

Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting on a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing gameshows, stuffing fucking junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away, pissing and shitting yourself in a home, a total fucking embarrassment to the selfish, fucked-up brats you've produced. Choose life. (Welsh, p. 187.).

This quote from Irvine Welsh's novel *Trainspotting* summarizes a sarcastic view on contemporary society. It points out to which extent our culture is dominated by consumer capitalism. The repetition of the imperative 'choose' emphasizes the irony that lies in life as it is described in Welsh's novel. The Capitalist system pretends to the consumer, to offer everything he wants to possess or to be, suggesting he would take advantage of absolute freedom. But in the end the consumer finds himself in the prison of commerce and assimilates to a capitalist system that is present in everyday life through certain images. These so-called pop-images are the ones that contemporary art uses to express its perspective on the world. Unlike the era of modernist art, postmodernism art adopts capitalist everyday images and symbols to express a perspective on the world, for example, the Pop Art of Andy Warhol. In regard to the critical statements, which are sure to be found in modernist fiction, Jameson asks the question if postmodernism "replicates or reproduces - reinforces- the logic of consumer capitalism" or if there is "a way in which it resists that logic." (Jameson 1983, p.124).

As outstanding examples of postmodern art this essay deals with two novels by Scottish contemporary writers. *The Busconductor Hines* by James Kelman and *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh. Both books depict contemporary society with the help of pop images. To answer Jameson's question this essay will first briefly explain, what is meant by the logic of consumer capitalism and afterwards, in the second part, examine to decide if there is an possible answer at all.

What is Consumer Capitalism?

This is the world of men and women who quest for the new and the latest in relationships and experiences, who have a sense of adventure and take risk to explore life's options to the full, who are conscious they have only one life to live and must work hard to enjoy, experience and express it. (Featherstone 1991, p.86).

Before focusing on the question if postmodernism replicates or resists the logic of consumer capitalism, it is necessary to explain what consumer capitalism and its cultural logic mean.

First of all, it is a matter of fact that we are living in the era of multinational capitalism - especially after the communist system in Eastern Europe has crumbled. What our society characterizes, is the possibility for all members, generally speaking, to choose between a wide range of products the market offers to the consumer. Consumer goods are not only essential materials to make people's life bearable, but give also the option to express the consumer's individual lifestyle. This is what Mike Featherstone in his book *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism* calls the 'triumph of signifying culture' (Featherstone, p.83). In reference to the French sociologist Baudrillard he claims: 'Consumption (...) must not be understood as the consumption of use-values, a material utility, but primarily as the consumption of signs.' (Featherstone p.85). In this sense, material goods have become a kind of 'communicators' (Featherstone 1991, p.84) and not just utilities. Consequently those communicators offer to show whatever someone wants his environment to know about, in any situation. The voices can vary from clothing to furniture and cars.

In this respect, Featherstone mentions the terms 'stylization of life' and 'calculating hedonism' as a keyword to comprise contemporary culture.

It is therefore possible to speak of a calculating hedonism a calculus of the stylistic effect and an aestheticization of the instrumental or functional rational dimension via the promotion of an aestheticizing distancing on the other. (Featherstone, p.86).

After this brief explanation of what consumer culture means, the question must be now: what is the logic of consumer capitalism?, and in which way does it influence the contemporary culture, namely postmodernity? Frederic Jameson describes the effect on culture as follows:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally. The frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (...), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. (Jameson 1996, p.560).

Living in the era of multinational capitalism, which influences every part of social life of course does not leave aesthetic productions unaffected. The era of modernity, which was formed by its critical and subversive attacks towards the political and social system, has passed by. In modernism, the subjective views on the world and peculiar opinions of certain artist and writers have dominated art. Unlike then, 'today', as Jameson states 'in the age of

corporate capitalism, of the so called organization man, of bureaucracies in business as well as in the state, (...), that older bourgeois individual subject no longer exists' (Jameson 1983, p.115). This missing subjective perspective on the world caused by the lack of a coherent subject finally results into an 'aesthetic dilemma' (see Jameson 1983, p.115). If there is no longer a coherent, subjective perspective, there cannot be a language, which would permit the artist to use an individual style. The trouble is, that contemporary writers do not know how to represent the present. (see Jameson 1983, p. 115). Therefore, the only way for writers to deal with their own history is to "seek the historical past through [their] own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach". (Jameson 1983, p.117).

To illustrate the process of adapting images from the consumer capitalism it is interesting to think about popular music; not about punk rock as Jameson does but about electronic music, which is supposed to be the most innovative trend. Considering "Mouse on Mars", two German musicians, it becomes obvious, that their music is unlike Jazz (as a modernist kind of music) not only commercially successful and accepted in society, but adopts also stylistically certain sound motifs of postmodern everyday life. Using a special language - here it is the one of consumer capitalism - to create a piece of art, is a technique which Jameson calls 'pastiche' (although he refers to literature):

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language (...) without satirical impulse, without laughter (...).
Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor. (Jameson 1983, p.114).

