makes her individuality (one largely defined by an elite class status) problematic; it is an identity unattainable, if not impossible, for most to acquire and/or imitate. Despite her claims that any woman can tap into her "inner heiress," Paris Hilton repeatedly acknowledges that "heiresses are born with privileges." 5 She has even claimed to be "American royalty." 6 But who among us will inherit tens of millions? Who has the opportunity to live in the Waldorf-Astoria on Park Avenue and to get unrestricted access to red-carpet events with famous actors and rock stars? If, as Leo Braudy reminds us, fame "requires that uniqueness be exemplary and reproducible,"7 what exactly is the source of Paris Hilton's appeal? Why does she receive so much public attention? Two photographs from the *Vanity Fair* article offer a clue about her celebrity. The picture entitled "Sweetie Pie," for example, shows Paris in an act of youthful rebellion as she stands near the entryway of her grandmother's lavish Beverly Hills living room. The elegant, wealthy furniture in the background clearly belongs to another, much older, generation, and a robe lies on the floor as if it has just fallen off her shoulders, revealing Paris's scantily clothed body. Her legs are wide apart. A short, tight skirt barely covers her crotch, and a fishnet tank top reveals her breasts and nipples. The straps of her highheeled shoes almost blend into a nearby phone cord (the most contemporary and anachronistic object in the room). Reflective sunglasses hide her eyes, and she extends her middle finger to the viewer. On one level, her brazen pose seems directed at members of the media and the general public who both desire her image and criticize her at the same time. On another, perhaps more obvious level (the one probably uppermost in Hilton's mind at the time), the photograph suggests Paris's rejection of her upper-class heritage – leaving behind the values of old money (as embodied in the furniture) and saying "fuck off" to the social propriety expected of someone of her economic class. Even the robe on the floor and her cut-off gloves imply a casting off of sorts. A robe and gloves would hide her body; they suggest an investment in privacy and, arguably, propriety. But Paris Hilton has largely defined herself as the antithesis of these things.8 Here, she wears an outfit that has more in common with a prostitute than an heiress. It is an outfit that suggests public

(as well as sexual) access, not private reservation. And in the context of this Beverly Hills estate, her clothing and exposed body elide class divisions between her and her audience; they promise intimate access to—and even the possible violation of—this world of privilege.

The most striking photograph, "California Girl," also works to mitigate Paris Hilton's elite status through sexual objectification and erotic desire. In this image, Paris's body has washed up onto Zuma Beach. Her eyes are closed, and her mouth is open in an ecstatic smile – perhaps in the hopes of mouthtomouth resuscitation from either the nearby men or an anonymous public. The top of her swimsuit has been lowered to reveal her right breast, and her legs, once again, are spread apart. Twenty-dollar bills and a few makeup bottles (trappings of her class or of prostitution) surround her body in the wet sand, while several surfers stand nearby, holding their long, phallic surfboards. These details invite the viewer to watch two things: Paris Hilton's inert, seemingly lifeless body and the surfers who gaze at her. The money reinforces the idea that part of her allure stems from her association with the Hilton family fortune. But her nudity and vulnerability, suggested by the position of her body and the men who surround her with their large surfboards, casts her as an object of desire and potential violation. One might not have riches to inherit, but one can engage in the fantasy of sexual congress with such money through a figure like Paris Hilton.9 It is both her wealth and sexually exposed/available body, therefore, that titillate the public. Together these things are presented as – and continue to be – defining terms of her celebrity.

Just as these photographs can be read as a critique of the public attention given to such a superficial individual, they also function ironically in relation to the article. Most obviously, they undermine the ways in which Mrs. Hilton insists, for example, that Paris is a "sweet kid" and "the most modest girl." 10 But in many respects, these photographs and the dynamic created by their juxtaposition with the text also set the stage for the ways in which Paris Hilton – and by Paris Hilton I mean all of the people who construct her image (her family, managers, agents, publicists, the media, a complicit public, etc.) – would make immodesty and, more importantly, humiliation significant components of her success. From her autobiography, Confessions of an Heiress, and reality television show, The Simple Life, to her controversial commercial for Carl's Jr. and her pornographic videos, particularly One Night in Paris, Paris Hilton's highly eroticized image promises an erosion of the economic boundaries that typically separate the upper class from the rest of society. As P. David Marshall reminds us, "celebrities reinforce the conception that there are no barriers in contemporary culture that the individual cannot

overcome."11 And Paris Hilton has made this message an essential part of her appeal.

"HOW TO BE AN HEIRESS": DECEPTION, BOREDOM, AND THE NOT SO SIMPLE LIFE

In January 2006, the Economic Policy Institute published a report on the growing disparity between the rich and poor in the United States. Authors Jared Bernstein, Elizabeth McNichol, and Karen Lyons attribute this problem to a number of factors, including wage inequality (which has been exacerbated by globalization, increased immigration and trade, long periods of unemployment, deregulation, and the weakening of unions), investment income that typically benefits the wealthy, corporate profits, and government policies ("both what governments have done and what governments have not done"12). The report argues that the economic inequalities of the last twentyfive years have led to a decline in most people's living standards, a decline that has social and political implications:

The United States was built on the ideal that hard work should pay off, that individuals who contribute to the nation's economic growth should reap the benefits of that growth. Over the past two decades, however, the benefits of economic growth have been skewed in favor of the wealthiest members of society.

... A widening gulf between the rich on the one hand and the poor and middle class on the other hand can reduce social cohesion, trust in government and other institutions, and participation in the democratic process.13

In part, the EPI's report, entitled "Pulling Apart: A State-by-State Analysis of Income Trends," views this widening economic gulf as a corrosive agent for the ideals of American democracy and society — a metaphoric and potentially literal "pulling apart" of the United States. It also implies that this gap can have dangerous consequences, including the weakening of social cohesion and the public trust.

The media quickly characterized this report—along with the conference hosted by the Economic Policy Institute in the same month—as a signal of impending "class warfare."14 And this interpretation resonates with the analyses of political and economic historian Kevin Phillips. In his book *Wealth and Democracy*, Phillips argues that the United States has long since abandoned the egalitarianism of the Founding Fathers and has, in fact, become a plutocracy. One dimension of his critique involves the "hereditary aristocracy." He

explains that early-twenty-first-century America is both the "world's richest major nation" and "the West's citadel of inherited wealth. Aristocracy [is] a cultural and economic fact, if not a statutory one."15 And Phillips considers the ability of the rich to pass on their estates to be a significant factor in this growing economic inequality: "The United States in turn entered the new century with the Republican Party having begun the elimination of federal estate and gift taxes in order to let the great wealth accumulations of the late twentieth century pass minimally hindered to the next generation."16 Philips concludes that this type of disparity often leads to a "politics of resentment" — resentment that is typically manifested in radicalism and sweeping political reform.

