REVOLUTIONARY MARKETING: HOW THE HUNGER GAMES FRANCHISE PROMOTES AND DISMANTLES POLITICAL AGENCY AND AUTHENTICITY

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ABSTRACT

Despite its more recent publication in the historical span of literature, *The Hunger Games* trilogy has thoroughly staked its position in popular culture and, to a certain extent, academic circles. The niche it found takes advantage of growing political discourse and the nihilistic outlook of its young adult readers. Suzanne Collins released it at precisely the right time for it to strike a chord in generations desperate for social change, thus propelling it into discussions surrounding revolutionary texts and the ways they purposefully parallel our societies. I analyze *The Hunger Games* novels and how their endorsement of certain political messages and not others critique the fictional world of Panem and, in turn, the United States. The antagonists' oppressive control, exploitation, and overconsumption of commodities are framed in a negative light and condemned through Katniss Everdeen's heroic development; contrarily, the text encourages activism, ethical reflection, and authenticity. I use a Marxist lens to compare the list of discouraged values to beliefs promoted within the United States' governmental system. Critiques made against Panem by the narrative therefore have a greater purpose than just a textual one—they intend to provoke the reader to think consciously about governmental injustices and oppressive regimes, encouraging them to take an active stance in political matters in the future. While the marketing campaigns for the related film adaptations effectively integrate with *The Hunger Games'* world, the basic nature of promotion in the film industry exemplifies the same themes of overconsumption and sensationalism that the novels condemn. Advertising campaigns for franchises adapted from influential political works, like *The Hunger Games*, are unable to convey the text's more challenging themes due to the commercial nature of transmedia marketing, blatantly contradicting the original text's political themes.

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SECTION 1: THEORY

Marxist Theory

Classic Marxist theory originates from Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx's 1848 pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*, which foregrounds human culture in economics, framing the economy as the foundation of all we do. Obtaining and maintaining economic power is the motive behind every social and political issue and forms the structures surrounding us (Tyson 51). While the lens I use in my senior capstone experience is distinct from the Marxist approach to economics, the theory still uses Engels and Marx's arguments to see oppressive and class-based ideologies in cultural products.

Scholar Lois Tyson, in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, summarizes the version of the Marxist lens proposed directly from *The Communist Manifesto*. Theorists widely agree that the lines of cultural battle are drawn between the bourgeoisie, the group who controls the world's resources, and the proletariat, the majority who produce the resources through manual labor while living in subpar socioeconomic conditions (Tyson 52). Marx and Engels believe that the latter are destined to simultaneously develop class consciousness and violently overthrow the ruling class. While many Marxists no longer believe this, modern ideology continues to promote the power of collective decision-making (52). It is the lower class's struggle to survive that prevents them from revolting against the bourgeoisie, with police forces and societal ideologies performing the rest of the suppression. Belief systems that are byproducts of cultural conditioning can also promote "repressive political agendas" which "prevent us from understanding the material/historical conditions in which we live" (54). These ideologies force on us a false consciousness that deceives us of our own true standard of living. While Marxists disagree on class solidarity among the proletariat, the role of media in manipulating political

consciousness and the principles that Tyson presents are the most widespread for the theoretical lens I use in my thesis (63–64).

In terms of literary Marxist analysis, Marx and Engels believed that literature "grows out of and reflects real material/historical conditions" (Tyson 63). More recent scholars like Raymond Williams, a leading intellectual in investigating literature in terms of politics, ideology, and social history, base entire literary approaches on Marxist beliefs (Leitch et al. 1565). Williams rebelled against classic perceptions of literature as being morally influential in the same manner as religion. Scholars at the time who viewed literature as a privileged cultural value believed Williams desacralized writing by analyzing it as a historical product with associated class values (1565). In his eyes, all literature was actively ideological and criticisms of its quality would always connect to class in some form (1568). He derived the thought behind his approach directly from Karl Marx's foundational works.

Karl Marx's own independent writings introduced the concept of commodity, or objects that satisfy human needs through various qualities and invariably cause human labor to be reduced to labor in the abstract (Marx 320–321). Formative philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer connect Marx's theory on commodity with the media industry's practices. Adorno and Horkheimer claim that modern culture "impresses the same stamp on everything," making media entirely uniform (330). Although those who buy into the industry argue that uniformity is necessary for practicality, this perspective ignores that those with a strong economic hold on the industry will also have the strongest creative influence. Movies being "just business" is turned into an ideology in order to justify the products' creation: "They call themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed" (330).

While Panem is not a real place, because it serves as an allegory for the United States, a Marxist lens is useful in analyzing the political systems found in *The Hunger Games*. For example, one of Marx's main arguments about the proletariat is that they are "often the last to recognize" their subjugation because they allow the bourgeoisie to separate them into "warring factions that accomplish little or no social change" (Tyson 52). While Tyson specifically references distinctions between gender and race, in the case of *The Hunger Games*, the manufactured conflict is the division between the districts. Panem's working class remains under the Capitol's thumb through this method and due to their unwavering focus on survival.

Transmedia Storytelling

Henry Jenkins, a foundational scholar of transmedia studies, defines this storytelling method as the "art of world making" (Jenkins 21). Audience members are required to compile bits of information across multiple media channels to fully understand and appreciate the overall narrative. Most scholars claim that transmedia storytelling permanently shifted the media landscape, the impacts of which some would label as overwhelmingly negative.

As transmedia studies' originating scholar, Jenkins establishes most of the foundations that are currently associated with the theory. His view is that a transmedia text unfolds across a series of platforms, with each medium bringing a unique element to the story. Each medium performs to its storytelling strengths and each individual part coalesces to make the finished product stronger (Jenkins 96). The unique elements should not be redundant and should only further flesh out the narrative's world building. After all, audiences desire fresh insights from each new property within a franchise (105). Scholars have critiqued Jenkins' original concept on multiple fronts, from the argument that it forces audiences from reality and encourages a

dangerous and total immersion into fiction, to the idea that transmedia texts create too much work when compared to the redundancy of classic Hollywood (104, 193). Another important critique from *Salon*'s Ivan Askwith and writer Mike Antonucci is that transmedia is "smart marketing" rather than "smart storytelling." They believe that the method more products. Jenkins' original description does acknowledge that the industry uses transmedia to its benefit. Creation across multiple platforms allows the media industry to appeal to a wide variety of markets at once, which has the potential to result in great economic gain (19, 96).

Literary critic Marie-Laure Ryan uses Jenkins' traditional definition of transmedia to explore whether academics should analyze the theory as a storytelling form or marketing strategy (2). Her belief is that one should examine older texts with similarities to Jenkins' definition to establish a framework for modern transmedia. Part of her studies also determines what transmedia is not: for example, adaptation is not automatically transmedia storytelling, but rather the snowball effect; transmedia cannot be based around transfictionality, or the migration of one character across a text; and it is not the use of media platforms to advertise a product, if they do not contribute meaningful information related to the product's narrative (3). Ryan claims that transmedia world building would be a better term for the phenomenon, as the word storytelling implies a self-contained story that is not prone to fragmentation across multiple documents (4–5). Creators are now more likely to pitch world concepts instead of plots and characters, because fleshed out fictional worlds allow for a wider variety of stories from an industry perspective (5). Fantastical worlds, in particular, have much more to gain through multiple platforms, as transmedia franchises tend to develop bottom-up around blockbuster films. Ryan acknowledges the widespread argument for transmedia as a marketing tactic, stating that some believe the

concept “force-feeds storyworlds to the public through as many media platforms as available, in order to reach the widest possible audience” (17).

In his informative outline on transmedia branding, scholar Burghardt Tenderich addresses the branding portion of the transmedia lens by investigating the benefits and detractors of applying transmedia principles to marketing. Transmedia storytelling extensively supports the development of Hollywood’s entertainment industry, including franchises, media production, and, more recently, public relations. Tenderich defines transmedia branding as a specific type of communications that packages brand information into a holistic narrative. This marketing is distributed across various media platforms to build an interactive brand experience. He lists multiple key ways to effectively use transmedia branding, including using transmedia storytelling techniques to maximize fans’ collective intelligence about a brand to map the details of the worldbuilding across media. Transmedia brands engage audiences in targeted ways rather than promoting redundant messages. Audiences prefer interacting with narratives that are easy to distribute, as long as the story is intended for its related audience. Engaged consumers will actively “[appropriate], [remix], and [recirculate] brand icons in ways that are often beyond the control of those who have historically shepherded the brand message” (Tenderich 2). From a historical perspective, Tenderich also argues that the internet is not a prerequisite for transmedia branding, as transmedia narratives have existed as long as the idea of communications has existed.

In contrast to more recent scholars, Jenkins’ introduction to transmedia storytelling in *Convergence Culture* does not account for social media due to its 2005 publication year. One of his arguments is that brand campaigns do not inherently count as transmedia, despite the fact that he considers the *Dawson’s Creek* promotional website to be its own text. Most current scholars

would place this product under the umbrella of social media now. While Jenkins does address marketing in his work, he does not in the same manner that I do in my analysis. I frame *The Hunger Games'* marketing techniques as their own medium with their own attempt at narrative. Tenderich is one such scholar who addresses the fact that some brands exist naturally with a transmedia label because they are the story—this often applies to major narratives like *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*. Most consumer products do not automatically come with a story in place. Since narratives are foundational to the idea that Jenkins originally presents, though, companies are forced to choose between two options: create a new narrative or join an existing narrative. One of the most essential parts of this method to keep in mind is that a story should be in alignment with the values of the greater brand. *The Hunger Games* strays from the transmedia marketing purpose in this manner.

The two theoretical lenses that are most important for my analysis of *The Hunger Games* franchise are Marxist theory and the transmedia storytelling lens. The former establishes class-based ideologies that are prominent in the novels while also analyzing the marketing campaigns' ideals. I use the concept of transmedia storytelling to determine the franchise's marketing priorities and understand the reasoning behind a few of the films' branding choices. Both theoretical lenses, tied together, present an idea of how ideologies, particularly those based in class, survive in the midst of a shift in media presentation. Transmedia is gradually gaining a reputation as a marketing tactic rather than a storytelling form, which directly relates to Marxist concepts I incorporate into my analysis of *The Hunger Games*.

SECTION 2: METHODS

Scope

The source materials I selected for my SCE are the original three novels in the *Hunger Games* trilogy: *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). Using textual analysis as my method, I searched for recurring political themes, the values the trilogy promotes, and what the novels' goals are within the young adult dystopian genre. The initial themes I drew from the novels were their promotion of political agency and authenticity, and their condemnation of overconsumption and exploitation. All these values serve to encourage the trilogy's young adult audience to pursue action in real-world American politics. I made notes about themes relevant to Marxist theory in the novels. My reading of the series focuses primarily on the first and third installment, but features substantial evidence from *Catching Fire,* as well.

My textual analysis method extends to the marketing materials for the subsequent film adaptations, which include trailers and propaganda TV spots accessed on YouTube, cast interviews and other articles from entertainment outlets, posters, photoshoots, merchandise, and miscellaneous social media posts from *Entertainment Weekly* and Lionsgate between 2012 and 2015, when the four films were released. I specifically collected marketing messages that address, reference, or contradict the films' themes in some manner. My analysis of materials does not feature actual content from the films, but I reference scenes when they are necessary to provide relevant support for my argument. I organized the materials based on social media platforms — Tumblr and YouTube being the most prevalent — and what the ad included. After I completed this step, I examined the novels' messaging against the political values promoted in the films' marketing materials to see if they encouraged similar ideals or if the ads promoted the values the novels condemn. The films themselves make genuine efforts to portray those same

values—sometimes these attempts fall short, and in other cases they even improve on the messaging—but the marketing campaigns fall victim to capitalistic priorities and often undermine the novels' political purpose.

