

THESIS

DEVELOPING (SUPER)CITIZENSHIP: CONSTITUTING IDEALIZED AMERICAN
CITIZENSHIP IN *THE AVENGERS: EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES*

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING (SUPER)CITIZENSHIP: CONSTITUTING IDEALIZED AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP IN *THE AVENGERS: EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES*

This thesis explores two elements of character design in select episodes from the animated series *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* (Disney XD 2010-2012) that guide audiences towards dominant readings of idealized American citizenship utilizing both close textual analysis and ideographic criticism. I argue that select episodes of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* contain representations of hyper-patriotic Americanized superheroes and un-American super villains which work together to teach viewers about dominant ideologies of Americanness and un-Americanness. In doing so, the text directs viewers towards a specific understanding of how to become idealized American (super)citizens.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION – THE CONSTITUTION OF (SUPER)CITIZENSHIP

Introduction

Each Saturday morning I am lucky enough that I am able to sit on the couch next to my young son and turn on the Vortexx programming block on the CW. We watch shows featuring superheroes such as Iron Man, the Amazing Spiderman, and the Justice League. It was in the hour of *Yu-Gi-Oh!* programming that I came to the realization that this experience has been transformative in my life. This weekly tradition has developed out of us not being able to watch television together for most of my son's first year of life and instead streaming entire series of shows on Netflix. Of those series, the animated superhero cartoon *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* (Disney XD 2010-2013) resonated the most and has provided me with insight into how I might become not only a better citizen but a better father as well.

The superhero genre has gained increasing popularity in recent years. Captain America has appeared across many media platforms from his comic book debut in March, 1941, to a 1944 film serial named after the title character which was the only Marvel film (then Timely Comics) for over forty years. Since 1998, Marvel has released over thirty films featuring franchises such as Blade (1998, 2002, and 2004), X-Men (2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2011, and 2013) and the Fantastic Four (2005, 2007). The most profitable of such franchises has been the film franchise dubbed the "Marvel Cinematic Universe" which began in 2008 with the release of *Iron Man* and *The Incredible Hulk*.¹ These two movies were followed by *Iron Man 2* (2010), *Thor* (2011), and *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), which laid the groundwork for *Marvel's The*

¹ Jon Favreau, *Iron Man*, film, performed by Robert Downey Jr., (2008, Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2008), DVD; Louis Leterrier, *The Incredible Hulk*, film, performed by Edward Norton, (2008, Universal City: CA, Universal Studios, 2008), DVD.

Avengers.² In 2012, *Marvel's The Avengers* made its way to U.S. theaters grossing over six-hundred and twenty-three million dollars and netting an estimated four-hundred million dollars profit.³ The franchise continued in 2013 with the release of *Iron Man 3*, which had an opening weekend box office that topped one-hundred and seventy four million dollars.⁴ *Iron Man 3* had the second largest opening weekend in the history of film, second to only *Marvel's The Avengers*.⁵ *Thor: The Dark World* advanced the franchise a step further in late 2013, making way for *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* in 2014, as well as *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Ant-Man* in 2015.⁶ In addition to these Hollywood films, Marvel and its partners have release multitude of ancillary products such as comic books, clothing, books, toys, costumes, and animated cartoons. As a result, scholars seeking to understand the rhetorical implications of the contemporary superhero genre have a plethora of texts on which to focus their analysis. This study engages just two episodes of the 2010 animated

² Jon Favreau, *Iron Man 2*, film, performed by Robert Downey Jr., (2010, Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2010), DVD; Kenneth Branagh, *Thor*, film, performed by Chris Hemsworth, (2011, Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2011), DVD; Joe Johnston, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, film, performed by Chris Evans, (2011, Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2011), DVD; Joss Whedon, *Marvel's The Avengers*, film, performed by Robert Downey Jr., (2012, Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios, 2012), DVD.

³ IMDB, "The Avengers (2012)," *IMDB.com*, access date 7/13/13, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0848228/?ref_=sr_1.

⁴ Shane Black, *Iron Man 3*, film, performed by Robert Downey Jr., (2013, Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios, 2013), DVD; "Iron Man 3 (2013)," *IMDB*, access date 7/13/13, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1300854/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

⁵ Four of the top-five biggest openings comprise of the superhero genre. Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* (4) and *The Dark Knight* (5) feature DC Comics's Batman. Franchises appear to greatly boost opening weekends. All of the top-fifteen opening box office weekends are films that are part of a franchise.

⁶ Alan Taylor, *Thor: The Dark World*, film, performed by Chris Hemsworth, (2013, Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios, 2013), DVD; Anthony Russo, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, film, performed by Chris Evans, (2014, Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios); James Gunn, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, film, performed by Vin Diesel, (2014, Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios); Joss Whedon, *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*, film, performed by Robert Downey Jr., (2015, Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios); Edgar Wright, *Ant-Man*, film, performed by Paul Rudd, (2015, Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios).

series *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*: "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier." My purpose is to conduct a preliminary examination of the ways in which these superhero texts construct and negotiate idealized American citizenship. Specifically, I argue that select episodes of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* contain representations of hyper-patriotic Americanized superheroes and un-American super villains which work together to teach viewers about dominant ideologies of Americanness and un-Americanness. In doing so, the text directs viewers towards a specific understanding of how to become idealized American (super)citizens. In the remainder of this chapter, I first ground my study in literature that explains how superhero texts have dominant readings that attempt to interpellate viewers using an ideological apparatus via media screens. Next, I outline my research methodology for critically assessing select *Captain America* texts for the elements that may have a constitutive effect on viewers. I conclude with an overview of the thesis' chapters.

Literature Review

The Death of the Hero

Citizen participation is a key indicator of any successful nation, and in the context of the United States, patriotism has been a key characteristic of "ideal" citizenship. In the early years of the nation, the frontier myth was a source by which citizens were able to develop their patriotism to become those ideal citizens. Richard Slotkin argues that storytellers use myths to develop genres such as a "credo, sermon or manifesto" in an effort to "articulat[e] ideological concepts directly and explicitly."⁷ The "American Dream," as well as tall tales about heroic American figures, functioned as tools for citizens to develop within the constraints of genre. Storytelling about patriotic heroes assisted in developing the antecedent constraints placed upon the concept

⁷ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in the Twentieth-century America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 4.

of "ideal citizenship." As notions of "ideal citizenship" developed in the United States, they became synonymous with the national mythos of "Americanness," which encapsulated these feelings of patriotism for citizens.

The word "hero," itself, "first appeared in the *Iliad*" and was used to represent "each free man who had participated in the Trojan Wars and *about whom a story could be told.*"⁸ Heroes have permeated culture from ancient Greek mythology to contemporary society. American heroes are longstanding figures in the mythos of the United States. They have taken many forms from the frontiersperson taming the Wild West to the contemporary superhero taking on forces of evil. A vast majority of these hero stories follow what Joseph Campbell calls the "monomyth." Campbell conceptualized the monomyth as the basic evolutionary story of heroic tales. It operates cyclically: An exigence exists that calls the hero to action; they and their band of allies face a challenge; they overcome the challenge and gain resolution.⁹ Douglas Mann argues that the monomyth readily applies to contemporary American cinema because it calls upon mythical archetypes that lay dormant among the collective unconscious of citizens.¹⁰ The linkage of media with Carl Jung's theory of collective unconscious allows for further analysis of the psychological effects that viewing of media has upon citizen participants.¹¹ Robert Davies, James Farrell, and Steven Matthews suggest that application of psychological theory can "offer insight into the

⁸ Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart, "The Hero as Communication Phenomenon," in *American Heroes in a Media Age*, ed. Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1994), 2.

⁹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York, NY: Princeton University Press, 1968), 15.

¹⁰ Douglas Mann, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces and its Application to Star Wars," *Academia.edu*, access date 9/7/2013, http://www.academia.edu/3118321/The_Hero_with_a_Thousand_Faces_and_its_Application_to_Star_Wars. Also see Douglas Mann, *Understanding Society: A Survey of Modern Social Theory*, ed. Douglas Mann (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London: Princeton University Press, 1996).

relationship between the film and the viewer, and can suggest the relevance of the film . . . to the society in which it arises."¹² Because of this, analysis of mediated texts is increasing in importance due to the fickle nature of nationhood. As Slavoj Žižek writes: "a nation exists only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and [is] transmitted through national myths or fantasies that secure [those] practices."¹³ The *jouissance* of scopophilic media viewing lies in the paradoxical nature of the citizen as a viewer. If the citizens were ideal to start with then there would be no need for hero figures in the first place.¹⁴

This project began when it was clear to me that superhero texts have imparted some effect on me, which I must analyze by looking at the intended message, or dominant reading, I receive as a passive viewer of the text, as well as my enunciation of what I have seen as an active viewer. What is clear is that media texts can have some effect amongst the people who view them and that pleasure seeking behavior is what largely powers that effect when one attempts to imitate in their real lives the images they see on television and movie screens. This study examines the textual strategies employed in specific televisual depictions of the ideograph of ideal citizenship with high levels of Americanness. As Rebecca Wanzo argues, "on one level, the randomness of the heroic narrative serves to emphasize how any citizen could change the world."¹⁵ By imagining oneself as the hero, one also imagines oneself as becoming the idolized chosen citizen.

¹² Robert A . Davies, James M. Farrell, and Steven S. Matthews, "The Dream World of Film: A Jungian Perspective on Cinematic Communication," *The Western Journal of Speech* 46 (1982), 327.

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 202.

¹⁴ Shaun Treat, "How America Learned to Stop Worrying and Cynically ENJOY! The Post-9/11 Superhero Zeitgeist," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6 (2009): 107.

¹⁵ Rebecca Wanzo, "Meditations on Surveillance, Salvation, and Desire," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6 (2009): 95.

In his discussion of the cinematic apparatus, Jean-Louis Baudry's explains that media screens can have an intense impact on viewers' understanding of the world.¹⁶ Screens function as ideological apparatuses, binding audiences to the screen through the process of interpellation in which subjects are “hailed” by discourses.¹⁷ Louis Althusser argues that citizens are always-already prepared to heed this call because they are pre-programmed to do so.¹⁸ You are acknowledging that you are the speaker’s subject because you are always-already prepared to heed when they call. The speaker has not only piqued your interest but they have garnered your attention and are now capable of using resources that you possess, such as time, attention, and energy. When a television show interpellates a viewer, it taps into the viewer’s consciousness and is able to influence the viewer's thought. The viewer of media "sees reality" when they view the text, even if it requires one to suspend disbelief for the duration. The experience is encapsulating.

In order to explore the viewer/screen relationship more fully, this study will assess the ways in which viewing bonds the viewer and screen together, forging an ideological relationship between the two. Structurally, the ideological apparatus "[re-centers] or at least [displaces] the center [to] ensure the setting up of the subject as an active center and origin of meaning."¹⁹ Therefore, the viewer of the screen believes that the screen truly directs its message towards

¹⁶ Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshal Cohen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 206-223; Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in *Film and Theory Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171-188.

¹⁷ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 174; Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133-150.

¹⁸ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," 174.

¹⁹ Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus," 356.

them. This creates both a "knowledge effect" and an "ideological effect" that constitutes viewers as the subject of the screen.²⁰ Knowledge effects are the empirical nature of the text. Ideological effects induce behavior. Furthermore, the goal of projection by the apparatus is to take the many separate frames and efface the differences between them creating the "illusion of continuity."²¹ Continuity of the images is important for creating and maintaining the cinematic experience because disruption of the continuity becomes a reminder of the world in which the viewer becomes absent during the more-than-real experience of viewing mediated texts. This is important because, from the perspective of this study, participants must enter the screened reality and allow the superhero to become a metaphor for oneself in order for the text to interpellate the viewer. The dominant reading tells viewers that they too can carry the qualities of the ideal American citizen (the superhero or (super)citizen) into the real world. This happens through the bonded relationship viewers create with the cinematographic apparatus because "projection and reflection take place in a closed space, and to those who remain there, whether they know it or not (but they do not), find themselves chained, captured, or captivated."²² The text will not affect every viewer, but the potential of affecting viewers who are influential in their peer groups or communities gives weight the power of these texts. The text only need interpellate the right viewers.

The concept of bonding is important to remember because while the viewer remains captivated by the image, it is just that, a reflection of an "image (an idea)," not a reflection of reality.²³ Instead, the image is a reflection of ideology, and by centering the subject, the dominant ideology creates "an apparatus destined to obtain a precise ideological effect, necessary

²⁰ Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus," 359.

²¹ Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus," 359.

²² Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus," 362.

²³ Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus," 362.

to the dominant ideology, creating a phantasmaticization of the subject."²⁴ The ideology then perpetuates based on repression of the knowledge of the apparatus. The model can only function if the subject remains knowingly unaware of the process as it unfolds. The text draws viewers in only to take a piece of the ideological apparatus with them when they return to the real world. The bond formed is a covalency in which the charged real-life experience of the viewer and the charged more-than-real experience combine to have an impact in the life of the viewer. Ideological screens may draw from both active and passive media effects paradigms, covalency requires viewers to experience both.

The metaphor of bonding explains the viewers' subservience to the screened ideological and real ideological apparatuses. Plato's cave allegory makes the analogy complete by arguing that viewers (the prisoners) desire to have the world represented through an alternate medium that can help rationalize the world to them. This creates a production cycle of ideological citizenship because "without his [sic] always suspecting it, the subject is induced to produce machines which . . . could represent his own overall functioning to him: he is led to produce mechanisms mimicking, simulating the apparatus which is no other than himself."²⁵ Baudry explains that the production cycle of ideology places the viewer into a perpetually reliant relationship with the apparatus because the viewer bonds with the ideology in order to maintain the more-than-real experience, which viewers find more pleasurable than the "normal waking situation."²⁶ In bonding the viewer with the screen, the text informs the viewers about the hegemonically empowered ideology displayed in the media text. One could extrapolate the

²⁴ Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus," 364.

²⁵ Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," 199.

²⁶ Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," 199.

screening of ideology as possible by a State apparatus as well. The subject position of the enactor of the apparatus places itself in a power relationship with the viewer where the apparatus positions the viewer as the subordinate. The viewer must submit to the ideological metaphors displayed by the apparatus in order to maintain the more-than-real experience.

In order for interpellation to be successful, the viewer must maintain an ideal relationship with the screen, because by getting too close to the apparatus (metaphorically) the viewer becomes too knowing of the experience and the more-than-real experience is lost. If the viewer gets too far away from the apparatus, the recognition of the symbols that represent the ideology to create the power relationship is lost.²⁷ Although the viewer may resist interpellation from the ideological apparatus, it is the responsibility of the enactor of the ideological apparatus to ensure that it interpellates the viewer—the text must interpellate the viewer, not the other way around. The viewer and screen must maintain an ideal amount of allusion to the real world that exists in tandem with the more-than-real experience of viewing the illusion of ideology. If either allusion or illusion becomes too prominent in the screened relationship, then the binding experience will fail and the apparatus will fail to create a power relationship with the viewer. If the apparatus succeeds in interpellating the viewer, informing them about the dominant reading of the text, it must still maintain a balance of allusion and illusion. If the apparatus does not maintain that balance, then a “revolution of ideology” can occur.²⁸

²⁷ Gaither Stewart, “Symbolism, Ideology, and Revolution,” *Counter Currents*, March 14, 2008, <http://www.countercurrents.org/stewart140308.htm>. Ideal Relationship is a concept I am developing and it refers to maintaining the correct distance needed for the viewer to be both close enough to become immersed but far enough to prevent recognition of the screen. The discussion of the illusion/allusion relationship is where the term developed. If the viewer maintains the correct distance from the apparatus, then the "screened reality" displayed by the apparatus will succeed in interpellating the viewer.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, "On Power," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*. ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 96-109.

The apparatus produces what media scholar Henry Jenkins calls the moral economy—the “social expectations, emotional investments, and cultural transactions which create a shared understanding between all participants within an economic exchange.”²⁹ The imprisonment of the cinematic experience becomes both a means of production of citizenship as well as a medium of reproducing the means of production while satisfying the social contract of the screen and the viewer. The sustaining of these relationships is what Karl Marx says will reproduce the means of production to sustain life. In the case of media, it reproduces the bonded relationship. In addition, Marx argues that people behave according to their relationship with the dominant apparatus in order to create definitions of reality. The “social consciousness” of one’s position in comparison to the dominant class or apparatus produces economic structures. Marx says “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.”³⁰ Development of one’s consciousness is the foundation to transforming “the whole immense superstructure.”³¹ Development can only occur based on one’s relationship to the ideological apparatus, which defines one’s consciousness because it tells those who view the apparatus what is ideal and what is real.³²

By creating these definite relationships via the apparatus, the subject enters into a social contract that empowers the hegemonic ideology of the screen that invited in the viewer. The enactor of the ideological apparatus utilizes the infrastructure—the means of production, in this case citizenship—to transform and thus perpetuate the superstructure, which includes the State

²⁹ Henry Jenkins, “The Moral Economy of Web 2.0 (Part One)”. *The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, published March 18, 2008, access date 9/7/2013, http://henryjenkins.org/2008/03/the_m2oral_economy_of_web_20_pa.html.

³⁰ Karl Marx, “Economic Manuscripts: Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,” *Marxists.org*, access date 9/7/2013, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.