Pastiche is an aesthetic concept of postmodern culture. The two pieces of literature this essay will focus on, are part of it.

What kind of statement, assumed there is one, does postmodernist literature make in regard to contemporary society and culture? If modernist writers treated their era in an oppositional, critical, negative, subversive way, one could ask, as Jameson does: 'Can anything of the sort be affirmed about postmodernism and its social moment?' (Jameson 1983, p.125).

Looking at the novels *The Busconductor Hines* by James Kelman and *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh, how do they represent contemporary culture? What statement do the authors make concerning the logic of consumer capitalism? In the following I will focus both on the language and on the main themes of the novels. In connection to recent theory it will give an answer.

Both novels are mainly written in contemporary 'Skaz'. *The Busconductor Hines* is presented in a funny, philosophical, sarcastic tone and describes a working-class member in

early eighties Glasgow. It is a novel about illusions, depressions, boredom and the hope for a happy relationship. *Trainspotting* is set in Edinburgh of the mid eighties. Welsh portrays the life of drug addicts accompanying each other through a life of AIDS, drugs, death and a lot of adventurous situations. Welsh concentrates on the language that was spoken in the drug scene of 1980's Edinburgh, whereas Kelman uses the Glasgow working-class vernacular, that is based on Scottish dialects. Both writers use pastiche. This stylistic mask is worn by the novels characters because of the lack of an own, subjective voice of the author. Whereas the modernist novelists invented their own voice to express their certain perspectives on the world, and deliberately gave it to their characters, Welsh and Kelman use the slang of their characters to create something like a distinctive voice.

In *The Busconductor Hines*, one can find two remarkable techniques of how to work with pastiche: namely the 'inner speech' as well as the 'code-switching' between Standard English and Scottish vernacular.

'It should be remembered, however, that Robert Hines has accomplished nought. Even the present circumstances could have been rendered or more amenable. A lick of fresh paint for instance, to hide the terrible wallpaper; a bit polyfilla round the skirting board. (...) Odd she should have taken Paul so readily. That is definitely something.(...) One considers the Busconductor, Hines: now, here we have a fellow, from a spruce district. How does she leave. How does she even fucking think a thing like this. How can she even think it for christ sake even think the fucking thing. Imagine it. For fuck sake. (...) she must've been really fucking upset.' (Kelman, p.165f.)

The narration starts with Standard English. The closer the narrator comes to the protagonist, it switches into Glasgow slang. For example, the direct speech of Hines is not indicated by inverted commas. The descriptions in third person switch without noticeable gap into Hines' words. Obviously, Kelman deliberately refuses middle-class English when his narration goes into the depth of personal thoughts. This stresses the resistance of the Scottish working class against the English middle-class. In the first place there seems to be a rather modern position, than a distinctive postmodern one because the narrator still holds to the oppositional system of middle-class vs. working-class. But the question is, if this is also Kelman's opinion. For the reader can hardly rely on Hines' point of view.

What definitely can be figured out as being postmodern in this novel is the use of the inner speech.

Now his head: it was a pattern of producing entity. Unlocked for stuff just shot in; and while in there went dangling about till clamping together with other stuff. And the result: he wanted to be, eh, an assortment of things. That's him. (Kelman, 1997, p.105).

This is the portrait of Hines consciousness. The inner speech (he wanted to be, eh, an assortment of things) shows the compulsion to contain the complexity of the world. Hines is an assembly of all the themes and things surrounding him. He denies a fixed identity when he or the narrator calls himself an assortment of things. If you think of the 'Death of the Subject', this is a very postmodern thought.

Quite the contrary 'Trainspotting', which is also written in contemporary Skaz, uses not only one point of view. As Craig says: "Trainspotting is a community's self narration in dialect - precisely to satirize the pragmatic society of Thatcherism, full of isolated units afraid of one another." (Craig, 1999, p.97). Each chapter is either written from the view of one character or from that of an anonymous narrator. Every certain point of view has its distinctive language. How strong the differences between those voices are, show the following extracts of two chapters.

1. Growing in Public:

Despite the unmistakable resentment she could feel from her mother. Nina could not fathom what she had done wrong. The signals were confusing. First it was: Keep out of the way; then: Don't just stand there. A group of relatives had formed a human wall around Auntie Alice. Nina could not actually... (Welsh, 1993, p.32)

In contrast a description through Davie's eyes sounds like that:

Oh my god, where the fuck am I. Where the fuck...I just don't recognize this room at all...think Davie, think. Can't seem to generate enough saliva to free my tongue from the roof of my mouth. What an asshole. What a cunt...what a...never again. (Welsh, 1993, p.91.)