Paris Hilton is a clearly a beneficiary of policies that help safeguard inherited wealth, and as a celebrity who represents this aristocratic culture, a great deal of public resentment about class inequality has been directed at (and mitigated by) her image. Oftentimes, upper-class society, just like celebrity culture, is linked to a democratizing impulse associated with the American Dream. Both imply that anyone can potentially achieve fame and wealth. At a time when the gap between rich and poor is greater than at any point in U.S. history and when political resentment seems to be growing over policies that favor the rich, however, Hilton's association with hereditary wealth (which by its very nature is exclusive) could have been a liability for her public image. Yet it hasn't been. In fact, it has been a crucial part of her popularity and success. Paris Hilton—at her most glamorous, most erotic, and most embarrassed – provides her audience, particularly those who feel disenfranchised by economic inequality, with an outlet for their fantasies and frustrations. Her eroticized body promises intimate access to the world of celebrity and upper-class privilege, while images of her that are intended to humiliate (as evident in the ironic subtext of the *Vanity Fair* article, *The* Simple Life, and One Night in Paris) enact a kind of politics that closes the socio-economic gap between herself and the majority of those who consume her image. In this way, Paris Hilton's image is not only an effective tool for examining contemporary tensions about wealth, but it also offers greater insight into the ways in which popular culture can mitigate – and even defer – the kind of resentment that would lead to social and political change. More specifically, both Confessions of an Heiress and The Simple Life use eroticism and humiliation to transform "the truth" about Paris Hilton's class standing into something palatable for consumption. These portraits make Hilton seem more accessible (either to imitation, derision, or desire) and ultimately work to contain some of the broader social problems that her extraordinary inherited wealth creates. P. David Marshall's Celebrity and Power: Fame

in Contemporary Culture argues that at some level "celebrities are attempts to contain the mass. The mass is the site par excellence of affective power, a kind of power that is seen to be very volatile and dangerous but also very desirable if it can be effectively housed."17 Unlike Marshall's analysis of celebrities who represent the public by attempting to resolve the inherent contradiction in a democratic society between the power of individualism and of collective will, however, Paris Hilton's celebrity contains the mass in a different way; it allows contradictory readings of her (as an object of desire and resentment) that parallels the public's often contradictory responses to wealth (as something that inspires both desire and envy).

Confessions of an Heiress, which has almost as many photographs as words, plays with this tension by offering a range of images that highlight Hilton's glamorous wealth and sexualized body. Her seemingly countless evening gowns, ostentations diamond jewelry, fur coats, and fashionable accessories appear alongside her bikinis, lingerie, and other revealing clothing. Of course, the wealth and privilege that is evident on every page inverts the more traditional narratives of American autobiographies – the rags to riches, trauma to recovery, rise and fall (only to rise up again) stories. Instead, Paris Hilton's story is one of riches to riches. In this way it offers yet another glimpse into high society life and celebrity culture that continues to intrigue the public. But the book also promises two things that do situate it in the tradition of autobiography: a portrait of the author's "true" self and strategies/secrets that readers can use to achieve the same. This promise of truth (like the illusion of reality in The Simple Life) constitutes another aspect of its allure, but neither lives up to these claims. As I will show, the artifice of Confessions and The Simple Life enables Paris Hilton to remain exclusively in the realm of the interpretable image – the primary vehicle that sustains her celebrity and cultural function regarding class.

Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, which he worked on from 1771 until his death in 1790, begins by setting up his life story as a model for future generations: "Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world. . . . my posterity may like to know [the conducting means I made use of], as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated."18 The prospect of imitation, in other words, adds a level of import to Franklin's life, for it links the value of his story to its usefulness as a model for other lives. And in eighteenth-century America where the production and consumption of goods was increasingly geared toward a capitalistic market, nothing could have been more important.
Franklin goes on to link this understanding of the American marketplace

to the idea of appearance: "In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care not only to be in reality industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances to the contrary. I drest plainly; I was seen at no places of idle diversion. I never went out a fishing or shooting."19 Franklin understood that one's public identity was often seen as a reflection of the private self, and as a result, he created a public image that would help secure his professional and personal advancement. As historian John Kasson explains in Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America, Franklin may not have "directly [advocated] deceit" in the Autobiography, but "he was notoriously willing, if he could not 'boast of much Success in acquiring the Reality' of a particular virtue, to be more than satisfied by his success 'with regard to the Appearance of it."20 For Franklin, projecting an image of success could be just as socially and personally meaningful as the real thing in a society where outward appearances were valued so highly. On the surface, Paris Hilton's co-written autobiography, Confessions of an Heiress: A Tongue-in-Chic Peek Behind the Pose (2004), seems to promote a similar philosophy about appearances and the art of deception, though without Franklin's sophistication, his belief that outward appearances should reflects one's inner merits, and his corresponding emphasis on moral virtues. Hilton begins by addressing some of the public responses to her image: "Newspapers and magazines write that I'm spoiled and privileged. . . . They think I instantly became famous because I was born into a rich, well-known family. . . . Okay, *I get it*. Everyone can have fun with my image because *I* like to have fun with it too."21 The main goal of the book is not to defend herself from such attacks but to offer a different, more personal interpretation of her own image: "I've finally decided to give you a sneak peek into my very hyped life – so you can know the real me."22 Yet based on the book, the real Paris Hilton is no different from the image-constructed one – a young woman preoccupied with clothes, cosmetics, fast food, hair, cell phones, parties, boys, and an insatiable desire to be associated with celebrity. This list does demonstrate one possible facet of her appeal, however. Hilton can claim to be "a normal kid" because she shares the "normal" interests of teenage girls. In fact, Fireside Books initially considered teenage girls the primary market for Confessions, which is now in its sixteenth printing. But the range of people who attended various book signings surprised Fireside editor Trish Todd: "We thought it was mostly going to be teenage girls . . . but it was moms with

The make-up of this audience is not entirely surprising given the various contexts we have seen for Paris Hilton's celebrity — a celebrity built on the

strollers, it was little old ladies, it was gay guys, it was businessmen in

suits—it was everyone."23

appearance of sexual availability, extraordinary riches, teenage interests (in malls, cell phones, and popular trends), romances with shipping heirs and movie stars, and an unabashed narcissism. Her image encourages a range of responses, in part, because it is not grounded in anything specific. As Leo Braudy reminds us, "those whose fame depends least on anything specific are, in an image-conscious world, the most likely to be emulated. To be famous for yourself, for what you are without talent or premeditation, means you have come into your rightful inheritance."24 Here, inheritance is personal freedom, the power to stand out in a world where so many people feel anonymous. Not surprisingly, Paris Hilton, who fully embodies this type of meritless fame, wants to establish herself as a model for personal freedom and individuality – qualities that resonate with American audiences of any class. Hilton's literal inheritance, however, tends to contradict the democratic implications that Braudy finds in her type of fame. Throughout *Confessions* of an Heiress, Hilton tries to glamorize her extravagant, privileged life, while suggesting that class is essentially a state of mind. This absurd message, which isn't offset by her repeated admission that she was born with privileges, is encapsulated in her central theme that everyone has an "inner heiress," the ability to "create [their] own image, and project an extreme sense of confidence." 25 Like Benjamin Franklin, Hilton offers her story as a model, suggesting that anyone, regardless of his or her socio-economic background, can achieve what she has through imitation. As she states at the end of the introduction: "Here are my fail-safe instructions on how to be an heiress and live like you have a privileged life – and I am serious about them. Most of them, anyway."26 Just as this claim is about simulacra, living like you're someone you're not, the playful set of instructions that follow also highlight deception as an integral part of Hilton's public persona: "Always tell everyone what they want to hear. Then do what you want."27 And later, she advises people to "act ditzy. Lose things. It throws people off and makes them think you're 'adorable,' and less together than you really are."28 And if all else fails, "you can always reinvent yourself and your lineage if you have to."29 It would be a mistake to take these instructions, or any aspect of Hilton's autobiography, at face value. Just when the narrative promises to offer some degree of truth (including her opening claim about getting to know "the real me"), it promotes deceit as a tool for success. Yet the implications of using deception to manipulate people and to achieve recognition remain unacknowledged here. Unlike Franklin's narrative or the autobiography of infamous showman P. T. Barnum in the nineteenth century, Hilton's book does not present a moralistic side to offset her flaws or questionable practices. She simply reminds readers to be kind to animals, which doesn't preclude eating

hamburgers or wearing furs.