SECTION 3: POLITICAL THEMES IN THE NOVELS

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins is one of the most well-known literary products of the dystopian genre. Novels under this umbrella present an "oppressive society that forbids expression of free thought and individuality" (Kanwal, et al. 3990). The dystopian society that *The Hunger Games* presents is Panem, which is made up of twelve districts and a ruling city called the Capitol. The latter rules over the former through totalitarian control, manifesting as mass surveillance, unjust punishment, rule enforcement, and other tactics of real-world oppressive regimes. Their crowning strategy is an annual event known as The Hunger Games, which forces 24 district children into an arena to fight to the death for entertainment on live television. Their true motivation is to prevent uprising among the districts, but when the novels' heroine Katniss Everdeen becomes a tribute, she disrupts the Games' usual narrative and sends Panem down a trilogy-long path to revolution.

Scholars commonly interpret dystopian plots as critiques of modern societal problems which are already coming to fruition elevated to the extreme (Kanwal, et al. 3992). *The Hunger Games* takes fear of government monitoring, punishment, the glorification of violence, and decadence and turns it into a "cautionary tale of what society could become" if the Western world does not change its current cultural trajectory (Cronshaw 131). Because dystopias enlighten readers to societal problems, dystopian studies scholars assert that the genre is "inherently political" (Hill 6). Marxist theory supports this claim, arguing that all literature promotes ideology regardless of age demographic. Adolescent audiences who are seeking agency and control in their changing lives seek out works that will challenge them. Dystopia provides them the opportunity to "save not just themselves, but the world," within the safe realm of fiction (Jones 226). One of the key features of the dystopian tale is that there is a "net of ideological

indoctrination" controlling its inhabitants, which only massive social change can break through (Kanwal, et al. 3990). By situating the Capitol and districts into the traditional dystopian roles of oppressors and oppressed, and framing Katniss' development of political consciousness as essential, *The Hunger Games* establishes that readers must assume the series' values and learn to carry that burden into their real lives.

Totalitarian Control in the Districts

Collins' opening descriptions of District 12 immediately establish Katniss' home as a pure archetype of dystopia. Its residents endure the real-life suffering of those under totalitarian regimes, from scarce resources to cruel and demeaning punishment, to censorship. As the trilogy's title implies, the greatest plight for most of its characters is hunger. Katniss, her mother, and sister scrape by on scraps. The rest of District 12 shares a similar, often worse, fate. It is common in Twelve to find emaciated bodies "motionless against a wall or lying in the Meadow" from inability to access food (*Hunger Games* 28). For many women in Twelve, their desperation to eat forces them to resort to prostitution. They line up at the head Peacekeeper's door, "vying for the chance to earn a few coins to feed their families by selling their bodies" (*Catching Fire* 114–115). Those in power in the districts exploit the disadvantaged, many of whom are seeking resources that should be easily accessible in a well-run society. Other simple pleasures—like warm water, showers, and 24/7 electricity—Katniss only receives when she is a tribute and slated for death (*Hunger Games* 42). Like in many Western societies, class elevation is the only way to guarantee their next meal or the resources they need to survive. However, also as in the U.S., climbing up the ladder to the rung above is next to impossible.

The state of exception that the first novel establishes reflects Karl Marx's classic theory of class war, in which the bourgeoise exploit the true laboring class, or the proletariat (Tyson 52). The Capitol's command over Panem comes from its "stranglehold on all consumer goods," including necessities like food, water, and electricity (Driscoll & Heatwole 110). The districts' very survival depends on these resources, and when the Capitol has the final say in distribution, the disadvantaged must adhere to their rule. Controlling the country's capital keeps the poor districts, the proletariat, and the rich Capitol, the bourgeoise, "identified with their respective places" within Panem's class structure (110). The question of whether Katniss will survive to the next day, week, or month defines her entire life, leaving little else to consider. This constant state of need is why the reward for winning the Games "is not just the absence of death but a life without scarcity" (110). The basic assets that the Capitol hoards are more desired than anything in Panem, and victors are the only members of the districts with (limited) ability to travel, a comfortable home, and a lifetime supply of funds and food. Although *The Hunger Games'* primary audience lives in the West, surrounded by a "privileged, leisured and consumerist" lifestyle, adolescents may still identify with Katniss as a "working-class, colonized subject" (Baker and Schak 205). Most Americans do not struggle to meet their basic necessities, but they also do not live and breathe the luxuries of the 1%. The Capitol's capability to distribute capital to its people, while keeping what the districts want just out of reach to allow the elite to continue their exploitation, may remind readers of the how the West's wealthiest hoard assets and withhold a livable wage.

Both the novels and the Capitol frame the districts exclusively within the context of their labor and respective items of production. Coal, as District 12's main export, keeps the minors essential to the Capitol as long as they meet their quotas (*Hunger Games* 203). The government

ensures that Twelve remembers the necessity of their labor to their survival by centering their entire lives around the product they create. Outside of basic language and arithmetic lessons, the majority of Twelve's curriculum is coal-related (42). Actual education falls to the wayside in favor of lessons which will benefit their eventual contribution to the workforce, much like the shift of America's education system toward career preparation. However, despite the cultural emphasis on labor, the outer districts receive none of the stock they produce unless they individually purchase it for controlled prices (203). No one in the districts "owns their own means of production; it is all controlled by the state" (O'Roark). There is also no opportunity for economic uplift to seize their own production. The working class's "different relations to the means of production, with manual labourers falling at the bottom" and the "parasitic city elite" reigning at the top through no effort of their own, pre-determine their entire lives (Driscoll & Heatwole 103, McKenna 158). From a Marxist perspective, this reliance on products makes overconsumption a social necessity for the Capitol's citizens, one which they can only maintain at "the expense of labour in the outlying districts" (Driscoll & Heatwole 103). Because Panem's system bases the worth of its commodities on their importance to class divisions, many literary scholars label the country as capitalistic in the same manner as the United States (103). The traits that come with this economic structure—exploitation and commercialization—are associated with the Capitol, which readers already view as the antagonist of the series. By association, Collins condemns these values along with the Capitol.

The aesthetics of the Games also serve to remind the tributes of their mere status as working bodies, with their district's principal industry dictating their opening ceremony outfits (*Hunger Games* 66). To the Capitol, the tributes and, by extension, the districts do not exist as individuals. They are all the products of their labor, or, in the case of the tributes, another market

to be exploited (Driscoll & Heatwole 32). Marxism predicts the same trend within Western society, which has grown reliant on the identity-less bodies of its workers. Different forms of labor will eventually lose all form of distinguishability, becoming "human labour in the abstract" (Marx 321). The Capitol degrades the tributes in a million other ways—through physical alterations and demeaning language—but their reduction to items resembles the U.S.'s dehumanization of marginalized groups.

More than any form of physical control, it is ideology, a belief system that is a byproduct of cultural conditioning, that keeps the districts in their place (Tyson 54). Ideologies can be negative or undesirable, promoting "repressive political agendas" that make it difficult to acknowledge the inequalities of contemporary society (54). The Capitol makes great use of this conditioning through extreme censorship of Panem's history, inter-district communication, and free thought. Although District 12's education system gives weekly lessons on the country's origins, Katniss describes it as "mostly a lot of blather about what we owe the Capitol" (*Hunger Games* 42). She and the rest of Twelve are conscious of the manipulation and lack of information they are given—"skepticism towards the official media story is ingrained" in the districts—but being aware does not negate the difficulty of facing one's "false consciousness," or ideals that deceive you (Driscoll & Heatwole 98–99, Tyson 56). District 12's citizens, including Katniss, prefer to continue in naivety, ignoring the truth for the sake of their survival, while the Capitol's citizens are fully brainwashed.

The trilogy explicitly establishes multiple of the Capitol's strategies for spreading propaganda within Panem, including media censorship and communication embargoes. The fences surrounding the districts prevent travel between them outside of officially sanctioned labor duties (*Hunger Games* 41). By prohibiting physical travel, the Capitol also prevents the

spread of potentially inflammatory information between districts. With the Capitol entirely dependent on working-class labor, censorship and monopolization of the media is how they maintain their power. During the Games, Katniss suspects that the Gamemakers are censoring her conversation with her ally Rue about the differences between Eleven and Twelve: "Even though the information seems harmless, they don't want people in different districts to know about one another" (*Hunger Games* 203). Their fear is that the dissemination of information could lead to comradery and greater awareness amongst the districts, resulting in potential uprising. The Gamemakers omit Katniss covering Rue's body in flowers from her victory interview for this very reason, because "even that smacks of rebellion" (363). This tactic is foundational in dictatorial regimes, where the ruling class uses media to manipulate the masses, divide them, and hold onto power. There is a similar, increasing distrust in Western countries of "those who wield power and control the media," for many of the same reasons *The Hunger Games* demonstrates (Cronshaw 131). By drawing attention to the Capitol's use of media in their oppression of the districts, it reminds readers to remain aware of how they consume government information.

Readers have drawn hundreds of comparisons between *The Hunger Games*' dystopia and the dangers of modern America. While some have labeled the trilogy as another shallow young adult narrative with little political purchase, Marxist scholarship argues that all literature has the potential to be actively ideological, regardless of intended age demographics (Leitch, et al. 1574). *The Hunger Games* intentionally works to draw these parallels to condemn government censorship, unjust punishment, and labor exploitation. These themes, as well as the novels' more revolutionary arcs, are reflected in various examples of international political unrest (Tompkins 70). Regardless of the series' application to a specific ideology, *The Hunger Games* has acted as

a "vehicle for people to debate the ethics of war, the importance of vigilance in the name of democracy, the reality of class divisions and U.S. imperial power, and the impact of sadistic entertainment in our media culture" (Hill 23). Its content may be fictional, but the series has real implications for how revolutions reverse the colonization of consciousness on a societal level. Oppressive regimes remove freedom of choice, making citizens "an extension of the State" (Kanwal, et. al 3993). Political narratives like *The Hunger Games* forces readers to consider this struggle in the context of contemporary America and its real revolutionary movements.

Overconsumption, Excess, and Spectacle in the Capitol

On the oppressive side of the class war is the Capitol, which engages in the dehumanization of the districts through media exploitation and overconsumption. In the early half of the series, Effie Trinket, Katniss' Capitol escort, acts as an embodiment of the Capitol's ignorant beliefs and customs. Collins establishes Effie as a driven but misguided character who desperately wants to use Katniss and her district partner, Peeta Mellark's, misfortune to improve her position on the corporate ladder. She, like most of the Capitol, views the Games as a television show, a once-in-a-lifetime chance for fame, as evidenced by her reaction to Katniss volunteering at the reaping. While the readers view Katniss' sacrifice as a tragedy, Effie is callously naïve, asking, "Don't want [Prim] to steal all the glory, do we?'" (*Hunger Games* 23). Her question displays a fundamental misunderstanding of both the horror of the Games and Katniss' selfless reasoning for taking her sister's place. Like other Capitol citizens who view the Games as a class-climbing opportunity, Effie "epitomizes the fashion and career-driven western individual with their eyes closed to political realities" (Cronshaw 122). Her awareness of the districts' suffering is also lacking: "'At least, you two have decent manners,' says Effie as we're

finishing the main course. 'The pair last year ate everything with their hands like a couple of savages. It completely upset my digestion.'" (*Hunger Games* 44). Effie's comment is followed by a blunt statement from Katniss' narration that the last pair were "two kids from the Seam who'd never, not one day of their lives, had enough to eat" (44). Directly comparing their two problems, an upset stomach and starvation, highlights the shallowness of Effie's lived experience.

Effie and other Capitol characters also repeat their dehumanized view of the tributes multiple times throughout the trilogy. Effie compliments Peeta and Katniss on "overcom[ing] the barbarism of [their] district," which Katniss rightfully disparages: "Barbarism? That's ironic coming from a woman helping to prepare us for slaughter" (*Hunger Games* 74). Although Katniss appears reticent to directly stand against the Capitol in multiple instances, in her internal thoughts she is unafraid to point out the thoughtless cruelty of its citizens. Many Americans are similarly desensitized to violence against other human beings, especially those whom they deem as lesser. When readers see this trait in characters who they, like Katniss, have no sympathy for, the negative effects of dehumanization become clearer.

