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Dressing up the author: Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace branding their masculine authorial identities through fashion

ABSTRACT

This article explores the use of clothes and other accessories as markers of masculine authorial identity. Fashion and literature are contentious partners, with literature attempting to keep a firm distance from the popular trappings of the fashion world. However, writers have historically used fashion to create their identities beyond the printed word. This can be seen in examples such as Oscar Wilde and Mark Twain and the ways clothing items have become associated with their personae as men of letters. Contemporary writers are no different, yet many continue to exude ambivalence towards clothing having any effect on their images in the literary sphere. Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace are two examples of writers who downplay fashion's role in their public images. Franzen and Wallace establish their positions at the forefront of American literature not only with their fiction and non-fiction works but also in the ways they adorn their bodies and present them within visual media. Nevertheless, both Franzen and Wallace perform as

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specific types of masculine authors through their fashion choices. Ultimately, they use fashion to brand their authorial identities in accordance with their literary output. Franzen's and Wallace's willing participation in the stylization of their images to meet the masculine standards of authorial identity reveals the prevalence of gendered stereotypes regarding how authors should be represented within popular culture.

Typically, writers are not known as fashion-forward individuals. They do not grace the covers of *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan* or any of the other popular fashion publications regularly, if at all, and they are typically imagined within popular culture as frumpy introverts. However, these are common misconceptions. According to Terry Newman, in *Legendary Authors and the Clothes They Wore*, the worlds of fashion and literature are closer than we traditionally think (2017: 7). These two cultural spheres intersect through the page, but more significantly through writers' choices in attire when engaging with media. One only needs to admire the exquisite beauty of Joan Didion modelling Jackie-O sunglasses and a black mock turtleneck sweater for Céline (Codinha 2015: n.pag.) to understand that most writers use clothing and other accessories to augment their authorial identities and participate in other arenas of cultural production. Writers, like all of us, use fashion as a means of 'ordering the world' and 'providing a sense of control over the social environment', which are two significant methods to establish meaning and identity (Finkelstein 2012: xv). This often-overlooked intersection, Newman contends, is significant because '[d]elving into authors' wardrobes and the way they write about clothes is also a glimpse into the world they inhabited and their moment in time' (2017: 8). Writers exist, moving about within and consuming the culture, and they are not exempt from the fashions of their time.

Even though many writers make it their mission to critique culture, they, like the rest of us, are expected to 'conform', in certain respects, to their society and culture through dress and other body adornment, so it is only natural that writers choose to represent themselves through their wardrobe, whether it be for utility or style. The underdeveloped area of academic inquiry into how writers participate in branding their authorial identities through clothing and other fashion accessories leads to the importance of delving deeper into how authorial identity is performed through the stylization of the body and the branding of the self.

Unlike the living, breathing writer, authors are fictional characters, just like the ones who come to life in writers' works. If Alexander Nehamas is believed, then the author becomes yet another 'construct' of textuality (1986: 688). As with any other part of the literary work, the author is ripe for analysis because meaning is produced through it and from it; essentially the author becomes a component of order (Barthes 1977; Foucault 1984). Following this post-structural method of interpreting the author, ways of dress create meaning in an author's image in the same way as other actors' attire signifies meaning on the stage and screen. According to Joseph Roach in *It, 'Clothing [...]'* functions as both noun and verb, as prop and performance. To clothe is both to conceal and to display; it is a way to let others view certain aspects, while hiding more intimate – both literally and figuratively – areas of identity' (2011: 88, original emphasis). In a similar vein, Diana Crane contends that 'the ways in which we perceive and use our bodies', as well as the ways we establish identities

and a sense of social belonging, are dictated as much by 'the fashion system' as by 'the mass media' (2012: 6). Ana Marta González asserts that 'fashion as a mask of one's identity entails a kind of paradox' because it is so easily altered from day to day, season to season, trend to trend, and so forth (2012: 24). At the same time, González finds how we choose to clothe ourselves is often 'regarded as the best way to play the game of identities' (2012: 41). For everyone, writers included, clothing enhances certain characteristics, creating identifiable images for public consumption. The difference between the general populous and writers is that writers seek to establish a brand identity that is closely associated with the way they want to be represented within literary and popular culture.

Authors throughout history have possessed signature looks that shed light on their identities as cultural figures. Although the author portrait, dating back to the seventeenth century, classically depicted writers, it is with the development of mass visual media and a more prominent visual culture that the image of the author becomes a central mechanism in the performance of authorial identity and the consumption of books. The act of '[p]erformance implies a certain level of shared expectation about the way in which participants will behave' (Roach 2011: 127). Social and cultural expectations involve the codes embedded within writers' performances, which includes their modes of dress, and often represent the tensions writers feel towards sociocultural norms. Ann Margaret Brach views fashion as one aspect of social performance that represents this type of struggle: '[t]here is a sense – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – that individual or personal identity and social identity are at odds with each other. Fashion is seen as a particular area in which the conflict between the two is played out visually' (2012: 48). What happens in this struggle for identity, as Tim Edwards reveals regarding performative theory, is 'that *all* acts, including those that are rendered entirely normative, are a form of performance or are "performative"' (2006: 87, original emphasis). We can interpret each and every act a person makes, from slight gestures to wardrobe choices, to be rhetorical devices used to communicate meanings and establish connections; and for writers, this is essential in establishing themselves within the imagination of the cultural world. From Mark Twain's white suits to Oscar Wilde's furs to Hemingway's bare chest to David Foster Wallace's bandana and Jonathan Franzen's glasses, clothes and other body adornments play an important role in the branding of certain masculine types of authorial identities.