³¹ Marx, “Economic Manuscripts.”

³² Marx, “Economic Manuscripts.”

and ideologies contained within. Henceforth infrastructure can be understood as the human component of production, the labor and citizenry, and superstructure can be understood as hegemonic ideologies, especially those perpetuated by the State made up of the repressive state apparatus and the ideological apparatus. The definite relationship, or, more specifically, the parasocial relationship, reflects the image of the apparatus off of the viewer back into the viewer's reality. It hopes to convert the passive viewer into an additional active screen as a part of the production and reproduction cycle.

In order to create an infinite chain of productive cycles, the enactor of the apparatus must reproduce the means of production and the force behind those means, namely labor.³³ In creating a reproductive labor cycle the worker is given the "wherewithal to pay for housing, food and clothing, in short to enable the wage earner to present himself [sic] again at the factory gate the next day – and every further day God grants him); and we should add: indispensable for raising and educating the children in whom the proletarian reproduces himself as labour power."³⁴ Reproduction of the labor cycle requires not just the wages given to meet the minimum needs for sustenance of workers but also necessitates giving them the tools required to perpetuate the cycle. Althusser explains that the citizenry, the State, and the State's hegemonic ideology maintain their tiered superstructure only if they are supported by the infrastructure base.³⁵ Viewers must continually participate as the infrastructure of the ideological apparatus—as the labor force of production. Citizenship perpetuates itself, then, through repeated storytelling of ideal citizenship displayed in both classical heroes and contemporary media.

³³ Infinite Chain is perhaps not the best term because it is not forever infinite, but it is a perpetually repeated chain until revolution.

³⁴ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," 110.

³⁵ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," 90.

The hero's journey is a form of rhetoric in which the text constitutes ideal citizens through personal projections of identification with the hero's journey. Kenneth Burke explains that identification occurs when one person perceives shared interests with another.³⁶ This linkage allows one to remain uniquely individual but also "substantially one" with another person as they act together consubstantially—they share an intrinsic nature of being.³⁷ Maurice Charland utilizes Burkean identification to argue that a text can form a constitutive community through the power of identification with an ideological apparatus. The hero's journey is one such text in that it invites identification from viewers, so that they might feel substantially one with the hero as well as others who have identified with the hero. Contemporary media, however, present heroes as a dying breed.³⁸ The American hero of folklore is dead because legendary tales of heroism are no longer believable—listeners can quickly deconstruct them as tall tales. Actual acts of heroism, such as those displayed by Joe Andruzzi, a former New England Patriot football player who helped carry people to safety after the bombing at the Boston Marathon in 2013, receive praise in the short term, but the media rapidly marginalizes these hero figures.³⁹ They receive their fifteen minutes of fame, and then next hero replaces them. Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart attribute the hero's downfall to the advent of "Freudian [looking] inward and Nietzschean pleasure seeking" in a massively mediated economy. Citizens simply desire celebrity in the contemporary world, not heroism.⁴⁰ Celebrities receive the modern-day idolized heroic treatment.

³⁶ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 20.

³⁷ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 21.

³⁸ Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*," 133-150.

³⁹ Chuck Schilken, "Boston Bombings: Ex-Patriot Joe Andruzzi Carries Woman to Safety," *LA Times* (Los Angeles, CA), April 16, 2013. [Http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/16/sports/la-sp-sn-boston-marathon-joe-andruzzi-20130416](http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/16/sports/la-sp-sn-boston-marathon-joe-andruzzi-20130416).

⁴⁰ Drucker and Cathcart, "The Hero as Communication Phenomenon," in Drucker and Cathcart, *American Heroes in a Media Age*, 4-5.

Lance Strate believes certain technological advances to be a catalyst for the downfall of the hero figure, arguing that "with the presence of a means to store information outside of collective memory, the heavy figures of myth and legend were no longer necessary, and greater numbers of lighter heroes were made possible."⁴¹ Strate mentions writing as having reduced the ability of disseminating the mythic hero, and as time passed, heroes became more and more human—weaker and worthy of commemoration but "not of worship."⁴² The development of radio and television, the growth of the movie industry, and the invention of the internet has furthered this weakening of the hero. Although technology is not the sole reason heroes have become a marginalized concept, it has contributed greatly to their weakened status. The hero inherently becomes more flawed as viewers become aware of the tallness of the tall tale. Suddenly, it becomes practice to question heroism; the heroes are dead and the media has killed them. Instead, US-American citizens are relegated to watch celebrities such as Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi who laments of feeling "like a pilgrim from the friggin' 20s washing clothes in the sink" during *Jersey Shore's* season two premier.⁴³ As Janice Hocker Rushing notes, "the old heroic myth, once essential and glorious, has run its course."⁴⁴ The hero is dead, and celebrities have taken its place. The death of the hero leaves a gaping hole that requires filling in the constitution of idealized American citizenship.

Although the connections between the hero myth and American citizenship may not be immediately clear, the figure of an "ideal" citizen often incorporates the iconography of hero

⁴¹ Lance Strate, "Heroes: A Communication Perspective," in Drucker and Cathcart, *American Heroes in a Media Age*, 18.

⁴² Strate, "Heroes: A Communication Perspective," 18.

⁴³ "Goin' South," *Jersey Shore*, Television, performed by Nicole Polizzi (2010; Miami, FL: 495 Productions), aired July 29, 2010.

⁴⁴ Janice Hocker Rushing, "Evolution Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*: Patriarchal Co-Optation of the Female Archetype," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75 (1989): 21.

figures. Drucker and Cathcart explain that the “Hero myth, in particular, has been studied as an important manifestation of the struggle to understand the world, to make order of crisis and chaos, and to bring understanding to the unexplained and unexplainable.”⁴⁵ In order to understand the world and conquer the chaos, the citizen must conquer the place that they occupy, such as the frontier, to become (super)heroes.

Rushing's analysis of *Alien* and *Aliens* speaks of the "New Frontier" being the hero's personal Hell but also a unique space in which to develop citizenship.⁴⁶ When the main characters travel to space, the last frontier, there is no identifiable Other to which the characters can compare to establish hierarchy. Joseph Campbell says this is "partly because the exploration of outer space tends to coincide with the exploration of inner space, the voyagers . . . look *in* as well as *out*" and "partly because the New Frontier contains no more objectively verifiable occupant-enemies to serve as scapegoats."⁴⁷ The former is a major factor in the death of the hero, while the construction of (super) citizens prevents the latter. Viewers are capable of suspending disbelief due to the psychoanalytic nature of viewing television and other media texts. Viewers want to identify with the heroes on the screen even though they subconsciously know that the character is not real.

Other theorists believe national fables construct citizenship through a culture of fear. Wanzo suggests that "citizens might sacrifice principles and freedom—to alleviate isolation, powerlessness, and despair."⁴⁸ In times of crisis, Wanzo writes, citizens will seek leadership from powerful groups who govern society. If this is true, then citizens may deflect the

⁴⁵ Drucker and Cathcart, "The Hero as Communication Phenomenon," 2.

⁴⁶ Rushing, "Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in *Alien* and *Aliens*," 12.

⁴⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and Religion* (New York: Alfred van der Marck Editions, 1986).

⁴⁸ Wanzo, "The Superhero: Meditations on Surveillance, Salvation, and Desire," 96.

responsibility of developing citizenship critically but instead develop citizenship through participation in social norms. This is important to consider due to the effect that opinion leaders can have on social normalization in their personal relationships. Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet found that opinion leaders, and this means any ordinary citizen who is capable of influencing others around them, are capable of changing behavior patterns of those around them, such as voting patterns in an election. These opinion leaders may have an even stronger effect than if the non-critical citizen had viewed the initial message such as a campaign ad or television show themselves, because social normalization is an important factor in participation.⁴⁹ Because the opinion leader shares the message, the non-critical citizen listens. With participation as a primary factor in developing citizens, media texts can constitute "ideal" or "better citizens" through careful use of the ideological apparatus. The apparatus does not need to interpellate every viewer, if it can interpellate the opinion leaders of a community. Participation as social practice may lead to the perpetuation of national myths of good citizenship in which citizens participate not only as law-abiding citizens but also as law-preserving citizens.

The Birth of the Superhero

With the hero fading into the background of contemporary society, it becomes increasingly important to investigate rhetorical strategies that appropriate technology in the constitution of citizenship. While the classic America hero was unable to survive as technology advanced, the superhero has flourished in a mediated economy. Therefore, examination of these mediated texts will help to identify the ideographs that comprise ideal American citizenship in the superhero genre. In order to understand the effects of superheroes on contemporary society,

⁴⁹ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, "The People's Choice: how the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign," in *The Audience Studies Reader*, ed. Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 13-17.

one must understand the relationship between heroism and national mythos through the use of superhero character archetypes. The popularity of superheroes bolsters this notion as they function similarly to the "dead" hero but also conveniently fit into twenty-two minute episodic adventures.

What then, one may ask, makes a superhero different than a regular hero? The superhero is always a mutation of the hero, an imperfection that allows him/her to continue when a real hero would falter or fade. When the cycle perpetually repeats, the hero may eventually die on the journey but the superhero is able to avoid death for much longer than the normal citizen, and even the normal hero. Superheroes are capable of overcoming odds that mere mortals cannot. They seem at times impervious to the anguish, pain, and difficulties they face when fighting "evil." Most importantly, superheroes repeat these feats of heroism on a constant basis in each text within which they appear. Drucker and Cathcart argue that heroism is "a social rather than a private impulse," but this is not true of superheroes.

As shown in a multitude of comics, animated series, and blockbuster movies, superheroism is quite the converse.⁵⁰ Superman, Spiderman, and Batman all seek to obfuscate their "true" identity when they undertake the role of a superhero. This is partially because a vast majority of superheroes become superheroes after becoming orphaned, or at least losing a close loved one to crime. The other reason for the "anonymity imperative" is to avoid celebrity status. These two attributes combine to allow media focus on the character (persona) but not the person.⁵¹ This fits well into contemporary "reality" television, which heavily focuses on the

⁵⁰ Drucker and Cathcart, "The Hero as Communication Phenomenon," 5.

⁵¹ There are some superheroes that do not function under the veil of anonymity, but it is a rarity. Tony Stark/Iron man is the most popular of such cases. Steve Rogers/Captain America did not reveal his identity publicly until the 2000s when he abandoned his Captain America persona and allowed his sidekick to take up the mantle.

development of persona for celebrities. Spiderman is a superhero, but Peter Parker is a lowly photographer for the local newspaper. While superheroes may fulfill social needs, it is often the private impulse, which drives them to do so.

The same media outlets that "killed the hero" have offered superheroes as a substitution because of their ability to function in the sound bite era. This may be because of two important traits superheroes have that allow them to thrive within a mass mediated economy: Most superheroes are also super-human and superheroes never fade away. While superheroes may possess human qualities, they possess them in drastically higher quantities that make them behave differently than "real people." The laws of the real world cannot subjugate superheroes because the superhero is beyond them. Superheroes have superpowers and/or indestructible weapons to fight their evil arch-nemeses. A superhero's sense of justice and will power are unbreakable. In the face of defeat a superhero will fight to the death because his/her inherent sense of what is right significantly trumps his or her inherent sense of fear in the face of danger. Superheroes are better equipped to defend "Truth" and "Justice" due to their superhuman traits.

Due to the mediated nature of superheroism, even in death, a superhero never fades away. After passing, superheroes often make cameos in flashbacks and recollection of other superheroes in the same universe. Dead superheroes are consistently reappearing as icons of the traits they carried prior to their death. Throughout the larger story arc of *Captain America*, both Steve Rogers (Captain America) and James Barnes (Bucky/Winter Soldier) are "killed" twice but their image lives on in the minds of both their comrades and in the eyes of the American people they serve. If a superhero should ever die, they can re-live in the chaotic perpetuity of the universe through cameos and the power of a series re-boot. This gives superheroes a constant

ability to re-interpellate viewers with each additional comic book, television show, and summer blockbuster.

Citizens may also navigate the superhero universe in order to navigate their own lives. As argued by both Thomas Andrae and Shaun Treat, the superhero myth is necessary because viewers translate social evils into personal evils within the context of the superhero mythos.⁵² Identification with the superhero combined with feelings that the super villain is attacking them personally provides a dominant reading where viewers are encouraged to mimic the superhero, so they too may defeat evil. Thus, when superheroes display characteristics of extreme nationalism, the text provides viewer-participants a dominant reading that encourages them to be more patriotic, like the characters they watch on television. This study will consider the elements that encourage viewer-citizens to appropriate and/or personalize the evil done to Captain America by his Nazi arch-nemesis into evil done to them. This may cause citizens to want to inherit the qualities of Captain America because he is able to overcome those tribulations and, ultimately, defeat evil. Wanzo explains that dominant superhero archetypes are often "interrogations of what kinds of identities and ideologies are cast as ideal in US culture and, as such, are useful springboards for discussing ideological mainstays informing narratives of good American citizenship."⁵³ This provides opportunity for discussions about the archetypes as well as the text in its entirety in an effort to convert and disseminate the ideology of the text.

This study examines the ways that textual development of superhero, super-villain, and anti-hero characters, hails the viewer towards a dominant reading of the text through continued

⁵² Thomas Andrae, "From Menace to Messiah: The History and Historicity of Superman," in *American Media and Mass Culture*, (Ed.) Donald Lazere (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 124-138; Treat, "How America Learned to Stop Worrying and Cynically ENJOY! The Post-9/11 Superhero Zeitgeist," 103-109.

⁵³ Wanzo, "The Superhero: Meditations on Surveillance, Salvation, and Desire," 93.

use of character archetypes. That dominant reading informs the viewer about the ideological constraints, and more importantly, the ideological apparatus of the media text. It also informs viewers how they might become a more ideal citizen by transferring the qualities of the idealized American citizen in the show into their actions in the real world. Producing and reproducing citizens in this way allows the apparatus to manipulate the dominant reading so that it constitutes the viewers as "ideal American citizens" even though what is ideal may shift over time.⁵⁴

Who are Captain America, Winter Soldier, and Red Skull?

This thesis focuses primarily on three characters from the 2010 animated superhero cartoon *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. Before I begin my analysis, I'd like to give some contextual history of the characters that I will discuss in-depth in the pages that follow. *The Avengers* is a Marvel Comics franchise that debuted in September of 1963.⁵⁵ The Avengers are a group of superheroes who unite in order to fight the greatest of evils and were Marvel's response to DC Comics's Justice League of America.⁵⁶ *The Avengers* franchise drives the Marvel Cinematic Universe discussed earlier in this thesis. While the original team consisted of Iron Man, Ant-Man, Wasp, Thor, and the Hulk, Captain America joined the Avengers in *The Avengers #4* in 1964.⁵⁷

Steve Rogers, better known as Captain America, originally debuted in December of 1940 in *Captain America #1* for Marvel's predecessor, Timely Comics.⁵⁸ Created by Joe Simon and

⁵⁴ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," 89.

⁵⁵ [Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (a), Dick Ayers (i),] "The Coming of The Avengers!," *The Avengers #1* (Sep. 1963), Marvel Comics Group.

⁵⁶ Stan Lee, *Origins of Marvel Comics*, (New York City, New York: Simon and Schuster/A Fireside Book, 1974), 16.

⁵⁷ [Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (a), George Roussos (i),] "Captain America Joins... The Avengers!," *The Avengers #4* (Mar. 1964), Marvel Comics Group.

⁵⁸ [Joe Simon and Jack Kirby (w), Joe Simon and Jack Kirby (a), Al Liederman (i),] "Meet Captain America," *Captain America #1* (Mar. 1941), Timely Comics. *Captain America #1*

Jack Kirby, this ultra-patriotic character was a frail but brave young man who allowed the U.S. Army to inject him with a super soldier serum so that he could aid the war efforts of the Allies against the Axis powers during World War II. While popular during World War II, Timely Comics discontinued *Captain America* by 1950.⁵⁹ Captain America was reintroduced as an Avenger in 1964 in a storyline that suggested that he had disappeared after being frozen deep in the Atlantic Ocean after falling from a drone plane near the end of World War II. Soon after resurfacing as an Avenger, Captain America continued his fight against evil and became a leader of the Avengers. Throughout his history, Captain America has stood in as an icon for a variety of social justice movements. In the 1940s and 1950s, Captain America fought against Nazism and the Axis powers. In the 1960s and 1970s Captain America spoke out against the U.S. government for its involvement in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal by abandoning his Captain America persona and becoming the Nomad.⁶⁰ Rogers would eventually resume his identity as Captain America in 1989. Ultimately, Steve Rogers/Captain America would appear across a variety of comics including his own title series, *The Avengers*, and a variety of cameo appearances in other Marvel features.

This thesis also features two supporting characters from the *Captain America* franchise: Winter Soldier and Red Skull. James "Bucky" Barnes is the best friend and sidekick of Captain

has a cover date of March, 1941 but was released in December of 1940. Cover dates are the dates put on the front of the comic but often do not correspond with the actual publication date of the comic. Typically, a cover date will be two to three months after publication. I cite the comics in this thesis using the cover dates of each issue.

⁵⁹ In 1953, Timely Comics, now called Atlas Comics, released a new Captain America series, however, it flopped, and Atlas re-discontinued the series.