At the same time, one could see the role of deception in Confessions of an *Heiress* as appealing to—or at least appeasing—those who resent the wealthy corporate culture that she embodies. Certainly, the recent scandals of Enron, Halliburton, Tyco, Qwest Communications, and countless others have kept corporate corruption and unconscionable displays of executive-level greed in the public eye; such scandals serve as disturbing reminder of the pervasive role of deception in corporate America and the lacuna between the haves and have-nots. In this climate, the ways in which Paris Hilton embraces and promotes dishonesty align her with the more insidious aspects of big business—a connection that puts her (with the corporate family name Hilton) in a unique position to operate as an outlet for some of the growing resentment in America over egregious wealth and corporate malfeasance. Specifically, her celebrity status gives people socially acceptable ways to voice their resentment, through television programs, magazines, newspapers, the internet, and even academic collections. Furthermore, the degree of animosity – particularly the tendency to insult, humiliate, and even degrade Hilton – highlights the extent to which her celebrity is about this outlet for contemporary class strife.

In addition to the rather scathing reviews of *Confessions* such as the *New York Post's* "How to Be an Heir-Head: Paris Hilton Dishes Bad Advice in New Book,"30 many of the over two hundred customer reviews on Amazon.com also make their criticisms personal—and do so by focusing on her wealth and sexualized image. One review, "My Bible," takes the form of a letter:

Dear Paris,

Thank you very much for writing such a wonderful book. It left me with such a strong impression that now I know what I DON'T WANT TO BE, and that is a good for nothing heiress with tons of money and no brains. I don't regret having bought the book in the least; on the contrary, it will be on my bedside table to remind me of my path in life. I want to be creative and do something for others. I don't not want to be remembered just for partying, misplacing videotapes, and accrebral [sic] reality shows.31

In part, this response attacks Hilton in terms of class, which is not surprising given the slick images and ostentatious displays of wealth in the book. But it is also an attempt on the author's part to define herself in opposition to privilege: "I want to be creative and do something for others." The reviewer associates this kind of money and lifestyle with selfishness, and she effectively makes Hilton a foil for her own life, which she claims will be dedicated to

creativity and communal investment. In another review, "So Bad, I Went Blind,"32 the writer links his dislike for Paris to her sexual accessibility and humiliation elsewhere: "In my honest opinion, Paris's best work has been in the video industry. Paris's real talent is not writing. If you want to know what her real talent is, rent the best-selling video. You will probably find that she is not ever that appealing when doing her video work." Interestingly, this reader doesn't mention the numerous erotic pictures in Confessions, as if these images are unsatisfying in a marketplace where one can watch a rentable video of her having sex. Clearly, this association with pornography is meant to degrade Paris (since the video, which I discuss later, was released without her consent and, from her perspective, "was humiliating"33), but in fact, pornography is largely responsible for Paris Hilton's unprecedented celebrity. The animosity expressed in these and dozens of other reviews not only comes from a profound class resentment for the kind of privilege that Paris Hilton has, but it can also be situated in the expectations of autobiography itself – particularly the notion of truth-telling. Autobiographies, and memoirs, promise a kind of truth about the subject/author, and even though audiences recognize these stories as crafted and shaped in various ways, there still is a general expectation of honesty. [...] This expectation of truthfulness connects Hilton's autobiography to The Simple Life (2003-present) and the problematic illusion of "reality" in reality television more broadly. Both of these "texts" try to lessen the more alienating aspects of Hilton's elite status (with varying degrees of success) by suggesting that a more genuine portrait of Paris will bridge the gap between her and her audience. Even though both of these works fail to provide an understanding of Paris Hilton beyond her photographic image, The Simple Life is successful in its explicit use of humiliation to mitigate Hilton's alienating wealth and to make her more palatable for the public as a celebrity.

The opening voice-over for *The Simple Life* establishes the economic and social tensions that will drive the show: upper class vs. working class, urban vs. rural, sophistication vs. simplicity, luxury vs. poverty (relatively speaking), and public vs. private: "Meet Paris Hilton—model, jet-setter, target of the tabloids, and heir to the \$360 million dollar Hilton fortune. . . . [She and Nicole Richie] are giving up their plush lifestyle to live on a farm. . . . They've challenged themselves to live the simple life." Throughout the series, "the simple life" is presented as antithetical to a life defined by fortune, extravagance, and jet-setting (which the opening montage equates with men such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Hugh Hefner). In the context of an agricultural community, simplicity also implies a lack of urban sophistication. Hilton and Richie stay with an Arkansas family, the Ledings, in the first season, and this

juxtaposition sets up the possibility of poking fun at both worlds (upperclass urban and working-class rural). Yet the Ledings are not constructed as stereotypical Southerners, a portrait that is all too common in Hollywood34; instead, they appear to be genuine, caring people who try (unsuccessfully) to help these young women achieve some degree of social and personal responsibility. This starkly contrasts with the characterization of Hilton and Richie as lazy, deceptive, irreverent, rude, ignorant, and childish. In this way, the show highlights the social and intellectual insularity of "the girls," not the Ledings. Money, the series implies, has kept Hilton and Richie from any real or meaningful participation in the world.

The opening sequence in the pilot episode, for example, works to alienate Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie for the audience in terms of wealth: twenty-twoyear-old Paris driving a convertible Porsche; Paris asking a salesperson at Dior if her mother's credit card is still on file (before quickly spending thousands of dollars on clothes, shoes, and handbags); Paris sunbathing in a bikini by the pool, Paris and Nicole arriving at a Hilton family party in a helicopter; Paris reluctantly handing over her credit cards and cash to a butler (demonstrating what she is about to sacrifice to live the simple life); and Paris and Nicole taking a private plane to Altus, Arkansas. At quick glance, the world of such money seems glamorous and enticing – her gorgeous car, elegant home, private jet, and freedom from economic worry. But each of these images associates extreme wealth with careless excess and personal irresponsibility. Paris, for example, doesn't have to earn her money; she can spend \$1500 on a travel bag for her dog, Tinkerbell, without hesitation. This kind of excess is also linked with Hilton's and Richie's ignorance and arrogance. While grocery shopping in the pilot episode, Paris asks Nicole what the word "generic" means, and this is followed by their first dinner with the Leding family:

Grandfather: Have you girls ever been to any of this part of the country before?

Paris: I don't know. I only travel like to Europe and L. A. or New York. Yeah. . . . I couldn't imagine living here. I would die.

Nicole: Now do you guys hang out at Walmart? [...] Paris: What is Walmart? Is it like they sell wall stuff?35

This exchange pairs Hilton's elitism with her educational and social ignorance. The humor comes, in part, from the contrast between the cosmopolitan image that she tries to establish by referencing her travels to Europe, L.A., and New York and her astonishing ignorance about the world around her. Of

course, it is conceivable that someone of Hilton's class has not been to Walmart, but having no knowledge of the largest retail company in the United States says something quite different. It signals a troubling gap between her aristocratic world and the everyday marketplace of middle and working class America – a gap that invites the audience's disdain, judgment, and mockery.36 My intention is not to suggest that *The Simple Life* is a realistic portrait of Hilton, Richie, or the Leding family. But for a figure like Hilton, whose celebrity is based predominantly on a superficial, highly readable image, The Simple *Life* – as well as the Fox television network's interest in producing and shaping the show editorially – further pinpoints artifice as a defining aspect of Hilton's appeal. Television scholars have examined the problematic use of "reality" for describing shows like The Simple Life. In Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real, James Friedman qualifies the term "reality television" by situating these current shows in the history of reality-based programming and emphasizing the important role of dramatic structure. "Rather than 'reality,' these programs are using seemingly 'normal' (real) people rather than professional actors for the production of televisual drama."37 Of course, Hilton and Richie are far from "normal" people, but as scholars Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn explain, "when celebrities are already a prerequisite of the show . . . the authenticity of the show is marked by the supposed provision of insights into the hidden 'real' aspect of celebrity personality."38 So like Hilton's autobiography, the reality genre of *The Simple Life* promises to reveal something authentic about Hilton and Richie, but the revelation here is not so much personal as it is socio-economic.