Branding has become a controversial feature of contemporary culture worldwide, but particularly in the United States. From multinational conglomerates to children seeking Internet stardom, branding generates a recognizable commodity that audiences gravitate toward (Holt 2006; Hearn 2008; van Dijck 2013; Whitmer 2017). Douglas Holt asserts that 'various sorts of social dependency' are manipulated through branding, allowing for a deeper connection amongst consumers and thus a larger profit for the producers (2006: 300). While generating economic capital is essential for corporations selling products like pants and shoes, establishing a connection to an audience is paramount for cultural producers such as writers through self-branding. For Brook Erin Duffy, self-branding often uses 'the language of audience-building' when attempting 'to define relatability and distinctiveness' (2018: 112). One of the most prominent ways of establishing a deeper connection to an audience

and potential consumer base is through the use of narrative. Alison Hearn provides a useful interpretation of this feature of branding:

Self-branding involves the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries. The function of the branded self is purely rhetorical; its goal is to produce cultural value and, potentially, material profit.

(2008: 198)

To establish a consistent brand, cultural producers must invoke known sociocultural meanings, and through this, the producers generate new meanings associated with their identities. The meanings created from this type of cultural work makes '[t]he branded self [...] a commodity sign' (Hearn 2008: 201). Besides the obvious consumption of authorial identity through print media like novels, short stories and other types of written communication, authorial identity is branded heavily via visual media. Staged as significant cultural figures, authors are revealed to the audience through photography. Visualizing authors in this manner, audiences form more salient connections to the identity types being performed and sociocultural meanings present in authorial identities.

Photography and other visual media allow us to glimpse the character of the author through the visual images attached to her or his work. Within these images emerge clues as to how authors use clothing and other accessories to promote their personal brands of authorial identity. The desire for authorial images, in many cases, surpasses the literary text nowadays (Louette and Roche 2003: n.pag.). Our highly visual culture desires the author's image, and it becomes a mechanism in the commodity process: it promotes the product, the authorial identity. For Hearn, 'self-branding and promotionalism are explicitly tied to the image-economy of the culture industries' (2008: 207). Visual media have allowed writers and publishers to capitalize on this by shaping how the author appears publicly. Visual media operate, according to David Marshall, as '*representational media*', which create a '*representational cultural regime*' that promotes and 'distill[s]' characters into 'the field of popular culture' (2014: xxxii, original emphasis). These types of media provide identities with the channels to flow, in Marshall's interpretation, from a controlled source – the author photograph – to the audience.

The author photographs provide audiences with mediated images of writers, snapshots into their characters. According to Jean-François Louette and Roger-Yves Roche, '[t]o make a portrait, for a writer, is often to seek a parallel between his texts and his image, to try to produce a mirror effect, to make the portrait consonant with the work' (2003: n.pag.). Louette and Roche propose that author photographs have 'two effects' on the consumption of the work and the author's identity: 'specular consonance and problematic surprise' (2003: n.pag.). In this sense, author photographs serve a significant purpose in the branding of the authorial identity within culture through their support of normative ideologies. Author photographs offer a 'degree of refinement' and, as Louette and Roche contend, 'the evolution of his portraits redoubles the evolution of his self-image [a]nd even the evolution of his image of his writing' (2003: n.pag.). How authors develop over their visual images marks their roles in literary and popular culture by allowing their audiences to gather and apply sociocultural meanings to their mediated bodies.

A closer analysis of two prominent contemporary US writers – Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace – and their authorial identity performances within the author photographs attached to a selection of their media appearances reveals the sophisticated mechanisms at work in branding authors in the contemporary media environment. This analysis also uncovers the subliminal and overt replication of masculine stereotypes embedded in authorial identity and, more importantly, fashion. Much like a dramatic shift from writing high literature to writing pulpy romance novels would disrupt how the author is imagined in the literary world, a dramatic shift in dress signifies a similar change in cultural meaning. The photographic images and textual descriptions of authors and their appearances across media channels sheds light on how they use body stylings to present themselves to audiences while reinforcing masculine ideas around the self and fashion. Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace serve as examples of how clothing and other accessories become tools to represent their masculine authorial identities within the cultural world. Ultimately, while they attempt to maintain a firm distance from what has often been stereotyped as lesser cultural forms, Franzen, Wallace and other mediaries use body stylings to create masculine commodities within literary and popular culture.

THE PROFESSIONAL AUTHOR

As a self-styled ‘professional artist’, Jonathan Franzen plays a role that is full of tension. On the one hand, he romanticizes the prestige of literature and a life devoted to writing in our increasingly technologized and entertainment-saturated world. On the other hand, Franzen wants to be a professional; he wants to make a living solely through writing (1996: 48, 2002: 65, 72–73). These conflicts affect how Franzen engages with the literary marketplace and how he is depicted visually. Franzen the author seeks to enact a masculine discourse that reverberates throughout US culture. According to R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, masculinity, more specifically hegemonic masculinity, dictates that white heterosexual, cis gender men position themselves above ‘other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities’ (2005: 832). Connell and Messerschmidt claim that masculinity is traditionally considered a source of power for certain types of men, and it has come to be a means of ‘position[ing] themselves through discursive practices’ and ‘nondiscursive practices’ (2005: 841–42). Authorship is one such discursive practice, and Franzen performs it within contemporary culture.

During the nineteenth century, many US writers attempted to establish a more masculine version of the author. Their attempts were further refined over the course of the twentieth century to solidify the image of the American male author as a professional who is strong, dedicated and rational, traits that avoided the feminized view often applied towards writing (Wilson 1985; West 1990; Charvat 1993). The writers who gained fame and cultural renown during this period become icons for American men. Icons, such as these manly authors, become validated by other sociocultural entities, like the mass media, and establish the illusion of normativity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 838). The images consumed by men across media channels become a curse, according to Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas. They declare ‘that male subjectivity is stalked, or haunted, by icons and types’, which serve as standards for identity performance (2017: 2). As an aspiring writer, Franzen had to have consumed the images of professional authors, whether directly or indirectly,

and in turn, this affected his choices when developing his own authorial identity because these types of authors were validated as manly professionals who were able to elevate a literary life into the realm of masculine professions.