⁶⁰ [Steve Englehart (w), Sal Buscema (a), Vince Coletta (i),] "The Coming of the Nomad," *Captain America* #180 (Dec. 1974), Marvel Comics Group.

America during World War II.⁶¹ Bucky, too, disappeared near the end of World War II in the same drone explosion as Captain America. Like Captain America, it was assumed that Barnes died in the explosion and the body was never recovered by U.S. forces.⁶² A Russian patrol submarine would recover Barnes's mangled body. When Barnes awoke, he suffered from amnesia. Because he had lost his memory, his captors introduced him to the Weapon X program.⁶³ There, he would receive a bionic arm from the program and began doing wetwork missions for the Russian government.⁶⁴ It was then that he took up the identity of the Winter Soldier.

Johann Schmidt, better known as the Red Skull, is the Nazi arch nemesis of Captain America, and as later revealed, the person who brainwashed Bucky into becoming the Winter Soldier. He, too, made his comic debut in *Captain America #1*. Schmidt was the leader of a special weapons division of HYDRA and the first to inject himself with a prototype of the super soldier serum that gave Captain America his strength. Unfortunately, the serum was not stable. Schmidt received the benefits of the serum, but the serum horribly disfigured Schmidt. He then became Red Skull, Hitler's right-hand man and a staunch leader of the Nazi movement across Europe. Captain America received a stable version of the super soldier serum as the United States's response to the Red Skull.

Captain America, Winter Soldier, and Red Skull are the three most iconic characters from the *Captain America* comic series. However, they have not only been successful in the comic

⁶¹[Fabian Nicieza (w), Kevin Maguire and Kevin West (a), Terry Austin (i),] "Battleground: Paris," *Adventures of Captain America* #3 (Dec. 1991), Marvel Comics Group; [Fabian Nicieza (w), Kevin West and Steve Carr (a), Terry Austin (i),] "Angels of Death, Angels of Hope," *Adventures of Captain America* #4 (Jan. 1992), Marvel Comics Group

⁶² [Roy Thomas (w), John Buscerna (a), George Klein (i),] "Death Be Not Proud," *Avengers* #56 (Sep. 1968), Marvel Comics Group.

⁶³ This is the same program that developed another popular Marvel character: Wolverine.

⁶⁴ Wetwork is a euphemism for murder or assassination missions.

world. The *Captain America* franchise has been extremely successful at moving across media platforms. Prior to his discontinuation, Captain America was the first superhero to cross platforms with the 1944 movie serial titled *Captain America*.⁶⁵ He returned in 1966 with his own television series titled *Captain America*.⁶⁶ He had two TV movies in 1979 with *Captain America* and *Captain America II: Death Too Soon*.⁶⁷ Following a decade long hiatus, he once again returned to the big screen in 1990 with *Captain America*.⁶⁸ In 2009, Disney bought Marvel and set into motion the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which has released two Captain America feature films in *Captain America: The First Avengers* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* in 2011 and 2014 respectively.⁶⁹ A third *Captain America* feature film is set for release in 2016.⁷⁰ Captain America had two video games title after him with 1991's *Captain America and the Avengers* and 2011's *Captain America: Super Soldier*, which coincided with the release of *Captain America: The First Avenger*.⁷¹

The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes is but one of many animated texts from *The Avengers* franchise. While there are a handful of animated movies featuring The Avengers, or individual characters from the franchise, *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* is unique

⁶⁵ Elmer Clifton and John English, *Captain America*, movie serial, performed by Dick Purcell (1944; Los Angeles, CA: Republic Pictures, 1944), film.

⁶⁶ Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, *Captain America*, television serial, performed by Arthur Pierce (1966; New York City, NY: Marvel Enterprises), television.

⁶⁷ Rod Holcomb, *Captain America*, television movie, performed by Reb Brown, (1979; Universal City, CA: Universal TV), film; Ivan Nagy, *Captain America II: Death Too Soon*, television movie, performed by Reb Brown, (1979; Universal City, CA: Universal TV), film.

⁶⁸ Albert Pyun, *Captain America*, film, performed by Matt Salinger, (1990; New York City, NY: Marvel Enterprises, 1992), DVD.

⁶⁹ Joe Johnston, *Captain America: The First Avenger*; Anthony Russo, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*.

⁷⁰ Brian Truitt, "Third 'Captain America' Movie to Arrive in 2016," *USA Today*, published April 7, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2014/04/07/captain-america-3-movie-release-date/7421275>.

⁷¹ *Captain America and the Avengers* (Sega Genesis version); *Captain America: Super Soldier* (PS3 version).

because of the episodic nature of the series, which has unique constraints for its audiences. *The Avengers* was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby while *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* was produced by Marvel Animation and distributed by Disney-ABC Domestic Television. The series debuted on Disney XD in 2010, just one year after Disney bought Marvel Enterprises. It began as a mini-series on both television and online to introduce the characters to the audience. Disney later combined each character's mini-series of episodes to create one coherent episode, which are now available for viewing in their entirety on both DVD and Netflix. The second season of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* aired in 2012, wrapping up the series.

The series' primary cast consists of Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, The Hulk, Hawkeye, Ant-Man, and the Wasp, with cameos and vignettes featuring many other Marvel properties. Episodes typically begin with a villain unfolding a new, more-evil plot to take over the United States and one or more of the Avengers formulating a plan to stop the villain. This cycle is repeated on both an episode basis, and across multiple episodes in a story arc. While some episodes divert entirely from the main story arc of the season, all of the Avengers complete each season working together to stop the most evil villain who seeks to destroy the universe at the time.

The two episodes included in this thesis, "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier," were broadcast in the two weeks prior to Disney XD's most watched month of programming ever in October of 2012. October 2012 was the second most viewed month in the history of Disney's prime time network in the Kids 6-14 and Kids 6-11 categories, and received the most total

viewers in the history of the month of October due in part to *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*.⁷²

Noel Kirkpatrick, a blogger and co-founder of Monsters in Television and This Was Television, lauds *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* as "the most enjoyable comic book superhero series on tv [at the time]" while offering a "pleasant contrast" to the darker DC Comics programming also available at the time.⁷³ While this is true, I should note that these two episodes do include darker themes than the typical nature of the series. Notably, the violence in these episodes is graphic for a television show targeting young audiences, but it also makes these two episodes stand out from the rest. The series as a whole received positive reviews including an 8.5/10 over 6,068 reviews on IMDB, while also receiving an 8.0 for season two over 27 reviews on Metacritic.⁷⁴ The series fits well into the larger body of Marvel's universe using characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as well as creating licensing opportunities for merchandise sales.

The *Captain America* franchise has pervaded popular U.S.-American culture for over seven decades, transversing a variety of platforms and socio-political eras. One thing has always remained: Captain America is the ideal American citizen and he continues to this day to fight for his beliefs in the American Dream. Much like the hero figures of antiquity, Captain America fills

⁷² Sarah Bible, "Disney XD Delivers Number 1 Month of All Time in October 2012," *TVbytheNumbers*, published 10/30/2012, <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2012/10/30/disney-xd-delivers-number-1-month-of-all-time-in-october-2012/155362>.

⁷³ Noel Kirkpatrick, "Why All Animation Fans Should Be Watching The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes," *TV.com*, published 6/30/2012, <http://www.tv.com/news/why-all-animation-fans-should-be-watching-the-avengers-earths-mightiest-heroes-28998/>

⁷⁴ "The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes (TV Series 2010-2012)," *IMDB*, publication access date 2/3/2014, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1626038>; "The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes – Season 2 Reviews," *Metacritic*, access date 2/3/2014, <http://www.metacritic.com/tv/the-avengers-earths-mightiest-heroes>.

the role of the superior citizen who continues to fight evil when nobody else can. This thesis is an exploration into how he goes about doing just that.

Methodology

This project uses two distinct methods of analysis. First, I engage in rhetorical analysis of the episodes "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" from *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* to identify elements of the superhero genre, which the text uses to construct character archetypes.⁷⁵ I then augment my examination of the generic features of each narrative with an ideographic analysis of the superhero, super villain, and anti-heroes character archetypes.⁷⁶

It is necessary to analyze the superhero genre in this way because of the fragmented nature of the texts. Michael Calvin McGee argues that rhetorical critics must analyze a text within its context in order to piece together complicated fragments in contemporary cultural conditions.⁷⁷ "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" exist within a complicated web of the superhero genre, *Captain America* and *The Avengers* as series, as well as comics, film, and television as a medium, and Americanness as an experience for the viewer. Viewers must navigate this complicated web to find meaning. McGee says, "The only way to 'say it all' in our fractured culture is to provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue *them* to

⁷⁵ In order to alleviate confusion due to the many uses of the term "Winter Soldier" in this paper: *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is a Marvel Studios film scheduled for release in 2014. "Winter Soldier" with quotation marks refers to the text I analyze from the 2010 animated television series *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. Winter Soldier without quotation marks refers to the character, he is also referred to as James Barnes, and Bucky. In addition, *Captain America* in italics refers to the collection of mediated texts featuring Steve Rogers/Captain America. Captain America without italics refers to the character within those mediated texts.

⁷⁶ Michael Calvin McGee, "The Ideograph': A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 1-16.

⁷⁷ Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990), 274-289.

produce a finished discourse in their minds."⁷⁸ The text speaks to viewers in order to give them the experiential fragments, the interpretation of the text, which the viewer must then organize to construct the text and find out what it means.

I examine American (super)heroes and anti-American (super)villains together as vehicles for explicit displays of Americanness and un-Americanness. I also assess the ways that an "anti"-American anti-heroes may function as an intermediary of the superhero and super villain binary. I selected "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" because of their ability to identify models for constituting Americanness.⁷⁹ Two specific elements illuminate how these select episodes provide a model for idealized American Citizenship: the use of visual elements to create dominant readings, which invite affective and aesthetic responses, and the use of elements of temporality to progress narratives about regaining one's Americanness when it is lost. Although the text constructs superheroes, super villains, and anti-heroes in vastly different ways, all of these character archetypes function rhetorically to constitute the ideal American citizen.

Overview of Chapters

The thesis includes four chapters. Chapter 2 assesses the text's visual elements to consider the affective response invited by the physical characteristics of some characters and the aesthetic response invited by the costuming of other characters. Chapter 3 analyzes the way these texts utilize elements of temporality to assist or prevent narrative progression, arguing that both the linear timing of the episode and the cyclical timeline that haunts Captain America and Winter Soldier are indicative of how one might lose and regain one's Americanness. Chapter 4 offers conclusions, limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

⁷⁸ McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," 288.

⁷⁹ *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, performed by Eric Loomis (2010; Burbank, CA: Film Roman Productions), television.

CHAPTER II: COSTUMES AS SPACE, REDNESS AS AESTHETIC

In the constitution of ideal American citizenship, visual aesthetics are important to consider for both the affective and effective responses they invite from their audiences. Superhero texts, such as *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, function rhetorically to inform media audiences about what "proper" citizenship looks, feels, and sounds like.⁸⁰ In doing so, *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* serves as a pedagogical tool for how one might participate in "proper" patriotic American citizenship if one were to model oneself after the idealized characters in these episodes. While affective stimuli, such as visual aesthetics, may inform viewers about what ideal American citizenship looks like, it also informs viewers about anti-Americanness as well. Through the usage of space and place, *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* serves as an ideological apparatus useful for the constitution of hyper-patriotic citizenship by showing viewers the "proper" forms of behavior within society. To identify those forms, one must analyze the visual aesthetics of Americanness and un-Americanness to identify the prevalent schemas within the text, which guide viewers towards the dominant reading of a polysemic text. Through those schemas, *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* provides a platform to educate viewers about romanticized, idealized American citizenship.

⁸⁰ In the context of this thesis, proper citizenship refers to a model set forth by Captain America within the confines of select episodes from *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. This study utilizes Captain America because he serves as a role model for other superheroes, and the citizens of the United States. It is important to remember that this study draws its view of idealized American citizenship from a Western animated cartoon, and provides an ethnocentric view of what an ideal citizen should be. It is not representative of all American people, but rather fits the mold of a White, patriarchal hero figures. The model described in this study utilizes how Captain America looks as indicative of his Americanness. When looking strong, brave, and confident, Captain America is able to embody the American Dream. When he does not have these traits, he is unable to do so.

The watching of film and television invites an affective experience for viewers. Affect, in the context of television viewership, is defined as the emotions or feelings elicited by the text from the audience. These feelings may be evoked by numerous facets of the text, including visual constructions and character development. Once activated, these affective responses may be able to encourage the viewer to behave in particular ways in their personal lives due to the parasocial relationship formed with characters on the screen. A parasocial relationship is a one-sided interpersonal relationship where only one party knows a great deal about the other, such as intense media fandom where the celebrity is unaware of the individual fan. The affect felt during viewership may shape viewers behavior in the real world, making the ideologies present in the screened experience also present in the real world. While affect is just one part of the visual aesthetic of an episode, it is key to understanding how watching cartoons can change one's sense of patriotism. The following chapter will analyze the visual aesthetic of a television episode titled "Code Red" by illuminating the use of space and place in *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. By arguing that the persona of Captain America and other characters in the episode can be understood as a usage of space, I illuminate a visual aesthetic present that informs viewers about both Americanness and anti-Americanness. In these selected episodes, Captain America's persona functions rhetorically as a model for a hypermasculine, Western, White, patriarchal view of idealized American citizenship. Furthermore, I contend that the use of Americanness and anti-Americanness in the visual aesthetic of this episode assists in the constitution of ideal American citizenship.

Producing Space and Place

Space and place, as defined by Michel de Certeau, illuminate how visual aesthetics guide viewers towards the dominant reading of a text. De Certeau's construct of space and place allows

for an understanding of how a concept, such as "the city," is practiced (space/active processing) versus how it is conceived (place/passive processing). The representations of space and place during the viewing experience necessitate analysis in conjunction with "what the consumer 'makes' or 'does' during this time [of viewership] or with these images."⁸¹ Making, or doing, is a process of production, a *poietic* function, hidden by larger superstructures of production, which obfuscate the "place" which consumers might occupy.⁸²

Place represents the structure, which defines the environment. When one thinks of the city conceptually, there are certain structures that must be in present in order for the city to function. There are networks of streets and business, which are necessary for the city to operate; the rules that govern the place called "city" help to form those networks into workable spaces. The place constitutes the "proper" form of the city.⁸³ Some subjects within that place, such as city administrators who make and hire police to enforce rules, employ strategies to both establish and reinforce place. Laws, which represent the strategies utilized by those who administer the place, are developed and enforced in order to maintain the status quo. Strategies occur when the "subject [with] will and power" can isolate itself from the environment so that it can assume and circumscribe a proper place that "serves as the basis to generating relations with an exterior distinct from it."⁸⁴ The administrator in our example is in a position in which they can use strategies to establish and reinforce rules by which the everyday citizen must abide, even though the citizen may not have had input in the formation of those laws. Thus, strategy marks the rules and regulations of proper citizenship as told by those who control the means of production in

⁸¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), xii.

⁸² de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi.

⁸³ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 101.

⁸⁴ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

society, and in particular, those who control the ideological apparatus of a given society.

Strategies attempt to "conceal beneath objective calculations their connection with the power that sustains them from within . . . its own 'proper' place" by permeating the structures within which the everyday citizen must live.⁸⁵ The administrators in charge of the city control the means of producing citizens, because they develop the rules by which proper citizens must abide or face punishment.

Space is the actual practice of a place.⁸⁶ Instead of representing the networks of streets, which define the city, or the rules made by government officials, who govern the place, space represents the citizen walking down the street on the way to work or existing within those networks of rules and regulations. Space is where places become material instead of ephemeral, and allows for the study of the quotidian aspects of material existence and the enunciation of those practices. Through the behaviors in which the everyday citizen navigates the social structures of society, they enunciate, or produce themselves as a product, in the world in which they live. Enunciation is the material effect of that citizen getting by in the city, through whatever means necessary. While places employ strategies to make and enforce laws, spaces employ tactics, which disrupt those strategies in order to provide the everyday citizen with fleeting personal victories. Tactics require one to use the resources of the dominant structure, or the place, in order to resist that structure and define one's space in the world—known as *la perruque*.

La perruque does not seek for "a revolution to transform the laws of history," but instead attempts to "foil here and now the social hierarchization" which has been established by the

⁸⁵ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xx.

⁸⁶ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 19.

ideological apparatus of the dominant power, the place.⁸⁷ Space, in this context, is a modality that allows one to exist within the structure, but still resist that structure, even if victory is only temporary. *La perruque* simply allows one to create "gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* and to confirm his solidarity with other workers . . . through *spending* his time in this way."⁸⁸ Resistance to the ideological superstructures, which control the means of production of citizenship, and the disruption of production are key to the destruction and repair of spaces.

In order to understand the destruction and repair of space, we must first turn to Henri Lefebvre to understand further how to produce space. Lefebvre argues the use of space and time are "among the *categories* which [facilitate] the naming and classing of the evidence of the senses."⁸⁹ Understanding space and time is useful for understanding the affective responses invited by a text if viewers understand the dominant readings of the text, as it will assist in developing a vocabulary for how viewers may see and understand media texts. To understand how space functions, we must first understand how to produce space.

