

# KONTEXTMASCHINE

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6TH MARCH 2019

POST REBLOGGED FROM KONTEXTMASCHINE WITH 1,699 NOTES

**kontextmaschine:**

So if I told you someone was using century-old hand-crafted artisanal methods to adapt traditional folk tales into **a quaintly obsolete art form** from the American Golden Age that would sound like the most twee, precious, non-normie thing ever and I just described Disney animation.

Disney's pretty weird like that. Like, take the parks. They're combinations of Coney Island and World's Fairs with this undisguisable midcentury *earnestness*. These are places that get seriously psyched about the **potential of novel transit modalities**.

And the theming - "Let's look forward to the wonderful future of space exploration, celebrate our roots in farm towns and the frontier west, AND enjoy the exotic charm of the South Pacific and Old Dixie!"

THERE IS A PAGEANT WHERE ROBOTS PAY TRIBUTE TO EXECUTIVE-DRIVEN WHIG HISTORY.

Oh. Oh. And. "The rides aren't very thrilling, but your kids will love the chance to explore the worlds of all their favorite authors - A.A. Milne, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, Mark Twain, AND Lewis Carroll - while you'll marvel at the exquisite background design."

(Sun-dappled Edwardian neoteny and obsessive set decoration. Wes Anderson makes movies like Walt Disney made parks.)

And we'd recognize this all as a weird thing to exist in 2015 if we weren't just used to it as the background noise of America. Like, I don't really watch TV so I don't see commercials much these days.

Oh man, they're a trip in their own right if you've stopped taking them for granted. Like, "oh hey, for the next 30 seconds some of our best artists are going to use all their techniques and leverage all your emotions and desires and every social value in a masterful, unapologetic, and unforgettable bid for you to give us money, and then everyone will move on and no one will acknowledge this even happened."

But the Disney World commercials in particular - you notice they don't really make a case for going to Disney World, or even really explain what Disney World *is*. Because they're not pitching Disney World, they're reminding you of Disney World. It's not "hey, Disney World is a thing you could go to", it's "hey, maybe it's time for this generation's pilgrimage".

Disney's weird. It's kind of a company, but also custodian of some of the cultic functions of American culture, something like the **priestly colleges** of ancient Rome.

Like, they maintain sites of pilgrimage. I'm not saying that as a joke. **Back of the envelope calculation**, Americans go to Disney parks at a rate 7 times higher than Muslims go to Mecca. (The line between "tourist trap" and "religious site" **has always been thin**.)

And they're custodians of the national narrative. Like I've said, they pitch "continuity with midcentury small town and earlier frontier culture" as a fundamental, almost taken-for-granted aspect of Americanness with a confidence and charm you don't often see these days. And I mean, hell, the Disney animated canon itself basically is to America what Grimm's was to Germany.

And as custodians, they curate that narrative - like, we joke about "you know your identity group's made it in America when you get your own Disney princess", and laugh at the people reediting Disney character designs to look like **their** specific **subgroup**, but that only works because it's fucking true, *your identity group's made it in America when you get your own Disney princess*. **I've worked** with Disney Channel casting, and they mix ethnicities with the same care, precision, and scale that Pfizer mixes drugs.

And that robot pageant, the Hall of Presidents? Look at **this history**. It started out in the '70s as a celebration of consensus history and popular triumph, with character actors playing great men and Civil War tensions understood as a challenge to national unity. In 1993 it was reworked by Eric Foner to be narrated by Maya Angelou, use "regular people" unknowns to portray more vulnerable takes on historic figures and re-frame the Civil War in terms of slavery as a moral challenge. In 2009 they redid it again, mostly keeping the changes but bringing back some of the old Hollywood charm and putting Morgan Freeman as the voice of civic authority.

And like, as a representation of how America understands itself and its history, correct. That is absolutely, in every way, 100% correct.

(In the other direction, Walt Disney originally wanted to call it "One Nation Under God", which *yikes*)

They say American copyright terms keep getting extended under pressure from Disney who wants to keep hold of all their founding properties, I almost wonder if it wouldn't be *less* of a corruption of the civic system to just carve out special protections for Disney in recognition of their distinct role in America.