Katniss' styling team exemplifies the same traits as Effie, showing that the selfish Capitol mindset extends past the escorts. After they strip Katniss of her physical imperfections and make her over in the Capitol's standards, her team says, "Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!" and they "all laugh" (*Hunger Games* 62). The amusement the trio shares over their objectification of Katniss frames the line as more sickening than it would be otherwise. Their glee extends past the Games, as well, where they continue to epitomize the views of the rest of the Capitol when they recount their live reactions to the horrors Katniss has just escaped: "'I was still in bed!' 'I had just had my eyebrows dyed!' 'I swear I nearly fainted!' Everything is about

them, not the dying boys and girls in the arena" (354). The lack of political consciousness, desensitization to violence, and obsession with media result from the narrative working of President Coriolanus Snow. His strategy to justify "overt violence against those he governs" is by "sowing a narrative that creates the basis for seeing the tributes as deserving their fate" (Heit 65). If he can frame the districts, their residents, and the tributes as less than human, underserving of ethical treatment, then the Capitol will either "fail to recognize" or will "effectively recognize and set aside" the cruelty of the Games and the implications they have for their own lives under Snow's oppression (65). By giving these traits to characters that both the readers and Katniss are intended to have a certain level of disgust toward, the series condemns their shallow and self-absorbed thinking.

Another aspect of the Capitol that Katniss repeatedly denigrates is their commitment to excess and extreme overconsumption. The trilogy is littered with paragraphs of overzealous descriptions of the city's buildings, fashion, food, and luxuries. From the moment Katniss arrives in the Capitol, the difference between the dreariness of Twelve and the ruling city is stark: "[The cameras] have not quite captured the magnificence of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal" (*Hunger Games* 59–60). Every dish Katniss eats and every shower she takes is described in minute detail, both highlighting the luxury of the city and the hunger in her stomach from a life of scarcity. Although Katniss and Peeta grow accustomed over time to the Capitol's riches, their greatest moment of horror comes from their discovery that Capitol partygoers intentionally vomit to continue the festivities: "All I can think of is the emaciated bodies of the children on our kitchen table as my mother prescribed what the parents can't give. More food…And here in the Capitol

they're vomiting for the pleasure of filling their bellies again and again. Not from some illness of body or mind, not from spoiled food. It's what everyone does at a party. Expected. Part of the fun" (*Catching Fire* 80). Collins' use of the adjective "emaciated" evokes extreme disgust, tying together the readers' emotions with Katniss and Peeta's horror. Their shock is made stronger through the use of short phrases and punctuation. While this facet of the Capitol's party culture is not yet replicated in American circles, it exists as a reminder of our culture's problematic relationship with dieting and food. To be able to gorge on food is a privilege in and of itself, and the people of the Capitol are unaware of the luxuries they possess at the districts' expense.

The lengths the Capitol takes to maintain their physical appearance demonstrates their vanity, pretentiousness, and wastefulness. The Capitol characters are defined by unique features, with each "so dyed, stenciled, and surgically altered they're grotesque" (*Hunger Games* 63). Skin tints, permanent diamonds, lip fillers, and extreme alterations like spikes, whiskers, and sharpened teeth are all traits Katniss names throughout the trilogy. The irony of the Capitol citizens, who look inhuman, treating the districts as barbaric, is not lost. However, even aside from the extreme examples, the city engages in standard beautification alterations that a modern reader would recognize. The Games' interviewer, Caesar Flickerman, has had the same face for more than 40 years and dyes his hair a different color to celebrate each Games: "They do surgery in the Capitol, to make people appear younger and thinner…Wrinkles aren't desirable. A round belly isn't a sign of success" (124–125). Stylists shave all of the hair off of female tributes before entering the arena to be slaughtered and, when she becomes a victor, the Capitol attempts to alter Katniss' breast size before Haymitch intervenes (*Catching Fire* 48, *Hunger Games* 354). Not only is this surgery an extreme breach of consent, continuing the trend of the Capitol claiming ownership of the tributes' bodies, it reflects standards of feminine beauty and anti-aging that

exist in the real world. The Capitol, as a "centre of excess and greed, vanity and frivolity," displays "vulgar excess and vainglorious pursuit of beauty" (Cronshaw 120, 131). McKenna acutely describes the Capitol and its elite as a "flickering world of illusion" where the elite "primp, preen and prance," wearing striking colors and "gilded with an edge of hysteria" (McKenna 155). Illusion is a common theme for the hyperreality the Capitol's citizens live in. Their luxurious experiences are not shared by the remainder of Panem, but they are so distracted by their own privilege they are blinded to the suffering of the districts. Their aesthetic hunger and desire for consumption are exchanged for the districts' physical hunger, making Capitol citizens "docile bodies" who "ignore the suffering and injustice" of the Games (Sullivan 187).

The spectacle of the Games heavily reflects Western cultures' investment in media, particularly regarding sensitive or controversial topics. Humans are naturally drawn to dramatic scenes, including "fantasy" violence and bloodshed. In the Capitol, that explains why the most popular Games are also the most brutal. At the beginning of the first novel, Katniss' best friend, Gale Hawthorne, assures her there will be wood in the arena due to the low ratings of the year that half the tributes died from the cold: "It was considered very anticlimactic in the Capitol, all those quiet, bloodless deaths" (*Hunger Games* 39). The plotlines that the Gamemakers write using their human tributes as characters "resolve too quickly" when the landscape is barren, and even the weapons they provide are designed to have the tributes "draw blood personally" (140, 219). The Gamemakers design every facet of the Games with the intention of entertaining the Capitol and its citizens in the same manner as a television show, thereby raking in the most views and engagement. Katniss worries in the arena when there are no cannons signaling the death of a tribute, because without a strong storyline, the Capitol audience will grow bored, "claiming that these Games are verging on dullness. This is the one thing the Games must not

do" (173). Entertainment is just another item on a long list that the Capitol is obsessed with consuming. Since they know such little hardship, they require the violence of the arena to be amplified until they are satisfied.

To do so, Gamemakers intervene regularly and manipulate the arena like a literal playing board. They purposefully drive the tributes together again and again to create dramatic scenes that will breed both bloodshed and complicated dialogue between tributes. To build the "climax" of the Games at the end of the first novel, a showdown between Katniss, Peeta, and the District Two tribute Cato, the Capitol physically pushes them together with genetically engineered creatures to guarantee a "bloody fight to the death with nothing to block their view" (*Hunger Games* 327). Not only does this scene come at the first book's climax, it acts as the peak of the Gamemakers' in-universe narrative. To make this scene memorable, the Capitol ensures that Cato dies as slow a death as possible in the jaws of their mutts:

> No viewer could turn away from the show now. From the Gamemakers' point of view, this is the final word in entertainment. It goes on and on and on and eventually completely consumes my mind, blocking out memories and hopes of tomorrow, erasing everything but the present, which I begin to believe will never change. There will never be anything but cold and fear and the agonized sounds of the boy dying in the horn (339).

This section begins with the Capitol's perspective, which reflects the same obsession the West feels with seeing "fantasy" violence on-screen. This type of scene is one that would come in many action narratives. However, when juxtaposed with Katniss' traumatized narration, it reminds readers that this fake brutality is very real for the tributes and others in the world who are exploited for entertainment.

To survive the Games, Katniss must play into her enemy's reality TV narrative against her better judgment. Before the arena, tributes establish their brands in live interview sessions to gain sponsors for the supplies they will eventually need. They must first "appeal" to the Capitol, "either by being humorous or brutal or eccentric" (*Hunger Games* 116). Other tributes like Glimmer from One play into the city's beauty standards through their sex appeal, while Katniss struggles to become someone other than herself (125). Peeta, who preaches the importance of not losing oneself to the Games, effortlessly wins the crowd's affection by confessing his love for Katniss. While she is initially resistant, she realizes the storyline's benefits: "Star-crossed lovers. Haymitch is right, they eat that stuff up in the Capitol" (136). It is only by playing the game behind the Games that Katniss and Peeta both survive after the rule change. By sustaining the angle of two tributes in love, they create a unique romance storyline that is "so popular with the audience," killing it off would "jeopardize the success of the Games" (247). The glamor, clothing, and added interviews surrounding the Games all occurs for the same reason that President Snow presents the districts as barbaric. The Games' narrative must be entertaining enough to "distract those watching from the brutal reality of the entire story" (Heit 56). Flashiness and the drama of large events easily draw the attention of human beings. If the Capitol feels like they are cheering on a television show, where you root for and become invested in your favorite characters, they do not have to worry about the implications of the violence they are urging on. Much like Americans' interactions with bloodshed in their media, it leads to mass desensitization of the brutality they are witnessing.

The Capitol makes both the Games and the tributes into commodities as another tactic to blind their citizens to the ethical truths of what they are supporting. President Snow frames the Hunger Games as a "festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others" (*Hunger*

Games 18-19). The exchange of money is foundational to running the spectacle and ensuring its participants feel involved. Residents in the districts take bets on who will be picked, how old the tributes will be, and how they will react, and in the Capitol rich sponsors back tributes for monetary purposes or to gain bragging rights among their social circles (17, 56). It is a celebration, similar to a commodified holiday like Christmas or Fourth of July in the United States. But it is a distraction, nonetheless: "The pageantry surrounding the games serves an important purpose in deflating the inevitable anger people feel toward the entire process" (Heit 12). If the Capitol gives viewers the opportunity to buy-in and feel involved in the process, it expands the entertainment aspect of the Games even further. It also allows the elite to continue profiting from the districts' pain in a literal sense. The Capitol preserve the very arenas where children died as historic sites for vacationing: "Go for a month, rewatch the Games, tour the catacombs, visit the sites where the deaths took place. You can even take part in reenactments. / They say the food is excellent" (*Hunger Games* 144–145). To emphasize the sheer dreadfulness of the scheme, Katniss' final statement splits into a separate paragraph. Her dry tone expresses a subtle dig at the irony of the Capitol being fed at a location where the districts starved for their entertainment, all while they continue to suffer without the right to travel.

Katniss' extreme anger at the Games' scripted and shallow veneer, which masks the dark reality of the arena, indicates the trilogy's displeasure with media designed to glorify violence. Repeatedly, Katniss protests the Games' brutality and those around her shut her down and force her to play a part. When she struggles to appeal to the elites in the interviews by being anything other than her dry, surly self, her mentor, Haymitch Abernathy, encourages her to share authentic details about her life. Katniss questions this advice, repeatedly railing against the idea of faking an angle to appeal to the Capitol elite, but her team insists on it: "'It's all a big show. It's all how

you're perceived…Which do you think will get you more sponsors?' The smell of wine on his breath makes me sick" (*Hunger Games* 135). Although it is Haymitch's breath that she ascribes her disgust to, her feelings are directed toward the idea of playing into the show and giving pieces of herself to the Capitol. This moment is one of the first where readers see Katniss strive to maintain her authentic self against others' control. However, she eventually recognizes the script's necessity to her survival and plays into it. Her fake love story with Peeta is what truly gains them the Capitol's sympathy, as the elite can relate more to unrequited love than stories of starvation or sacrificing their life for their sister (130). Having a storyline to follow also gives the crowd something specific to root for. In the arena, Katniss directly interacts with the audience, making audible comments that she knows will make the Capitol laugh and wondering what the commentators and sponsors are thinking of her and Peeta's strategy (165, 181-182). The ever-watchful eyes of Panem resemble the mass surveillance Katniss suspects they are under from President Snow, although it comes in the form of live television instead.