The production of space has three components: Spatial practice—the perceived notion of the space that helps to identify what one sees; representations of space—the conceived notion of how that space is experienced or conceptualized; and representational space—the lived practice of the space. When these three elements combine, they form life as we know, think, and experience it.⁹⁰ The networks within which one lives, and more importantly, the daily routine by which one navigates those networks, make up spatial practice. There is a certain cohesiveness to

⁸⁷ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 25.

⁸⁸ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 25.

⁸⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 1992), 1.

⁹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38-39.

one's daily routine when one wakes up, leaves home, drives the path to work, and exists within those structures every day. It is what one sees on this journey through those networks that informs what one conceives and experiences. Representations of space are the "dominant space in any society" and link the perceived with what is lived. Experts develop the conceptualized space in attempt to produce the space in a way functional to how the everyday citizen lives. By employing Lefebvre's construction of the production of space, I can examine the ways in which control over the means of producing spaces is significant. Doing so will illuminate how strategies employed by the systems set forth by places disrupt and destroy spaces, as well as how to repair the means of producing space following the disrupting event.

Controlling the means of producing citizenship is an important consideration for those who control the ideological apparatus. They must consider how a disrupting event can elicit an affective and/or effective response from viewers. In his research on affect in television viewers, Brian Massumi identifies two key trends: viewing is both autonomic and cognitive, and image reception is a primitive affect.⁹¹ Massumi argues that the response viewers have when viewing an object develops out of the qualifications made by the viewer of both the "*intensity*" (autonomic response) and "*qualities*" (cognitive-emotional response) of the image.⁹² Additionally, when an image creates a galvanic response in the skin of a viewer, that response is an autonomic process that occurs in the half-second prior to cognition. He calls this measure the intensity of the image and he argues that viewers are not in control of this response. One may be able to control other semi-autonomic responses, but one cannot control the intensity felt when

⁹¹ Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 84.

⁹² Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 84.

viewing images. It is a separate autonomic loop outside of conscious decision; it is "narratively de-localized" because it occurs prior to cognition.⁹³

While the initial response is not narrative driven, the narrative could have intense impact on the cognitive-emotional responses of viewers.⁹⁴ An emotional moment in which viewers assess the qualities of the image "breaks narrative continuity to measure a state – actually re-register an already felt state" because the viewer will have already begun to feel the response before they can cognate the response.⁹⁵ Thus, viewers may use the cognitive-emotional response as a tool for amplification of the autonomic response. The autonomic response detaches from linear progression while the cognitive-emotional response assures narrative progression through re-integration.⁹⁶ This invited affective response creates space for an interpellative effect on viewers, but only if the viewer understands the dominant readings within the polysemy of the text. In inviting affect, the text outlines what the viewer should feel, even if not every viewer feels the same way every time they view the text.

The affective response may be insipid for viewers in that they might not know why or even exactly how they feel, blurring the ability to measure affect without measuring the bodily responses of viewers. Still, in shaping the text in a particular way, the text guides viewers in how they ought to feel during the more-than-real experience. Because viewers are decoding a polysemic text, they may have a range of emotions that they do not understand, thus having an insipid reaction. Insipience invites a phenomenon called "synusia," which occurs within the consciousness of viewers when they see an image that makes them so happy they cry, or so sad

⁹³ Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 85

⁹⁴ Hertha Sturm, *Emotional Effects of Media: The Work of Hertha Sturm (Working Papers in Communications, McGill University)*, ed. Gertrude Joch Robinson, (Montreal: McGill University Graduate Program in Communications, 1987), 25-37.

⁹⁵ Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 86.

⁹⁶ Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 86.

that they laugh.⁹⁷ Synusia takes elements which are "normally opposite [and allows them to] coexist, coalesce, and connect" to create an event which "cannot be experienced" but which can be felt. The paradox exists not because happy and sad exist in a binary, but because they instead exist coalescent in a state of synusia. While positively valenced and negatively valenced phenomenon are distinctly different entities, they work together to create an event, such as narrative re-integration when viewers move from the autonomic to the cognitive-emotional response. The event of re-integration combines these seemingly binary forms like happy/sad into a moment of *potential*. Synusia is amalgamation of the elements trapped inside a paradoxical vacuum; a covalent moment which bonds together charged "more-than-real" experiences of affect at the moment of narrative re-integration. This phenomenon is neither text nor genre specific, but assists in showing that a wide range of emotions are possible while viewing a text creating potential for non-dominant readings, and opportunity for multiple understandings of the text.

These moments of potential, or moments of synusia, can help viewers to navigate competing and powerful centers for "symbolic education" in media texts.⁹⁸ Symbolic education is a useful tool because it helps to establish a civil religion of sorts where people "pay attention to the fantastic but credible narratives to which so many Americans feel a deep emotional attachment."⁹⁹ If the text's attempts at interpellation are successful, viewers are encouraged to identify with characters in media texts, thus creating an ideological apparatus for ideal patriotic

⁹⁷ Imanishi Kinji, *A Japanese View of Nature: the World of Living Things*, trans. Pamela J. Asquith, Heita Kawakatsu, Shusuke Yagi, and Hiroyuki Tagasaki, ed. Pamela J. Asquith, (London: Routledge, 2002), 53.

⁹⁸ Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 27.

⁹⁹ Jewett and Lawrence, *Captain American and the Crusade Against Evil*, 27.

citizenship, to which viewers can point to and read when it comes time to develop their own political identities.

Context of "Code Red"

The episodes in the following chapters, "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier," come from the second season of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. I selected these two episodes for close textual analysis because they fall into a smaller story arc within the larger series, while also illuminating the pedagogical elements of character archetype design.

This chapter assesses the textual construction of Americanness in "Code Red" by analyzing the visual experience invited by the dominant reading of the text utilizing two distinct visual phenomena. Using the disruption of producing Captain America's space, and the use of "redness" as a metaphor for evil, "Code Red" employs an aesthetic of Americanness versus un-Americanness/Otherness. In studying this example for how it displays Americanness, I will develop a blueprint for the constitution of hyper-patriotic American superheroes, and anti-American super villains through visual aesthetics. By understanding the dominant readings suggested by key textual features, critics can more fully appreciate the interpellative potential of the text. "Code Red" draws its story from the comic series *Collecting Avengers #65-70*, titled *Red Zone* and written by renowned writer, television producer, and current chief



(Figure 2.1) The cover of Avengers Vol. 2: Red Zone, which compiled *Collecting Avengers #65-70* into book format.



(Figure 2.2) A citizen poisoned by the dust of death.

creative officer of DC comics, Geoff Johns.¹⁰⁰ The Red Zone comic series from 2003 rated sixth on IGN's Top 25 Greatest Avengers Stories.¹⁰¹ The episode is segmented into three sections or acts.

The first section of the episode opens with Captain America/Steve Rogers and Iron Man/Tony Stark doing simulated combat training. During a pause in the training, the two men discuss Captain America becoming the leader of the Avengers, a group of superheroes who fight crime, as he is better suited for the role than Iron Man.

During this conversation, a bomb explodes in Tony Stark's Manhattan mansion, which also functions as the headquarters of the Avengers. The bomb releases a red, noxious gas, causing all of the Avengers except Iron Man to be afflicted with an ailment that turns their skin red and transforms their faces to look like a skull as shown in Figure 2.2. Iron Man avoids contamination because he is in his protective suit of armor at the time. The poison weakens its victims, making it so they are barely able to stand and assuredly unable to fight. After the poison has set in, a team of super villains called the Code Red Protocol attack the Avengers under the guise of national security. They eventually take Captain America prisoner.



(Figure 2.3) Red Skull with his Dell Rusk mask partially torn off by Captain America.

The second section of the episode finds the rest of the Avengers unable to fight off the invasion of the Code Red Protocol. Iron Man desperately synthesizes an antidote while the rest of the Avengers hold off their intruders. During this act, the Avengers discover that Dell Rusk,

¹⁰⁰ Geoff Johns, *Avengers Vol. 2: Red Zone*, (New York City, NY: Marvel Comics, 2003).

¹⁰¹ Jesse Schedeen, "Top 25 Greatest Avengers Stories," *IGN*, published 5/2/2012, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/02/the-25-greatest-avengers-stories?page=4>.

the US Secretary of Defense, ordered the attack on the Avengers mansion in an effort to frame the Avengers for creating biological weapons in the heart of the New York.¹⁰² Furthermore, he also assembled the Code Red Protocol team to destroy the Avengers, and sent the team to attack the mansion after the explosion. The act concludes with Iron Man successfully synthesizing an antidote, administering it to the Avengers in the mansion, and the innocent bystanders in the streets outside, and then flying to find Captain America to save him as well.

The final section begins with Winter Soldier thrusting Captain America toward the feet of Dell Rusk. Winter Soldier is a member of the Code Red Protocol and an assassin serving the Red Skull. Viewers later discover that Winter Soldier is Captain America's former partner, Bucky, who has been brainwashed by the Red Skull. As Rusk mercilessly beats Captain America, Captain America rips off Rusk's mask revealing his arch-nemesis the Red Skull. At this time, a convoy of fighter jets intercepts Iron Man to prevent him from flying toward the capital building where Red Skull is holding Captain America. Realizing that he will not make it to the capital building successfully, Iron Man uses his satellite tracking system inside his suit to project a missile carrying the antidote to Captain America. Just as the antidote is about to reach its destination, the Winter Soldier grabs the vial out of the air, preventing Captain America's rescue. When this happens, Captain America tries to fight back against Red Skull, who is still mercilessly attacking him, but ultimately the effort is in vain. Captain America is still unable to fight. Red Skull orders Winter Soldier to kill Captain America, and in the process alludes to Captain America that Winter Soldier is really Bucky. Captain America suspected that Winter Soldier was really Bucky when Winter Soldier arrested him, and this would further exacerbate

¹⁰² Dell Rusk is an anagram that also spells Red Skull. The use of this name alludes to Dean Rusk, former secretary of the state during the both the John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson administrations. Rusk also served the United States Army as a decorated colonel during World War II.

Captain America's suspicion. The ultimate irony of making Captain America's best friend kill him worked against Red Skull. Through watching Captain America fight back and attempt to regain his hyper-American qualities, Winter Soldier's brainwashing begins to wear off, and he eventually gives Captain America the antidote, restoring him to his normative state.

Captain America then thrusts forward punching and kicking Red Skull out of a window onto the lawn of the capital building. The rest of the Avengers join him to make the arrest on Red Skull, and when Captain America goes back inside the capital building to find Winter Soldier, he has disappeared. The episode ends with the Avengers reflecting on what would happen to the Code Red Protocol team because they had been brainwashed, similar to Winter Soldier, into becoming villains. The camera pans to Captain America standing on the S.H.I.E.L.D. helicarrier while he ponders his lost relationship with Bucky, leading into the next episode about his reconciliation with Winter Soldier.

The Space Called "Captain America"

Captain America seems a natural choice as a case study for idealized patriotic citizenship because the character represents obvious Americanness. Captain America's costume consists of an American flag design, he has served in the United States Army in World War II as a captain, and he has had unwavering belief in the principles of an ideal America for all citizens. More implicitly, Captain America has distinct qualities of Americanness that are less obvious and more powerful in the constitution of American citizenship, which are illuminated in "Code Red" by their absence and resurgence. In order to delve deeper into the building blocks of Americanness, one must move past the most easily discernible pieces of Captain America's identity and instead analyze the "everyday" qualities that make him relatable to viewers. In this section, I argue that some characters in a television series reinforce place while other characters in that same series

are a use of space. In defining characters in this way, I identify a dominant reading suggested by textual depictions of what is American and what is un-American, focusing specifically on the strategies and tactics used by superheroes and super villains. This reading of the text focuses on the ways in which the text invites an interpellative effect which communicates to viewers what it means to be American or un-American. As the text instructs viewers about patriotism, it also invites viewers to consider or re-consider their own political identities, constituting viewership as an alternative form of participatory citizenship.

To understand the reading of the text proposed here, one must first understand the ideological apparatus of the text. Within the world of this episode, the super villains control the ideological superstructure, which is also the means of producing citizenship. By reinforcing the ideological superstructure of villainy they make material the conceptual constructs of the fearful citizen. Thus, super villains create places in superhero universes through a culture of fear in which a super villain will conceive a newer, more evil plot, the consequences of which make the everyday citizen extremely fearful; fear is their normative state. Superheroes fight to resist those structures, which make citizens fearful. Because they are resisting the governing forms of "the city" in the superhero universe, superheroes are practiced space. They are an enunciation of space because they make the resistance to the ideological apparatus material.

Villains control the systems that form place in superhero universes because they produce an ideological apparatus of fear by which the citizens of the city live. To clarify, villains are always on the offensive because they have the power to employ systemic violence, which an extraordinary citizen must resist to protect the city. Rebecca Wanzo contends that superheroes are the "chosen one," the only person with the ability to employ tactics against the superstructure

of the city.¹⁰³ Superheroes are consistently defending themselves and other citizens against the oppressive ideological apparatus that produces fearfully compliant citizens. This is the status quo for citizens, and super-citizens both. Thus, superheroes practice space within the confines of super villain-controlled cities, but also utilize *la perruque* to turn the villain's plan against itself, in order to attain a fleeting moment of victory.

While the citizens cheer at this given moment, the inevitability of evil assures they will be just as fearful tomorrow as they were today. As this cycle repeats itself in each episode of a superhero cartoon series, the superhero will eventually run into hiccups, which disrupt the process. Understanding Captain America as a use of space assists in analyzing the quotidian elements of what it means to be a superhero, as well as how those hiccups might disrupt the production of that space. Those quotidian elements are effective markers for ideal citizenship because they are hidden while present, but glaring while absent. If Captain America does not look, sound, act, or feel like Captain America, he cannot attain his fleeting victory.



(Figure 2.4) Captain America in his poisoned state. He sees his reflection in Iron Man's helmet and cries: "No, not this . . . not him."

In order for superheroes to resist the oppressive strategies of super villain places, they must employ guerrilla tactics in order to disrupt the means of producing fearfully compliant citizens. They are only capable of doing so if they are fully themselves. One such example of guerrilla tactics in "Code Red" is Captain America recognizing Winter Soldier as his old friend. When he realizes that the Winter Soldier is Bucky, Captain America works to display his extreme resolve to keep fighting in the face of defeat, so that he may protect the citizens of

¹⁰³ Rebecca Wanzo, "The Superhero: Meditations on Surveillance, Salvation, and Desire," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* (2009): 95.

America from the oppressive ideological apparatus. In doing so, Captain America turns Red Skull's own plan against him—*la perruque*, attaining the fleeting victory awarded to spaces, which will last for only a short time. In regaining some of his bravery, Winter Soldier sees enough of Captain America's Americanness to convince him to turn on the Red Skull. That victory is important, but lasted only until the next episode.

The regaining of Captain America's Americanness identifies how the text forms meaning around the spaces of superheroes. Superheroes' spaces develop meaning when they are the only person able to alleviate the stress formed by the culture of fear. It is an expectation of the superhero that s/he should fight the violence that permeates superhero societies. Furthermore, it is an expectation that the superhero should win said fight by resisting the structure while beating the structure at its own game. There is no expectation, however, that the victory should last for an extended period. The victory is fleeting, simply waiting for the next evil plot that will attempt to destroy the world. Captain America is the performative aspect of the superhero that resists the oppressive structures present in the city: he is the "practiced place."¹⁰⁴ The practice of the space called "Captain America" supports the more noticeable qualities of superheroism, but also resists the dominant structure of super villain controlled cities.¹⁰⁵ Viewing the performance of the superhero within the superhero universe creates a junction between the trajectories of the superheroes in the more-than-real screened experience and the viewer in the real world. That junction allows opportunity for pieces of the space to leave the screened experience with the

¹⁰⁴ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ I purposefully use a vague term like "the noticeable qualities of superheroes." There are far too many superheroes to form a singular, all encompassing formula for what heroism looks like. In the case of Captain America in "Code Red," some qualities are: bravery, strength, resolve, attentiveness to his comrades, and his belief in the American people. These qualities are exaggerated in this episode because Captain America loses them for some time, and is only able to fight once again as he starts to regain them.

viewer, potentially shaping the viewers future behavior if the text successfully interpellates viewers.

Synusia appears throughout a text, such as "Code Red," when the competing centers of symbolic education that inform citizens about citizenship fight for control of the ideological apparatus, and thus, control over the means of producing citizens. Good and evil combine to create an opportunity for viewers to understand the text in dominant, oppositional, or negotiated readings. An example of such occurs when Captain America's belief in the American Dream is so strong that it is able to re-invigorate Winter Soldier's American identity and cause him to betray Red Skull. Captain America's Americanness was so strong that it was able to de-program a brainwashed assassin. Neither can truly exist without the other, but they still fight to occupy the same area. Good and evil are both/and, not either/or, and create potential for understanding Americanness and un-Americanness in "Code Red" through the competing superheroes and super villains who wish to produce citizens who follow their lead.