But... at the end of the day, it's all just **a strategy to maximize profits**.

I used to be a lot more libertarian than I am now, and one of their tribal boogiemens, the idea of a "Ministry of Culture" - a government that sees the national culture as its domain, to shape as it will, "as it will" meaning as it always does with governments "through the instrument of bureaucracy" - that still rankles.

But what's the alternative, though? You think about it and you realize it's this - the national mythos rests in the hands of a **publicly traded** corporation.

(And then you maybe start to appreciate WHY having your king as the head of your church **once made sense** as a symbol of liberty and self-determination.)

((And start to recall the CIA going around **giving grants to the avant-garde** with a certain fondness.))

We **live** in the capitalpunk AU.

Tagged: **rerun**



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26TH FEBRUARY 2018

POST WITH 70 NOTES

We need a name for the kinda channel drift where niche brands with existing name recognition end up degenerating to general-interest content farms

Like, Cracked, I remember that as Mad Magazine's Pepsi, full of black-and-white puerile humor for 7-14 year old boys. And I guess making a comedy writing website from that makes sense, and I guess making individual voice central to that made sense, that was how the Something Awful frontpage went...

SparkNotes, the online competitor to Cliffs Notes, the condensed summaries and thematic analysis of literary works to fake your way through common English class assignments. It's halfway down this road, on the one hand its content nuggets keep themed around "books you read in 11th grade" on the other hand I only realized this because I clicked through someone's Twitter bio had her as their advice columnist

VICE, man, I've never really known what's up with that, even before Disney sunk half a billion trying to make it Time-Life for the hipster generation, in the mid-'00s when it already had a reputation on paper and McInnes was like "wait it's NOT cool to be a junkie, what's COOL is being a RESPONSIBLE SKATEBOARD DAD" and the whole rest of the magazine was like "what's COOL is being 23 and discovering cocaine 6 months ago"

(and then they sold their name as a symbol of "hip parties" to some iffy NY/LA DJ nights promoting **Colt 45 malt liquor**)

Tagged: **2018** **it's media**

12TH APRIL 2017

POST REBLOGGED FROM **POLYALETHEIA** WITH 122 NOTES

**polyaletheia:**

**kontextmaschine:**

**kontextmaschine:**

I wonder exactly which day it was that the amount of time Comedy Central had spent broadcasting The Daily Show finally caught up to the amount of time they had spent broadcasting PCU

This was supposed to be a culture war joke, in fairness on further reflection I was like "yeah but maybe put all the hours of South Park, Tosh.0, and The Man Show on the PCU side too." Maybe the Kilborn years, even.

Okay, for the benefit of all the followers I'm getting with absurd ages in their profiles, let me explain this one.

When Comedy Central started in the '90s, they didn't have much original programming, and what they did was mostly one-off (but frequently rerun) specials - filmed standup sets, basically.

So what they ran was mostly secondhand content they'd picked up rights to, and what was most common were these two movies, I swear to god I'd seen them run back to back and then over again, I'm pretty sure I've seen the same one run twice in a row. One was **Throw Momma From The Train**, a Danny DeVito comedic riff on Strangers On A Train.

The other was **PCU**, a campus comedy in the Animal House vein starring a visibly balding Jeremy Piven. It was a lovable frat fighting the dean and his Young Republican lackeys, but (because "boat shoe and dinner jacket-wearing WASPs" were overdone and increasingly anachronistic as villains by then) there was a third faction that took the brunt of the mockery: earnest, censorious social issue activists. Thus the title. The climax involved the activists protesting the big frat party (tagline: "Everyone Gets Laid"), but then realizing "holy shit, we're against drinking, sex, parties, freedom, and fun, *we're the bad guys*" and giving up and chilling out and hooking up with the frat members.

Because obviously you were supposed to see that as the only acceptable position for anyone with *any* pretensions to being cool and with it. Like I said, '60s-derived social liberalism used to offer **something for everyone**.