The Capitol's relationship with the Games parallels the West's unhealthy attachment to reality TV and other forms of media. Critics often describe *The Hunger Games* as the "ultimate reality television show," purposefully blurring the lines between this motif and real forms of exploitation in the 21st-century (Cronshaw 120, McKenna 160). The comparison does not just remain relegated to academics, though. Casual audiences of the series also noted the similarities between the Capitol's obsession with the Games and the United States' focus on celebrity gossip and fashion culture. Fans drew parallels between the "thoughtless cruel[ty]" and privilege of Americans and the naivety of the Capitol, declaring the novels' main critique to be of the West's "shallow media culture" (Hill 14). Evidence of this theory exists in how the Games take conventions of reality television—like the special features done on the tributes as they reach the

final eight—and turn them into a dystopia (*Hunger Games* 226, Driscoll & Heatwole 50). In a society of "shallow appearances and media-saturated voyeurism, where people are heavily costumed and cosmeticized," Peeta is the character who most explicitly takes a stand against the façade of the Games (Driscoll & Heatwole). While Katniss believes he is a media mastermind for creating the star-crossed lovers narrative, she is unaware that his feelings for her are genuine. Katniss does not consciously pursue this same type of authenticity, remaining fully aware of the tactics required to win the Games even if she struggles to engage in them. Her "spontaneous courage and sense of justice," though, make her seem "spectacularly real" when compared to the shallowness of the spectacle surrounding the Games (Driscoll & Heatwole 50). While Katniss's development may be described as a traditional heroic narrative, her commitment to pursuing the values of authenticity, justice, and compassion she begins the series with matches the "real-world presumption" that fitting a reality TV stereotype is a "moral failure" (50). Volunteering for her sister Prim, Katniss' first act of justice, is just the start of the journey to establish her character as such.

Katniss Everdeen's Agency

Within *The Hunger Games'* narrative, Katniss and President Snow act as character representations of the virtuous and immoral values in the trilogy, respectively. The former's role as the protagonist of the series establishes a clear ethical boundary between the districts and Capitol while "helping underscore the virtuous standpoint of those who suffer from that divide" (Tompkins 77). This tool posits Katniss as the manifestation of what is good about Panem and pits it against the negative actions of the Capitol, District 13, and to a greater extent, class war. Within the series' narrative, Katniss actively resists this burden of responsibility and prioritizes

herself and her family's safety. She repeatedly "disengage[s] from the struggle for freedom" (Cronshaw 137). However, as the series progresses, Katniss grows from a passive and silent actor to the face of the revolution—and not through the rebellion's propaganda, but because of her unique ability to unify the districts through her authenticity and commitment to justice. Her development into a political actor encourages young readers to rethink their own relationships with politics and government.

Katniss' development over the course of the trilogy, specifically regarding her agency and her belief in collective action, indicates which values the narrative promotes and condemns. Despite being the point of view heroine of *The Hunger Games*, the series starts with her firmly under the clamps of Panem's ideological and physical control. She disagrees with the inequality of their living situation, recalling the "things [she] would blurt out" about the Capitol and their exploitation of District 12, but she eventually realized that speaking out against the system would only bring pain onto her loved ones (*Hunger Games* 6). So, she "learned to hold [her] tongue and to turn [her] features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read [her] thoughts" (6). This uncaring veneer is representative of how closed off Katniss is to the idea of revolution, particularly externally. While Katniss demonstrates an internal resentment towards the Capitol's brutality, she "accepts it as inevitable" (Jones 228). The electric fence surrounding District 12 both physically traps its residents and mentally controls their right to free thought. They cannot permanently leave either cage, "so why bother talking about it?" (*Hunger Games* 10). The lower class cannot even revolt due to their innate "struggle to survive" from the Capitol's stranglehold on their food and communication: "Who has the time to become politically active, or even politically aware, when one is struggling just to stay alive and feed one's children?" (Tyson 53). This classic Marxist assessment perfectly describes the situation of Katniss, who worries each

day about how she will feed her family and keep them safe. Her constant struggle makes Gale's persistent and vocal rage at the Capitol "seem pointless" to her: "It's not that I don't agree with him. I do. But what good is yelling about the Capitol in the middle of the woods? It doesn't change anything. It doesn't make things fair. It doesn't fill our stomachs" (*Hunger Games* 14).

Her fatigue and reluctancy to speak against the Capitol strongly contrast with Gale's fiery rage, but it fits neatly with the characterization of the rest of District 12. Collins opens the book with her description of the Seam's residents as "men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces" (*Hunger Games* 4). Their inability to brush the pain, aches, and dirt from their bodies is not just from physical exhaustion, but a fatigue with the exploitation they face from the Capitol. They have grown accustomed to the unequal conditions and their inability to enact change. In all, Panem faces a "status quo of inaction"—there are "not a lot of viable ways to reassert their identities and basic rights" under President Snow's dystopian regime (Heit 13). The constant fear of punishment and suffering may cause rage in other districts like Eleven, but "until the people of District Twelve have cause to hope, they have no reason to rebel" (Jones 229). Importantly, they never do. Up until the destruction of Twelve at the end of *Catching Fire*, Katniss' home does not take a stand with the other districts. A series that is entirely about finding "the means for resistance" and "the impetus toward it" posits District 12 as an example of a group that is never able to find the will to pull themselves toward revolution (Jones 228). The scene of Prim's reaping in the first novel foreshadows this idea: "So instead of acknowledging applause, I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. Which says we do not agree. We do not condone. All of this is wrong" (*Hunger Games* 24). Their revolution is a silent one, not active or empowered.

Due to Twelve's inaction, it is Gale who establishes the comparative foundation through which Katniss "comes to perceive the injustices of living in Panem" (Jones 231). She demonstrates a distinct awareness of the unfairness of the world and the propaganda that insists all is right. In her lessons at school, she acknowledges that there is more to the history of Panem and the Games than the Capitol is sharing, but she does not "spend much time thinking about it" because "whatever the truth is," it will not put food on their table (*Hunger Games* 42). Yet again, Katniss is too consumed with her ability to survive to give any conscious thought to actively overcoming the Capitol's blatant oppression in the manner that Gale wants to. Peeta's presence in the book introduces a different type of resistance to Katniss, though. He expresses discomfort at Rue's inclusion in the Games due to her age, which Katniss internally acknowledges, as well. But she still verbally insists that there is no point: "'What can we do about it?' I ask him, more harshly than I intended" (99). At this point in the novel, readers have seen this response from Katniss multiple times. She repeats it to Peeta before they enter the arena, when he explicitly makes clear what his own plan for rebellion is. The conversation that the two share defines the starting point for Katniss' development over the course of the series:

> "Only…I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?" he asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not."
>
> I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self…
>
> "Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to…to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their games," says Peeta.
>
> "But you're not," I say. "None of us are. That's how the Games work."

"Okay, but within that framework, there's still you, there's still me," he insists. "Don't you see?"

"A little. Only…no offense, but who cares, Peeta?" I say.

"I do. I mean, what else am I allowed to care about at this point?" he asks angrily. He's locked those blue eyes on mine now, demanding an answer.

I take a step back. "Care about what Haymitch said. About staying alive" (141–142).

Katniss consistently reasserts her need for survival above any grander message of revolution. She mocks Peeta for his decision to plan "some noble death in the arena" and prioritizes the life-or-death decisions she will need to make to return to her family and care for them (142). While it is true that Katniss displays her first moments of agency when she volunteers for Prim at the reaping, she does not do it as a political statement against the Capitol. She may "marvel at Gale's desire to fight the regime," but she only "wants safety for herself and her loved ones" and initiates revolutionary actions in order "to achieve those goals" (Baker & Schak 208). Her first instance of political action was done out of love, not out of an innate need to rebel. Her lack of agency at the beginning of the series, while not condemned, establishes the baseline from which she grows into values of political consciousness that the trilogy promotes.

The area where Katniss most falls for the Capitol's machinations is her willingness to play into the division and competition between the districts in the first and second book. Much like President Snow cuts off communication between the districts to prevent collective action, the Games and other oppressive techniques intentionally pit the districts against one another to prevent them from realizing their true enemy. Most of the tributes suffer from the same problems of living under a totalitarian regime, with hollow cheeks and skin from having never been fed properly a day in their lives (*Hunger Games* 94). When they are placed next to the well-trained

career tributes from Districts 1, 2, and 4, where they accept the Capitol's narrative of winning being the highest "honor," it creates a further divide between the poorer and wealthier districts (36). From Katniss' perspective in the first novel, the career tributes of the 74th Hunger Games are the main antagonists of the narrative, and the narration establishes such early on: "Career tributes are overly vicious, arrogant, better fed, but only because they're the Capitol's lapdogs. Universally, solidly hated by all but those from their own districts" (161-162). Although Katniss may despise the Capitol in her own internal narration, she is unable to speak out against them in the same manner she is allowed to with her would-be killers in the arena, who are closely aligned with the Capitol.

The Gamemakers situate Cato as Katniss' intended arch nemesis in the Games' narrative, and Katniss herself consciously plays into this, framing him in the same light: "Twenty-one tributes are dead, but I still have yet to kill Cato. And really, wasn't he always the one to kill? Now it seems the other tributes were just minor obstacles, distractions, keeping us from the real battle of the Games. Cato and me" (327). In her internal narration, Katniss is using the same, thoughtless language as the Capitol would. The other tributes were merely obstacles, and although other children are dead, it is Cato who is the real prize. In this manner, the Games are "able to manufacture a level of consent on the part of its participants"—they don't want to partake but are nevertheless convinced (McKenna 154). Katniss' increasing violence, willingness to "kill anyone…on sight," and her burning hatred of Cato and the careers create the exact kind of division the Capitol wants (*Hunger Games* 238).

It is not until Rue's tragically young death that Katniss begins to show the first signs of understanding the type of rebellion Peeta was encouraging. She admits that she cannot bring herself to "hate the boy from District 1, who also appears so vulnerable in death":

> It's the Capitol I hate, for doing this to all of us. Gale's voice is in my head. His ravings against the Capitol no longer pointless, no longer to be ignored. Rue's death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict upon us. But here, even more strongly than at home, I feel my impotence. There's no way to take revenge on the Capitol. Is there? Then I remember Peeta's words on the roof…and for the first time, I understand what he means. I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own. That Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I (*Hunger Games* 236–237).

In this moment of extreme emotion and grief, Katniss returns to Peeta's speech and realizes she has her own agency, even while trapped within the arena. She covers Rue's wound with flowers both out of love for her ally, but also as a blatant protest of the Capitol's media censorship. This scene shows a change in Katniss from when she first volunteered for Prim without additional political ramifications in mind. She has a clearer understanding of what revolution means now that she has witnessed the horrors of the arena firsthand. Her own doubts regarding the Capitol's pitting of the districts against one another also begin to creep in, although temporarily: "I killed a boy whose name I don't even know. Somewhere his family is weeping for him…But then I think of Rue's still body and I'm able to banish the boy from my mind. At least, for now" (243). Katniss is forced to still operate within the rules of the Games, ensuring her survival and the continuation of Rue's legacy through continued bloodshed, but her new sympathies plague her as she realizes that she does not want any of the other tributes to die. Her inability to win without violence comes to a head in her showdown with Cato, where his brutal death seeps any last desire for revenge from Katniss: "Then the raw hunk of meat that used to be my enemy makes a

sound, and I know where his mouth is. And I think the word he's trying to say is *please*. Pity, not vengeance, sends my arrow flying into his skull" (340–341). There is no victory in Katniss' mercy killing of Cato. Although he may have been her enemy only a chapter before, the chilling implications behind the Gamemakers' mutts remind Katniss of her true opponent.