Destruction and Reparation of Space in "Code Red"

Another way of exemplifying Americanness and un-Americanness is with the destruction/disruption of producing space, and the reparation of the production process. The attack on the Avengers's mansion at the beginning of the episode illuminates how the destruction and repair of spaces, such as the space of Captain America, has a pedagogical effect, teaching viewers about ideal patriotic citizenship. The "dust of death" is the poison employed by Red Skull, which greatly weakened Captain America. In addition, the poison discolored his skin to a shade of red, and tightened his skin so that his face resembled a skull, a red skull. When Captain America is poisoned, he loses the obvious indicators of his superheroism such as his identity, his super powers, and even his good looks. The space becomes unworkable because the poison

damaged the production process. Because the space is unworkable, Captain America cannot fulfill the daily routine of being Captain America. All that is left is Steve Rogers, the man, left inside of the vessel that Captain America used to occupy. At this moment, Captain America is gone, and Steve Rogers is not superhero enough to continue trying to maintain the tactics used to resist the ideological superstructure of fear created by super villains' dominance in society. Rogers is participating in a fight that he would always lose.

The unworkable space of Captain America appears weak both physically and mentally. Without being Captain America, Rogers no longer believes in himself or the Avengers's ability to defeat the invasion of the villains of "Code Red." The Code Red Protocol emasculates Captain America. It also de-humanizes him to the point that he no longer occupies his space because he is not strong, nor brave enough to fight. It is best to view the space as a vessel, which one can fill or empty, and in this case make vacant when Red Skull damaged the means of producing and enunciating Captain America. The poison makes it so that Rogers is unable to fill that empty vessel because he no longer perceives himself as what Captain America is, and no longer links his own experiences with the lived experiences of Captain America. The poison destroyed the networks required to produce Captain America. When that space cannot be produced, the text no longer constructs Captain America as a hyper-patriotic American citizen; he is not strong, brave, resolute, and he doesn't believe in the Avengers. The unworkable space does not match the viewer's previous knowledge of the lived experiences of Captain America. Something is wrong because Rogers cannot enunciate Captain America; he is not strong enough to do so, and the vessel is vacant.

Knowing that Rogers cannot produce Captain America has palpable affect on the narrative progression of the episode. Each episode in a superhero cartoon like *The Avengers*:

Earth's Mightiest Heroes marks a cataclysmic confrontation between the strategies that perpetuate super villain controlled cities and the superhero that aims to disrupt their arch-nemeses' plan. Both parties work vigilantly to disrupt each other's means of production; the superhero aims to disrupt the means of producing fearfully compliant citizens and the super villain aims to disrupt the means of producing superheroes who might foil their plans. If the villain disrupts or destroys the means of producing superhero spaces, they effectively disrupt the ability of superheroes to employ tactics, which might have undermined the oppressive ideological apparatus.

In the events of "Code Red," the Red Skull is able to find a way to subvert the cataclysm in which Captain America would thwart him and instead forces Captain America out of his vessel, preventing Captain America from foiling his plan to infiltrate the U.S. government. With the majority of the Avengers also unable to enunciate their spaces, there is nobody left to fight for justice. All that is left is a (mostly) empty shell, lined only with the residue of what once filled it, and which Roger seeks to fill once again if he successfully repairs the means of producing the space. The history of the space, left over from the conception, construction, and occupation of the space, tells the viewer how to repair the space and make it workable again. The problem arises when there is a disruption in the relationship between sign and space. When one sacrifices the space to language or lack thereof, it becomes unworkable.¹⁰⁶ To repair the space, one must identify what constituted the space in the first place. With that knowledge, one is able to make the ephemeral material. Rogers could recall Captain America from his absence should he be given the correct circumstances to repair the space. The production and reproduction of Captain America can only occur when Rogers finds the ability to regain his bravery, courage,

¹⁰⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 136.

and moxie, so that he may enunciate Captain America once again. To find those qualities once again, Rogers must fix what was broken: the perceived networks the perceived networks that create spatial practice and the lived embodiment of those networks in representational space.

The spatial relations of Captain America represent a system that makes up the "daily routines and urban networks" that link the "work, 'private' life, and leisure" activities.¹⁰⁷ The daily routines of superheroes are largely unrepresented in media texts but the beginning of "Code Red" shows that training sessions to improve strength, agility, and coordination with his teammates, as well as interactions amongst other Avengers to develop leadership and camaraderie are an everyday aspect of Captain America. Interactions with his Avengers teammates seem to be the crux of Captain America's daily routine as exemplified when Iron Man names Captain America as the *de facto* leader of the Avengers. These interactions exemplify themselves further throughout the episode when Captain America is unable to contact his comrades while Red Skull holds him captive.. Without his allies, Captain America is simply not himself. While poisoned, Captain America is not able to regain these elements of his daily routine because he is unable to fight off the attackers who have invaded the Avengers's base; the poison has caused Captain America to withdraw from his vessel, disconnecting his networks of contacts.

The networks of allies, weapons, and tactics to resist super villains are amongst the tools that superheroes use in order to resist the structure of super villain controlled universes. The Winter Soldier's success in capturing Captain America and forcing him to the feet of the Red Skull makes it difficult for Rogers to fix the networks necessary to produce Captain America. Instead, Rogers attempts to mend other networks in order to create an opportunity. He begins

¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38.

doing so by identifying the Red Skull as his captor and thus links the explosion at the Avengers' mansion to fascism in Nazi Germany and the Axis powers, a peripheral network to the ones necessary for Captain America to emerge from his withdrawal. By tapping into his World War II sensibilities, Captain America is able to regain some of his idealized heroic qualities. When the Winter Soldier watches Captain America begin to regain his Captain Americanness, he too begins to remember who he was prior to his brainwashing. In recognizing his past, the Winter Soldier resists his programming as an assassin—at least enough that he decides to administer the antidote to Captain America. In fixing a broken network with one former ally, Captain America regained his essence. He re-enunciates himself and is able to repair his entire network of Avengers allies. In identifying the Red Skull and de-programming the Winter Soldier, Captain America repaired networks peripheral to that of his Avengers allies, ultimately affording him the ability to escape his capture and reunite with his allies. Repairing that disrupted network of relationships also repairs the spatial relations required to produce Captain America. Upon re-integrating the spatial relations and representations of space, Captain America refilled his empty vessel, and became material once again.

The modes by which viewers perceive Captain America as a hyper-patriotic character develop out of constructing, and re-constructing networks between Captain America and the rest of the Avengers. Rogers was only able to enunciate Captain America when the means of producing spatial relations were functional once again. With the perceived space and conceived space in line with each other once again, Captain America is able to re-embodiment himself, to re-materialize as his own space. Captain America is no longer withdrawn and has become material once again. Captain America is lived once again, as Lefebvre describes, in the representational space.

Watching Captain America withdraw from his space and then re-emerge is instructive in identifying the dominant reading of Americanness in "Code Red." Though superhero texts are polysemic, the ideological structures in place still guide viewers towards an understanding of good and bad, right and wrong, justice and evil, and more importantly American and un-American. When Captain America loses the very qualities that make him both hyper-patriotic and superheroic, the text illuminates how important those qualities are for idealized American citizenship. Only through regaining his Americanness could Captain America stop Red Skull's evil plan and save the day.



(Figure 2.5) Captain America after his space is repaired and he is able to return from his withdrawal from his space.

Code Red Protocol – Redness as a Sign of anti-Americanness

There is a second visual aesthetic in "Code Red" which builds off of the understanding of Captain America's space. As argued previously, super villains control the means of production and thus the structure and ideological apparatus of superhero universes. Prevalent in "Code Red" is a motif of "redness" which plays upon post-World War II anti-European, and anti-foreign sentiments, as well as Cold War anti-Communist sentiments that are prevalent in the superhero genre. I present this as problematic because it encourages an anti-European, anti-Communist sentiment in a text designed for viewers who have not yet likely developed a language to describe their prejudice. Furthermore, the use of "redness" as an underlying link to anti-Communist sentiment provides a disingenuous perspective because it links to a sensationalized American view of Communism that appears fascist in nature. The text appears to conflate the two under the umbrella of HYDRA, a fascist organization linked allegorically to the Axis powers

of World War II. Clearly, "Code Red" has a dominant reading that red is a signifier of evil, and that red is a signifier of un-Americanness.

In using redness, the visual aesthetic in "Code Red" strongly suggests the separation of hyper-patriotic American superheroes, anti-American super villains, and (anti)American anti-heroes. The anti-Americanness of the villainous characters in "Code Red" appears primarily through their costuming. The villains in those costumes clearly represent an allegory to World War II and the Cold War in three primary ways.

First, every villain in the episode represents HYDRA. While HYDRA is an allegory to the Axis powers, it is also literally an organization of super villains, which opposes the Avengers. HYDRA has the goal of overturning world governments in order to appoint their leader, Supreme HYDRA Baron



(Figure 2.6) Red Skull wearing his Nazi uniform with a HYDRA armband.

Wolfgang von Strucker, as the leader of the world.¹⁰⁸ While the Red Skull is not an official affiliate, on numerous occasions he has used HYDRA's resources as a means of producing villainous places.

The Red Skull representing the Nazi party in World War II combined with his ability to utilize the resources of an immense fascist organization suggests a dominant reading of the text that bolsters anti-European sentiment. In the wider scope of *Captain America*, the Red Skull stands as filler to represent concepts such as bigotry, hate, and evil. Throughout *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* the Red Skull appears wearing a Nazi war uniform with the swastika replaced by the symbol for HYDRA. While Red Skull never appears to be Adolf Hitler, he often

¹⁰⁸ [Stan Lee (w), Jack Kirby (a), Frank Giacoia (i).] "Hydra Lives!," *Strange Tales* #150 (Nov. 1966), Marvel Comics Group.

appears alongside Hitler in the comics. Red Skull exists as the material embodiment of Hitler's ideals, especially in his continued crusade against the United States following Hitler's death. That anti-American sentiment occurs throughout both seasons of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* whenever Red Skull makes an appearance. "Code Red" further enhances the anti-European sentiment when the Code Red Protocol introduces Cold War era anti-Communist, or anti-red, sentiments into the already anti-European environment through the costuming of all of the villains in the episode.



(Figure 2.7) Dell Rusk is an anagram for the Red Skull. Dell Rusk was the secret identity the Red Skull employed in order to infiltrate the United States government and become the Secretary of Defense. The American costume allowed the Red Skull to gain a large amount of power in the United States' government, exactly as McCarthy argued.

The second way "Code Red" links its villains to World War II and Cold War anti-European sentiments is through the metaphor of Communism, or redness, as a poison for good American citizens. Communism as a poison has been present in U.S. political rhetoric as early as the anti-Bolshevism movement following World War I, and it made a resurgence following World War II with the McCarthyism movement. An iconic moment of McCarthyism occurred on February 9, 1950 when Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy gave a speech in which he claimed to have in his hand a list of two hundred and five names of members of the Communist Party in the United States who worked for the State Department and shaped U.S. public policy.¹⁰⁹ The corruption of good American citizens has bearing in "Code Red." Each of the villains in "Code Red" has a red costume, excluding the Winter Soldier. Dr. Samson, a government doctor, Falcon, a social worker, Red Hulk/Thunderbolt Ross, an Army general, and Red Skull/Dell Rusk, elected as U.S. Secretary of Defense while in the disguise featured in Figure 2.7, all use red costuming

¹⁰⁹ Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 49.

while also showing that protocol Code Red has infiltrated all levels of the American government. The only member of the Code Red Protocol not to wear a red costume is the Winter Soldier, a former U.S. soldier. In the comics, Soviet Russia kidnaps Captain America's sidekick, Bucky, and brainwashes him into becoming the Winter Soldier. In *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, the Red Skull is who brainwashes Bucky.

Beyond costuming, a third aesthetic of redness makes an appearance in "Code Red" through the toxic gas released in the attack on the Avengers' mansion: the poison known as the Red Skull's "dust of death." Inhalation of the gas causes any person's skin to tighten and they themselves become red, as was discussed earlier with Captain America. The dust of death is capable of causing mayhem, and this poison made Captain America's hyper-patriotic space unworkable. This strongly plays into the Communism as a poison metaphor; the dust of death is a red poison used on the American people by a corrupt "red" person who had infiltrated the government.

The use of anti-European and anti-Communist sentiments in the media is a common tool to construct anti-American villains, especially in superhero texts. Not every villain is an anti-American European person, but a large enough portion fit the description that it deserves analysis. Georg Drennig argues, "American comics frequently use anti-European discourse and the representations through stereotypes as a part of comic's vocabulary."¹¹⁰ The Nazi uniform that the Red Skull wears in "Code Red" plays, as Drennig suggests, upon dormant stereotypes left behind by other mediated texts. Sixteen of the nineteen most popular US-American born superheroes in the Marvel universe have arch-nemeses that were either foreign-born or work for

¹¹⁰ Georg Drennig, "Otherness and the European as Villain and Antihero in American Comics," in *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures: Essays on the Interplay of Media, Disciplines and International Perspectives*, ed. Mark Berninger, Jochen Ecke, and Gideon Haberkorn, 127

foreign powers.¹¹¹ Only Spiderman, Luke Cage, and Daredevil have American-born archenemies who do not serve a foreign master, but all have encountered European villains at some point. In "Code Red," every American born superhero has a foreign born or foreign serving arch-nemesis.

In conjunction with the utilization of Captain America as a space to exemplify Americanness, the visual aesthetic of redness present in television shows such as *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* functions as a pedagogical tool for ideal citizenship. The dominant reading of redness as evil assists citizens in navigating competing and powerful centers for "symbolic education" where people "pay attention to the fantastic but credible narratives to which so many Americans feel a deep emotional attachment."¹¹² The effect of a post-World War II culture ripe with anti-Communist sentiment is played out through experiencing "redness" in media texts where citizens can prod and poke, but don't risk their lives to do so. The charged, more-than-real experience provides an outlet for viewers a potential affective experience from the viewer about the paratextual stimuli, such as anti-European sentiment. In doing so, the text provides a covalent bond between autonomic affective experience and cognitive-emotional narrative re-integration. While providing a space for citizens to prod and poke is beneficial, the avenue of doing so is problematic because the target audience is not likely to have a strong enough historical background to navigate the heavy anti-European sentiments of the episode.

¹¹¹ The combinations analyzed were: Spiderman and Green Goblin; Daredevil and Bullseye; Luke Cage and Chemistro; Hulk and Thunderbolt Ross; Professor Xavier and Magneto; Captain America and Red Skull; Iron Man and Mandarin; The Fantastic Four and Dr. Doom; Ghost Rider and Blackout; Iron Fist and Master Khan; Punisher and Jigsaw; U.S. Archer and Highwayman; Hawkeye and Crossfire; Moon Knight and Bushman; Darkhawk and Evilhawk; War Machine and the Advisor; She-Hulk and Titania; Hank Pym and Ultron; and Dr. Strange and Dormammu. Heroes whose origins were unknown, non-US-American, or foreign born but a US citizen were not included.

¹¹² Jewett and Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil*, 27.

Conclusion

The portrayal of anti-Americanness in super villains leads to a question about the use of redness to display anti-Americanness. In Othering super villains, it is easy to portray them as evil. If Captain America is the ideal patriotic American citizen, and he fights against the red characters, then the red characters must be evil. The use of space and place in "Code Red" exemplifies how they constitute Americanness and un-Americanness in media texts. As Maurice Charland argues, textual narratives "constitute subjects as they present a particular subject position . . . as the locus of action and experience."¹¹³ The textual construction of Americanness in "Code Red" functions rhetorically as an ideological apparatus that gives opportunity for the text to interpellate viewers. It does so to shift the locus of action for the viewer toward the dominant readings of Americanness within the text. The viewer enters the more-than-real experiences with those characters, and hopefully takes a piece of that constitutive rhetoric back into the real world with them when the viewing experience is over. Furthermore, if the interpellative effect is successful, the viewer may act out the constitutive rhetoric of the text through parasocial relationships with the text, as well as the viewer's personal interactions with other citizens. In that sense, viewership is a medium by which citizens can develop, mold, and re-configure their political identity. Viewership, then, may function as an alternative form of participatory citizenship. The constitutive rhetoric of "Code Red" give opportunity for the development of a polity by "recognizing the contingency of the social, it offer[s] the possibility of social critique and the development of praxis."¹¹⁴ Theory, while informative, is unable to overcome the "constraints of ideology" because the "ontological status of the [citizen] offers

¹¹³ Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 139.

¹¹⁴ Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 148

[itself] as unproblematic" in a theoretical understanding of constitutive citizenship.¹¹⁵ This is especially true of superhero universes. Ultimately, praxis is more important because it is "the position one embodies" and that is a rhetorical effect, in this case a media effect.¹¹⁶ Viewership as an alternative form of citizenship may occur on the vernacular level of children just wanting to be more like their heroes, an affect felt before they likely know or understand it. It may also occur at the core of one's identity. It depends on which of the dominant readings the viewer successfully decodes. Developing praxis for either one of those cases is essential; too many people are watching texts from the superhero genre to ignore it as a venue for interpellation.

Using place and space to operate within the immense construct of the superhero universe as a means of producing real-life citizenship through dominant readings is a viable way of reaching citizens who, as Wanzo suggests, may defer the development of their own civic identity to those in power. While this may be beneficial for the development of "more ideal" citizens, a judgment about the cost of Othering super villains as European lingers. Is using redness as a tool for developing patriotic citizenship a positive phenomenon? Whether it is positive or not, it could be effective.