And it's not like oooo, this was *acceptable* once upon a time, it's that when I was growing up, this was *the official line of media social liberalism*. Who was that anon asking about the '90s? In the '90s, liberal Hollywood was putting out "message movies" the messages of which were **America Is Finally Free, Thanks To Brave Heroes Like Larry Flynt Depicting Women As Violently Degraded Sex Objects, And Thank God For His Heirs Like Howard Stern, Still Fighting The Good Fight**.

If you don't know who Howard Stern is, he was the foremost crude "Morning Zoo" radio DJ in the country.

Like, in the '90s, white, blue collar (or "dudebro") tits-n-beer vulgarity was plausibly **coded left/liberal/Democratic**. And that's a little disorienting to remember.

I mean hell, Benny Hill was aired in part by an official arm of the most socialist Anglosphere government ever. *Benny Hill*.

If you've never seen Benny Hill, it's from the British "light entertainment" tradition, a little variety but kind of sketch comedy, only a lot of the "comedy" was basically dirty old man leering. Sketch leering. Episodes famously ended with sped up comedic chase scenes where Benny would try to catch and grope some pretty young girls, then turn and run away as they tried to catch and punish him.

Now by the '90s that was already a bit off, but still, it ran in reruns on Comedy Central. It ran on fucking *PBS*.

If you ever wonder why intelligent educated sensitive me is wary of if not actively hostile to so much of what passes for modern cultural liberalism, it's because it pattern-matches so closely not only to the apocalypse visions conservatives were warning of when I was growing up, but to the liberals' versions as well.

The 90s were a wonderful liberal interlude between the positive faction winning the feminist sex wars, and the start of the social justice movement. I remember reading Camille Paglia essays and thinking "glad that's sorted"...

same tbh. Remember when Paglia essays ran in fucking Salon, before it was Bush-era Salon, before Slate was Bush-era Salon, when it was blue skies forever and our job was gonna be to just sit on green hillsides drinking mild poppy tea and maybe know how WINSOCK.DLL worked?

Source: [kontextmaschine](#)

5TH JUNE 2016

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[kontextmaschine](#):

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Tagged: **rerun**

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Tagged: **culture war it's media PCU Benny Hill amhist**

4TH JUNE 2015

POST WITH 122 NOTES

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8TH NOVEMBER 2017

POST REBLOGGED FROM [ARGUMATE](#) WITH 163 NOTES

bambamramfan:

the-grey-tribe:

I feel called out by Hotel Concierge, but at the same time, I'm starting to see through HC's and Scott's respective writing styles.

HC is easy. HC is channeling TLP.

Scott writes in fits and starts, and in the latest flurry he started to cut corners that laid bare the ever-same skeleton of his essays, and then he wrote posts that were just a single idea, without any additional scaffolding.

Once in a history test I wrote a nested outline at the beginning of my essay on the causes of World War One. I should have completely erased it, because I did not finish the structure in time, so I just crossed out the outline and skipped two sub-headings. My teacher knew what I had left out, and deducted points accordingly. To this day, I'm certain if the outline had been completely unreadable, not just crossed out, I would have gotten a B instead of a C. I'm not bitter about this after all these years, but there was a lesson to be learned, and I learned it: Do not make the negative space in your concept map too obvious if you want to impress people. The systematising mindset is not your friend here.

---

HC has ten good ideas in five posts, but only six if you don't count duplicates, and none of these are new, not even the duplicates. I think I'm being so hard on these people because the quality of their ideas fluctuates wildly, while their writing stays the same. My writing fluctuates too. I am not a wooden persona. I am a real boy.

I think there's a lot of similarity in the writing styles of hotelconcierge, kontextmaschine, raggedjackscarlet, TLP, and to some degree balioc (though quality varies widely.) bal said it could be called "working class intellectual"

It's writing that's completely secure that the author has no need to convince you, you're here to listen or not and that's not their problem. It's cynical about almost every political movement, and looks at internal sources of happiness rather than external. And it's built on a foundation of a lot of non-topical knowledge, that makes for entertaining stories and feels less caught up in the current culture wars.