The narrative forces Katniss to consider the potential for revolution in a more practical sense as the series continues. Her stunt with the berries, although unintentionally subversive on her part, causes a spark that elicits dangerous actions from other districts who are angrier than Twelve. Characters like Peeta and Gale both want to take similar action—the latter through physical uprising, and the former through their positions as victors—but Katniss continues to express her desire to survive above all else. When Peeta sees the Capitol gorge themselves on food at President Snow's mansion and expresses doubts about following the Capitol's script to "subdue" uprisings in the districts, Katniss shuts down his concerns (*Catching Fire* 81). She also enters a disagreement with Gale after she shares news of uprising in Eight with him:

> "Don't you see? It can't be about just saving *us* anymore. Not if the rebellion's begun!" Gale shakes his head, not hiding his disgust with me. "You could do so much." He throws Cinna's gloves at my feet. "I changed my mind. I don't want anything they made in the Capitol." And he's gone. I look down at the gloves. Anything they made in the Capitol? Was that directed at me? Does he think I am now just another product of the Capitol and therefore something untouchable? (100–101).

In this scene, Gale promotes collective action over their desire to save themselves and their loved ones. Katniss, however, is too afraid and too under the Capitol's control to take a true stance. The major turning point in her agency comes not long after, though, when the new Peacekeepers publicly whip Gale for hunting. Seeing his suffering prompts her to realize that although she is

resisting rebellion to protect Prim, the Capitol has already hurt her sister beyond repair by killing their father through unsafe labor practices and hoarding their resources to the point of starvation (122–123). She decides that "what has been done" to Prim and Rue is "so wrong, so beyond justification, so evil that there is no choice" but to fight back in any way possible (123). Her compassion and self-sacrificing nature for those around her, the very traits that were once holding her back are now what begin to drive Katniss toward revolutionary agency. Her coming of awareness is fully solidified by returning, once again, to the conversation she and Peeta shared on the roof in the first novel. Peeta asks Katniss why she provoked the Gamemakers in her talent presentation, and she replies, "I don't know, To show them that I'm more than just a piece in their games?" (242). She regurgitates Peeta's words back at him, admitting that, originally, she "hadn't understood what he meant. Now I do" (242). By repeating this line multiple times throughout the series, it establishes benchmarks to ensure readers understand how far Katniss has developed as a heroine.

Catching Fire also returns to the issue of division between the districts, although this time from the perspective of a more open-minded Katniss. On her victory tour, she notes the difference between the poor districts and the career districts, the latter of which is at no risk of uprising. Instead of anger at their privilege, though, Katniss only feels guilt at her murder of the boy from District 1: "As I try to avoid looking at his family, I learn that his name was Marvel. How did I never know that? I suppose that before the Games I didn't pay attention, and afterward I didn't want to know" (*Catching Fire* 72). Katniss avoided humanizing him in the same manner that the Capitol avoids humanizing the tributes, and she is aware enough at this point to admit her fault. This time around, the Games force Katniss to confront the conflict between the districts. Because the pool of tributes was pulled from the existing victors, all the competitors

outside of Katniss and Peeta have been friends for decades and have no desire to capitalize on the divisions the Capitol wants them to create. Katniss practices camouflage with District 6, talks to the others at one large table at lunch, and spars with the older career tributes. This comradery creates a moral crisis in Katniss, who realizes that the more she knows her fellow tributes, the more she likes them and wants to protect them instead of killing them (233–234). The friendship between the victors is not reflected in the districts—they are an exception to the rule, a hope of what could be if the rebellion were to pull together. When the victors, one-by-one, takes shots at the Capitol during their interviews, they present a united front: "By the time the anthem plays its final strains, all twenty-four of us stand in one unbroken line in what must be the first public show of unity among the districts since the Dark Days. You can see the realization of this as the screens begin to pop into blackness. It's too late, though. In the confusion they didn't cut us off in time. Everyone has seen" (258). This moment on the interview stage represents one of the largest political themes the series promotes, which is collective action. The series begins with District 12 fractured from within, forcefully separated from the other districts, and in an entirely different society from the Capitol. The victors in *Catching Fire* represent the first signs of what organized rebellion could look like if the districts overcame the communication embargoes and divisions between them.

Although Katniss is part of this show of support and understands its gravity, she still struggles to push past her automatic desire to save only herself and Peeta. Haymitch knows her well enough to predict this issue and attempts to prevent it in his goodbye to her, saying, "Katniss, when you're in the arena…You just remember who the enemy is" (*Catching Fire* 260). Like when she first heard Peeta's speech on the roof, she initially does not understand Haymitch and disregards the statement. His words come back to her at the climax of the novel, though,

when she cannot determine who is a friend and who is a foe among her district allies. This time she does not need an explanation: "Why would I need reminding? I have always known who the enemy is. Who starves and tortures and kills us in the arena. Who will soon kill everyone I love. My bow drops as his meaning registers. Yes, I know who the enemy is. And it's not [the careers]" (378). For the first time, when Katniss shoots the force field and breaks the arena, her act is one of true, conscious rebellion.

As *Mockingjay* begins and Collins introduces District 13, a meticulously controlled society with no more free thought than the rest of Panem, Katniss must work to maintain her newfound agency under another oppressor. President Alma Coin and the resistance were manipulating the 75th Games from the beginning, unbeknownst to both her and Peeta. They made her yet another game piece, just as she "was meant to be a piece in the Hunger Games. Used without consent, without knowledge. At least in the Hunger Games, I knew I was being played with" (*Catching Fire* 385). District 13 needs Katniss' public persona to lead their revolution, but they would prefer her without her own thoughts or actions. Instead, they want the Mockingjay, or the figure they believe Katniss to be. Their simplification of her to a commodity resembles the Capitol's treatment of her from the first two novels. Thirteen assembles "a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances—as if that doesn't sound horribly familiar—and all I have to do is play my part" (*Mockingjay* 10–11). The stylists polish her to the same extent as the Capitol before fake burning and scarring her for revolution propaganda ads. This façade is designed to remind readers of both the fictional Capitol's propaganda and recruitment ads from the real world. However, Katniss' attempts at regurgitating Coin's carefully scripted lines, which are as stiff and dramatic as the Capitol's material, fall short of expectations (71). Haymitch and Gale are the only two rebels to realize where the appeal of

Katniss as a person comes from: her compassion, her authenticity, and her selflessness to protect her loved ones. Her live moments that appealed the most to the districts did not belong to the star-crossed lovers storyline or Caesar Flickerman's interview influence: "'They were Katniss's,' says Gale quietly. 'No one told her what to do or say'" (75). Katniss begins to realize, to the chagrin of President Coin, that the initial power of the revolution has come from her own agenda outside of the control of the Gamemakers, President Snow, the rebellion, and President Coin.

As Katniss grows increasingly disillusioned with the rebellion, their true intentions come to light through their treatment of the Capitol's citizens. Katniss, who begins the third novel with the statement that she would kill "every living soul" working under the Capitol "without hesitation," shows her commitment to collective action and gradually learns sympathy (*Mockingjay* 31). When she learns that Thirteen is mistreating her prep team by chaining them to a wall, drenched in filth and the stench of their own urine, she protests to Gale's disgust:

> "It's more complicated than that. I know them. They're not evil or cruel. They're not even smart. Hurting them, it's like hurting children. They don't see…I mean, they don't know…" I get knotted up in my words.
>
> "They don't know what, Katniss?" he says. "That tributes—who are the actual children involved here, not your trio of freaks—are forced to fight to the death? That you were going into that arena for people's amusement? Was that a big secret in the Capitol?"
>
> "No. But they don't view it the way we do," I say. "They're raised on it and—"
>
> "Are you actually defending them?" He slips the skin from the rabbit in one quick move. That stings, because, in fact, I am, and it's ridiculous. I struggle to find a logical position.
>
> "I guess I'm defending anyone who's treated like that for taking a slice of bread" (53–54).

Despite their naivety and cluelessness to the reality of the Games, Katniss' compassion for others outlasts the desire for revenge that burns through Gale. She begins to realize that, even within the Capitol, there is a grey area. Her change in perspective carries into the next argument they share regarding how the Districts should take the Nut, or the last stronghold between the rebels and the Capitol. Gale's proposed plan would result in the deaths of every worker in the mountain. He is willing to make that sacrifice, though, because of Two's close relationship with the Capitol. Although Katniss initially considers it, she changes her mind: "I want everyone in that mountain dead. Am about to say so. But then…I'm also a girl from District 12. Not President Snow. I can't help it. I can't condemn someone to the death he's suggesting" (204–205). While Gale is still blinded by the divisions between the poor districts and the Capitol-aligned districts, Katniss learns to see past that, even reflecting on the pain she now feels at the deaths of Cato and his district partner Clove.

The scenes that Katniss witnesses when the rebels breach the Capitol are enough to shake her from her wholly negative perception of the city's citizens. As she and Gale attempt to track down President Snow, they pass "confused, sleepy children" who are stumbling after their parents in their "bare feet" (*Mockingjay* 332). The sight of them reminds Katniss of the children who died in the firebombing of Twelve. One little girl with a bright yellow coat forms the centerpiece of this section: "The little girl who was watching me kneels beside a motionless woman, screeching and trying to rouse her. Another wave of bullets slices across the chest of her yellow coat, staining it with red, knocking the girl onto her back. For a moment, looking at her tiny crumpled form, I lose my ability to form words" (339). Although the rebels eventually force their way through the chaos of refugees caught in the crossfire of fighting—"screaming people, bleeding people, dead people everywhere"—Katniss can only think of the "lemon yellow coat"

(340-341). Her horror at the rebellion's bloodshed overwhelms her to the point that she cannot name the girl, only address her by her clothing. The repetition of "people" with increasingly violent adjectives also conveys the trauma that Katniss is actively developing. In this chapter, the rebels inflict on the Capitol a similar brutality to what President Snow has done to the districts. It speaks to the kind of world Katniss wants, and whether District 13 truly represents the values she champions.

Katniss' most significant development is her recognition of how essential collective action is to revolutionary thought. She grows from playing into the divisions between the districts and the rebellion and Capitol, into someone who sees more important goals in the world than these differing sides. Her speech to the Nut's surviving workers in Two encompasses her entire growth as a character. She acknowledges the pain their districts have caused one another in the past 75 years, that they have "every reason to kill each other," but that she refuses to kill the Capitol's slaves for them:

> "I'm not their slave," the man mutters.
>
> "I am," I say. "That's why I killed Cato…and he killed Thresh…and he killed Clove…and she tried to kill me. It just goes around and around, and who wins? Not us. Not the districts. Always the Capitol. But I'm tired of being a piece in their Games." Peeta. On the rooftop the night before our first Hunger Games. He understood it all before we'd even set foot in the arena (*Mockingjay* 215–216).

She ends her plea for Two to surrender by reminding them of Haymitch's words in *Catching Fire*. The districts are not each other's enemies, and the only way to end the true oppression of the Capitol is to do it together (216). Her words reflect the ideals of classic Marxist theory, which argues that only the unification of the proletariat can lead to the downfall of the

bourgeoise. If the revolution allows their oppressors to split them into warring factions, they will have no social influence (Tyson 52). While unsuccessful, this disunification was President Coin's plan all along. President Snow realizes it first, informing Katniss that President Coin used her Mockingjay persona to convince the Capitol and districts to "destroy one another, and then step in to take power with Thirteen barely scratched" (*Mockingjay* 357). This realization, combined with Coin's proposal to host a symbolic Hunger Games with the Capitol's children, is enough to turn Katniss against the rebellion and contemplate if the cycle is repeating from 75 years before: "All those people I loved, dead, and we are discussing the next Hunger Games in an attempt to avoid wasting life. Nothing has changed. Nothing will ever change now" (370). Beetee is one of the only victors to vehemently protest the idea. He warns that "unity is essential for [Panem's] survival," and if the districts and Capitol do not "stop viewing one another as enemies," nothing will ever change (370). In this final discussion surrounding ethics in *The Hunger Games*' universe, Collins frames collective action as not only essential to revolutionary thought, but to the foundation of a new society.