Audiences certainly realize that the participants in these shows are being filmed and, in many cases, are playing to the camera for dramatic effect, but they still watch for signs of something genuine. As critic Annette Hill explains in her analysis of Big Brother, "audiences look for the moment of authenticity when real people are 'really' themselves in an unreal environment."39 In the case of *The Simple Life*, these "truthful" moments rarely occur through Hilton's on-camera behavior. Perhaps this is due to the inversion of real and unreal here; Hilton's "real" world of privilege is completely alien to most, so she seems unreal in a more modest middle and working-class environment. Regardless, an authenticity does emerge in the show's ironic subtext and its explicit engagement with class resentment. While wearing lingerie and sitting on an elegant, canopied bed, Paris Hilton introduces The Simple Life with what will become an ironic promise: "Listen. Everyone thinks Nicole and I are these two girls who never worked a day in their life and that we can't do anything. And we're doing this to prove everyone wrong and to show we can do anything."40 Not surprisingly, The Simple Life demonstrates that these

young women *cannot*, in fact, do anything—except lie, party, sleep, and complain. If they were capable of hard work, the show would not be entertaining. But more importantly, their incompetence is largely attributed to their privileged backgrounds. The girls admit that they have never had jobs or earned money for themselves; they have no concept of the cost of living; and they demonstrate no work ethic whatsoever. [...] Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie are merely [...] embodiments of an alienating, disconnected, and irresponsible upper-class culture; they only function as individuals to the extent that they are associated with famous families.

Even the confessional moments — the only vehicle that reality shows provide for a somewhat truthful, and potentially forgiving, glimpse into their characters — is undermined in *The Simple Life*. Unlike the contestants on *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, or *The Biggest Loser*, for example, Paris and Nicole are never interviewed separately about their experiences or feelings. They not only perform for the cameras that record every interaction with the family, their various employers, and the townspeople, but they also appear to be performing for each other during their joint "confessions." In effect, the lack of privacy or presumed intimacy here makes these moments ring false. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault discusses the personal and social functions of confession in relation to sex, truth, and power:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, and reconcile; . . . a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it.41

The ritual of confession here involves both judgment and transformation. It "liberates" and "purifies" 42 because the revelation is an unburdening of something hidden. In the context of Foucault's work, sex is "a privileged theme" 43 and hidden burden in Western society.

A rather pedestrian confession about sexual desire does occur on *The Simple Life* when Paris admits to being romantically involved with a local teenager nicknamed "Chops," but the presence of Nicole during these moments foregrounds the performance of the confession. It makes Hilton's sentiments and her other amorous escapades on the show feel as artificial as everything else—from the late night outings to local bars (equipped with stripper poles,

mirrors, and strobe lights) to her outrageous behavior at various jobs. As a result, none of these confessional sequences offer an endearing or genuine portrait of Paris and Nicole; in fact, they ultimately heighten the audience's critical judgment because of their inauthenticity.

Another important element that is absent from these confessions, to return to Foucault, is that of transformation. Nothing about Hilton's and Richie's experiences in *The Simple Life* suggest that they have been changed in any way. Their romantic flings are explicitly described as temporary. Their apologies for various transgressions are conscious acts of deception to placate the family and their employers. They are never punished or held accountable for their behavior. And this pattern of deceit also makes their expressions of gratitude seem disingenuous. In the final episode, they ultimately express relief at leaving. "I'm ready to go home," Paris states unequivocally and loudly enough to be heard over Nicole Richie (which is not an easy task).44

Judgment and, as Biressi and Nunn point out, derision are essential components of reality television. Not surprisingly, viewers of The Simple Life are continually invited to judge Hilton and Richie and to do so in terms of class. When an off-camera voice asks the Ledings' teenage son, Justin, how he will treat the girls when they first arrive, he responds: "It depends on how they're going to treat me. If they're nice to me I'll be nice to them, but it they're like little snotty bitches, I mean . . . payback's hell."45 In many ways, the entire series can be seen as a kind of "payback" for an audience that is not part of the hereditary aristocracy. We may not consciously align ourselves with Justin per se (he is a minor character), but the show clearly wants us to embrace this sentiment by giving us ample opportunities to mock and criticize these rich, ridiculous girls. In the recurring musical motif associated with Paris Hilton, for example, a rock-and-roll type singer belts: "Miss Hilton, you must be worth a trillion bucks; get the feeling that you don't really give a [fuck]!" The reiteration of this is obviously a conscious attempt on the part of the producers to manipulate the audience, to invite us to see Hilton's money as the reason for her various ineptitudes and deceptions. But the lyrics, particularly the censored word "fuck," implies that Hilton herself feels an aggressive indifference towards others – an indifference that encourages an aggressive response from the viewers/listeners. Interestingly, there is no corresponding tune for Nicole Richie. True, Paris Hilton is the main star/draw for the show, but her name is also the one associated with corporate culture, inheritance, and undeserved fame – characteristics that *The Simple Life* encourages the audience to see derisively.

Perhaps the most telling example of class resentment occurs in the final

episode of the first season. In the opening scene, we see Richie getting drunk at a local bar. After misplacing her purse, she starts accusing people of theft and even pours bleach on a pool table. When the owner throws them out, a surprising exchange occurs. The other patrons start jeering at Paris: "Go back to your hotels, Paris!" "Go home, rich bitch, go home." "Go home, little girl, we don't want to see ya." "Get outta here!" 46 Paris Hilton's initial expression might be the only authentic moment in the entire first season – genuine shock and even anger. She immediately leaves, though, calling out to her drunk, absent friend, and the scene fades to black. This collective anger is somewhat misdirected here, since Richie is largely responsible for what happens (though Paris does become indignant when she realizes that her jacket is missing as well). The demeaning phrases "little girl" and "rich bitch" come across as genuine expressions of resentment, and the sudden solidarity of the bar's patrons (who have presumably been witnesses to the antics of these women for thirty days) invites us to agree with them as well. Indeed, there is a certain pleasure in seeing the girls thrown out. They have behaved badly throughout the series, and as Justin warned, "payback is hell." Here, the town gets revenge in the very medium in which these women thrive – television/ photography. Additionally, the reference to the Hilton hotels gives another clue to the source for this working-class community's anger – economic inequality. "Go back to your hotels" is a reminder to Paris that what she has is inherited, not earned. The line also emphasizes the fact that hotels are temporary dwellings, usually associated with luxury, as opposed to the more modest permanent domicile in which Paris and Nicole have been living (as in a hotel) during the show.

As I mentioned earlier, the overriding dichotomy in *The Simple Life* is about class (upper vs. middle and lower), and this contrast is reinforced by the role of labor (what is earned and what isn't) and language. The girls "work" at various jobs, but they aren't fired for gross incompetence. Laziness seems to be the primary problem. In their first job at a diary farm, for example, they simply decide to stop working (because it is so hard) and to sunbathe by a Jacuzzi. (Of course, they just happen to have bikinis with them.)

Their laziness is juxtaposed with the real labor being performed in the community of Altus, and this comparison encourages our critical judgment. They aren't capable workers, but they are good at superficiality — putting their bodies on display, spending money, and hanging out with boys. The underlying message of this behavior is that sexuality and status are the only qualities that (self-proclaimed) glamorous women need for success in this world. When Hilton and Richie are confronted by those who do not accept this philosophy and/or validate it, however, these women react petulantly.