Welsh stays despite of the first passage very close to his character. He exploits his whole view. In regard to the complexity of the world, Welsh does not rely on the perspective of single person but uses a whole set of voices to create a differential world in his novel.

referring to the main question in terms of the author's technique of language one should ask: Do Welsh's and Kelman's techniques point at a reproduction of the logic of consumer capitalism or do they resist its logic? Although they definitely reproduce the logic of consumer culture by using images of contemporary culture, this does not exclude, that they resist that logic. It depends, on what pastiche is used to; whether it glorifies or criticizes it, or if it is without any moral statements.

Kelman's protagonist Hines is a Glasgow working-class member set in a small, narrow-minded world. He is surrounded by his son, his wife Sandra and their families. That is his private life. His public life takes place during worktime, when he and his colleagues are

on the bus. To sum up, one could say, Hines has got three main problems, Glasgow, his wife – he is not sure whether to stay with her or to leave her- and his job that he already dropped once. He is dealing with boredom, the possibility of a better life and the suffering from a corrupt Capitalist system.

Its hopeless though. It just means we're having to do her work as well as our own. We're managing right enough but it's a push. Hh; typical capitalist strategy next thing you know auld Bufuckingcanan'll turn round and tell you the part-timer's service are no longer required.' (Kelman, 1997, p.24).

Hines is complaining about the Capitalist system in which he, as a working-class member, is exposed to the fear of losing the job almost every day. By using Hines voice, Kelman draws the reader into Hines' thinking and causes a slight identification. The reader gets involved into Scottish working-class problems.

Hines dreams of a better life:

Beyond all that lay a better future. But hazy visions of distant travel did recur. Upon receipt of this twofold objective the wild blue yonder could be vanished into, the sunbaked shores of Australasia perhaps for an open outlook, bright scapes; where one can stand on one's tiptoes and glimpse at a stretch, unlike bloody dumps where one can be lucky to get glimpsing such thing from the topdeck of an omnibus. (Kelman, 1997, p.94).

But he does not manage to progress in any direction. Neither he goes to Australia, nor does he realize his dream of getting the license to drive a bus he just manages to desert his job again. And in the end

Hines is a 3 time loser, if he jacks it this time the present is less than brightly. The broo is not the thing to do. What happened the last time. Nothing. He just couldn't get another fucking job so he had to come fucking back, and he was lucky as fuck to get back. A hands and knees carry on. Hines Robert looking for his job back. His job back. What does he mean his job back! He means his old job back! He means his old job back sir he used to work here before sir before he left the last time, after the one before, when he left the first time, and now here he is reporting back again sir will I tell him to fuck off or what. (Kelman, 1997, p.101)

Kelman imitates the rules of a capitalistic, hierarchical conversation on the work. Arguably, he does not make fun of the boss only, but also about the groveling of Hines. On the one hand, Hines seems to be forced to act in this certain way, on the other hand, he could try to disrupt it. In the very end of the novel it becomes clear that for his whole misery not only the ruling class, but also Hines' resignation is to be blamed. He stays in Glasgow being a busconductor. The following two scenes, of which the first shows Hines in the living-room and the second one during worktime after a conversation about football, can be read as clear statement echoing Kelman's view on consumer Capitalism:

'A foreign film was beginning. Sandra had switched on the television for it. He passed a cup of tea and sat down with his own.' (Kelman, 1997, p.234).

'He yawned and got from the seal; he sat down again. Hines shifted his position, he wiped the condensation from the back window and looked out.' (Kelman, 1997, p.237).

Kelman portrays a strong character as a victim of consumer capitalism. Hines is an anti-hero, he is the one who assimilates to consumer capitalism and does not try to push against it. Inventing characters with their own language in the environment of consumer capitalism Kelman definitely replicates and reinforces the logic of consumer capitalism - which does not naturally mean that he does not resist it. It is obvious that his depiction is very critical for he creates a story about the failure of a human being in contemporary society. Kelman blames the responsibility for the miserable life not only on the ruling class, but also on the working class. He criticizes the whole capitalist society.

In contrast to Hines, Welsh's strongest character Mark Renton, a University drop out has more or less 'chosen' his life in under-class, or more precisely the Edinburgh drug scene. The characters Welsh introduces to the reader are all troubled with their identity in consumer capitalist society. As a consequence they escape into drugs.

'Ah went tae the Central Library and read Carl Roger's *On Becoming a Person*. Ah thought that book wis shite, but ah huv tae admit that Tom seemed tae get us closer tae what ah believe the truth might be. Ah despised masel and the world because ah failed tae face up tae ma ain, life's limitations. The acceptance ay self-defeating limitations seemed then tae constitute mental health, or non-deviant behavior. Success and failure simply mean the satisfaction and frustration ay desire. Desire can either be predominantly intrinsic, based oan or individual drives, or extrinsic, primarily stimulated by advertising, or societal role models as presented through the media and popular culture. (Welsh, 1993, p.185).