One such way authors replicate masculine professionalism within their authorial identities is through the author photograph. Franzen's attire in his author photograph for *The Corrections* (2001) brands him as the consummate professional with the clothes he wears: a sport coat and a white-collared shirt (Martin 2001). These articles of clothing, along with the pose, convey to the audience that Franzen is highly serious about his art and his image – the idea that professional attire – suits, collared shirts and ties – is important in the performance of masculinity. For Ben Barry, '[c]lothes *unmark* men's bodies by articulating dominant masculine performances that are uniform and understated, such as the wearing of dark, boxy suits' (2018: 640, original emphasis). Barry finds this 'unmark[ing]' a 'safety zone' for most men because it allows them to act within the accepted norms of their society and culture (2018: 641). Franzen's clothes in this photograph are no different. The charcoal jacket and white dress shirt are the casual wear par excellence for the contemporary professional man. Through styling his image in this manner, Franzen taps into the ways these types of clothes have 'commonly [been] associated with rationality, authority, and the renunciation of femininity' (Barry 2018: 648). It is clear that Franzen is performing a contemporary version of the masculine professional authorship developed since the late nineteenth century. Franzen unmarks his authorial identity by playing it safe and representing the implied norms of this identity.

However, the headshot performs another function for Franzen's authorial identity. As his clothes imply professionalism, Franzen's body signifies celebrity beauty. His five-o'clock shadow and unbuttoned shirt create desire within the viewer. Although it implies professionalism, the pose directs Franzen's gaze onto the viewer, drawing them in. The author photograph relies on the power of representational media to make Franzen's face the selling point, and his clothes enhance this aspect by making him appear professional and serious, but also handsome. This makes Franzen's body a commodity. According to Whitmer, '[t]he body is a key site for the process of identity construction as it is shaped, maintained, aestheticized, experienced and inscribed with symbolic goods' (2017: 119). Whitmer declares that 'the body is framed as a source of material value and a means for upward mobility' within our culture and that 'the male body [is fashioned] as consumer project and aesthetic object' (2017: 116). For Connell and Messerschmidt, 'social practice' makes bodies serve dual purposes as 'agents' and as 'objects' in establishing cultural norms (2005: 851). In essence, Franzen's author photograph acts as a stand-in for his actual body, a mediated version that is ripe with the implications of sociocultural views of masculinity and professionalism. The audience views him through the rhetoric of the image to create value and meaning, which legitimizes Franzen's performance.

A further replication of masculine professional identity occurs when Franzen is proclaimed the 'Great American novelist' by *Time* in the 12 August 2010 issue. The cover image is a portrait, with Franzen wearing a black dress shirt and no tie, posing against a dark grey background (Winters 2010). The portrait as a genre, according to art historian Eric Garberson,

relates the person portrayed to the categories and abstractions that constitute larger systems of cultural meaning. It contains visual cues, based in past traditions and current conventions, that prompt viewers

to read it as a true statement about the person independent of its accuracy as a likeness. These cues also establish a relation, both physical and conceptual, between the person portrayed and viewers, who are thus prompted to interact with it in particular ways.

(n.d.: 35)

Following Garberson's definition of portraiture and its effect on identity performance, I contend that the cover image of Franzen draws the audience and him into conversation with the masculinist discourses of professionalism, greatness and authorship. This image solidifies the dominant cultural norms around these discourses within the popular imagination by replicating certain traditional historical features not only through the genre of the image but also through Franzen's attire. The items of clothing connote professionalism, signifying Franzen's seriousness regarding the state of art, culture and society. Philip Weinstein believes Franzen appears 'vaguely all-American' and that he 'has the look of a serious (even severe) man' on the cover of *Time* (2015: 1). The colour palette of the portrait canonizes Franzen, placing him firmly within the upper echelon of literary and popular culture by connecting him to the long tradition of significant figures depicted in this manner. Taken as a whole, the *Time* cover reveals the subtle ways mass media conceal and disseminate certain meanings to a wide variety of audiences.

Extending the image's function as a performative text is the contribution of other cultural producers. Lev Grossman, writer of the accompanying profile of Franzen in *Time*, quotes Franzen's description of his aspirations to become a 'great' author:

I began with an ambitious wish to be a writer of a certain stature, and to be mentioned in the company of such and such, and to produce a certain kind of masterful book that engages with contemporary culture and all that.

(2010: n.pag.)

Although we can take this quote to imply that Franzen wants his art to be transcendent, it also reveals the subtle ways greatness is attributed within our culture. By being 'mentioned in the company of such and such', Franzen gains prominence through association, and this association can be linked through methods of styling the body. Geczy and Karaminas assert that the media and other 'communication practices' establish personae as 'social signifying systems, tied to mythology' (2017: 161). Grossman, Winters, *Time's* editors and Franzen all work together to construct his authorial identity based around the sociocultural meanings entailed in the image and the text. The combination of image and text works to fix meaning, reducing the 'endless number of possibilities' into 'a single certainty' (Barthes 1990: 13). This characterization of his own authorial identity shows that Franzen desires to be seen as a certain type of author, and to achieve that status, he must not only create literary works that meet those standards, he must also dress the part as well. Franzen's clothing, posture and facial expressions all contribute to the overall impression of his authorial identity. By fashioning himself as a professional, both through his words and his clothing choices, Franzen becomes the epitome of this masculine authorial type.