Lastly, the language of the show, particularly the repeated use of "boredom" and "bitch," reinforces our personal and socio-economic-based dislike of the protagonists. For Hilton, boredom is constant preoccupation and concern one that she never bears any responsibility for. She merely complains about it in almost every episode. As she explains in her autobiography, "there is no sin worse in life than being boring."47 The language of boredom here is presented as the antithesis of fun. But it is also stands in opposition to thought, self-reflection, and the value of community. In the final two episodes of season one, Albert Leding, the father, asks the girls to spend an evening with the family, to stay home so that they can get to know each other better. But Paris rejects the idea on the grounds of boredom and spoiled entitlement: "It's bullshit. . . . It's like we're trapped. . . . Talk about making something out of nothing. . . . I'm going crazy in this house. I can't sit here all the time. . . . I'm so bored!"48 Hilton seems to equate boredom with familial intimacy because this request puts the family above her own self-interest; boredom, in other words, is something that involves sacrifice (e.g. doing chores around the house) and investing time and effort in others. Hilton's off-putting defiance (with characteristic teenage pouting and dismissiveness) can be seen as youthful rebellion, but her awareness of an audience is also making her act out more. These things give her a freedom that most young kids living at home don't have. Once again, it is her difference from the rest of us that stands out here.

The word "bitch" creates a similar distancing effect. Oftentimes, it operates playfully both as a term of endearment between the girls and more ironically in the subtext of Tinkerbell's role on the show — as Paris's literal bitch. It can also function humorously to characterize most of Hilton's interactions on the show—as complaining or "bitching" about something. At the same time, bitch is a hateful word, and there are many instances in the series when it is used hatefully. Like the word "boredom," it also ends up functioning as a statement about appearances and reality. One of the bar owners, Shannon, remarks: "These girls can be the sweetest things. And they can turn on you like they're the biggest bitches in God knows what." 49 Shannon recognizes the role of deceit in the public personas of Hilton and Richie, and she articulates what the audience has seen throughout the series – that these girls behave in nasty, disrespectful, and dishonest ways. Having a lot of money can clearly bring one fame, nice clothes, and the attention of men, but being able to write a check to pay for the damages or to take off one's clothes for photographers and home videos doesn't offset uglier truths about the self. It doesn't prevent one from "being a bitch" or mistreating and abusing others.

HAMBURGERS, WINE, AND HOME VIDEOS: THE PORNIFICATION OF PARIS

[Commercial director Chris Applebaum used the car-washing girl scene in the movie Cool Hand Luke (Stuart Rosenberg, 1967) as inspiration for Paris Hilton's controversial Carl's Jr. spot. He told Krista Smith of Vanity Fair that "I was one of those people who always felt that glorifying the acquisition of fame and wealth is an ugly thing about our society, and that [Paris] sort of symbolizes that. When I finally got to [the commercial], I found a girl who is so in on the joke and so ready to laugh at herself."51 What he means by "in on the joke" is a bit unclear here. Is it the recognition that she is playing into the public's desire – not so unlike the chain gang in Cool Hand Luke – to see women purely in terms of sexuality? Is it the joke that Paris recognizes her true investment in selling herself as a sexual object for fame and public recognition? Or both? In any case, the Carl's Jr. advertisement recasts this scene in Hilton-esque terms. Instead of walking out of a farmhouse, Hilton walks into a hangar/studio to wash a Bentley (the kind of car that she would presumably be driven around in). Wearing both the trappings of her class (a diamond necklace, jeweled bracelets, rings, and a fur that she drops to the ground in a striptease) and a one-piece leather garment that suggests an association with call girls and strippers, she crawls across the car and the floor in a sudsy fervor. Unlike the woman from Cool Hand Luke, Paris looks directly at the audience throughout the scene; in and outside of this advertisement, there is nothing shy about the power and pleasure that Hilton gets from being an object of both sexual and economic desire. The commercial ends after she bites into an enormous, 1000-calorie hamburger and then squirts a nearby hose at the camera with ejaculatory pleasure. The music throughout is fitting for both a strip club and a pornographic film, and much like the videotaped sequences of Paris Hilton in the remake of House of Wax (2005), it clearly alludes to her infamous pornographic videos, particularly One Night in Paris.52

Arguably, it is Paris Hilton's inextricable association with amateur porn that made this commercial controversial. Certainly, one can see half-naked women draped over cars in any number of NASCAR-type calendars, but the Parent's Television Council launched a highly visible and successful campaign to remove this advertisement from primetime television. In September 2005, PTC president Brent Bozell maintained that the Hilton commercial hurt the fast-food chain, citing an Associated Press report that the company recently saw a 30% drop in stock for the year. "Once again," Bozell concludes, "we see the evidence that Carl's Jr. and Hardee's racy Paris Hilton ad failed to increase sales. . . . The soft porn Paris Hilton ad has alienated millions of families

and exposed millions of children to raunchy content that has no place on television during primetime hours."53 Bozell's comments make Hilton's association with pornography and "raunch culture" 54 grounds for censorship here. Paris is bad for families, for children, so she should be banned from primetime. Even in an era when nudity, profanity, and simulated sex scenes are increasingly part of primetime television, Bozell's hysterical response is not entirely surprising, however. As Walter Kendrick argues in The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture, the history of pornography is also a history of censorship. "Once 'pornography' was labeled and its threat identified, the methods employed to control it were borrowed unchanged from the long tradition of political and religious persecution that preceded 'pornography' and outlives it."55 Yet censoring Hilton's advertisement from television didn't prevent people from reading about it in newspapers and, more significantly, watching it on the internet. The controversy actually seems to have drawn more attention to the commercial as a result. One newspaper report sarcastically points out that a link to the advertisement on the PTC's website ("You can't be outraged if you can't watch it a few times to be sure"56) helped contribute to the immense internet traffic promoting it. Nevertheless, Kendrick reminds us that these acts of censorship expose

the ways in which pornography is a highly politicized genre: "The history of 'pornography' is a political one." 57 So what exactly are the social and political implications of Paris Hilton's association with pornography? What explains the extraordinary interest in her video *One Night in Paris?* A four-minute version first became available on the internet in November 2003, one month before the premiere of *The Simple Life;* a thirty-eight-minute version then appeared on Rick Salomon's own website in February 2004 (for \$50); and the current tape, which is approximately forty-five minutes long and includes generic footage of the couple from May 2001, is one of the best-selling pornography "films" in the industry. (According to *The New York Times,* for example, Red Light District, which obtained distribution rights and began selling the Hilton tape in June 2004, had sold over 600,000 copies as of March 2006.)58

Paris Hilton's amateur home video should be somewhat revelatory in that it is far less edited and constructed than *Confessions* and *The Simple Life*. Home videos often capture spontaneous moments and provide a more nuanced glimpse into the lives of the people on film. Certainly, this was part of the appeal for the notorious video *Pam and Tommy Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored* (1997). The fifty-four-minute Pamela Anderson/Tommy Lee tape, which was stolen from a safe in their garage during their second year of marriage, includes only eight minutes of explicit sex. The rest features rather mundane

interactions and conversations, but as Minette Hillyer points out, "the bad camera work and the boring stories the tape tells serve, in this way, to remind us that one or other of the two celebrities is always behind the camera; that—as we might like to imagine with other pornography—this time it really is just them, and us."59 The illusion of intimacy and reality is a significant part of the fantasy of pornography, and in this case, the amateur quality and the fact that it was never meant for public consumption give the Pamela Anderson/Tommy Lee tape an air of realism. The honest expressions of love and desire on the tape also distinguish Pam and Tommy Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored from the porn genre, which has its own conventions and rituals.60 Critic Chuck Kleinhans argues that "the overall effect of the entire tape is counter intuitively – not a highlighting of the sensational parts, but a placing of explicit newlywed sex in the context of love and affection, enthusiasm, mutual playfulness, and exploration."61 Even though the nature of this tape changed when it moved from home video to commercial pornography,62 it still promises a certain degree of intimate access into the lives of this rock star and former Playboy model. So in many respects, shouldn't viewers expect to find similar revelations in the Paris Hilton tape, which was filmed with her boyfriend of several years, Rick Salomon?63

As my discussion of Hilton has suggested, pornography seems to be a logical extension of her career; placing her exposed, sexualized body and money on display for public consumption and voyeuristic pleasure. *One Night in Paris* plays into these aspects of her celebrity and has significantly raised her public profile, helping to promote various projects such as *The Simple Life, Confessions of an Heiress*, jewelry lines, perfumes, clubs, video games, and even a music CD whose title song is "Screwed." Specifically, *One Night in Paris* offers both the illusory promise of discovering something beyond Hilton's public image and the desire to see someone of her economic standing humiliated through sexual objectification and exposure.