Man thinking of myself as "working class intellectual" feels all kinds of wrong, not least 'cause in cultivating this highhanded writing voice I always thought of it as aristocratic

Though university graduate/**Wikipedia**-dwelling essayist Karl Marx was pretty much this exact type and if that guy doesn't count

The concept of the "organic intellectual" might come closer, distinguishing self-selected types analyzing things as they are experienced (particularly from their structural position in society) from the credentialed intellectuals committed to The Discourse as an interpretive lens and peer group

Honestly though, "accumulating a broad store of non-topical knowledge from here, there, abroad and ago, so that you can bring it to bear on society today" really was the point of the liberal arts tradition and the public intellectual, and if it seems so alien today maybe there was something to all the fears of their decline

Source: **the-grey-tribe**

5TH AUGUST 2017

POST REBLOGGED FROM **ARGUMATE** WITH 92 NOTES

**the-grey-tribe:**

**the-grey-tribe:**

I think I understand why nrx essays are always at least 10000 words long now.

## THEMES AND INFLUENCES

**Counterintuitive Insight Porn:** The Last Psychiatrist, Hotel Concierge, Malcolm Gladwell

**Gratuitous Longposts:** Steve Yegge, Scott Alexander, (maybe Oswald Spengler)

**Going out of your Way to Appear Like More of a Dick:** Zed Shaw, Jim Goad, Friedrich Nietzsche, (maybe Nydwracu)

**Giving Catchy Names to Patterns:** Paul Graham, Big Yud, Robin Hanson, Richard Dawkins, Venkatesh Rao, David Chapman, Christopher Alexander, Ward Cunningham, Friedrich Nietzsche, (maybe Oswald Spengler)

**Reading Old Books:** Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler

Not mentioned above: Hannah Arendt, Robert Jay Lifton, Eric Hoffer, Jane Jacobs

## STYLE

A good way to get a feel for the style of an artist and why it works is to look at what happens when **others try to copy him** and to see what works and what doesn't.

**Darkly Hinting at the Fridge Horror** is definitely the theme that ties them all together in Moldbug's writing. But his essays don't start out that way.

## THE BLUEPRINT

Like an old *The Simpsons* episode, which starts out with a simple problem and its zany solution to set up the main plot of the episode, these essays start out with the description of a **historical situation**, or a very technical/procedural/non-ideological problem of modern society. The digression into history allows the author to set up the mental stage in a way

that does not immediately raise ideological shields, activate old thought patterns and fall victim to cognitive dissonance. If I write about Kings, Jacobins and Girondists, you are much more likely to pay attention than if I wrote about Democrats and Bernie Bros.

Readers are intrigued: Jacobins, CPSU, Gavrilo Princip, Weather Underground - damn interesting!

In this historical situation, you start the **narrative**. You explain the problems of the common man, based on the contents of this **old book** you read about the man who you assume was quite common and typical for his era. This might even be a great idea to counteract your biases. The biases that colour your perception of history are not so much your own, as they are the biases of historians who tried to fit long-term historical trends into neat theories of historical development. In hindsight, the right side of history is curiously always the one that won in the end. Isn't that neat? The older a book is, the more time was there in the meantime for written history to congeal into an overarching narrative.

After you have used the old book to start the historical narrative, you can **extrapolate** into later eras and today. Viewed from the past, the present looks not inevitable, but terrifying, and the future will be as terrifying!

Now, you need to **go back** into the past. Do not dwell too much on the present - yet! Start with another anecdote or statistic about New England in 1850. You must let the first anecdote percolate in the mind of the reader. If you let them think about the present again, they might reject everything you said based on tribalism, ideology or wishful thinking. The past is a place where intuitions don't apply and we can examine situations on an intellectual level. (If not: Abraham Lincoln was a Republican! The Progressive Era was kind of racist!)

Repeat this a couple of times, so that the reader can form new intuitions based on these examples. Now tie this back into your **Big Buzzword Theory!** Give a catchy name to the pattern, and link back to an earlier post where you explained the pattern and its implications in more general terms.

Now, the **the takeaway**: Apply the theory to the present situation by showing how the situation fits into it and how it is similar to the earlier instances of the pattern, but don't draw the conclusions explicitly! You can darkly hint, and leave it to the reader to figure it out. You must end the essay now.

When he walks away to the next tab, the epistemic fridge horror will slowly thaw and make him realise: "Oh my god! I don't believe in democracy any more!" That feeling fades after a couple of hours.