Through the affective and aesthetic experience, viewers are encouraged to understand Captain America as the superhero embodiment of traditional American values, as well as a proxy for the ideal American citizen; Captain America fights corruption and evil where the normal citizen cannot. The Red Skull is the super villain embodiment of corrupt fascist German political culture. The Red Skull too is fighting for his country, but only by using evil strategies, at least by the Westernized standards put forth when the text constructs Captain America as the ideal (American) citizen. The Winter Soldier is the anti-hero embodiment of corrupted citizenship, a

¹¹⁵ Charland, "*Constitutive Rhetoric*," 148

¹¹⁶ Charland, "*Constitutive Rhetoric*," 148

proxy for the duped citizens; he became a tool of the Red Skull in "Code Red." The Winter Soldier portrays a brainwashed Russian assassin devoid of feeling who is at least partially involved in or responsible for many of the conflicts the United States had been involved with following World War II. As antithesis to Captain America, the Winter Soldier is unpatriotic, dastardly, and cold, at least until Captain America re-infuses him with some Americanness at the conclusion of the episode. The drive to do "good" supersedes the infection of redness in true American citizens.

The aesthetic experience harkens the cultural aspect of ideal citizenship in which citizens must reconcile their feelings about the government with their narratives about the government. Cultural and aesthetic practices are both fragile and malleable "because they entail the construction of spatial representations and artefacts [*sic*] out of the flow of human experience."¹¹⁷ Ideal citizenship is molded out of the cultural and aesthetic (and anesthetic) experiences that occur over time in the trajectory between the conceptual (representations of space) and lived (representational space) which fuse together for the "reversal of the two dimensions — a temporalisation of space and a spatialisation [*sic*] of time."¹¹⁸ This phenomenon creates life as we "know" it and is privileged by an understanding of the world developed through visually aesthetic experience—the production of space through visual stimuli. De Certeau supports this notion when he laments the "cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown, and transmuting communication into a visual journey."¹¹⁹ While I disagree with the negative connotation, I do agree that material value placed on the ocular experience has shaped human beings' ability to understand both space and place

¹¹⁷ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 327.

¹¹⁸ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (West Sussex, United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons, 2012), 24.

¹¹⁹ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi.

and to reflect on the ways in which they constitute the ideograph of citizenship. With visual stimuli provided a dominant position in the human psyche, they have ample opportunity to guide viewers towards dominant readings. Juhani Pallasmaa contends that "I experience the [world], and the [world] exists through my embodied experience."¹²⁰ Viewership helps to make real the spaces and places present in the superhero universe by transferring ideological mainstays of the superhero universe into the material world, if the text is successful in telling the audience to do so. Viewership of ideal citizenship in superhero cartoons provides opportunity for a fully embodied more-than-real covalent experience of citizenship in the real world through visual stimuli if the text successfully interpellates viewers towards a particular ideological apparatus, as it is designed to do. In the end, the space of Captain America, the anti-red American in the superhero universe, suggests a state of being for the viewer.¹²¹ The text encourages US-American viewers to display their Captain Americanness through their own Americanness. The cinematic and ideological apparatuses that are present make possible the Americanness of the viewer-citizen; it makes real the experience of Americanness. Pallasmaa adds, "Literature and cinema would be devoid of their power of enchantment without our capacity to *enter* a remembered or imagined place."¹²² The real world would be sorely unsatisfactory if human beings lacked the capacity to bring that remembered or imagined place back with them.

This chapter has opened an additional avenue by which viewer-citizenship may be possible through the visual aesthetics of a television episode. The textual construction of "Code Red" may guide viewers towards dominant readings such as mistrusting a potentially corrupt

¹²⁰ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 43.

¹²¹ Producing space is a process of becoming for Captain America performed by Steve Rogers. One the space is produced, however, it is practiced, and then becomes a state of being for the space itself.

¹²² Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 74.

government, and those who might try to infiltrate and corrupt it. It constructs super villains as evil, European, and "red," to provide an Other by which viewers can compare idealized American citizenship. Through affective and aesthetic experience, the text constitutes viewers as always-already prepared to become the idealized (super)citizen should the day come when they too become the chosen one.

CHAPTER III: TIMING AND TIME—NARRATIVE AS AMERICANESS

Notions of temporality permeate television media in a variety of ways. In "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier," time functions in two primary ways that affect narrative progression. In altering viewers' sense of temporality, these two episodes pull viewers towards dominant readings of Americanness and un-Americanness by framing both timing and time as essential characteristics of superhero identities. This effect is pedagogical for viewers because it guides them towards a dominant reading of a polysemic text. Through narrative disruption and narrative re-integration, these two episodes demonstrate to viewers how Captain America loses his Americanness and then regains it. The construction of both timing and time in "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" instructs viewers about how they may become more ideal citizens by understanding Captain America's narrative and temporal trajectory. Because of the text's constitutive dimensions, viewers who the text attempts to interpellate toward the dominant reading of "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" are more likely to model their own ideal citizenship after the characters in the episode. In this chapter, I analyze the use of strategies and tactics to disrupt and repair Captain America's and Winter Soldier's temporal trajectories, arguing that narrative re-alignment is necessary in order for Captain America to regain fully his Americanness. Additionally, I contend that control, disruption, and reconciliation of time are key building blocks in the construction of superheroes, anti-heroes, and super villains. The reconciliation of disrupted timelines gives the superhero the opportunity to display his/her patriotism by employing tactics, which challenge the chaotic perpetuity of evil within the superhero universe. The reading presented in this chapter suggests to viewers that they must

reconcile with their past so that they can move on to the present, and eventually the future because it is utterly American to do so.

This chapter examines the use of timing and time in "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" as tools for narrative progression. By analyzing both linear and cyclical timelines as pedagogical for idealized American citizenship, these select texts from *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* illuminate how Captain America loses and regains his Americanness through narrative disruption, and narrative re-integration. Through controlling time, Captain America is able to re-align his cyclical, disrupted timeline with that of the linear narrative. He does so by utilizing three distinct metaphors that combine to assist him in regaining his Americanness: Perseverance, forgiveness, and the American Dream.

Literature Review

Timing

With time separated into two categories, it is prudent to first identify how viewers most easily experience time in the context of a television episode. In this case, the medium has a large influence in displaying dominant readings of the text for viewers. I selected an animated television series because it departs from traditional analysis of the cinematic apparatus and the attempts of various screens to interpellate viewers. In the case of these select episodes from *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, viewers are able to resist, escape, and come back to the screen as convenient making it so that the episodes must match a unique set of needs in order to interpellate television viewers that do not necessarily match the needs of filmic viewers. For this study, those needs are met through measured use of both timing and time to draw in viewers and maintain their attention towards the dominant reading of the text.

I begin my analysis with timing, as opposed to time, because both naïve and well-versed viewers are likely to understand the timing of an episode. Timing refers to linear narrative progression and the pacing of a television episode. Primarily, timing will occur on the level of the individual episode within a season. Timing may also occur throughout the season of a television show but genre may have an effect on the likelihood of linear progression to occur on that level. For the purpose of clarity, I will analyze timing over the course of individual episodes while understanding that it may occur over a story arc as well. Regardless of whether linear narrative progression occurs on the season-wide or episodic level, timing is a notion of experience felt by a viewer.

Frederick A. Thompson argues that the gerund, or verb-noun, is an effective measure that allows viewers to construe a deeper understanding of their experience with an object or text. Examples of a gerund are spacing as opposed to space, or timing as opposed to time.¹²³ The gerund changes the concept of time into timing so that individual trajectories of experience are more readily apparent for analysis. Applying the gerund to television viewership allows the critic to analyze the episode for moments when these experiential trajectories cross, whether that is multiple experiences of timing, or multiple experiences of spacing. The crossing of those trajectories works to "create a sense of unity between concepts" and assist in identifying the range of possible meanings within a text.¹²⁴ Viewers may identify with some of those trajectories more than they may identify with others; perhaps they will identify with Captain America's temporal trajectory more than Iron Man's. The narrative progression of the episode, however, informs the viewer about which trajectories are most important, guiding them towards the most

¹²³ Fred Thompson and Barbo Thompson, "Unity of Time and Space," *Arkkittehti, The Finnish Architecture Review* (1981):68-70.

¹²⁴ Thompson and Thompson, "Unity of Time and Space," 68-70.

dominant of possible readings. The lead role, or the protagonist, behaves as the focus of the narrative and thus, has the best opportunity to have interpellative effect on viewers, even if the protagonist does not interpellate all viewers. Using a variety of experiences that occur prior to viewing the text, as well as during the process of viewership, viewers must organize and navigate through a complicated web of fragmented trajectories in order to find meaning.¹²⁵ McGee argues in contemporary culture, it is necessary for the speaker to interpret, and the audience to construct meaning out of the text.¹²⁶

Because timing guides viewers towards dominant readings of the text, timing is a persuasive, rhetorical move. Regina Hoffman argues "rhetoric entails the placement of human action in the temporal continuum. By crafting temporal sequences fitting to their ends, rhetors shape perceptions of events and interpretations involving cause and consequence."¹²⁷ Timing is the most blatant of temporal continuum and provides the first opportunity for viewers to develop meaning out of a text because it is the most readily apparent aspect of temporality. Although the text is polysemic, allowing for some character's trajectories to resonate viewers more than others, timing functions rhetorically to shift viewers towards specific temporal continuums as driven by the narrative of the episode. This chapter explores the temporal continuum constructed in the text, which viewers may be capable of apprehending both actively and passively, possibly at the same time. Viewers may accept some aspects of temporality wholesale, while dissecting and examining other aspects more closely. Analysis of narrative progression can lend insight into the link between active and passive viewership.

¹²⁵ Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990), 274-289.

¹²⁶ McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," 288.

¹²⁷ Regina M. Hoffman, "Temporal Organization as Rhetorical Resource," *Southern Communication Journal* 57 (1992), 194.

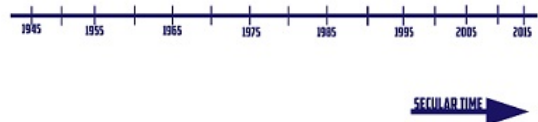
Research on both active and passive audiences examines the ways in which viewers find meaning within a text. If a viewer watches the text and simply accepts the message without critical analysis, then the viewer is passive. If a viewer watches the text and analyzes the messages within the text for their value and impact, then the viewer is active. Due to the polysemic nature of media texts, viewers may do both at once. Frederick Wertham's landmark book *Seduction of the Innocent* showed that this capacity for simultaneous activity and passivity is possible, even in children.¹²⁸ Transcripts from the research showed that children accepted some pieces of true crime comics as instructional without questioning the crime itself while at the same time being able to assess critically the realness of true crime comics versus the impossibility of fairy tales.

Contemporary research on the pacing of television shows that modern viewers have the same capacity for activity and passivity. Pacing, including the number of cuts, edits, and story length affects viewers' ability to remember what they have seen in a media text. Pacing can affect viewers' ability to identify the dominant reading of a text because producers have used it to arouse interest, but not necessarily memory. Timing adds to this definition of pacing the possibility of crossing temporal trajectories within a text at specific moments in order to encourage viewers to guide viewers towards dominant readings of the text. The texts are

¹²⁸ Fredrick Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, in *The Audience Studies Reader*, ed. Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn, (New York: NY, Routledge, 2003), 61-66. Unfortunately, Wertham's methodology and analysis was incredibly flawed and his bias negatively affected the study. The analysis I provide in this chapter is not congruent with Wertham's finding. Instead, I analyzed transcripts of Wertham's study so that I may look closer at the actual responses of the participants, instead of Wertham's analysis. This analysis focused on how the children participating in the study found meaning in the comics they read. The participants showed that they had modeled some of their behavior after the true crime comics without having put much thought into the matter, while at the same time closely scrutinizing some aspects of the comics for the "realness" or "fakeness" or the narrative. For this reason, I include *Seduction of the Innocent* as a landmark study opened many avenues for analysis, even if the original researcher did not intend to have those avenues explored.

polysemic, not pluralistic. Timing informs viewers about what they should experience, even if not all viewers do so. Timing occurs separate from time because it only moves in one direction and never refers back to itself. If the narrative of the episode loops back to a specific event in order to progress the narrative, then it is utilizing time, not timing. In using timing for narrative progression, viewers will see pacing techniques, which point them to a dominant reading of the text. Additionally, viewers will see timing techniques that assist them in remembering the crossing trajectories, which aroused their interest throughout the episode. These two phenomena combine to suggest a dominant reading and make it memorable for the viewer.

News media and television scholars have given considerable attention to the effects of timing on viewers. Research shows that timing is effective for individual episodes because it is able to garner significant amounts of attention to arouse viewers,



(Figure 3.1) Timing moves in a linear fashion. One example would be a character's experiences from 1945, until 2015. This happens synchronically.

even if it does not become a long-term memory. Annie Lang, Paul Bolls, Robert F. Potter, and Karlynn Kawahara argue that the relationship between attention and memory is not linear. Attention was a "necessary condition for memory" but, by itself, is "not sufficient."¹²⁹ Lang et. al. shows that while producers of news media tend to try to maximize attention through both rapid pacing and high levels of action to trigger autonomic responses in viewers, media texts often sacrifice memory for attention. Timing functions by having the highest amount of impact in the minutes of attention given to the text by a viewer; it functions opposite of time because it does

¹²⁹ Annie Lang, Paul Bolls, Robert F. Potter, and Karlynn Kawahara, "The Effects of Production Pacing and Arousing Content on the Information Processing of Television Messages," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* (1993), 472.

not benefit from a cyclical nature. One cannot go back in timing because timing is solely linear. Timing is secular, existing only in the moment, and cannot be recalled because it never doubles back upon itself. Timing works to gain the most assent possible from viewers in the shortest amount of time so that the individual narratives can be resolved and viewers can leave the screened experience awaiting next week's episode.

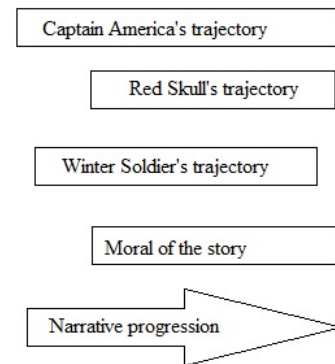
Other aspects of timing have been shown to impact the ways that viewers understand media texts. Lang, et. al., found that the number of cuts, edits, and story length had significant impact on both cognitive and physical arousal for viewers.¹³⁰ Their results showed that in longer stories, such as a twenty-two minute episode, a high number of cuts and edits increased cognitive effort and physical arousal. This supports the argument made in this chapter about individual temporal trajectories being important to timing of the episode. Cuts between individual characters' interactions within the world allows for both narrative progression and high levels of arousal by viewers. With increased arousal, the covalent experience becomes memorable for viewers. As argued by Brian Massumi, a higher level of impact increases the likelihood that viewers will remember the experience far beyond the few moments in which they viewed the text.¹³¹ With increased memory, the likelihood of the viewing experience to impact people's lives increases significantly.

This experience is covalent because it combines two charged experiences to form one meaning. The first is the charged, more-than-real experience of viewership with a media text, which is experienced passively because the viewer/participant is unable to modify the text.

¹³⁰ Annie Lang, Mija Shin, Samuel D. Bradley, Zheng Wang, Seungjo Lee, and Deborah Potter, "Wait! Don't Turn That Dial! More Excitement to Come! The Effects of Story Length and Production Pacing in Local Television News on Chanel Changing Behavior and Information Processing in a Free Choice Environment," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* (2005), 18.

¹³¹ Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995), 84.

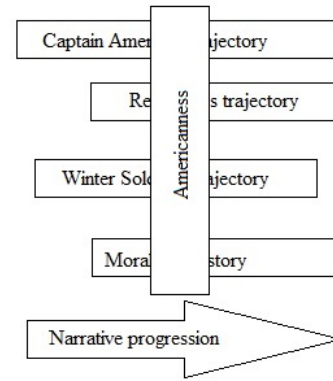
Because viewers lack the ability to change the intended or dominant reading of a text, their experience of space and time can only be accepted as-is. Viewers can only experience the ideologies displayed, and cannot interact with the characters in an interpersonal relationship. Viewers must first take in all the possible readings of the text, done through the narrative progression of an episode, so that they can leave the screened more-than-real experience and develop individualized meaning from the text. The second is the charged real experience of transference that occurs when viewers bring back into the real world that passive meaning developed during viewership, and then apply the text to their own lives so that the viewer may develop active meaning out of the text. If the text is successful in guiding viewers towards the dominant reading of the text, the viewer will see how they too can be more like the characters to which they have most strongly attached.



(Figure 3.2) This is a diagram of how temporal trajectories function synchronically. In this case, one would look only at Captain America's trajectory over the course of the episode as a source of meaning. This provides only a limited view.