One of the most striking aspects of *One Night in Paris* is the surprising lack of intimacy on the tape. Rick and Paris do not share deeply personal sentiments (even when they use the word "love," which I will discuss later), nor do they seem invested in mutual pleasure. In fact, they mostly come across as two people with very different desires: Rick for voyeuristic sex and personal pleasure, Paris for posing before the camera and satisfying Rick by complying with his commands. Rick prods—and practically forces—her to perform for the camera and for himself, telling her to strip, to sit on his cock, to lie down, to open her legs, to show her "gorgeous pussy," and to perform fellatio ("suck it"); whereas Paris Hilton looks noticeably bored during intercourse—and heiresses should never be bored, right? This boredom clearly

contrasts with the pleasure that she takes in being in front of the camera. Hilton continually seems to pose for and to be fully conscious of how her body is appearing on film. In the opening sequence of Salomon's thirty-eight-minute web version, for example, the camera shows a close-up of breasts and then gradually rises to reveal Paris Hilton's face. She then points the camera back onto her breasts, as if she is taking pleasure in recording herself for later viewing/consumption. This moment of posing, studying, and presenting her own body is when she seems most familiar and, sadly, most comfortable. It is a moment that encapsulates her public and, as suggested here, private life.64 After the opening shot of Paris's topless body, the tape cuts to approximately twenty minutes of explicit sex in the greenish hue of night-vision. Their glowing white eyes, which reflect the bright, unnatural light of the camera, and the grainy green-black color make them appear unreal and even ghoulish. These shots (many of which feature close-ups of penetration) could be of anyone; they are so close and/or distorted by the night-vision that they are difficult to "figure out" initially. Once again, this helps to keep Paris Hilton's body in the realm of the ambiguous, interpretable image. She is not individualized here; she is just a set of body parts on display: neck, breasts, back, vagina, legs, buttocks, etc. In fact, without the opening bathroom sequence, we couldn't be sure who is having intercourse. A few moments later, Rick orchestrates rear-penetration sex, setting up the camera on a nearby surface and ordering Paris into various positions. Her head is off-screen for most of this, except when Rick periodically stops to adjust the camera. During these breaks, Paris crawls into view to smile for the camera – a somewhat eerie image that seems more reminiscent of a photographic negative than a real person, as if her private, sexual life occurs in a kind of darkroom, a place where more poses and images are waiting to be produced for public consumption.

Only when Paris first climbs on top of Rick and faces the camera during intercourse do we get a sustained opportunity to watch Hilton's face. Here she seems utterly bored and far more interested in looking at the camera than in what Rick is doing beneath her. This boredom not only raises issues about the role of women's pleasure in pornography, but it also returns us to the importance of appearances for Hilton's persona. As Ariel Levy sarcastically points out in *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, "any fourteen-year-old who has downloaded her sex tapes can tell you that Hilton looks excited when she is posing for the camera, bored when she is engaged in actual sex. . . . She is the perfect sexual celebrity for this moment, because our interest is in the appearance of sexiness, not the existence of sexual pleasure."65 This reading resonates with the portrayal of Hilton's celebrity

in her photo-centric autobiography, which is about appearing to be a glamorous, sexually accessible jet-setter and party girl; the pornographic overtones of the Carl's Jr. commercial (where the principal pleasure comes from being watched); her self-involved dancing in *The Simple Life*, and her highly staged romance with "Chops" on the same show. For Levy, Hilton's current cultural function is emblematic of a larger problem among young women today who embrace an overt and public sexualization of the body as a means for empowerment. This critique also resonates with Linda Williams's concerns about pornographic representations of female pleasure in her study Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible": "[Pornography has] long been a myth of sexual pleasure told from the point of view of men with the power to exploit and objectify the sexuality of women."66 Both of these analyses point to problematic notions of power in relation to women's sexuality and the consumer marketplace. Exposing one's breasts on the pages of Playboy, for Girls Gone Wild, or in the context of a pornographic film, for example, does not empower women, yet many women embrace this kind of "raunch culture," as Levy calls it, to assert a certain degree of sexual and personal liberation. Certainly, Hilton has used this type of sexualized exposure to claim her independence from an aristocratic privilege and, by extension, her individuality.

Without a doubt, raunch culture has significantly contributed to Paris Hilton's fame, yet the power and pleasure in One Night in Paris center around Rick Salomon. His forceful, often degrading, treatment of Hilton completely plays into the socio-economic politics of the video and her public persona more broadly. The Paris Hilton of this video is submissive, easily embarrassed, and in many ways humiliated – a far cry from her aggressive pose in the 2000 Vanity Fair photograph "Sweetie Pie." Given her highly publicized place in America's hereditary aristocracy and her association with corporate culture, this is certainly part of the video's appeal. A quick search of recent pornography titles reveals numerous films that feature settings and/or characters associated with upper-class society and wealth: Upper Class (2002), Rich and Horny (2004), Rich Girls Love Anal (2004), Filthy Rich (2005), and not surprisingly, The Not So Simple Porn Life, Volume 1 (2005). In many ways, One Night in Paris can be read as contributing to this genre in that it casts such wealth in the context of pornographic fantasy. As one of the customer reviews of One Night in Paris on Adult DVD Empire suggests, the portrayal of the upper class in pornography is often linked to the pleasure of seeing degrading images of the rich: "No matter what, it's nice to know this little trust fund girl can take cock like a champ. It's too bad she takes a shot to the chest in the end, as a facial would have made this home porno even hotter.

Buy this video . . . you will not regret it!"67 Locker-room rhetoric aside, this endorsement suggests that the video's value comes, in part, from the revelation that "this little trust fund girl can take cock like a champ"; to see Hilton performing sexually, erodes some of the distance between her privileged, trust-fund life and her low-brow associations with pornography.

Likewise, Hilton's submissiveness to Rick Salomon contributes to the ways in which the video can be read in terms of humiliation — a pleasure presumably comes from seeing an heiress on her knees, so to speak. I'm not suggesting that pornography is synonymous with humiliation and the misogynistic objectification of women, though much of it does this. But the context surrounding the release of *One Night in Paris* and the ways in which we read Paris Hilton's celebrity and shameless self-promotion contribute to this reading. When Paris Hilton first learned of the tape, for example, she claims to have been heartbroken and humiliated:

Someone sent it to me and I was, like, crying, I was so embarrassed. . . . It was humiliating. . . . I used to think it was so bad, but it's like, everyone has sex. I'm sure everyone has filmed a tape. It's not like it was some random person. I was in love with that man. I was with him for three and a half years. We were together. I don't even really remember filming it, I was so out of it on that tape.. . . He is making so much money. It makes me so mad. We were suing in the beginning, but everyone has already seen it. . . . I don't want to go to court. He will fight me. I just want to get on with my life.68