One part of Franzen's fashion has become synonymous with his authorial identity – the dark-framed glasses. His eyewear functions metonymically;

the glasses stand-in for the masculine professionalism Franzen performs. Franzen's glasses are synonymous with his brand, and they generate a narrative, not only about Franzen as an author but also about the power of celebrity in contemporary culture. For van Dijck, '[n]arratives are supposedly the lubricant for connecting people to products and products to people', and he goes on to claim, '[t]he more people buy into a story, the better the brand is promoted' (2013: 206). Although Franzen wears glasses to see, like the majority of people who wear these accessories, the ways in which the glasses have established a link between these products and his specific type of authorial identity makes them a desirable object for his audience. Audiences often recognize Franzen more by his glasses than his novels, and this extends to caricatures that appear in top-tier publications like the *New York Times* (Carrilho 2006; Ciardiello 2010; Tamaki 2013). These popular media representations brand Franzen even further. Whitmer defines 'self-branding [...] [as] a way of packaging one's self and one's lifestyle as a commodity to be consumed by a wide, unknown audience' (2017: 116). In this manner, Franzen's glasses become icons of his professional authorial identity and, ultimately, fetish objects for his fans.

At a promotional event for *Freedom* (2010) in London, Franzen's glasses were stolen, not from a hotel room, lectern or restaurant table but right off his face. The theft became celebrity news. Publications ranging in cultural prestige from *The Guardian*, NPR and the *Los Angeles Times* to *GQ* and *Gawker* produced pieces on the incident. The thieves left a ransom note requesting \$100,000 for the glasses' 'safe return' (Page 2010: n.pag.). Guests at the event reported seeing police helicopters searching the area and expressed 'a mix of shock, disbelief and hilarity' (Page 2010: n.pag.). The thieves were caught, and one, James Fletcher, eventually recounted the events of the night to *British GQ* in 2012. Fletcher describes the plan to pilfer Franzen's eyewear: 'I'd mentioned several times to my accomplice how much I admired Franzen's frames and thought that they deserved to be the subject of a hostage-ransom situation' (2012: n.pag.). He ended his article by describing how he admired Franzen: '[h]e is one of the most talented writers out there and I have the utmost respect for the man. I just hope he didn't get the wrong impression from my actions and was able to take it all in good humour' (2012: n.pag.). Fletcher's claims reveal how fans idolize and fetishize celebrities. For Fletcher, Franzen's glasses are a metonym of his authorial identity, and through acquiring them, he can possess a part of Franzen. More importantly, the theft and subsequent confession of Fletcher add to the narrative branding of Franzen. The glasses no longer are just accessories to aid in sight; they become essential components in the commodifying process of Franzen's authorial identity.

THE HIPSTER AUTHOR

In a similar, albeit steeped in another tradition of masculine performance, David Foster Wallace, Franzen's friend and literary rival, constructs his authorial identity around many of the traits often associated with the hipster. The hipster is a contentious figure in popular culture, often associated with elitism, gentrification and consumerism (Geczy and Karaminas 2017). However, the hipster and Wallace, as its literary embodiment, reveal the 'uncertainty and anxiety' of our mass mediated age with its 'depersonalization and complexities' (Geczy and Karaminas 2017: 51). These characteristics of hipster culture, which Wallace critiques within his literary works and embodies within his visual media presences, act as badges of honour, ways to claim authenticity in an

overly processed culture. For Duffy, the claim to authenticity is not new since it has been a major tenet of advertising and branding since the early twentieth century (2018: 101). Duffy contends that an ‘infectious rhetoric of “realness”’ exists in self-branding because many cultural producers seek ‘to shore up the image’ they distribute within culture (2018: 135). Wallace’s signature look – a bandana, round wireframed glasses, a beard or stubble, and extremely casual clothing such as t-shirts and shorts – is an act to present himself and his authorial identity as ‘real’, something of value to literary and popular culture. His look pushes against the ways culture has restricted the author figure and cast ‘him’ out for new methods of communication and entertainment. Duffy asserts that ‘tension between internal desires and external demands is intrinsic to the struggle between creativity and constraint that has long characterized paid cultural work’ (2018: 136). Wallace and other cultural producers position him as an anti-establishment author, which is built upon his looks early in his career and, especially, after his suicide.

Many publications present Wallace as an indifferent figure: he acts and seeks to look disinterested in the cultural attention around him and his art, and his clothing choices are physical manifestations of his disinterest. Mark Caro finds Wallace’s appearance emblematic of his rebellion from the literary establishment:

The author [...] was wearing a yellow bandana around his head and a white T-shirt, and he abided the university’s no-smoking rule [...] by stashing a clump of smokeless tobacco inside his lower lip and occasionally leaning behind his desk to spit the juice into a waste basket.

(2012: 54)

Caro gives his audience a representation of Wallace’s casual nature and his resistance to altering his identity in the face of public recognition. Wallace was not the masculine professional performed by his close friend Franzen. However, Laura Miller reads Wallace’s appearance as a creation of the promotional material surrounding *Infinite Jest* and not a true version of the writer; the Wallace who appears in publications is a character devised for branding purposes. Miller asserts that the ‘low-key, bookish appearance [Wallace portrayed during their interview] flatly contradicts the unshaven, bandanna-capped image advanced by his publicity photos’ (2012: 58). Miller establishes a difference between the author on the dust jacket and the man who wrote the novel, but she also reinforces the idea that the identity Wallace performs is a tool to position himself within literary and popular culture.