Katniss' one act of true revolution, representing the final step in her growth in political consciousness by the end of the series, is her execution of President Coin (*Mockingjay* 372, Baker and Schak 203). Although President Snow reveals that Coin's war strategies led to the death of Prim, Katniss' eventual decision is all her own. Killing Coin ushers in new leadership with plans to establish a democracy, rather than a dictatorship. Katniss begins the series too afraid to even contemplate leaving Twelve, but by the end she realizes that she has just as much influence and responsibility to create a better Panem (Cronshaw 137). Readers witness her growth into a protagonist who promotes authenticity, justice, and collective action, while vocally condemning the oppression and exploitation of the Capitol. She frames the districts' plural will

as the driving force of change. This trait sets *The Hunger Games* apart from other young adult novels, which "champion individual agency against group conformity" (Hill 14). Katniss stands alone in the first novel's introduction, and she is determined to keep it that way. In Panem, though, being a self-operating individual and placing personal survival above all else is what weakens the districts' revolutionary message. Only through embracing their status as one person in a collective does their ethical fight get off the ground. By presenting the unfair conditions that the districts suffer and the Capitol's privilege as the ultimate enemy of the novels, the "agency for political change rests with people who perceive that their rights are not being met" (Heit 103). Pulling together a rebel collective, however, requires a "deep commitment" that the districts do not always meet, as evidenced by Twelve's inaction (Heit 104). Katniss' development from a similar non-actor to someone who is politically conscious and outspoken gives the other districts the "awareness and encouragement to think differently" (Kanwal, et. al 3993). And, outside of the narrative, her "awakening to her role as hero…offers readers the opportunities to seek their own heroic opportunities, and to find—and realize—their own potential" (Jones 245). *The Hunger Games* give its readers, many of whom are adolescents, the impetus to assume Katniss' awareness of her political culture and environment.

This message of agency appeals to the very concept of dystopian and young adult literature, which are both political in nature. Each is a genre of the "disempowered, the oppressed and repressed, those subject and yet resisting the hegemony of their worlds—they are inherently literatures of resistance" (Jones 225). Their content is designed to inspire readers to action or, at the very least, awaken them to the issues of their present. This message is specifically aimed at adolescent audiences, who are growing into themselves and new sets of values. When they see stories that call upon them to "act with passion and integrity, and to advocate justice," it reminds

them that they do have the power to change oppressive and harmful societies "even when it seems hopeless" (245). This process involves looking past one's self-centered will to survive and actively discovering what is most important for the collective (Cronshaw 137). If this involves confronting the major themes of novels like *The Hunger Games*, which "ask us to question our media" and "to be contemplative about our government," then that is what is necessary (Gagnon 143).

The Hunger Games could be best described as a "self-directed satire" that causes its audience to "question our consumerism that forces children into slave labour," our "perverse conception of entertainment as the purpose of life," and willingness to accept the televised scenes of dead children from foreign wars on TV screens (Cronshaw 131–132). It also "illuminates the modern preoccupation with self and the disengagement from morality and political engagement," which Katniss suffers from early in the series and prevents audiences from condemning these issues (131–132). Like previous examples of dystopian literature, this critique is reflected in the fabrics of our present rather than a fantastical story about an alien future. However, that message does not automatically carry over into every aspect of the franchise. Even though the trilogy's narrative has always been about "political power," even when "focused on media spectacles, lethal action sequences, or youthful romance," our modern media structures warp this message for the same reasons *The Hunger Games* critiques them (Driscoll & Heatwole 106).

SECTION 4: CONTRADICTORY MESSAGING IN TRANSMEDIA MARKETING

The marketing for *The Hunger Games'* subsequent film adaptations, *The Hunger Games* (2012), *Catching Fire* (2013), and *Mockingjay: Part One* (2014) and *Two* (2015), used in-universe language, parody propaganda, and transmedia strategies to create wildly successful advertising campaigns. Lionsgate Films led this work with a 27-member team, utilizing both traditional and unconventional marketing tactics. The studio distributed 80,000 posters, covered almost 50 magazines, and advertised on over 3,000 billboards for the first film alone (Barnes). The centerpiece of the strategy, though, making it an exemplary case study for public relations firms, was its unique use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr beginning in March 2011. Publications like *Znaki* and *The New York Times* furthered the campaign's reputation among PR circles and the public by predicting that Lionsgate's Chief Marketing Officer, Tim Palen, developed a model that would become a template for "future advertising campaigns in the sphere of social media" (Jansen). The media's promotion of *The Hunger Games'* marketing improved the franchise's popularity just as much as the actual advertising itself. Due to the uniqueness of Lionsgate's strategy, all eyes were on their work and content. In total, it cost the studio over $50 million to advertise the first film. This price is drastically different from the more than $100 million that larger studios usually require to market big releases, primarily because the team's extensive use of digital marketing lessened the cost.

While seemingly unreasonable and expensive, these massive marketing campaigns are designed to bring record-breaking numbers into the opening weekend box offices (Marich 4). Due to modern standards of success for movies, studios feel immense pressure for their work to perform well almost immediately. Each release, then, is a "new product that needs to be explained, positioned, and promoted to consumers" (5). Advertisers frontload their campaigns

early to achieve this purpose. A marketer's perspective traditionally involves "position[ing] the film within the minds of consumers in order to encourage consumption of their film," turning the movie from an art form to an economic product (Kerrigan 1). Critics of contemporary Hollywood claim that new marketing practices from studios strip away the emotion behind creating movies and prioritize labor above all else. With this perspective in mind, it is safe to establish that most studios' advertising decisions are made with monetary rather than creative motivations. Although Lionsgate's campaigns promoted more political subtext than the average ad, their primary goal is to give Collins' franchise a successful box office opening.

This challenge was especially difficult to navigate for *The Hunger Games'* marketing team, as they already had to maneuver around the franchise's difficult and sometimes controversial subject matter. Collins' book trilogy is explicitly "critical of violence as entertainment," which is not simple for a marketer to tackle when bloodshed tends to draw in audiences (Barnes). Showcasing too much violence, however, would undermine the novels' argument, which Palen acknowledged in an interview he gave prior to the film's release: "The beam for this movie is really narrow, and it's a sheer drop to your death on either side" (Barnes). Most of the decisions that Lionsgate made when handling the films' subject matter heavily weighed this balance. After all, film marketing can act as an educator for various ideologies, both political and social, so it is important that a film's advertising establishes its argument as soon as possible (Kerrigan 1). Word of mouth is a marketer's most powerful tool, but if they do not position the film correctly, then the expectations of consumers may be incorrect, and the message of the film will fail (129). This danger was especially prevalent for Lionsgate, seeing as the themes of the novels are both complex and politically controversial.

Most of the traditional forms of marketing in *The Hunger Games'* advertising campaign, including trailers and interviews, successfully promoted authenticity, anti-consumption, and critiques of government oppression while also publicizing the qualities that make films commercially successful. The first film's three trailers combine multiple aspects of what makes movies desirable to audiences, including a multi-genre overlap, teases of controversial storytelling, and a sampling of the fictional world's atmosphere (Kernan 47, 60). Famously, Lionsgate did not reveal footage of the Games themselves in the trailers they released, outside of the bloodbath countdown and a few second-long clips (Lionsgate Movies). Instead, most of the trailers featured shots from the first half of the movie before Katniss enters the arena. Palen confirmed in multiple interviews that they hoped to preemptively prevent the criticism that Lionsgate was sensationalizing violence against children. A viral article published in the *LA Times* circulated this idea among audiences (Fritz). However, this tactic also adheres to a classic piece of industry advice: to "sell the sizzle and not the steak" (Marich 2). Advertisements should never show the true focus of the film, because studios want to force audiences to pay to see content not shown in the trailer. Palen admitted to this approach, stating that, "Everyone liked the implication that if you want to see the games you have to buy a ticket" (Barnes). His quote contradicts the idea that their sole motivation was to not glorify violence. While the team may have wanted to avoid backlash and loss of interest from fans, their decision also benefits them from a monetary perspective. Nevertheless, the trailers chose to display the Capitol's decadence as a promotional tactic rather than unnecessarily spreading the death of child characters over social media, showing their surface level commitment to the trilogy's themes.

In place of scenes from the Games, the trailers featured establishing shots of Panem and the A-List actors who make up the secondary cast. The latter emphasizes the star power behind

their film, playing into America's obsession with celebrity name brands. Although the early trailers do not directly address the novels' political messaging, following the industry rule that narrative structures are often not present in teaser trailers, each one features Peeta's "piece in their Games" line from the first book (Kerrigan 141, Lionsgate Movies). While new viewers will not recognize the significance of this inclusion, its presence signals to existing fans, who will instantly recognize the quote, that the writers are not losing sight of *The Hunger Games*' greater messaging and that they should continue to support and promote the adaptation via discussion on social media.

Catching Fire took an alternate approach to its advertising, transitioning to the modern "tell-all" trailer which showcases scenes from every act in a film. Rather than saving footage of the Games for the film itself, as Lionsgate did for the first installment, Palen wanted to promote the action quickly since *Mockingjay* features no Hunger Games: "With this movie and this book, there are opportunities we won't have again…It's our last games" ("Palen Crafts Stylish Universe"). His admission shows that Palen understands how essential the Games' presence in the narrative is to drawing in audiences, even if he does claim that their marketing does not prioritize action. Each of *Catching Fire*'s official trailers also featured Gale kissing Katniss, often at the climax of the backing song ("Catching Fire - Official Trailer"). This instance is the first and only where the franchise's trailers overtly prioritize the love triangle between Katniss, Peeta, and Gale. Its inclusion created contention and buzz among fans who have a strong preference for Peeta or Gale as a love interest. The decision to purposefully stoke anger among audiences is ironic, considering the *Mockingjay* novel directly addresses how this action would detract from the revolutionary message when Thirteen considers making Gale Katniss' new love interest: "'I think we should continue the current romance. A quick defection from Peeta could

cause the audience to lose sympathy for her,' says Plutarch" (*Mockingjay* 39). The rest of the trailer juxtaposes scenes of the growing rebellion with a manipulative voiceover from President Snow, beginning to demonstrate the themes of the novels in a more explicit manner.

The trailers that Lionsgate released for *Mockingjay: Part One* and *Two* best demonstrated the potential of visual marketing in promoting the books' anti-media and censorship themes. By using fake propaganda that pulled from diegetic events in the film, the studio increased the viral attention surrounding the movies' release. Each of the three films aired on a fake television channel called Capitol TV emblazoned with the Capitol's symbols. The first propo used a classic, deep-voiced narrator over stock clips of district laborers working to promote product production. Proud workers shared positive dialogue lines, including "Love your labor" and "Take pride in your task" ("Capitol TV"). The actors' fake positivity, praise of labor, and maintained eye contact with the camera are overtly designed to be critiqued by audiences, particularly using a Marxist lens. A second propaganda clip features President Snow framing the districts as the body of Panem and the Capitol as the "beating heart" ("Panem Address"). By emphasizing the symbiotic nature of each group, he emphasizes the novels' themes of unity, collective action, and sacrifice, but from the Capitol's twisted perspective. Audiences are aware that Snow does not truly believe these ideas based on the dark shift in his tone and the music at the 0:38 mark, indicating to the audience that although these ideas on their own are not problematic, Snow is leveraging them in a way that further oppresses the districts. This propo warns viewers to remain conscious of how governments may use unifying language as a weapon.

Lionsgate promoted multiple interviews before the 2012 release which showcased the cast and director's understanding of the novels' themes to fans. In a January 2011 conversation with *Entertainment Weekly*, director Gary Ross highlighted the "defiant" and "anti-authoritarian"

tone of the franchise, arguing that it comes from Katniss' humanity and her relationships with others rather than action sequences ("Gary Ross"). He made similar references to collective action and the importance of not prioritizing violence in their marketing, ensuring that listeners knew the advertising team's motivations (Mitchell). Jennifer Lawrence indicated a deeper understanding of Katniss when talking to *Entertainment Weekly,* as well: "It's so tempting, especially with a cool, big budget franchise movie, but we have to remember that she's a 16-year-old girl who's being forced to do this. These kids are only killing each other because if they don't, they'll die. It's needless, pointless, unjustified violence" (Valby). Other actors like Wes Bentley and Amandla Stenberg directly addressed the political ramifications of the franchise, warning that Panem, as a nation not too different from America, is intended to be a prediction for audiences (Levine, capitol_barbie). Each of these interviews expresses similar sentiments to the original novels, showing that the cast and crew do understand the complexity of Collins' narrative. However, while these interviews were public, Lionsgate did not center them as a main promotion for the film in the same manner as the unconventional media they created. Their visual campaigns left a stronger impression on audiences' minds, causing most of the brand problems the franchise suffers from.