Renton thus notices a problem Deleuze and Guattari deal with in their book *The Anti-Oedipus*. They claim: "The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class." (Deleuze/Guattari, p.414). The only way to escape out of thie viscous circle are drugs. For these offer the possibility to get away from the pressure and expectations society lay on the characters. Sick Boy, a straight forward hedonist who has made popular culture to a part of his identity by absorbing the habit of Sean Connery (James Bond) is quoted by Renton, while shooting heroin, as follows:

'As Sick Boy once said, doubtlessly paraphrasing some other fucker: nothing exists outside the moment.(...) The moment is me, sick and Mikkey, healer. (Welsh, 1993, p.17). But Renton doubts this theory. Instead he takes an advice by a friend in account: 'You just want tae fuck up on drugs so that everyone'll think how deep and fucking complex you are. It's pathetic, and fucking boring.' (Welsh, 1993, p.186f.). Although Renton knows that it is not that simple, but he observes that he and his friends obviously feel a lack of something, or as Deleuze and Guattari say:

[T]here is an object that desire feels the lack of; hence the world does not contain each and every object that exists; there is at least one object missing, the one that desire feels the lack of; hence there exists some other place that contains the key to desire.' (Deleuze/Guattari, 412).

The clue is, that the ruling class takes advantage of this innate desire and exploits the consumer. Renton is aware of this fact.

Society invents a spurious convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae's behavior is outside mainstream. Suppose that ah ken aw the pros and cons, know that ah'm gaunnae huv a short life, am ay sound mind etcetera, but still want tae use smack? They won't let ye dae it. They won't let ye dae it , because it's seen as a sign ay thir ain failure. The fact that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit huv tae offer. Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life.

Well ah choose no tae choose life. If the cuntas cannae handle that, it's thair fucking problem. As Harry Lauder sais, ah jist intend tae keep right on to the end of the road... (Welsh, 1993, p.187f.).

The question is this: how can he get out? In a world where everything can be chosen, he has chosen not to choose life. Instead, he has chosen drugs.

But soon Renton notices, that drugs cannot be the adequate answer. He distances himself from his friends, tries to get rid of his addiction at his parents place, and finally moves to London. But because Scotland is not that far away, he gets the possibility to sell first class cocaine with his old friends. After the deal is done, he is alone with the money in a hotel room in London. What would Deleuze and Guattari suggest to do? Which options does the individual have in consumer capitalism? The theorists bring the term of the 'schizophrenic' into play, as the only concept to live a life that is appropriate to recent society.

As for the schizo, continually wandering about, migrating here, there and everywhere as best as he can, he plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialization, reaching the furthest limits of the decomposition of the socius on the surface of his own body without organs.(...) The schizophrenic deliberately seeks out the very limit of capitalism: he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat and its exterminating angel. He scrambles all the codes and is the transmitter of the decoded flows of desire. The desire continues to flow. Deleuze/Guattari, p.420)

One could say, that Renton becomes a schizo now. He is as corrupt, as capitalism is. He takes the money from his friends and leaves for Amsterdam.

He had done what he wanted to do. He could now never go back to Leith, to Edinburgh, even to Scotland, ever again. There, he could not be anything other than he was. Now, free from them all, for good, he could be what he wanted to be. He'd stand or fall alone. This thought both terrified and excited him as he contemplated life in Amsterdam. (Welsh, 1993, p.344)

Mark Renton's observations are blunt to the point. The hero who can help to slip out of the dilemma of postmodernity. He takes the advantages of consumer capitalism, the money and Amsterdam, to begin a new life. But presumably he won't get that far.

No doubt, Trainspotting is postmodernity as its best. It is full of consumer images and strictly follows the logic of consumer capitalism. But similar Kelman, if not as explicitly, he doesn't

glorify the life in consumer capitalism, instead, he resists its logic. He uses the whole aesthetics of consumer culture, and shows the trouble of his characters..

One could finally be tempted to answer Jameson's question as follows: Yes, there is a way in which postmodernism resists the logic of consumer capitalism. Postmodernist literature is not less critical, or oppositional than modernist fiction was. The main difference is, that postmodernism makes use of popular culture, not to celebrate contemporary culture, but to create a sort of chaotic realism depicting a confusing reality. As I have exemplified , both novels take advantage of 'pastiche', that permits the writer to portray the world in its whole complexity, or rather in the complexity of a writer's mind. A difference to modernism might be, that those both novels do not moralize. The justification of the meaning of the novel is up to the reader. It is him or her who is supposed to give meaning to the books' worlds . Depending on whether one wants to resist or replicate the logic of consumer capitalism.

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