A few years later, Wallace’s visual image is described as ‘both endearingly little girlish and hard to synthesize’ (Stein 1999: n.pag.). This description of Wallace points towards the ways his fashion choices, though not particularly radical, disrupt the common tropes of the masculine author. Barry contends that ‘fashion still creates an ambiguous space’ when applied to men and masculinity (2018: 642). However, incorporating more gender-fluid fashions has allowed many ‘[p]rivileged men’ to challenge yet still hold ‘their associations with hegemonic masculinity’ (Barry 2018: 641). By describing Wallace as a ‘little girlish’, Stein uses Wallace’s image to push against the dominant representations of the author within popular culture. This is akin to Connell and Messerschmidt’s idea that ‘[m]asculinities are configurations of practice’, which rely on certain sociocultural ‘setting[s]’ for their meanings (2005: 836). Stein subtly implies that Wallace’s appearance represents a lack of masculinity;

he reveals Wallace as not only a masterful writer capable of ‘chang[ing] the sounds and aims of American fiction’ but also a confused man whose style is a bricolage of overtly masculine and feminine accessories – ‘calf-high duck-boots (jeans tucked in), a nylon backpack and a tortoiseshell hairband too small for his head’ (1999: n.pag.). Wallace’s fashion choices reveal his willingness to stand out; he aspires for originality in both his literary art and in his physical appearance. The attempt to be unique within society and culture is nothing new in the cultural world, according to Duffy (2018: 107). She claims, ‘[a]uthentic self-expression [...] is widely celebrated as part of the currency of “realness”, bound up with the notion of creative individualism’ (2018: 136). As Stein rightfully posits, Wallace is accepted into the cannon of literary greatness based upon his novel *Infinite Jest* (1996) and the ways he pushes against the boundaries of literature and cultural criticism.

In *Time*, a juxtaposition of clashing images similar to Stein’s occurs. Sheppard states, ‘Wallace may look like a carefree Frisbee player with his ponytail and head hankie, but he has the soul of an old-fashioned inkstained wretch’ (1996: n.pag.). Sheppard romanticizes Wallace’s casual image by linking it to the popular image of the author toiling away on his masterpiece in solitude. Unlike fellow contemporary authors, such as Franzen, Wallace taps into the artistry of literature; he is a throwback to another time, much like the hipster attempts to resurrect bygone traditions, fashions, technologies and other cultural artefacts. Although he achieves cultural recognition, it is Wallace’s ability to perform the identity of a hipster both in dress and in his art that truly brands him as a significant cultural figure. Whitmer contends, ‘[t]he rhetoric of branding enjoins individuals to tap into what makes them unique to profit from themselves’ (2017: 125). Wallace strategically utilizes the hype-machine of literary and popular culture to craft an image of himself as an author, and this image incorporates the discourses associated with hipsterdom (Anon. 2008).

A bandana-clad hipster becomes the iconic depiction of Wallace. The descriptions offered in print about his appearance establish an image of the author that must be met in order to have a successful performance. In essence, he becomes, what Roach calls, a ‘role-icon’. Roach states, ‘[t]he role-icon represents a part that certain exceptional performers play on and off stage, no matter what other parts they enact from night to night’ (2011: 39). Audiences expect consistency and challenge any variation, so performers must deliver a constant product in order to create a believable identity. Roach contends that consistency produces ‘habits’, which take the form of clothing, that is, nuns’ habits or the ritualistic repetition of acts; thus, ‘the identity of the role-icon’ is produced ‘by the performance of *habits*’ (2011: 92–94, original emphasis). In this way, Wallace’s appearance and his posturing as a literary hipster establish a consistent image of the author. Max describes him as a ‘*monster sacré* in his iconoclastic outfits – bandana, beaten-up hiking shorts and double athletic socks inside unlaced hiking boots’ (2012: 271, original emphasis). This image fleshes out Wallace’s character traits, but it also resituates him within a masculine rhetoric. Gone are Stein’s veiled critiques of Wallace’s incorporation of feminine accessories, and they are replaced with rugged masculinity and eccentricity. These descriptions of Wallace’s appearance place him in the role of the true artist, whose clothing states as much about his identity as the art he produces. Upholding this image becomes part of the performance.

Wallace’s style takes on a myth of its own after the success of *Infinite Jest*. According to Frank Bruni 1996: n.pag.), Wallace’s image and, ultimately,

celebrity ‘was predictable and painstakingly engineered’ by his editor Michael Pietsch. The promotion of *Infinite Jest*, but more specifically Wallace as author, hinges on the ability to consistently perform the image that circulates through promotional materials. According to Bruni, this is successful:

And Wallace – wittingly or unwittingly – has served it [the promotion] well, projecting the perfect measure of aloofness, particularly in his appearance, which flouts conventional vanity in a manner that doth protest perhaps a bit too much. He often wears a bandana wrapped tightly around his head, as if to avoid combing his shoulder-length hair and to coddle his febrile mind. His wire-rimmed glasses, stubble of beard and hole-ridden sweaters lend him the aspect of a doctoral candidate so deep in thought that he cannot afford the time or energy for grooming.

(1996: n.pag.)

The words ‘coddle’ and ‘febrile’ in Bruni’s description confirm the prevailing image of Wallace as a delicate yet passionate thinker, but also as a character attuned to a certain type of self-presentation. Other mediaries’ constant descriptions of Wallace’s dress reveal how his fashion plays a significant role in performing his authorial identity across media channels.

The continual replication of Wallace’s clothing in print and visual media allows for the items to become steeped in the meanings associated with him and his type of authorial identity. Hearn asserts, ‘[p]romotion entails a re-arrangement of the relation between sign and referent, the sign comes to displace the material object to which it refers, and, in this way, acquires a kind of agency’ (2008: 200–01). She continues by making the relationship between ‘self-branding and promotionalism’ and ‘the image-economy of the culture industries’ clear by revealing how these acts are part of the larger ways identity is commodified and distributed to mass audiences (2008: 207–08). Whether Wallace was complicit in the branding and promotion of his authorial identity we may never know, but it is clear that many critics and fellow writers find his image to be highly suspectful (Ellis 2015: n.pag.).