Palen's non-traditional forms of marketing, which expanded *The Hunger Games* franchise to the level of a transmedia property, were much more likely to lose sight of the novels' meaning due to the inherent nature of commercial promotion. When Jenkins first popularized the transmedia concept, its main critics claimed that it was the industry's attempts to further cash in on fans under the guise of creating more fictional content for them (Jenkins 19). *The Hunger Games*' transition to a transmedia property particularly struggles under this criticism due to the meta-marketing campaign they developed using diegetic marketing elements from the franchise.

In the fictional narrative, Katniss appeals to the Capitol audience through glamorous costumes, interviews, and flashy storylines. The studio promotes the *Hunger Games* films with similar angles, leaving their campaign to often undermine its own anti-sensationalist messaging (Keller 24). Scholars directly relate this contradiction to the concept of carnivalesque, which is a "form of social control masquerading as rebellion"—an oppressed group may push against order, but it always ends in the reassertion of control over the population (37). The fictional narrative showcases this idea when Katniss commits rebellious acts, yet repeatedly loses control to both President Snow and President Coin. However, the carnivalesque also expands to the concept of watching revolutionary films within a commercial culture. American cinema manipulates its audiences, allowing them to imagine heroic acts against the ruling institution but forcing them to return home to complacency when the film has ended: "The compulsion of the subordinate districts of Panem to watch passively mirrors our own inability to turn away" (Keller 40). The transmedia concept worsens this problem to an extent. By overly committing to Jenkins' ideas and spreading out promotional material as far as possible, the strategy may not "fully reflect the whole essence" of a film (Xue 3). When it is already difficult to convey a revolutionary message, splitting the narrative between multiple formats weakens it even further. Using several platforms may successfully create conversations surrounding films that benefit them monetarily, but it leads to an overconsumption of fictional content with little to no actual meaning behind it.

The creation of cosmetic merchandise was one major aspect of Lionsgate's marketing that invalidated the novels' condemnation of overconsumption and beauty standards. Before the first film, China Glaze released a nail polish line called "Capitol Colours" with Effie Trinket as the face of the brand (Schillaci). Each line featured 12 shades of nail polish, each one associated with a different district. Wearing a certain color "allow[ed] citizens to show their solidarity and

support for a favorite tribute" (Schillaci). While this tactic uses textual references to further immerse audiences into the expanded franchise, the optics of promoting beauty items with a Capitol character to sell the movie is harmful considering the series' critique of such methods. The ad also read, "What will you be wearing to the opening ceremonies," which places fans into the persona of a Capitol citizen who cares more about aesthetic presentation than the ethics of the Games (Schillaci). While this tactic would hopefully remind fans of their own cultural position, "drawing attention to the unnatural and even unacceptable current status-quo," it does not do so explicitly (Gagnon 142). Fans are forced to fill in those blanks themselves and the perception of the marketing is simply that it further promotes the Capitol's behavior.

Image 1 – China Glaze

Other *Hunger Games*-inspired beauty products included LASplash Cosmetics' line of faux mink lashes, glitter eyeliner, and lipstick, and CoverGirl's "Capitol Beauty" collection (LASplash Cosmetics, "CoverGirl"). The latter, like China Glaze, promoted the items of production from

the various districts including luxury, masonry, tech, and fishing. The models' photos are similar to the staged poster of Effie that China Glaze promoted. While she was intentionally in character, however, the models are framed in dramatic colors for aesthetic alone. Audiences are set up to critique the products through a Marxist lens, but are unlikely to due to the seriousness with which the posters are presented.

Image 2 – Capitol Beauty

Other merchandise items included several *Hunger Games* Barbie dolls from Mattel and a limited line of chocolates from Vosges. Both are ironic considering the persisting connections between dolls and beauty standards, and the fact that Lionsgate is using food to promote a narrative about the districts' starvation. Transmedia as an approach gives marketers leeway, though, to create themed consumer goods that will appeal to fans and create new buzz (Xue 1). While there may be attempts to relate these products to the themes of the books, the young target audience "do not recognize that the Capitol mirrors the privilege and passivity of American culture" or that they are more similar to the population of the Capitol, who "engineers and watches" the Games, than those struggling in the districts (Baker & Schak 211). Even non-licensed merchandise has the same challenges. To directly reach fans on social media, *Entertainment Weekly* created a Tumblr page named The Hob that featured announcements and

discussion surrounding the release of the first film. In December 2010, the site platformed a variety of fan items available for purchase including a game set, charm bracelet, and Mockingjay necklace. Two other items referred specifically to Peeta: a pin that stated, "Peeta can put a bun in my oven anytime," with a loaf of bread and a sticker that read, "Team Peeta," with the Mockingjay symbol ("Gift suggestions"). The products sexualize a teenage character and prioritize the conversation surrounding the franchise's love triangle, ignoring the novels' explicit condemnation of exploiting the tributes' bodies and personal lives. Katniss explicitly disagrees with Gale and Peeta being pitted against each other for her, as well: "It's a horrible thing for Gale to say, for Peeta not to refute. Especially when every emotion I have has been taken and exploited by the Capitol or the rebels. At the moment, the choice would be simple. I can survive just fine without either of them" (*Mockingjay* 330). DePalma argued that the studio never played into the Team Peeta vs. Team Gale divide because fan feedback indicated that *The Hunger Games* was "so much more" than that, but magazines continued to, regardless of the team's intentions (Karpel).

Promotional photoshoots, specifically for the 2012 film, emphasize the physical attractiveness of the lead actors and the love triangle over the movie's actual brand. In November 2011, *Vanity Fair* published a cast photo that is reminiscent of an ad found in a mall clothing store (Smith). Its bright lighting, photoshopped appearance, and the actors' plastic smiles contradict the gritty tone of the books and the serious nature of the traditional marketing formats.

Image 3 – Cast photo

In addition, the magazine published separate shots of Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, and Liam Hemsworth. The heavy makeup on Lawrence's face accentuates her features but calls back to criticisms of Katniss' Mockingjay look in the third novel: "'She's still a girl and you made her look thirty-five. Feels wrong. Like something the Capitol would do'" (*Mockingjay* 77). Her expression is smoldering and sexy, and she is centered between both leads with her arms draped over them, calling the love triangle to the forefront of audiences' minds.

Image 4 – Lawrence, Hemsworth, and Hutchinson

For the sequels, Palen avoided putting the trio on posters and magazines together, demonstrating that he understands the implication these promotions had ("Palen Crafts Stylish Universe"). A

second round of photos from *Entertainment Weekly* also featured photoshopped versions of Gale and Peeta in the woods with the accompanying tagline, the "devoted young men who fight for her" ("Peeta and Gale"). The photoshoots harken back to *Twilight*'s advertising campaign, which relied more heavily on the intrigue of romance. By modeling their marketing after another prominent young adult franchise, *Vanity Fair* contradicts the novels' explicit prioritization of the revolutionary message over Katniss' romances with Peeta and Gale: "'I can't think about anyone that way now. All I can think about, every day, every waking minute since they drew Prim's name at the reaping, is how afraid I am. And there doesn't seem to be room for anything else'" (*Catching Fire* 97). The themes of the novels always return to Katniss struggling with and overcoming the oppression she faces, but the promotional photoshoots would indicate a preference for the glamorous and romance-obsessed Capitol.

Although teen movies are slightly different from their YA counterparts, the narratives follow similar story beats: a teenaged protagonist faces problems that push the plot of the film forward, all while they discover and reclaim their agency. While the genre has shifted slightly from a high school setting to grander worlds like *Twilight* and *Harry Potter,* the focus remains on how the main characters determine "who they are and who they want to be," both as individuals and within a greater community, and learn how to become self-actualized (Nelson 128). Katniss' individual development, for example, focuses on her ability to act politically; her journey is merely conveyed through a dystopian rebellion. By seeing their own narratives portrayed in a blockbuster like *The Hunger Games*, young adults learn how to engage with and grow from the media they consume. Historically, the film industry produces more YA films when new media is pressing in on the market or the market is becoming unstable (126). Studios hope to appeal to adolescent audiences by putting the stories of young adults at the forefront. If

the purpose of *The Hunger Games* franchise is to reach young adult audiences and improve their agency, then it would make the most sense to center Katniss' journey in the marketing materials. However, Lionsgate prioritized advertising based around the Capitol's aesthetic instead of Katniss' character development. Most of the initial marketing that featured her emphasized her appearance over any complex analysis of her character.

The Hunger Games' advertising team utilized the prominent and unique costuming items within the film as another strategy to heavily promote it. *InStyle* shared in November 2011 a list of numeric facts related to hair and wigs on set, including that 45 hairdressers were present each day, Elizabeth Banks had three separate wigs—"One pink, one green, and one lavender"—and over 400 cast members and extras wore wigs in a single day of filming (marcia993). The sheer number of accessories on set was necessary to properly reflect the Capitols' eccentric fashion, but the promotion of these fast facts could be interpreted as more of a brag about the studio's budget than commentary on the Capitol's overconsumption. In January 2012, Lionsgate also launched a fake Tumblr blog called Capitol Couture dedicated to Panem's fashion. The site used real name brand fashion houses like Viktor&Rolf and LaQuan Smith next to magazine covers with dramatized photos of Katniss and Peeta (Barnes). Palen and his team expanded on this idea for *Catching Fire*, creating manufactured articles curated by freelance journalists. The site released exclusive Capitol portraits of the film's characters in luxury fashion items.

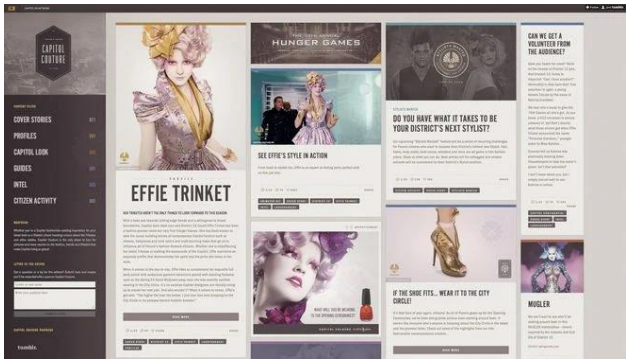

Image 5 – Capitol Couture Pt. 1

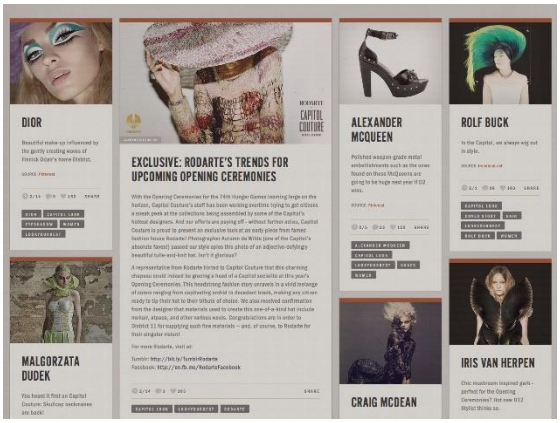

Image 6 – Capitol Couture Pt. 2

By playing into the Capitol's decadence, Palen felt that it "helped the campaign avoid overt product placement or sponsorships, which tend to turn off fans, and instead let them pretend they were living within the environment of the story" (Barnes). This sentiment is both fair and effective from a marketing perspective. As Collins stated in *Variety*, Lionsgate's work was "appropriately disturbing and thought-provoking" in a similar manner to the book itself ("Collins Breaks Silence"). However, even if the advertisers are aware of the irony behind their choices, they are nevertheless promoting brands and commodity products. The greater political messaging of the site, that overconsumption is to be critiqued, is lost when the studio spreads it over as many formats as possible.