**You might also like: "How to Jezebel"**

Tagged: **not wrong**

Source: **the-grey-tribe**

# KONTEXTMASCHINE

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12TH DECEMBER 2010

POST WITH 53 NOTES

So as far as I'm told there are three ways left in which more than a handful of people can survive as workaday writers, they are

- Women's blogs that cover supermarket checkout topics
- Algorithmic content, creating crappy 20 minute how-to listicles from and for the internet, forever
- Recapping television shows

(Technical writing is still okay if you have a security clearance, everything else is going to India)

Now as an American without a security clearance who is not yet a beloved Hollywood darling and might like to work by writing anyway, that sucks but it's a lot of other posts.

What I want to raise here (and leave dangling, without much resolution) is that last point, TV recapping. It is now a thing! But I don't really hear anyone thinking or talking \*about\* it. Maybe 'cause it's not one of those three. Maybe I read the wrong tumblrs.

But isn't that weird?

That we've outsourced TV watching? Moreover that we've outsourced TV-watching-for-cultural-fluency-and-status? The business of sitting through an episode, and developing opinions about the action, and the characters, and the writing, and the performances, and rendering those opinions witty?

Maybe it'll turn out like book reviews were from the '50s-'90s, half way for people to pretend to have consumed esteemed culture they hadn't, half weird and nonobvious form where for economic reasons all the best essayists pitch all their best ideas pegged to tenuously related (b/h)ooks.

Like how modern blockbusters are stories pegged to tenuously related internationally bankable stars.

And another way to look at it is that just like medical care, or childcare, or cleaning, or sewing, or food preparation, or the ur-example, food production, television watching is a domestic activity we less and less find worthwhile to do ourselves - Baumol's cost disease cheapening it minute-for-minute and pushing it under the respectable threshold - yet still find worthwhile enough to Have Done.

And ISN'T THAT WEIRD.



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4TH JANUARY 2011

QUOTE WITH 3 NOTES

*In that moment, I felt like a time traveler from 1991, a sad remnant of the pre-Internet days, when wearing Doc Martens with the laces undone and dumping Manic Panic in your hair and reading controversial novels was a way of distancing yourself from everything that was dull and normal about society. I realized that my revolution was long over ... not because we'd lost, but because we'd won. We'd remade the world in our image, and the world didn't care about us anymore. My teenage fantasy of a world connected by global networks and controlled by badass nerds, a world where subcultures and musical forms and narratives rise and fall quicker than the tides, has become the reality ... and, as it always is, it's so much less interesting than I imagined it to be.*

— Joshua Ellis - [Children by the Millions Wait for Alex Chilton](#)

# KONTEXTMASCHINE

20TH JUNE 2016

POST WITH 8 NOTES

haha you know what I just remembered? In like middle school when all the horse girls had like, leather wristbands with brass plates with the names of their horses

at Cornell I took a class with Joan Jacobs Brumberg, author of **The Body Project**, that was cross-listed American Studies/FGSS ("Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies" - our **merged Women's and Gender Studies department**).

it was a history of girlhood in America, which I took because I was like "that's history I'm unlikely to have picked up by osmosis", I was the only guy in the class of 35

I want to say I wasn't that guy, but I kinda was probably. I was like 20 and the internet was still young, sorry.

She was a pop feminist author more than an academic, it showed through; on the last day she swelled with pride in like, our girlhood and readiness to become women and shared secrets of womanly vulnerability and kind of invited us to cry together and it was fucking *excruciating*

ANYWAY, she had mentioned that her next project was going to be a book that was basically "Middle School Girls and Horses: What IS Up With That, Anyway". Sadly seems she never got to it, it's a question I'd like answered and she seemed well-suited.

5TH JUNE 2014

POST WITH 1 NOTE

By the time I read A People's History of the United States I was in the senior year of an undergraduate American Studies major, which made me the exact opposite of the intended audience. It was all "hey, I bet you didn't know *this* stuff was part of American history", but yes, yes I did. More than that, I knew the stuff Zinn didn't see fit to mention, the context and linkages and contradictions.