However, Wallace admits that his photographs are ‘appalling’ because he ‘wish[ed] that wasn’t what [he] looked like’ (Bruni 1996: n.pag.). This brief statement reveals a deeper issue with Wallace and the representation of his authorial identity. On the one hand, we can gather that he could be like many of us and not care for our photographic depictions; on the other hand, Wallace can be interpreted as questioning the methods of style used in his author photographs. I find the latter interpretation to be one that fits best with Wallace. Since he performs a type of hipster identity, Wallace could be hinting towards the overt commodification of his identity by literary and popular culture. His concern leads him to reject the commercial nature of these images because they do not reflect his ‘authentic’ self. However, it is problematic to assume that Wallace is not complicit because the hipster style has a tenuous relationship with commercialism. Geczy and Karaminas allege, ‘[i]f hipsters are embroiled in consumption practices, mass media, and the cultural industries, then claims to authenticity can look dubious, since the concept of style is the active enactment of resistance’ (2017: 50). In other words, the hipster is nothing more than an identity that has been co-opted for the purposes of promotion and consumption, and Wallace and his style are no different for his audiences.

Through these processes, Wallace's iconic image – the bandana- and glasses-wearing, long-haired, scruffy hipster – emerges as a product that represents the meanings of masculine rebellion against the corporate literary establishment. Patrick Arden calls Wallace's appearance as 'the very picture of his age – an unshaven young man lost in thought, a bandana wrapped around his long hair like a bandage protecting a head wound' (2012: 94). Arden alludes to the grunge aesthetic of the early to mid-1990s, something Geczy and Karaminas find '[m]arked' onto discourses around hipsters (2017: 50). Max discusses how Bruni and other *New York Times* journalists cast Wallace as the literary equivalent of Kurt Cobain. Max does not deny that there are similarities in how each cultural figure has 'an allergy to façades [and] to disco-type slickness' and how they both wear the 'uniform for anyone who felt disenchanting with the post-Reagan American culture of buying and owning' (2012: 221). By uniform, Max refers to the style of clothing and accessories each cultural figure donned during their public performances – an anti-style style that flew in the face of mainstream, corporate America. Then again, much of the grunge aesthetic, ultimately incorporated into the hipster's wardrobe, becomes 'all about a fashionable "look" instead of a "reference to an "original"' (Geczy and Karaminas 2017: 50). Both Wallace and Cobain come to represent a specific type of masculine fashion aesthetic that audiences can emulate. Their willingness to incorporate feminine accessories with traditionally masculine clothing allows for a redefinition of masculine identity during this time, something both figures seem disinterested in promoting, yet their disinterest becomes part of the branded performance.

In another link to Cobain, Wallace's suicide serves as the catalyst for the consecration of his styled image. The renewed attention towards Wallace as the 'voice of Generation X' and 'a hero of grad students and alternative readers' (Gilbert 2012: 76) presents us with what I like to call the 'definitive Wallace'. The 'definitive Wallace' becomes the one most closely associated with the afterimage. The bandana-adorning, long-haired, glasses-wearing figure dominates his appearances across media channels and becomes solidified with the final author photograph published with his uncompleted novel *The Pale King* (2011) (Giovannetti 2011). Print articles, online media and the author photographs included on his posthumous works and reissues all use this image as an identifier of Wallace. The picture respectfully memorializes Wallace in a flattering light. However, this afterimage's effects make Wallace into more of a character than an actual person, which he feared 'becom[ing] this [type of] grotesque parody' (Lipsky 2010: 191). Unfortunately, his fears came true because this image has become a sign for his hipster authorial identity. The enactment of masculinity and fashion aesthetics is capricious, and it leads to the creation of 'icon[s]' that are solely 'image[s]' intended to stimulate 'desire' (Geczy and Karaminas 2017: 161). Much like Cobain served as an image of rebellion during the 1990s and has become a commodity for the continued marketing of faux rebellion currently, the 'definitive Wallace' acts in much the same manner. Within literary and popular culture, this version of Wallace embodies the ways clothing and accessories mark one's identity with cultural meaning, for it serves as a model for others to look towards when constructing their own identities, but it also serves as a way for the brand to continue generating profit based on a recognizable and consistent product – Wallace as the hipster author.

THE SHIFTING FASHION OF AUTHORS

Authorial identities do not remain static: they adapt to changes in society, culture and technology to reflect or reject contemporary norms. Understandably, writers adapt their clothing to reflect current trends, but more importantly, they alter their wardrobe to express the new meanings contained within their authorial identities. As cultural recognition is achieved, many writers feel the need to either reinvent or reveal more of their 'real' selves within their authorial identities. The gaining of larger amounts of cultural capital justifies the alterations that take place in their dress and how it is depicted across media. At the same time, the shifts in visual appearance indicate a shoring up of loose ends, particularly regarding the branding of masculine authorial identities. This can be seen in Franzen's and Wallace's post-breakthrough author photographs. The images reveal the continued branding of these men within literary and popular culture, but also renewed efforts to transmit alternative meanings around their masculine performances of authorial identity.

With the publication of his latest novel *Purity* (2015), Franzen alters the prevailing professionalism of his dress and image. The author photograph shows him smiling while standing barefoot on a beach (Bahry 2015). He is tan, wears a yellow hiking shirt and rolled-up jeans and holds hiking boots. The Franzen of this picture is not the professional author from *The Corrections* headshot; this is an adventurous author travelling the world. More revealing is the fact that Franzen is captured in a moment of pure bliss by Watter Al Bahry, the photographer, which further disrupts the manly professionalism established in earlier author photographs.

In an interview with *Fresh Air* on NPR, Franzen tells Terry Gross that the photograph was taken in Egypt after he had returned from a bird-watching expedition (Franzen 2015: n.pag.). Gross presses Franzen as to why he chose this particular image since it is such a deviation from previous visual depictions. He replies, '[b]ecause I'm absolutely happy-looking' (Franzen 2015: n.pag.). This response highlights the ability of the celebrity individual to exert some control over her or his visual representation, especially once renown has been achieved, simply by changing her or his fashions and self-presentation. Lucia Ruggeroni asserts that 'being dressed is quintessentially *situational* (unpredictable, surprising, queer)' (2017: 586, original emphasis). Ruggeroni views clothing as shifting, depending on the wearer's experiences. Obviously, if Franzen has been hiking, he would not be wearing a finely tailored suit; accordingly, the attire he does wear matches the experience, but it also mirrors the joy Franzen finds by being placed in this space. For Ruggeroni, 'the power of clothing (every day or fashionable) to transform the wearers is [...] a process of mutual becoming' (2017: 580). Through the adoption of a situational dress – outdoor/rugged clothing – Franzen alters his authorial image by revealing a hidden characteristic.