Covalency allows for multiple possible readings to surface from polysemic texts because not all spatial and temporal trajectories are successful in interpellating every viewer. While certain trajectories will be more likely to have saliency with viewers, many of the individual trajectories have little importance to the overall narrative. The dominant reading, however, relates closely to the temporal trajectories woven into the narrative of the episode, making timing an important aspect of how viewers understand a given text. Individual trajectories of timing occur synchronically, in a linear fashion. Meaning, however, develops diachronically. Meaning is found by analyzing all of the available trajectories at a given moment or series of moments to create a fuller picture of the experience. A diachronic view informs the

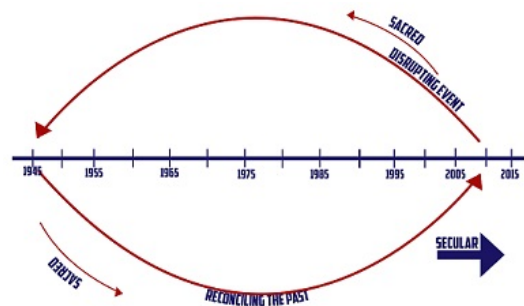
viewers of the entire narrative, which works to interpellate the viewer. Analyzing timing diachronically gets the viewer from start to finish in twenty-two minutes so that the viewer experiences a variety of characters' temporal trajectory while also developing an understanding of how each character's experience adds to an ideograph such as "Americanness." Thus, timing is a useful tool for directing viewers towards the dominant reading of the text. It allows viewers pick and choose with which characters they identify, along with which parts of the moral of the story they identify, and analyze those diachronically to form a meaningful experience. Linear narrative progression makes meaning forming possible.



(Figure 3.3) This is a diagram of how temporal trajectories function diachronically. In this case, one must combine elements from multiple trajectories in order to understand Americanness. The viewer must recognize Captain America's level of Americanness alongside Red Skull's and Winter Soldier's levels of Americanness.

Time

Time, as opposed to timing, operates in a cyclical nature and occurs as a looping narrative thread throughout one, or many, episodes. Time may stop, go back, or continue through many episodes in a story arc, which assists individual narrative of an episode a sense of continuity throughout the series. Time loops back to halt narrative progression and force a character to reconcile the past so that they may move on to the future. This differentiates serial animated superhero cartoons from other animated genres and even separates *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* from some other texts within the superhero genre.



(Figure 3.4) Time functions rhetorically to allow a disrupting event to force a person or society to go back and fix the mistakes they have made. Only by reconciling one's past, can they move from sacred time, back into the secular timeline, and move on with their lives or the narrative of the story.

Shows such as *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* function primarily as a purely episodic text in

which episodes rarely or never reference one another for narrative continuity. *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, on the other hand, has story arcs that bridge many episodes and some that bridge the entire season. For this study, the story arc that occurs during the episodes "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" will illuminate how time assists characters in moving from cyclical, sacred timelines to linear, secular timelines. When timing is disrupted, Captain America must reconcile his tumultuous past with the Winter Soldier in order to regain his Americanness, and defeat evil.

Secular time is time, which "proceeds in a single direction" and is "homogenous, continuous, and irreversible."¹³² It is the linear narrative progression described as "timing." Sacred time, however, calls one to the "moment of origins," and "effects an immediate and total unification of the field of experience."¹³³ Michael Leff adds that sacred time "manifests itself recurrently as an interruption in our normal sense of temporality, and thus sacred time is cyclical and discontinuous; it is something always there that we occasionally recover."¹³⁴ While secular time's linear nature causes it to be more ambiguous, even arbitrary, because of one's ability to choose between all of the available temporal trajectories, sacred time has a distinct ability to separate the past from the present and the future, something timing cannot do. Timing can never go back in timing; it is not possible. Timing is secular and irreversible because narrative moves in only one direction, towards the finish. Time is sacred because it repeatedly refers back to itself to remind the viewer of what was, what is, and what will be, and it disrupts the continuity of narrative progression in doing so.

¹³² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 68-69.

¹³³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 68-69.

¹³⁴ Michael Leff, "Dimensions of Temporality in Lincoln's Second Inaugural," *Communication Reports* 1 (1988): 29.

Time, then, is more flexible than timing, because the present moment is recoverable. While timing is progressive, time is "atemporal" and serves as a flux between the past, present, and the future.¹³⁵ Time experienced in this way is ripe with "passive acceptance," allowing for both the accounting of the past with the reconciliation of the present to create the potential of a future.¹³⁶ Leff argues that a speaker is able to do this by creating a "frame of acceptance [that] appears less a construction of the speaker than a residue of history; it is an atemporal insight forced upon us by an historical understanding of the limits of human history."¹³⁷ The frame of acceptance, for which Leff argues, moves one back towards secular time and comes from a moment in which the two temporal frames combine. For this reason, viewers may conflate time and timing, because they may both progress the narrative congruently. When an event disrupts time, breaking it from the secular timeline, it becomes apparent that the time and timing operate similarly, but separately. In moving the auditor of the text from the cyclical sacred time towards linear secular time, the text "induces us to accept its plausibility as an explanation of the moral significance of political events."¹³⁸ The processing of time, the reconciliation of one's past, and the move towards re-inserting oneself back into the secular time line all present to the viewer the ideological apparatus, which may function to interpellate the viewer towards a particular political stance in the real world.

In "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier," *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* utilizes time and timing to create a dominant reading of the text where Captain America loses part of his Americanness while he is stuck in sacred time. Only through reconciling with his past could he re-align the sacred and secular timelines, allowing him to progress through the narrative and

¹³⁵ Leff, "Dimensions of Temporality," 29.

¹³⁶ Leff, "Dimensions of Temporality," 30.

¹³⁷ Leff, "Dimensions of Temporality," 30.

¹³⁸ Leff, "Dimensions of Temporality," 31.

protect the American people from evil. In disrupting time, the Red Skull also disrupts Captain America's ability to enunciate his space, preventing him from being able to thwart his evil plot to destroy America.

Context of "Winter Soldier"¹³⁹

"Winter Soldier" continues the storylines that began in "Code Red" and this chapter will utilize the story arc that branches both episodes. The episode begins with two sequences of flashbacks. First, a recap of the previous episode shows Captain America and Bucky trapped on the experimental



(Figure 3.5) Captain America staring at the statue of Bucky and himself.

drone plane that exploded over the Atlantic, as described in Chapter II. The camera pans to Captain America staring at a statue of Bucky and himself made in commemoration of both, presumably, dying that day. Then, a different flashback begins with an assault on a Nazi medical testing facility in which

Captain America and Bucky are able to drive out the scientists and investigate the premises. After the completion of the flashback, Winter Soldier appears in the present day at the same testing facility, to discover a giant robot monster that



(Figure 3.6) Captain America and Bucky investigating a Nazi experimental facility.

attacks him. The robot monsters would later be revealed as the sleepers, Red Skull's failsafe if his plan as Dell Rusk failed.

¹³⁹ "Winter Soldier," *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, television, performed by Eric Loomis (2012; Burbank, CA: Film Roman, 2012), DVD.

After the title sequence, Captain America questions the Red Skull while Red Skull sits in his prison cell. Captain America demands Red Skull tell him why he wished to infiltrate the U.S. government, and why Red Skull brainwashed Doc Samson, Falcon, and the Winter Soldier. One of the robots attacks the prison and Captain



(Figure 3.7) Red Skull leaves a message behind for Captain America when he escapes from prison.

America leaves Red Skull to go fight alongside the rest of the Avengers. After an intense battle, the Avengers destroy the robot, and Captain America returns to Red Skull's cell to find that he has escaped. The only evidence left behind is a flaming message on the wall: THE SLEEPERS HAVE AWOKEN! Captain America then embarks on a journey to find out if the Winter Soldier really is his former partner, Bucky. It has only been a suspicion up until this point.

With the help of Nick Fury, another crime fighter, Captain America is able to locate the Winter Soldier at the testing facility. Fury believes Winter Soldier is the one who is releasing the sleepers, but Captain America shows Fury that the Winter Soldier is actually trying to destroy the robot. Captain America, Nick Fury, and Winter Soldier



(Figure 3.8) An army of sleepers rising out of the Potomac River as they descend on the capital.

fight together to send the sleeper over a cliff, which gives opportunity for a dialogue between the three. Winter Soldier reveals that he is Bucky, and that he was brainwashed by Red Skull, forcing him to become an assassin. Winter Soldier expresses his desire for revenge, telling Captain America and Nick Fury that he does not care if they believe him or want to help him. Captain America and Winter Soldier agree to work together to stop the sleepers.

The action cuts to the other Avengers attempting to locate the rest of the sleepers near the Washington monument. Suddenly, a swarm of sleepers rises from the Potomac River, charging towards the capital building. The swarm of sleepers begins transforming to create one large robotic body. Suddenly, a robot red skull rises out of the reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln memorial to complete the transformed robot. As the super-robot charges the capitol building in an effort to destroy it, the Avengers attempt to hold it back to give Captain America and Winter Soldier enough time to infiltrate the interior circuit system. Once inside, the two discover the Red Skull is behind the plot to destroy the capital. A magnetic beam rushes towards the heroes, pinning them against the exterior wall. Red Skull gloats to Captain America that the two heroes had fallen for "the one trap he knew he could not resist, the ghost of [his] dear Bucky." As Captain America declares that killing him would not stop the Avengers, Red Skull laughs maniacally. Red Skull does not intend to kill Captain America; instead, he plans to brainwash him in the same way that he did Bucky, to use him against the Avengers.



(Figure 3.9) The super-robot formed out of the transformed sleepers. Red Skull's base lies in the head of this monstrosity.

At the prospect of being reprogrammed, Winter Soldier declares, "No, never again!" He then breaks into the main circuit of the super-robot, frying its electrical core. Now demagnetized, Winter Soldier falls perilously to his doom. At the last moment possible, Captain America grasps him by the shirt, preventing him from falling to his death. While Captain America clutches Winter Soldier tightly, Winter Soldier tells him, "Go, get him Cap." Captain America catches Red Skull and begins to beat him mercilessly.



(Figure 3.10) Winter Soldier tells Captain America to chase Red Skull after Captain America saves him.

He screams at Red Skull, "This is for what you tried to do to the country. This is for the damage the sleepers did. And this is for Bucky!"

The other Avengers finally succeed in stopping the super-robot's progress toward the capital building but in doing so give Red Skull another opportunity to escape. Seeing this, Captain America goes back to get Winter Soldier. Winter Soldier questions Captain America,

"What are you doing? Go after him!" Captain America replies, "Not without you. The world needs Bucky too." The action then cuts to Red Skull parachuting out of the escape hatch of the super-robot but his parachute hangs on the Washington monument, allowing the Avengers to capture him once again. Iron Man questions the Red Skull about the whereabouts of Captain America and Winter Soldier. The escape hatch is then crashes into the reflecting pool with the two inside. Both



(Figure 3.11) Captain America looks back at Winter Soldier and smiles after Winter Soldier says "10-4 Cap, Bucky out."

Captain America and Winter Soldier emerge from the wreckage together. Winter Soldier thanks Captain America for saving him. Captain America then asks the Winter Soldier to join the Avengers but Winter Soldier declines because he "needs to sort things out in [his] head" because he "needs to clean up the wreckage of [his] past. Alone." Captain America insists once more that he cannot let Winter Soldier leave. Suddenly, an explosion occurs in the wreckage and the Winter Soldier disappears. Captain America stares into the distance saying, "I hope you find what you're looking for soldier." As Captain America despondently walks towards the other Avengers, Winter Soldier leaves him with one last message, "10-4 Cap, Bucky out." The episode ends with Captain America smiling back into the distance towards Winter Soldier.

Timing and Time in *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*

The movement from the cyclical to the linear time lines is a prevalent theme of the story arc that occurs over these two episodes. Captain America is a character who is "haunted by his past, and trying to adapt to [contemporary] society."¹⁴⁰ This is noticeable in "Code Red" when Iron Man asks Captain America to become the leader of the Avengers despite his troubles adapting to contemporary society after having been frozen in time for over sixty years. While Captain America struggles to catch up to the present, his sacred and secular timelines are moving closer into alignment each day. The time-disrupting event occurs after the explosion at the Avengers' mansion in "Code Red" when the Winter Soldier captures Captain America. During the fight, Winter Soldier is able to avoid all of Captain America's attacks, which causes Captain America to recall a ghost from his past. Captain America asks the Winter Soldier, "Where did you learn those moves?"¹⁴¹ This moment pushes Captain America into a sacred timeline in which he is haunted by the mannerisms of Bucky. While Captain America presumes Bucky is dead following the drone explosion, he sees Bucky in the Winter Soldier's movements. Captain America sees the image of Bucky from 1945 but not the face of the man for whom he felt intense guilt over abandoning during World War II. When Captain America displays his Americanness in order to de-program the Winter Soldier at the end of "Code Red," he is doing so to face the ghost he sees in front of him. Captain America is making a move to try and re-align the sacred with the secular, to progress the narrative, which he would continue to do in "Winter Soldier."

In-depth analysis of the strategies and tactics present in "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" will illuminate how Captain America and the Winter Soldier resolve the disruption of their linear

¹⁴⁰ Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 215.

¹⁴¹ "Code Red," *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, television, performed by Eric Loomis (2012; Burbank, CA: Film Roman, 2012), DVD.

trajectories, allowing them to regain their Americanness and defeat the Red Skull. Furthermore, it will illuminate how super villains such as the Red Skull are able to re-disrupt the timelines of superheroes to interrupt the production of their space, thus preventing the superhero from successfully thwarting the super villain's evil plan. The production of temporality in "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" shows these texts have a dominant reading that utilizes both time and timing as a constitutive rhetoric to tell viewers what idealized American citizenship looks like; a constitutive media effect. There are notions of temporality engrained into the very fabric of superhero universes. The essence of super villains is outlined through the strategies they employ to disrupt time and space. The essence of superheroes is outlined through the oppositional tactics they employ to recover the means of producing their space and re-aligning their sacred and secular timelines. The narrative consistently follows a linear trajectory upon which the text places the secular timeline—it is marked by the progression of the narrative. Timing, by nature, is linear, and a timeline is merely a "tracing of acts."¹⁴² However, each character's timeline is ultimately unique making it so that not all temporal trajectories can be purely linear; one must analyze them diachronically. This allows superhero universes to operate on a mixed time schedule of both secular and sacred time.¹⁴³ The transfer between the two timelines occurs through varying uses of tactics by superheroes against the structure of society developed when super villains control the means of production of fearful citizenship. An example of such occurs at the conclusion of "Code Red" when Captain America is able to de-program the Red Skull's assassin, setting in motion the events that would ultimately lead to sacred and secular temporal re-alignment.

¹⁴² de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

¹⁴³ Leff, "Dimensions of Temporality," 26-31.

The strategies employed by super villains aim to disrupt a superhero's linear progression through time and instead hopes to cause the superhero to become haunted by his or her past. Superheroes must employ tactics to subvert those strategies in order to move back into the linear timeline and thus progress through the narrative of the superhero's life, which ultimately ends with the defeat of evil. Until Captain America restores the secular flow of time, he is stuck in a cyclical battle against time with the fear that the world will leave them behind again, making Captain America just as fearful as the everyday citizen. He has to reconcile with Bucky to release himself from the sacred timeline.

Strategy is the "calculus of force-relationships" which occurs when a subject with power is able to differentiate itself from the environment—the structure or fabric of everyday society. Upon separating oneself from the structure one is capable of modifying the environment in order to create a "proper" place for the generation of exterior relationships.¹⁴⁴ Red Skull utilizes strategy in "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" by releasing the dust of death into Manhattan and the sleepers into the capital. Both of these acts function rhetorically to make citizens fearful and to constitute them as obedient to the oppressive State apparatus. Individuals, such as superheroes, struggle to modify strategy as they often lack the power necessary to modify the structures that people live in every day. The structure, perhaps, could change should the superhero persuade enough ordinary people to follow them in their pursuits, but for the most part, strategy remains unchanged—the citizens are still fearful of super villains. A superhero's victory lasts only for a moment, until the next criminal comes to take over the lives of the everyday citizen once again. At the end of each episode, Captain America arrests the Red Skull, but viewers know that Red Skull will escape imprisonment once again so that he may unleash the next evil plot he develops

¹⁴⁴ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

during his incarceration. While the citizens can feel that moment of victory, all of them know it won't last. The strategies remain in place because the villains outnumber the heroes in an insurmountable power relationship. Because of this, the villains are able to employ strategies that establish and reinforce the force relationship between the structures of the city. Strategies also allow villains to control the ideological apparatus, which terrorizes citizens, and the temporal trajectories of superheroes by forcing them to recover the past that haunts them.

The force relationship develops through the culture of fear and destruction in which the citizens must call upon the superhero to save them and in which the superhero must act to prevent chaos. This dark cloud effect exists in perpetuity along the secular timeline, primarily due to crime syndication in the universe. The super villains are capable of making vast crime networks, which are capable of occupying the superhero. The superhero remains occupied while the super villain plans the next assault, and then uses the crime network as a decoy for their newest, most evil plan to be deployed. In *Captain America*, the Red Skull is capable of using the resources of HYDRA due to his relationships with HYDRA's leadership. Although not officially affiliated with HYDRA, Red Skull is has the connections to utilize those resources.¹⁴⁵ Because the Red Skull is able to employ a vast amount of resources towards maintaining the chaotic perpetuity of evil that exists within the structure of the linear timeline, he is also able to employ resources towards disrupting the timelines of Captain America, to distract him from thwarting the Red Skull's plan. Strategies employ resources toward the destruction of the linear timeline of the superhero, which pushes them in to a cyclical timeline that disallows the superhero from preventing chaos.