With the distribution of *Mockingjay: Part One*, Lionsgate also released "The Hanging Tree," which is the song that Katniss sings for a propo in both the film and book. The Capitol banned the song in District 12 due to its rebellious undertones (*Mockingjay* 123). Lines like, "Where they strung up a man they say murdered three" contributed to this meaning. Lawrence's rendition of the song places emphasis on "say," implying that the authoritarian "they" is falsely claiming the man committed a crime. It puts doubt on the honesty of the subject, which district

residents would view as the Capitol. The lyric, "Wear a necklace of rope, side by side with me," resembles Katniss' stunt with the berries from the first installment (123). The named lovers would rather "be free" in death than live in confinement, which speaks to the inequalities the districts wish to escape. The song represents "life outside the rule of the Capitol," as well as reminding audiences of Katniss' "capacity for empathy and love" (Driscoll & Heatwole 106). However, in addition to the original version of the song which evokes rebellious sentiments, Lionsgate also released Michael Gazzon's "The Hanging Tree (Rebel Remix)." Gazzon's remix speeds up and autotunes Lawrence's voice, adds a backing track, and turns the song into a dance anthem (Vevo). This version going viral led to multiple other remixes in different styles on SoundCloud, all of which warp the song's original purpose. Advertisers willingly sacrificed the call to revolution within the original lyrics for a catchy tune on the radio that would sell well on iTunes.

Official websites using diegetic elements to their advantage were one of the main methods of promotion throughout the series. The first, TheCapitol.pn, was an interactive site that acted as the official website of Panem's ruling government, complete with its own domain name. Initially launched in 2011, fans were able to make digital ID cards as if they lived in the universe of *The Hunger Games*. In a second phase of the campaign, other fans on Twitter could then elect ID holders to be mayors of various districts (Jansen). Their cards featured their assigned district and occupation, which according to DePalma, "gave them an identity" (Karpel). By simplifying *The Hunger Games'* worldbuilding to production alone, it reinforces the prominence of labor in the districts and reduces fans to commodities in the same manner as Panem's workers. Watson Design Group re-designed the overall website for *Mockingjay: Part One.* If social media users posted with #WhatsMyDistrict, which was placed at the end of all the trailers, the image of

President Snow, Peeta, and District 7 victor Johanna Mason bleached in white on the homepage became clearer (Jansen).

Image 7 – Capitol.pn

This hashtag was an example of how the marketing team relied heavily on fans to increase the film's popularity through word of mouth and buzz marketing. Some critics pose issues with the increasing popularity of buzz marketing as transmedia also becomes more prevalent: "As studios try to engage fans with these new online tools, who's driving popular culture? Is it the studios like they've always done? Is it the fans pushing it the other way? Or, is it studios convincing fans that they're doing it when it's really a Hollywood product all along?" (Barnes). This argument breaks down part of the issue that *The Hunger Games* faced in terms of its advertising decisions. Although these sites appealed to fans through references to the trilogy and immersion into the fictional world, the studio's blatant manipulation of audiences to promote the film's ticket sales is ethically questionable.

The website's homepage and other browsing tabs featured diegetic elements from the narrative in multiple forms. The main landing page read, "For the citizens. By the Capitol," in reference to President Snow's control over all aspects of the districts' lives (Jansen). Other content included miscellaneous clips from Capitol TV and interviews with famous fictional heroes. A few of Capitol TV's videos included the districts discussing developments in labor

practices and famous YouTube video bloggers, modeled as Panem residents, talking about the Capitol's fashion, style, and "beautiful life" (Jansen). All of these features integrate fans with *The Hunger Games'* world, increasing their emotional attachment to the franchise. Also present on the home page was a poster series of each district featuring slogans such as "Panem today, Panem tomorrow, Panem forever" (Jansen). This slogan is reminiscent of taglines found in authentic political propaganda. It pulls once more on the theme of unity, from the perspective of the Capitol elite. In the district heroes tab, the visual representing District 12 features a 6-year-old girl covered in dirt with an apple in her hands and a mining uniform in front of her. The text to the side states that she "captures the spirit of the next generation of District citizens: ready, willing, and eager to power the Panem of tomorrow" (Jansen).

Image 8 – District Heroes

Lionsgate's fake website reminds audiences how Panem prioritizes labor and production above all else, as well as twisting themes of authenticity and collective action in a negative direction. The subtext of these marketing materials aligns with the novels' original political intentions, but these visuals are just one part of a greater whole. Fans are forced to seek out additional elements if they want a full understanding of Panem's inequalities and issues.

Revolution.pn, the inverse of TheCapitol.pn, was another interactive website that Lionsgate used to promote *Mockingjay: Part Two*. If social media users posted with #UNITE,

the website gradually began to take over the content that TheCapitol.pn displayed. District Thirteen consistently intercepted the Capitol's messages on the site, and inevitably overtook the all-white image of President Snow with the words, "The Capitol must fall so we may be free" (Jansen). Revolution.pn featured a few promotional elements, as well, including a main homepage with multiple text boxes which read: "Stand with us," "There is no turning back. Together we will stand. Together we will fight," and "Join the revolution" (Jansen). These phrases are similarly propagandistic to the language found on TheCapitol.pn, but to the benefit of Thirteen. However, the similarity in the language between the two is enough to foreshadow Katniss' eventual turn against President Coin and her rebellion. This site's focus on correcting the false media of the Capitol also plays into the anti-media messaging of the novels. To understand the site's full effects, though, fans would have had to experience both versions, and this expectation is simply not possible for casual audiences.

The websites were another prime example of *The Hunger Games'* use of buzz marketing. This type of strategy first developed due to the fragmentation of media over time, leading to a lack of effectiveness in classic marketing techniques. With the rise in consumerism, audiences required more and more extra content to find interest in franchise narratives. Advertisements that use the buzz marketing model "inject" an exciting message that will create conversation surrounding the film (Mohr). Often, this process occurs through the word-of-mouth phenomenon, by "which an individual influences the actions or attitudes of others" (Mohr). One benefit of the buzz marketing model is that it will make the movie last in public consciousness and increase the studio's revenue. As a result, this brand of campaign is entirely based on getting audiences to buy tickets, purchase merchandise, and discuss the film in online spaces. All the while, advertisers are also "satisf[ying] studio executives who are confronted with steadily

mounting marketing costs" and want methods that will save them the most money (Mohr). Based on Mohr's perspective, marketers who create viral campaigns are not thinking about the cultural ramifications of their messaging. Rather, they are prioritizing financial gain to the detriment of the film's purpose.

Lionsgate's emphasis on celebrity culture in their advertising closely resembles the Capitol's obsession with the lives of its tributes and victors. Most of The Hob's engagement came from casting predictions or announcements, including posting overtly clickbait photos of Robert Downey Jr. and Taylor Swift, two prominent A-List names ("Cast the Hunger Games"). By focusing almost exclusively on casting conversations, publications ignored serious conversations surrounding the direction of the franchise or its narrative. This method engages fans who are parasocially invested in their favorite celebrities, drawing them into other monetary promotions. A viral magazine cover in October 2013 that labeled Lawrence as "the World's Most Desirable Woman" focused exclusively on her physical appearance rather than any definable acting ability ("Marketing Campaign Heats Up"). By objectifying Lawrence, the magazine resembled the Capitol's tendency to make tributes and victors into one-note personas of themselves. The first trailer footage for the films also premiered at the MTV Video Music Awards, as confirmed by *NextMovie* ("Debut at MTV"). The article frames this announcement in the context of various other pop culture moments: "Over the last quarter century, MTV's Video Music Awards have provided the world with some of its most famous pop culture moments, from Britney's "comeback" performance to Kanye West crashing the stage during Taylor Swift's acceptance speech" ("Debut at MTV"). Instead of promoting the political complexity of the franchise, the article emphasizes how the premiere will establish *The Hunger Games* within

celebrity culture. It equates the content of the film to surface level moments from actors and musicians, lessening its impact.

Conclusion

The primary issue with the franchise's marketing is not its actual quality. *The Hunger Games*' team, including Palen, were a masterclass in the ideal way to use transmedia to their advantage in their campaigns. The multiple forms they used—social media, websites, merchandise—led to the extreme commercial success of the films. However, by spreading their promotion across as many platforms as they did, the foundational messaging of the books was weakened. Classic Marxism argues that contemporary culture has made the media industry uniform, with the same lack of commitment to expressing ideology (Adorno & Horkheimer 330). Even for narratives that attempt to argue against economic traditions, the very fact that films are part of an industry removes any form of social influence (Adorno & Horkheimer 330). This statement is broad and disregards the role that media plays in developing ideology. Fictional narratives can influence social perceptions, but when those narratives are translated to marketing, the effect is lost.

Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy successfully promotes a series of values, including political agency and authenticity, while condemning overconsumption and the sensationalization of celebrity culture. She does so by leveraging the dystopian genre to her advantage, creating an allegory between Panem and the United States that would be recognizable to readers. Her young adult audience are intended to see themselves in this world and in Katniss herself. When the series' heroine develops from a place of inaction to an authentic revolutionary figure, the series frames the development of political agency as necessary for maturity. Although scholars

critiqued the young adult genre in the past for its emphasis on shallow plotlines and love triangles, *The Hunger Games* proves that it is possible to convey a genuine political message about contemporary government through this medium.

While the film adaptations themselves carry these themes over, at times even expanding on them successfully, the marketing campaigns for the films fail to do so to the same level. The "vague metaphorical weight" behind the provided examples "promotes the idea of radical change and agency but does not force its audience to follow through practically" (Tompkins 75). It certainly gives them the tools to: the marketing emphasizes fashion, luxury, and aesthetic consumption in the same manner as the Capitol does in the books, providing the perfect platform for critique. But this approach, when spread over dozens of platforms, requires viewers to acknowledge these discrepancies by buying into the same exploitative system it is critiquing. Audiences are allowed to play into these capitalist ideals by using the novels' messaging as an excuse: "Indeed, it is as if the films and their marketing extensions were saying, 'We know that you know that blockbusters about class revolution are really nothing more than commercial hype, but precisely because you know this—because you're too smart to succumb to the promotional charms of the films—you can knowingly indulge their publicity'" (Tompkins 72). However, audiences leave the theater with little impetus to take a stance because the marketing's messages are so contradictory. All movies become brands through advertising at a basic level, which means that an incoherent film identity can cause consumers to struggle with what the film is about (Alwi, et. al 369, 371). In the case of *The Hunger Games,* this lack of definitive identity harmed its own messaging.

Unlike Collins' work, which explicitly intended to raise her audience's political consciousness, shaping social issues is often not a purposeful "intention of the marketer but

merely a by-product" (Kerrigan 176). The primary goal of a filmmaker may have selfless origins, but, as established by Kerrigan's continuum of roles and motivations of movie marketers, most adaptations are underpinned by commercial motivations. It is possible to "combine both commercial and social aspirations and varying levels of engagement in the exchange relationship," but *The Hunger Games* does not accomplish such (Kerrigan 190). It is impossible to convey the same development into agency Katniss undergoes when promotion is spread out so far through the transmedia model. Audiences do not gain a strong enough idea of what the narrative is arguing when they are only able to see certain parts of it. At the end of the day, audiences are "made conscious of the fundamental antagonisms that structure our society" by franchises like *The Hunger Games*, but we still "carry on according to a capitalist media system that bids us to live out the dream of revolution as mere entertainment" (Kerrigan 90). This is the nature of adaptation, where genuine political arguments are commodified for the benefits of studios.

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