Franzen admits to Gross that it is 'weird' audiences do not see him as a happy person, and he blames himself for this misrepresentation:

But it's [...] maybe I try too hard to keep it under wraps because I already feel sort of guilty for how well things have gone for me. And I have to be photographed with a frown to make clear that I'm not enjoying the experience [...] But really I am enjoying the experience.

(2015: n.pag.)

Franzen reveals his performance here, the act he uses to create his authorial identity. By disrupting his standard role with the *Purity* author photograph, he acts against the masculine professionalism associated with him. According to Erving Goffman, cultural performances take place in 'region[s]', which have borders or 'barriers to perception' (1959: 106). These regions are divided into 'front', 'back' and 'outside'. The 'front region' is the public performance, and this region must maintain cultural 'standards' (Goffman 1959: 107). Franzen 'adopt[es] a social face' or what Goffman clarifies as 'the projection of a constant image' (1959: 8). According to Goffman's interpretation of social performance, people maintain aspects of their identity through a consistent representation before audiences (1959: 8). Franzen alludes to Gross during the interview that the majority of his media appearances occur in the 'front region': 'that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (Goffman 1959: 22). It is this region that, Goffman contends, maintains the cultural 'standards' for performances (1959: 107). All of Franzen's previous appearances across media channels have constructed and supported his masculine professional identity by establishing a dominant image; however, the left-turn with *Purity's* author photograph disrupts the controlling narrative around his brand.

The author photograph from *Purity* and Franzen's claim of being dismayed by the public reception of his authorial identity take place in the 'back region', as opposed to the main stage of most sociocultural performances of identity – the 'front region'. Goffman contends that performers use the 'back region' or 'backstage' as a reprieve from the audience: personal fronts are dropped and 'stored' (1959: 112). For Goffman, 'backstage' functions as a site where 'illusions and impressions are openly constructed' (1959: 112). Franzen's appearance and language allow the audience and Gross backstage into the more private show. This choice highlights Franzen's desire to deconstruct the prevailing representation of his authorial identity and popular presences. This move is problematic, however. Since it is done in public, Franzen's pulling back of the curtain can be considered a continuation of the 'front region', which, according to Goffman, merges the character with the individual, thus making it difficult to ever move beyond performance (1959: 134). Even though it can be taken as an inside look at who he really is, the presentation of it through media – audio, visual and textual – makes this a continuation of Franzen's masculine professionalism because the experience he uses to perform this different side of his character comes off as a masculine privilege. The way Franzen works to define the meanings contained within his choice to use the image and the meaning present within it are not geared towards gaining a new audience; it is geared towards solidifying the audience he already has, which further reinforces many of the dominant norms of the culture his brand of authorial identity replicates.

Unlike Franzen's attempt to demasculinize his authorial identity, Wallace's last two books – *Oblivion* (2004) and *Consider the Lobster* (2005) – feature author photographs that fashion him as a hypermasculine working-class author instead of a literary hipster (Ettlinger 2004, 2005). Instead of the disinterested hipster ironically critiquing US culture from a privileged social position, Wallace and Ettlinger use clothing and location to shift Wallace's authorial identity to one that is more relatable and 'real' to a larger US audience. According to Duffy, 'working class ordinariness' is '[o]ne specific way that "realness" is coded' by communication technologies and the media (2018:

107). At the same time, this – primarily masculine – identity is ‘as much a performance as any other gender display’ (Whitmer 2017: 124). The previous descriptions of Wallace’s authorial identity as a hybrid of masculine and feminine characteristics, especially through his use of feminine accessories, are stripped away in these images for a doubling down on overt masculinity. Whitmer contends, ‘[p]rofessional and creative class men can [...] appropriate signifiers of working-class masculinity as a means of performing “authentic” masculinities and easing anxieties about gender, without repudiating their privileged class position’ (2017: 124). What emerges from the two author photographs is a new Wallace, one that does not maintain a disinterested and feminine look towards his art and culture at large, but one that mirrors the hardworking all-American male. Even though Wallace’s gender, class and racial privileges are obscured in these images, they manifest in more subtle ways to continue his brand of authorial identity.

As opposed to the bandana-clad, glasses-wearing hipster who appeared in the promotional materials for *Infinite Jest*, Wallace dons a workman-like attire for *Oblivion’s* author photograph (Ettlinger 2004). This taps into the depiction of authors as hypermasculine individuals in the traditions of Hemingway and Mailer. Wallace wears all denim and unlaced work boots. An overlap exists between Wallace’s clothing in this image and the earlier descriptions; however, femininity is stripped away and replaced with hypermasculinity. Ruggerone contends dress involves ‘an opening up to a process of becoming’, which signifies a break from using clothing as ‘only a matter of aesthetics’ (2017: 582). In essence, Wallace’s use of clearly masculine attire and props – his dog, a Rottweiler mix, sits in the left foreground wearing a chain collar, and water bottles and buckets surround Wallace and the dog – shows the renewed sense of maleness that is absent in the earlier images. These elements present Wallace as a tough, rugged author, visualizing the difficulty associated with his art and his views on culture. Meant to imply that he had been working diligently and was now taking a rest, the image’s representation of Wallace’s identity through his clothing operates against these meanings because, similar to Franzen’s author photograph for *The Corrections*, Wallace becomes a desirable object. The elements that make up the image become ‘ersatz signifiers of working class masculinity’ (Whitmer 2017: 124). For Whitmer, ‘flouting masculine norms may actually be a way of demonstrating the inherent stability of one’s masculinity’ (2017: 128). These counterfeit pieces of clothing and the highly staged setting do not present a believable scene or identity. They ape the culture and stylings of another class to shore up one’s own masculinity.