Hilton highlights two issues here: her emotional and financial violations. On the one hand, she feels that the tape violates the private context in which it was filmed and the love she shared with Rick, who was married to someone else during part of this three-and-a-half year courtship.69 On the other hand, Hilton expresses resentment about Rick's ability to profit from her image, which she feels more entitled to: "He is making so much money. It makes me so mad." Though she has repeatedly claimed that she doesn't earn anything from the sale of the tape, her lawyer, Peter Lopez, has stated otherwise, explaining in 2005 interview that Paris does, in fact, receive profits from the tape.70 Regardless, the link between the emotional heartbreak of this exposure for Hilton and the financial exploitation that resulted makes any viewer a participant in this dual violation. We are, in effect, investing money in witnessing and perpetuating this humiliation of Paris Hilton.71

The absence of Hilton's own sexual (and arguably emotional) pleasure in *One Night in Paris* can largely be attributed to Rick Salomon's degrading and

humiliating treatment of her. Throughout the video, he refers to Hilton as a

"bitch," "a fucking scumbag," "a beautiful beast," and "an animal"; even though some of these labels are presented playfully (he doesn't seem capable of speaking without giggling), the terms are degrading nonetheless. At one point, Hilton even protests: "Don't talk to me like I'm an animal." Yet this protest doesn't change Rick's behavior, which is increasingly domineering and objectifying, or hers, which is increasingly compliant. This animalistic and abusive language also undermines the rhetoric of love in the video. At one point, Paris asks Rick to say "I love you," and he only does so because he wants her to show him her "pussy" ("You'd better show me that fucking pussy right now"). He then offers a disingenuous "I love you," mimicking her voice and immediately asking, "Can I please take off your pants?" In fact, Rick Salomon's use of "love" only occurs in tandem with either an objectifying comment about her body, a self-congratulatory remark about his penis, or in the midst of his own pleasure (specifically when she performs fellatio on him at the end of the video). These proclamations of love are ultimately undercut by this behavior, and one never gets the sense that Rick actually loves Paris. Though a certain degree of truthfulness can be heard in Hilton's voice when she proclaims her love for him, these words cannot be understood apart from the sexual gambit that is going on here. Rick is only willing to give her what she wants (a verbal statement of love) for sex. This fairly conventional, almost cliche'd division – a woman desiring emotional fulfillment and a man desiring physical gratification – fits into the misogynistic undercurrent that runs throughout One Night in Paris and adds another layer to the humiliation that can be read into it.

Prior to the final scenes of missionary sex and fellatio, Paris removes her panties for him (and the camera) while sipping from a bottle of wine and holding it between her legs. At one point, Rick asks, "Are you going to sit on that bottle?" A few moments later his penis will substitute for the bottle that has been between her legs and in her mouth. In the meantime, we watch Paris Hilton on the divans and plush chairs of the elegant hotel room, wearing a black bra and holding that bottle. The white wine and the rest of the furniture function, to some extent, as props for her wealth and class. This isn't Motel 6, and they aren't drinking beer. Normally, this setting would require money to get access to, but through this video, the viewer gets intimate access both to this affluence and Hilton's body. As Rick proceeds to put his penis inside her, first pressing her legs against his chest as she lies on the bed beneath him and then rolling her over, she moans more in pain than pleasure, and says repeatedly that it hurts. Unlike the closing minutes of the video, which provide a close-up of her fellatio, this sex is about not Rick's pleasure but his control. It is a control that comes from Rick's persistent objectification

and his forcefulness—he slaps her buttocks during this sequence as well, insists that she loves his "big cock," and later presses her head onto his penis even after she protests that he is choking her ("Sorry," he says with a trademark giggle. "I was sort of trying to [choke you]."). It is this kind of dominance that *One Night in Paris* invites and enables us to participate in. It is this kind of dominance that mitigates what is alien, elite, and inaccessible about Hilton's vast fortune and her place of privilege in American society.

CONCLUSIONS: PASSIVITY AND THE PROBLEM WITH PARIS HILTON

From the photographs in *Vanity Fair* to her exposure in *One Night in Paris*, Paris Hilton's image continues to highlight both her class standing and her sexuality in ways that empower the viewer to desire as well as despise her. Her success, as I have argued, comes in large part from this duality, and is possible because Paris Hilton does not represent or stand for anything outside of herself. Her image, which is both valued in its ubiquitous reproduction and derided, enables her to fill a unique socio-political role today. Particularly, the representation of her privileged, ostentatious lifestyle and the corporate culture of her family name help make her an effective symbol for some of the growing anxiety and resentment surrounding problems with economic inequality in this country. Wealth is not distributed equally, and it is certainly not distributed based on merit.

This privilege, particularly her place in the hereditary aristocracy, also works to exacerbate what is unlikable about Paris Hilton—her ability to have material riches without working for them, to achieve celebrity without talent, to gain access to those with wealth and power simply because of her name, etc. Though her place in celebrity culture may appear be glamorous, fame also invites criticism and resentment. Persistent critiques of her in the media certainly help inform the ways in which people tend to read her image, and Paris Hilton's success can largely be attributed to the fact that she continues (intentionally and unintentionally) to play into and give credence to these criticisms.

Ultimately, this negative publicity, such as demeaning book reviews, the ironic subtext of photographs and *The Simple Life*, and public and private humiliation of her exposure in *One Night in Paris*, enables Hilton's image to serve a social and political function—what I have called a politics of humiliation. The prominent role of wealth in her public image continually reminds the public of her association with extraordinary hereditary wealth, corporate culture, and class-based elitism. And at a time of such economic disparity and resentment, our ability to see Paris Hilton in derisive, humiliating terms seems to be part of her appeal.

There is a serious problem with this dimension of Hilton's cultural function, however. In the contemporary climate of growing economic inequality, the disenfranchisement of the poor, corporate malfeasance, an increasing neglect of education, the absence of universal health care, and the astronomical deficit, it seems that we need more than ever to become politically active whether that means getting more people to vote, rallying communities to protest, writing to our political representatives, supporting social programs and education, or fundraising in tangible and meaningful ways (through education, time investment, and mentorship). The politics of humiliation may allow us to laugh at and to ridicule Paris Hilton as a means of feeling better about ourselves, but it doesn't inspire action or change. In this way, Paris Hilton's image contributes to long-standing and destructive tendencies in America that encourage people to think that they too can get access to such riches – through luck, fame, and/or hard work. It encourages people to be satisfied with the status quo for the time being, instead of inspiring people to act on and demand change in the present.

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Notes:

- 1. Nancy Jo Sales, "Hip-Hop Debs," Vanity Fair (September 2000): 378.
- 2. Sales, "Hip-Hop Debs," 381.
- 3. Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 9.
- 4. P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 246.
- 5. Paris Hilton and Merle Ginsberg, *Confessions of an Heiress: A Tongue-in-Chic Peek Behind the Pose* (New York: Fireside Books, 2004), 6.
- 6. Reported in Sales, "Hip-Hop Debs," 352.
- 7. Braudy, The Frenzy of Renown, 5.
- 8. In many ways, Paris Hilton comes across as incapable of privacy—to such an extent that she has reportedly claimed to be so accustomed to being photographed that "she hears clicking noises even when there are no cameras." This quote comes from paparazzo photographer Ron Galella. See Krista Smith, "The Inescapable Paris," *Vanity Fair* (October 2005): 284.
- 9. It is also worth mentioning that almost all of the bodies in the photograph are fragmented in some way or another; the image is cropped to remove the heads of three of the men, to show only the leg and hip of another man at the far right, and to cut off the bottom part of Paris's right leg. Each of the surfers also shares the same basic shape and build, and the two male faces that are visible have strikingly similar features (dark eyes as well as dark, shoulder-length hair). These details—particularly the group of indistinguishable men whose partial bodies suggest that there are more of them staring at her off camera—imply a desire for Paris Hilton that is infinitely reproducible.
- 10. Sales, "Hip-Hop Debs," 378.
- 11. Marshall, Celebrity and Power, 246.