So when he tried to build these anecdotes into an indictment of America, in that register of white American post-New Left Zack de la Rocha cod-radicalism that tries to reinvent the wheel of Marxism without the baggage of dusty old discredited notions such as the circle, I noticed that while this conceit rested on a continuity and coherency between the respective "winners" and "losers" of each vignette, in actuality some of the "winners" had actually been the "losers" of other situations, or their (literal or figurative) heirs.

(If your interpretive categories are winners and losers, you can read any and all of history as a conspiracy to valorize the former at the expense of the latter, which as a reading is not so much wrong as so thoroughly, question-beggingly correct as to be worthless.)

I mean hell, the 2nd (okay, **3rd**) American nation, that is to say black slaves and their descendants - those guys definitely get the short end of the stick, over and over. But even they occasionally win one. Briefly. In the early '70ses, mostly.

Tagged: **howard zinn** **a people's history of the united states** **history**

I'll say that from my experience in American Studies there definitely were other currents going on.

Some came from history, which like I said was my focus. My advisor was technically Michael Kammen, but he was on half-time getting ready to retire and had a really easy signature to forge for add/drop forms, a MK with the right stroke of the M serving as the left of the K, so Stuart Blumin ended up being my major influence in the department. That side of things was social/cultural history drawing on Hobsbawm and the Communist Party Historians Group - to my shame, it's only now that I'm getting around to reading *Making of the English Working Class*.

That helps account for my Marxian sympathies even though if you've been reading my essays lately my history isn't very materialist at all and I came up through the apparatus of institutional libertarianism. (Back in the '90s before blogs and aggregators were a thing, I'd go to free-market.net's daily link roundup and enter their contest. I finally won in college once - the months ahead of and behind me got I think \$50 in gold, I got a paperback copy of L. Neil Smith's *Pallas*, a CD of the most atrocious folk music ever recorded and a steady stream of direct-mail appeals from Jews for the Protection of Firearms Ownership.)

The third tendency, which I don't even think recognized itself as a tendency, was Badass Big Swinging Dick Truth-Telling Journalists/Social Novelists. Mark Twain, Horatio Alger (yes, Horatio Alger, if you know him secondhand then you don't know him) Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Mencken, Pietro di Donato, Phillip Roth. For some reason not the New Journalism, though jfc, HST and double jfc, Tom Wolfe (an American Studies man himself) would fit right in. That might've come after the average professor got tenure, though. (Starting today they'd probably get at least a chubby for Sailer and all of Grantland, too.) That's got a pretty good socialist streak itself but there's room for reactionaries and above all Clever White Guys Who Are Really Good At Describing Things so

Tagged: [american studies](#)

## "CULTURAL MARXISM" AND AMERICAN STUDIES

So the "Cultural Marxism" meme.

Which, for those of you that have the misfortune to follow this tumblr because you know me personally or like happy hardcore, is an idea lately growing in prominence though still largely confined to the rightist alt-media. It's the idea that "political correctness", the collapse of self-assured WASP cultural supremacy, the destabilization of gender roles, and so on and so on are actually continuous with the Marxist project of world revolution in general and the destruction of America in particular.

And that this is all traceable to a group of German Jewish refugee academics known as the Frankfurt School, who in the shadow of WWII took Marxism (which traditionally viewed itself as the science of history, and was most likely to be classified by outsiders as economics or political philosophy), married it to Freudian psychology and literary criticism, and birthed of that unholy union a revolutionary monster. (Actually more recently I see Frank Boas and cultural anthropology getting tossed in, though he's a generation earlier - but still German Marxist Jewish.)

I see people wonder Where This All Came From All Of A Sudden, and there's a simple

answer, and it's American Studies.

Andrew Brietbart, who did more than anyone to get the idea circulating, was American Studies at Tulane. William S. Lind, who basically originated the meme in the '90s at the Free Congress Foundation, was History - specifically American - at Dartmouth and then Princeton, but then I don't think they give American Studies degrees at the corresponding levels. (I know when I was doing American Studies at Cornell, most of my classes were cross-listed history.)