In another image photographed by Ettlinger, which appears as the author photograph for *Consider the Lobster*, Wallace appears in a corn field wearing an unbuttoned plaid wool overcoat and a black shirt (2005). The choice of clothing, again, reveals Wallace’s desire to be associated with a working-class identity, not the postmodern art world he has been placed within since his emergence into literary and popular culture. These simple midwestern farm clothes attempt to tap into Wallace’s roots by making him one of the common people. However, the author photograph does not accomplish this feat because Wallace’s appearance is too refined and beautiful. His clothes are not worn, nor are they what many working-class people would wear in that environment; they are the clothes of an author, a creative class male character detached from the simple workings of the world and more attuned to artistic endeavours. Duffy asserts that “‘realness’ is coded as *relatability to an imagined*

audience' (2018: 112, original emphasis). This means that cultural figures seek to connect their brand and identity to those of their intended audience.

In this case, Wallace attempts to open up his dense literary art to the general reader: '[m]y ideal reader is somebody who likes to read and is willing to, at least for a while, to give the author the benefit of the doubt' (1996). However, the image does not succeed in accomplishing this feat. Ettlinger makes Wallace the punctum of the image by blurring the background, which further disrupts Wallace's connection to the setting. Wallace smirks, implying that this performance of the 'everyman' author in a corn field is ironic. Ettlinger's photograph places Wallace both inside and outside: he is firmly inside highbrow culture because of his previous works and visual images, but by posing him literally outside, it symbolizes his outsider mentality. Even though there is a drastic attempt to add more masculine features to Wallace and his authorial identity, the author photographs for *Oblivion* and *Consider the Lobster* subtly highlight the disconnect that Wallace has with this type of authorial identity and its masculine overtones.

THE MANLY AUTHOR IS THE SUM OF MANY PARTS

Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace participate in an intricate performance of authorial identity in literary and popular culture. Through their roles, both men have become associated with the discourses still affecting our conceptions of authors and literature. For Newman, '[f]ashion is a history book as well as a mirror', and she asserts that fashion sheds light on society and culture that is often obscured by more prevalent cultural productions, such as literature and art (2017: 8). However, she contends that fashion, broadly defined, is more than just a covering for one's body: '[t]he psyche of every decade is reflected in its cultural output, and it's often possible to see in retrospect a fusion of identity to an era. Fashion is an excellent starting point in distinguishing the voice of a generation' (Newman 2017: 48). Wallace's experiments in literature, but also his association with 1990s grunge aesthetic and his ultimate suicide, has made him a hipster icon within literary culture, much like Kurt Cobain has become the same figure for music. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Jonathan Franzen mirrors the professionalism that developed around literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, making him a bastion for literary culture's significance in our media-saturated age. Their authorial identities are deepened by their visual images, and the clothes and accessories they wear mark their identities as much as their writing. Through fashion, Franzen and Wallace both show that authors are more than words on the page; they are characters performing for their audiences.

These two male authors also represent our contemporary fascination with branding and the subtle ways masculine norms reveal themselves within mediated images and fashion. Edwards views masculinity and fashion as intrinsically linked, and it is through this link that men utilize the signifying powers of clothing to establish their identities (2006: 97). This broadens further into the realm of celebrity culture and its 'influence' on how men's fashion is mediated (Edwards 2006: 99). Although they are not international movie stars, athletes or any of the more popular types of celebrities, Franzen and Wallace hold significant amounts of cultural capital within their field. This means that their appearances in visual media, particularly author photographs, and their dressed bodies establish ways that authors should fashion themselves to create a certain brand of authorial identity. Each of these writers

and the other mediaries they interact with create narratives that disseminate the authorial identities through media channels to various consumers, which, according to Hearn, serves 'as a site for the extraction of value' (2008: 199). It is the creation of meaning that makes the performance of authorial identity such a strong feature of literary and popular culture. As I have shown with Franzen and Wallace, these authors come to embody certain ways of being within the culture, and they, in turn, transmit those ways to their audiences through their art, visual images and, most importantly, their clothing. Holt maintains that 'brands work by molding existing ideologies to serve the needs of capital' (2006: 301), and Franzen's and Wallace's authorial identities give their brands power within literary and popular culture.

This branding and performance of authorial identity across media channels allows for writers to tap into the dominant cultural norms of their society, which is especially true for male writers. According to Whitmer, '[w]e can learn more about the construction of masculinities in this changing cultural and economic landscape by examining what men do as producers in consumptive worlds, and how they frame their own experiences and identities' (2017: 116). In essence, masculinity is performed in a myriad of ways, whether it be through sports, business, education or, in this case, writing, and it is through the adoption and display of certain kinds of clothing and accessories that male writers begin to replicate the prevailing norms of their culture. What we can observe with Jonathan Franzen's and David Foster Wallace's fashion choices is the delicate dance between being and becoming the masculine author in contemporary culture. Their abilities to brand their identities as one type – Franzen as the masculine professional, and Wallace as the hipster – with their first mass successes reveal the strategy behind establishing a recognizable identity and brand that audiences will return to throughout a career or, in Wallace's case, after death. These identities use clothing and other accessories to generate a mediated image that marks the brands, becoming synonymous with the specific types of authorial identities they perform. Even though they attempt to disrupt these branded images through changing their dress and representations within literary and popular culture, Franzen and Wallace, ultimately, reveal the dominant forces of masculinity at work in constructing contemporary authorial identities.

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