- 12. Jared Bernstein, Elizabeth McNichol, and Karen Lyons, "Pulling Apart: A Stateby-State Analysis of Income," *Economic Policy Institute* (January 2006): 4, http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm?id=2246.
- 13. Bernstein, McNichol, and Lyons, "Pulling Apart," 11.
- 14. Founder and former president of the Economic Policy Institute, Jeff Faux spoke at this conference and warned of impending "political unrest." For more on this, see Andrew Leonard, "Class Warfare, Anyone?" Salon.com, http://www.salon.com/tech/htww/2006/01/24/faux/index.html/. Steven Pearlstein of *The Washington Post* sees the need for "fundamental tax reform" (including "a reasonable inheritance tax") as a far cry from "class warfare." See Steven Pearlstein, "Solving Inequality Problem Won't Take Class Warfare," *The Washington Post*, March 15 2006, D01. And for a critical response to the Economic Policy Institute's report, see Tim Kane, "Income Relativism," *National Review Online*, January 30, 2006, http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=ZmVjZmlzZDl2OTY4ZTdiYTEwOWViNDViYzdiYzY0OTc=.
- 15. Kevin Phillips, *Wealth and Democracy* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 124.
- 16. Ibid., 392.
- 17. Marshall, Celebrity and Power, 243.
- 18. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Dover, 1996 [written between 1771–1790]), 1.
- 19. Franklin, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, 50.
- 20. John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban American* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 30.
- 21. Hilton and Ginsberg, Confessions of an Heiress, 4.
- 22. Ibid.
- 23. Quoted in Smith, "The Inescapable Paris," 288.
- 24. Braudy, The Frenzy of Renown, 7.
- 25. Hilton and Ginsberg, Confessions of an Heiress, 6.
- 26. Ibid., 9.
- 27. Ibid., 11.
- 28. Ibid., 13.
- 29. Ibid., 10.
- 30. See Maureen Callahan, "How to Be an Heir-Head: Paris Hilton Dishes Bad Advice in New Book," *The New York Post*, September 8, 2004, 73. Elizabeth Barr's "A Little Paris Is Still Way Too Much" (*The Buffalo News*, October 24, 2004, G7) begins with the following statement: "We all knew this ubiquitous amoral party whore had suspected depth." And Pia Catton's review for *The New York Sun* criticizes the selfconscious celebration of the self in *Confessions* in comparison with Gloria Vanderbilt's autobiography. See Pia Catton, "Not All Heiresses Are Created Equal," *The New York Sun*, September 22, 2004, 15.
- 31. This review was posted on September 26, 2004 by isala "Isabel and Lars" (Fairbanks, Alaska, US).
- 32. This was posted by Tim C. (Vatican City) on January 10, 2006.
- 33. Quoted in Smith, "The Inescapable Paris," 280.
- 34. This doesn't mean that urban biases about the South are not part of the show. Most notably, the unseen narrator (James DuMont) is either imitating a Southern accent poorly or exaggerating one for absurd dramatic effect. Nevertheless, the Leding family is not set up as a cliche´, in part, because the focus of the show is on the humiliating adventures of Hilton and Richie.
- 35. The Simple Life, "Ro-Day-O vs. Ro-Dee-O," episode 1, Fox 2003.
- 36. In a recent interview on *Live with Regis and Kelly*, Paris Hilton claims that her "stupid" comments on *The Simple Life* are intentional and that she finds it amusing when people take her seriously. Whether or not this is true, these self-serving remarks don't change the message that this kind of moment sends to the viewing public (particularly when the show first aired). See Paris Hilton, interview by Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa, *Live with Regis and Kelly*, ABC, June 13, 2006.
- 37. James Friedman, "Introduction," in *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real*, ed. James Friedman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 8. 38. Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality T.V.: Realism and Revelation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005). 147.
- 39. Annette Hill, "Big Brother: The Real Audience," Television & New Media 3.3 (Summer 2002): 324.
- 40. The Simple Life, "Ro-Day-O vs. Ro-Dee-O," episode 1, Fox 2003.
- 41. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (trans. Robert Hurley; New York: Pantheon, 1978), 61–62.
- 42. Ibid., 62.

- 43. Ibid., 61.
- 44. The Simple Life, "Good-bye and Good Luck," episode 7, Fox 2003.
- 45. The Simple Life, "Ro-Day-O vs. Ro-Dee-O," episode 1, Fox 2003.
- 46. The Simple Life, "Good-bye and Good Luck," episode 7, Fox 2003.
- 47. Hilton and Ginsberg, Confessions of an Heiress, 5.
- 48. The Simple Life, "Boy Crazy," episode 6, Fox 2003.
- 49. The Simple Life, "Good-bye and Good Luck," episode 7, Fox 2003.
- 50. Cool Hand Luke, DVD, directed by Stuart Rosenberg (1967; Los Angeles, CA: Warner Home Video, 1997).
- 51. Smith, "The Inescapable Paris," 288.
- 52. In September 2004, another sex tape featuring Hilton started circulating on the internet. This video featured Hilton "with Nick Carter, a former member of the band Backstreet Boys, and Jason Shaw, a Tommy Hilfiger model." See Ariel Levy, Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture (New York: Free Press, 2005). 28.
- 53. To see these comments, visit the PTC website at: http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/advertisers/campaign.asp.
- 54. I am borrowing this phrase from Ariel Levy's Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture, which I discuss later in the essay.
- 55. Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking Press, 1987), 95.
- 56. Rick Kushman, "Paris Hilton and the Future of Advertising," *Sacramento Bee.* June 7, 2005, Entertainment.
- 57. Kendrick, The Secret Museum, 281.
- 58. This number does *not* include the version sold via the internet by Rick Solomon, the co-star, prior to his deal with Red Light. According to *The New York Times*, this video also received an award from "a porn industry trade group for Top Selling Title of the Year in 2005." See Lola Ogunnaike, "Sex, Lawsuits, and Celebrities Caught on Tape," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2006, sec 9: 1.
- 59. Minette Hillyer, "Sex in the Suburban: Porn, Home Movies, and the Live Action Performance of Love in *Pam and Tommy Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored,*" in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 53.
- 60. For more on this, see the first chapter of Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989)
- 61. Ćhuck Kleinhans, "Pamela Anderson on the Slippery Slope," in *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Films in the Nineties,* ed. Jon Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 297.
- 62. As Minette Hillyer's "Sex in the Suburban: Porn, Home Movies, and the Live Action Performance of Love in *Pam and Tommy Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored*" reminds us, "while the footage per se shows little evidence of planning, or even coherence beyond the strictly circumstantial, what is at stake here is not the documenting of reality, but the creation of a product, bound as much by conventions as by circumstances." See Hillyer, "Sex in the Suburban," 69.
- 63. Rick Salomon was married to actress Shannen Doherty during the filming of this tape. Their marriage was annulled in 2003, and this adds another dimension to the scandalous celebrity draw for the tape.
- 64. Not surprisingly, this moment will be repeated at the end of the night-vision sequence, operating both as a frame device for the first part of the tape and as a marker that divides the night-vision segment from the footage filmed in color. It is a frame that blurs the line between Paris Hilton's private and public life, suggesting that in both spheres she is preoccupied with presenting herself for public consumption.
 65. Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 30.
- 66. Williams, Hard Core, 22.
- 67. This customer review, "Cum for Paris, Stay for Porn," was posted on June 14, 2004 by Master Tang.
- 68. Quoted in Smith, "The Inescapable Paris," 288.
- 69. Salomon was married to Shannen Doherty briefly between 2002-2003.
- 70. See Ogunnaike, "Sex, Lawsuits and Celebrities Caught on Tape," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2006, sec 9.
- 71. In January 2005, Paris Hilton was so upset about the video that she reportedly stole a copy from a street vendor in Hollywood. See "Paris Hilton Cleans Up Smut Shop," *UPI*, February 2, 2005.