And the thing about American Studies is - well, university departments are fiefdoms more than anything else. I'm not sure how it works in the STEM fields, but in the social sciences and humanities, just like nations are languages with an army, departments are canons with tenure lines. When you think about it that way all the departmental politics make more sense. The canonical example of stakes so low, but the thing is even in miniature, they're still full-blown feudal succession crises, with usurpations and splits and takeovers attendant.

Boasians pretty much stole anthropology from the skull-measurers, economics departments are split into freshwater and saltwater, philosophy's got continental/analytic (in America, mostly analytic). Sociology claims to be the study of society, and you'd think that would be covered by history, or anthropology, or hell maybe philosophy, but none of those disciplines worshipped statistics like they did in Chicago so.

Women's Studies departments were formed to give feminist canon a home, then Gender Studies for queer theory canon, and recently there were a bunch of mergers between the two that got really hostile because even if they'd seem to cover the same topics THEY'RE DIFFERENT CANONS with different theoretical bases and policy biases and that's what counts.

English departments in America were always struggling to put together a native canon, after WWII they kind of settled on Thoreau and Melville through to Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and the theoretical approach of close reading. (That's where secondary education last dipped into the well, which is why high school still has you sniffing out symbolism in an American literary tradition that ends in the '30s, plus maybe Amy Tan and Toni Morrison and *The Crucible*.)

Then the Canon Wars of the '70s blew that all away, and in the aftermath you ended up with English taking in refugees from canons too unhegemonic to get recognized as their own discipline. "Theory" was big for a while, and it was largely continental philosophy's outpost in America, though I hear it's been pushed back to redoubts in Cornell and Irvine. Elsewhere you've got visual studies and film studies and material culture and post-colonialism and I hear evo-psych's preparing to storm a few.

But I digress. The thing is that the Frankfurt School is the canon that American Studies coalesced around, and so it's unsurprising that people who came up in that tradition would hold them up as The Key To Understanding America, because in that tradition that's exactly what they are. The right-blogsphere take on them isn't even a mirror image of the American Studies view, it's *the very same view*. Tenured academics would be much more positive (and jaded) about the long march through the institutions - obv - and the Scheming Jew subtext gets played as Cultured European instead, but the idea that the Frankfurt School represents a successful attempt to destabilize and revolutionize America's understanding of itself, and successive cultural developments can be laid at their feet fundamentally IS the American Studies idea.

Tagged: **cultural marxism** **american studies** **frankfurt school**





c86:

Early colour photograph taken by Léon Gimpel on Autochrome Lumière at the first air show, Grand Palais, Paris (September 30th, 1909)

I came of intellectual age in an American Studies program in which the Columbian Exhibition was the key to everything (also: why don't white people talk in the theater anymore?) or maybe Disneyland was the key to everything, said the younger olds?

Where's our glory? Where's our glory? Where's our glory?

Source: c86

# KONTEXTMASCHINE

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22ND OCTOBER 2017

POST REBLOGGED FROM KONTEXTMASCHINE WITH 150 NOTES

**kontextmaschine:**

Listening again to Taylor Swift's *Red*, picked up something I hadn't -  
"memorize" used in two different songs

In Stay Stay Stay,

you took the time to memorize me  
my fears my hopes and dreams  
I just like hanging out with you  
all the time

and then in Red,

memorizing him was as easy as knowing all the words to your  
old favorite song

and I thought on it and realize this downright *sapiosexual* knowledge-as-intimacy theme is pretty important in Tayswift, it's the load-bearing element of YBWM

I'm the one who makes you laugh  
when you know you're 'bout to cry  
I know your favorite songs  
and you tell me bout your dreams  
think I know where you belong  
think I know it's with me  
can't you see I'm the one who understands you  
been here all along so why can't you see  
you belong with me

it's even important in negative (which is how interrogators tease personality from pretense) in Red,

forgetting him was like trying to know somebody you never met

thinking about that, and also remembering when her transparent brand strategy was accessibility and fans chosen to meet her would gush about her casually referencing something they mentioned on their tumblr long ago, and it's like

AWW, she really IS just like us, in that her real output **is multilayered invocations** of accreted culture but she charms incidental humans by studying up on whatever incidental shit they happen to be and mirroring it back at them

I just want to know you better  
know you better  
know you better now  
I just want to know you

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2ND DECEMBER 2017

POST REBLOGGED FROM KONTEXTMASCHINE WITH 22 NOTES

## TAYLOR SWIFT'S SEMANTIC OVERLOADING

kontextmaschine:

Okay, as I've established, I think Taylor Swift is a supergenius writer, the only one I consider my clear superior. But, I mean, have you heard those lyrics? Come *on*, right?

Okay, yes the vocabulary and grammatical structure is pitched at an eighth-grade reading level; her work is pitched at an eighth-grade audience. But that's hardly to say there's no depth to her lyrics, it's just that a lot of it relies on semantic overloading, and particularly semantic overloading that specifically plays on her bridging of popular music genres. To simplify, pop-rock lyrics tend to set a *mood* while country lyrics tell a *story*, but Taylor Swift lyrics tend to craft an atmosphere in which individual lines *suggest* a story or multiple stories (which listeners can fill in, according to the specifics of their own lives or daydreams), which can in turn be taken as literal or as metaphors.

(A lot of her themes have traditionally been about the stock female coming-of-age, but they shouldn't be taken as coming from personal experience - which makes them even more impressive. Remember that she spent her teenage years not going to school and dating but home-studying and establishing her career because, contra Fifteen, she knew *exactly* what she was going to be. And she does venture afield of this - Never Grow Up and The Best Day are about the experience of watching your child grow, and Innocent is about a 32 year old woman looking to distance herself from the things she's done - "Taylor Swift lyrics as explications of manosphere/redpill themes" would be a pretty impressive series in its own right.)

Like, **Mean**, from Speak Now. It's about bullies, right? That you'll escape from when you leave this one-horse town and live in a big old city?

Or is it about abusive parents? I mean,

some day I'll be  
big enough so you can't hit me

Girl bullying isn't really a "hitting" thing, plus

I bet you got pushed around,  
Somebody made you cold,  
But the **cycle** ends right now,  
cause you can't lead me down that road

Or is it about critics, such as critics of pop-country star Taylor Swift?

Or yourself and in your insecurity, as your own biggest critic? (cf. Tied Together With a Smile and A Place In This World from the debut)

The answer, of course, is “yes”.

And that's not even adding in the reading where it's about her and Kanye West at the VMAs - because Swift can wield her public celebrity tabloid persona to add *more* reading and layers of valence to her songs, in part through encoded messages in her liner notes. Like, the liner notes code isn't hard to figure out - just take the letters incongruously capitalized. Because she's pitching at an eighth-grade audience. And she's pitching that audience *encrypted intertextuality*.

Okay, let's look at another song, **Long Live**, from Speak Now.

For one, it works a sequel to “**Change**”, from previous album Fearless, with its blended imagery of supporting a relationship partner, general teenage pressure, and literal revolution (released two months after the first Hunger Games novel came out and shifted the dominant tone of YA from Twilight-era “supportive relationship” to “youth insurrection”).

It's about triumph, in a supportive relationship, over general teenage pressure (with an aside about high school relationships not being long-term things, in a much more optimistic tone than the similarly themed White Horse and Fifteen), is it metaphorizing that through the recurrent imagery of a coronation, or is it telling a literal story about being named Prom King & Queen, and the answer of course is “yes”. And then the recurring line “bring on all the pretenders”.

“Pretenders”, like, “phonies”, Holden Caulfield style.

“Pretenders”, like, *unsuccessful claimants to a royal title*.

Tagged: **supergenius shapeshifter taylor swift rerun**



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7TH APRIL 2019

POST WITH 31 NOTES

Something I remember from Web 1.0 was background images that just looked like wallpaper

Like, pastel or beige or other mild colors with unobtrusive repeating elements

Which seems weird now why insert ANY such obnoxiousness vs. white backgrounds but back then a well-tiled 4-8Kb gif\* could make your whole page colorful while style sheets hadn't been invented yet and colorful spot illustrations could take upwards of a minute to load

\*back then gifs weren't synonymous with animation, known more for reduced color palettes (and thus file sizes) vs. jpegs

Tagged: [web 1.0](#) [90s90s90s](#)



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