¹⁴⁵ D.G. Chichester [w], Jackson Guipe [a], Doug Hazlewood [i], "The Soldiers of Anarchy," *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* vol. 3 #26 (August 1991), Marvel Comics Group.

When strategies and tactics are used to construct the place and space of superhero universes control over temporality becomes a key underpinning of how each character is constructed and how each character moves back into the linear timeline. More importantly, control also shows how one might recover one's Americanness if they should lose it in the chaotic perpetuity of being haunted by their past. The way a character chooses to go through the process of narrative re-integration shows viewers a way to recover their own Americanness in a time of need. That process may have consequence on viewers' understanding of citizenship in the real world if the text successfully interpellates the viewer toward the dominant reading of the text. The requirement that Captain America reconcile with Bucky in order to ultimately defeat the Red Skull's plan to destroy the U.S. capital and infiltrate the government shows a model of behavior that equates Americanness to the ability to deal with adversity. In fighting against the strategies, which force citizens to face the demons of their past, superheroes provide a model in which Americanness overcomes those demons, reinvigorating the ideal American citizen's belief in the qualities of Americanness.

If the strategies to disrupt the secular timeline consistently remain the same, then surely the tactics must change for the superhero to regain narrative progression. Tactics, as opposed to strategy, do not have an inherent structure to support them. They cannot count on the "proper" because the "proper" is created when a strategy finds "victory [in a] space over time."¹⁴⁶ When the super villain's strategy creates a culture of fear among citizens, the structure doesn't allow the superhero's success to continue outside of the exact moment in which it exists. The knowledge that there are more criminals than heroes and that we, as citizens, must remain wary of our everyday moments in which fear and crime controls us overshadows the extraordinary moment

¹⁴⁶ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

of success in which the superhero finds victory. Although the superhero has thwarted the villain's plan, tomorrow will produce a new threat.

Yet, superheroes persist in attempting to subvert the immense superstructure, and they can only do so using guerilla tactics. Superheroes must employ innovative tactics, which must "constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities.'"¹⁴⁷ There is constant disruption of the everyday lives of superheroes when villains attack the city and they must, once again, save the day. "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" exemplify this argument. De-programming the Winter Soldier affords Captain America a fleeting victory in which he is able to fight and arrest the Red Skull. Immediately at the start of the next episode, the Red Skull escapes from his prison and releases an army of robots to destroy the United States. Reconciling Captain America's past with the Winter Soldier allows the two of them to stop this newer, more evil plan, but even that victory was fleeting. Captain America is able to move on with the other Avengers, but now Winter Soldier must continue to reconcile his own past and clean up the mess he made.

This constant disruption/reconciliation cycle is why tactics occur on a more individualized basis, or at least in a small group such as the Avengers. The individual is able to turn the strategy against itself by operating "to their own ends forces alien to them."¹⁴⁸ An example of such is evident in the moment of reconciliation for the superhero. The citizens look at the destruction of the oppressive apparatus and in this moment have avoided the culture of fear so that they may cheer the superhero for the victory the superhero has achieved. This moment only occurs when the superhero is capable of combining various heterogeneous elements in order to use the efforts and resources of the oppressive apparatus against itself. The heterogeneous

¹⁴⁷ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

¹⁴⁸ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

elements are the specific opportunities, which one can seize at a particular moment, as well as the synthesis of smaller opportunities into a larger opportunity. The moment of victory is when the heterogeneous elements coalesce to form a tactic, which may succeed in resisting the strategy of super villains. It is with hope that superheroes employ tactics; to one day revolutionize strategy so that the superhero can control the means of producing ideal citizens instead of super villains producing fearful citizens.

The perpetuity of strategy and tactic lead to constant shifts between linear and cyclical time. Super villains nihilistically reject the moment of revolution when tactics overcome strategy. They do so by pushing superheroes and anti-heroes back into cyclical time cycles that repeat themselves constantly even after the super villain has been defeated. This cyclical loop will continue perpetually in these superhero universes because the strategies can never actually change, making it so that the tactics are constantly evolving as super villains return to face their superhero foe once again. Superheroes and, by proxy, the everyday citizen must always work to reconcile the sacred with the secular to avoid fearful citizenship to move from time back to timing. "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" provide three prevalent constitutive metaphors that allow the characters to move from the sacred back to the secular timeline. In doing so, the episodes establish a dominant reading that uses constitutive metaphors of idealized American citizenship to assist viewers in navigating their own citizenship in the real world by showing how Captain America must reconcile his past in order to move onto the future.

There are three prevalent constitutive metaphors in these two episodes, which have opportunity for interpellative effect on viewers' senses of citizenship. All three metaphors occur through the presence of time in the episodes but are more visible during the sacred's re-integration to the linear progression of the narrative. Each metaphor operates for both timing and

time to illuminate how the text guides viewers towards a dominant reading of the text that displays specific qualities of Americanness. "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" use the metaphors of perseverance, forgiveness, and the belief in American ideals to navigate the temporal trajectories that bind Captain America and the Winter Soldier, allowing them to recover their Americanness and become more ideal citizens.

Perseverance occurs within timing in "Code Red" through the continued attempts to produce an antidote by Iron Man and Black Panther. When the antidote is successfully made, Iron Man must then rush to deliver the antidote to Captain America but is met by fighter jets, which attempt to bomb him out of the sky. Iron Man uses his satellite navigation system to launch the vial filled with the antidote through miles of space in a last ditch effort to deliver the antidote before it is too late. Winter Soldier intercepts the vial, stopping the progression of the narrative, pushing the narrative back into the cyclical timeline once again.

Perseverance occurs within time in "Code Red" through the attempts of Captain America to reconcile his past with Winter Soldier/Bucky. When Captain America has been defeated and Red Skull orders the Winter Soldier to kill him, Captain America must convince the Winter Soldier to remember who he is, not was, so that they could be allies once again. While the Winter Soldier struggles with this reconciliation, the good-hearted Americanness inside of him overtakes him, causing him to assist Captain America in defeating evil once again.

The interplay between perseverance in timing in time in "Code Red" shows that disruption can occur multiple times throughout the narrative, with multiple disruptions occurring simultaneously. Captain America's secular timeline is disrupted at the beginning of the episode when he becomes poisoned while Winter Soldier's secular timeline is disrupted when he became an assassin for the Red Skull following World War II, meaning both are stuck in a cyclical

timeline haunted by their past—they are frozen in Time. At this climax of the episode, however, both those cyclical timelines cross trajectories allowing Winter Soldier to regain his Americanness and become an American hero once again. Through Captain America's perseverance to recover this lost relationship, both characters are able to become strong and brave enough to fight evil together, and to protect America.

Linked closely with perseverance is forgiveness. Forgiveness occurs within timing in "Winter Soldier" through the Winter Soldier's secular timelines. Early in the episode, a frustrated and angry Winter Soldier says he does not care who believes he is trying to do good for the world, or about saving Captain America, that he only wants revenge for the brainwashing that Red Skull forced him to endure. He does not forgive Captain America, despite Winter Soldier's willingness to help Captain America in the previous episode. Winter Soldier is still at battle with himself in attempt to navigate his tragic past with his rediscovery of his Americanness. Near the conclusion of the episode, as Winter Soldier nearly falls to his death, Captain America saves him, and in this moment Winter Soldier forgives Captain America for the past by letting Captain America know that he was all right, and encouraging Rogers to "go get him, Cap."¹⁴⁹ That moment of release allowed Captain America to once again arrest the Red Skull and for the United States to be safe again, for the moment.

Forgiveness occurs within time in "Winter Soldier" through that same moment. While there was a brief reprieve from cyclical time at the end of "Code Red," both Captain America and Winter Soldier were immediately thrust back into the haunting of their pasts. Perseverance on its own would not be sufficient in "Winter Soldier" and instead Captain America must convince Winter Soldier to forgive him for his past mistakes. The act of saving Winter Soldier's

¹⁴⁹ "Winter Soldier," *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*.

life allowed Captain America to move past the chaotic perpetuity of sacred time, to move beyond the haunting of his past, and to once again, defeat evil. Saving the Winter Soldier's life allowed Captain America to make up for not saving Bucky in the explosion that froze both of them in the past.

The interplay between forgiveness in the timing and Time of "Winter Soldier" shows that the repair of disrupted spaces and timelines occurs from within. While perseverance was capable of temporarily mending the timelines towards secular time, adding forgiveness allowed for a more lasting effect. Surely, those timelines will be disrupted once again, but as evidenced in the remainder of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* following the events of "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier," the Winter Soldier has decided to align himself once again with Captain America, and thus the Avengers, to protect the United States against the next invasion of evil. Forgiveness is a metaphor for the ideal citizen's ability to accept the faults of a nation and its citizens, move past those faults, and ultimately serve the greater good by fighting for justice.

Perseverance and forgiveness combine to form the third metaphor: The American Dream. The American Dream forms out of the relentless belief Captain America has in strong American ideals; they are infinite. Through the passing of this story arc, along with the individual narratives of each episode, the American Dream is displayed and has the potential of being passed onto viewers as they exit the more-than-real covalent experience of viewership back into their real lives. The dominant reading of "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" tells viewers to persevere in times of hardship, and forgive those who have wronged you, because an ideal American citizen would do so—it is how one obtains the Dream. In watching Captain America and Winter Soldier navigate the temporal trajectories of their own lives, they guide the viewer

towards the ideological apparatus of the superhero universe, giving opportunity for idealized American citizenship to interpellate viewer-citizens.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, the production and disruption of linear timelines into cyclical timelines has intense effect on the lives of superheroes. Furthermore, the interpellative effects of viewing temporality in superhero texts invites viewers toward a dominant reading of the text that tells them to participate as citizens in the real world based on the constitutive metaphors used as a tactic for resisting the disruption of time for superheroes. Through understanding the tactics present in these television episodes, viewers can begin to understand agency's function as a constitutive metaphor. In watching the reconciliation between the past conflicts of Captain America and Winter Soldier, viewers are taught that through perseverance, forgiveness, and a belief in American ideals, they too can be an ideal citizen like Captain America; they have the agency to do so.

By reconciling Captain America's past, the text allows viewers to re-integrate into the narrative once again and continue through the story resulting in the moment of victory for the superhero, and the potential for the production of ideal American citizenship as well. While temporality on a conceptual level may lack the interpellative effects of other building blocks of the superhero universe such as visual aesthetics or oratory style, it is a key linkage, which is both incredibly present, but also flies under the radar at the same time. Timing, as opposed to time, is the ultimate goal of the twenty-two minute episodic adventures that viewers share with superheroes each time they start a new episode. In order to achieve a moment of victory, the text says, one must not allow the past to prevent the future. Though superheroes and viewers alike may pass through a haunting experience, they ultimately reach the same destination where they

come back each week for the newest episode in order to experience the more-than-real once again. In that episode, the viewers will experience once again the constitutive media effect of the metaphors of perseverance, forgiveness, and the belief in American ideals both in the superhero universe, and in the real world.

These constitutive metaphors are experienced passively because viewers lack the ability to modify the text in which they appear, but the dominant reading of the text still invites active participation from viewers by modeling ideal American citizenship, which may be enunciated in the real world. Viewership is a unique moment of both passivity and activity that gives opportunity for a deeper understanding of constitutive media effects. The combination of both space and time, as well as spacing and timing, allows viewers to accept the ideological apparatus of the text as it interpellates them during the viewing experience, and then allows the viewer to process and modify that ideology to create a narrative for their own experiences with life, citizenship, government, and the world

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

As the superhero genre has exploded into popular media, scholars have begun to turn their attention to the ideological work that these texts do. This thesis examined select episodes from *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* as a preliminary study on the rhetorical import of these texts by analyzing how specific characters display their Americanness or un-Americanness. In the remainder of this chapter, I review my research questions and findings, consider the broader relevance of those findings for the field of Communication Studies, discuss the limitations of the study, and suggest additional avenues for future research.

Review of Research Questions/Insights

In this thesis, I have argued that an ideographic criticism of two select episodes from *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* illuminates essential building blocks of the character archetypes of superhero, super villain, and anti-hero. Furthermore, I have argued that those building blocks guide audience members towards a dominant reading of the text that informs the viewer about Americanness and un-Americanness utilizing visual and temporal elements within the episodes. In doing so, the text attempts to interpellate viewers towards an ideological apparatus that constitutes the audience as ideal American citizens. The continued usage of these three character archetypes constitutes viewers as always-already prepared to see good and evil in American and un-American characters respectively.

Entering into this study, my hypothesis was that reproduction of the character archetypes superhero, super villain, and anti-hero allows the ideological apparatus of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* to manipulate the dominant reading of select episodes from the series. In particular, "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier" provide a dominant reading that seeks to inform the

audience about idealized American citizenship and forms a constitutive rhetoric that tells viewers what idealized American citizenship entails. Using visual elements that invite affective and aesthetic responses, and temporal elements that control narrative progression, I have shown how each character archetype has underlying qualities of Americanness and/or un-Americanness, which provides a model of idealized American citizenship to viewers.

In Chapter 2, I argued that two dominant visual elements play a role in guiding audiences towards a dominant reading of Americanness and un-Americanness in superheroes, super villains, and anti-hero characters in "Code Red." In producing superheroes as a space, and allowing the production of that space to be disrupted or lost, "Code Red" shows viewers what Captain America's Americanness looks like by forcing him to lose it, and then regain it throughout the episode. "Code Red" shows audience members that Captain America must embody his belief in the American people and the American Dream, or he will not be strong enough to defeat evil. Furthermore, "Code Red" places Captain America's Americanness in opposition to a group of "red" villains. This bolsters his Americanness while Othering the villains as evil anti-American European forces. This aesthetic plays upon dormant anti-European and anti-Communist sentiments in US-American pop culture to tell young children and adults alike that you are either American or you want to destroy America.

In Chapter 3, I argued that timing and time play a role in narrative progression, which showed how Captain America loses his ability to display his Americanness when evil forces disrupt his personal secular timeline. Using sacred time to allow the past to haunt Captain America provides a distinct message that one must reconcile their past in order to move on to the future. In reconciling his relationship with Winter Soldier, Captain America is able to reconstitute himself as the ideal American soldier and defeat the forces of evil to save the

American people once again. In disrupting the linear timeline through haunting, and then re-integrating into the linear timeline through reconciliation, the dominant reading of the text gives a view of perseverance, forgiveness, and a belief in American ideals as tools for regaining one's lost Americanness in a time of social crisis or personal moral panic.

Both of these content areas work together, simultaneously, to provide a dominant reading that tells viewers what the ideal American citizen looks and feels like in attempt to interpellate the viewer. The effect of interpellating viewers in this way is that those viewers are then encouraged by the text to participate in the world as a beacon for the ideological apparatus of the text—to become ideal American citizens. While media screens function as an escape from reality into the more-than-real experience, the ideological apparatus present in those texts attempts to seep into the real world through a constitutive rhetoric. Through the possibility of covalent viewership experiences, ideal American citizenship can exist in both the screened and real worlds.

One possible reason for this is the *jouissance* or the enjoyment that viewers find when they identify with specific characters within a television episode that gives power to the ideological apparatus within a given text: it will be easier for the text to constitute the viewer as an ideal American citizen if the viewer finds pleasure in becoming ideal. The scopophilic tendencies of media viewers bolster further the *jouissance* of identifying with characters in the media. Media scholars have long discussed whether viewers are active or passive when watching media screens. In this thesis, I have argued that viewers are simultaneously active and passive because some visual and temporal elements invite an active response, while others do not. This thesis has demonstrated the ways in which texts have the capacity to invite a variety of responses from viewers. Some parts of a television episode will wash over viewers without critical thought

while other parts will trigger an active response in viewers: Both are informative of how the text constitutes the viewer as whatever the ideological apparatus wants them to be. Interpellation exists at a point where viewers are able to suspend disbelief when they know that the characters are not "really" real, but at the same time process their actions and the moral of the story as a pedagogical tool. It does not matter which part of the text interpellates the viewer because many heterogeneous elements combine to form a homogenous ideograph of Americanness—all parts work toward the same goal. Whether viewers see the good in the heroes or the evil in the villains, the effect on Americanness remains the same. What truly matters is how viewers may enunciate the ideological apparatus within the text after the viewership experience, allowing it to become material. In the case of *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, people who can vote in an election, drive on the same highways as you, or even live in your neighborhood may enunciate ideal American citizenship based on what they see on television. All of this is possible when the ideological apparatus interpellates a viewer based off of the behavior of the good guys or bad guys they watch on TV. The hyper-exaggerated qualities and abilities of superheroes permits a citizen to think and act like Captain America, even if they cannot quite be Captain America.

Producing citizens through the ideological apparatus of a media text presents a case study that is analogous to the production of citizenship in the real world. From classical rhetoric to contemporary theory, the production of ideal citizenship has always been a major concern in every society—those who control the ideological apparatus are constantly trying to find a way to constitute citizens as ideal. Even in fantasy/science-fiction, citizenship and Otherness play major roles in the development of one's identity. Although superheroes struggle constantly with how to be a proper (super)citizen in a world that is difficult to navigate, these texts provide actual citizens with equipment for navigating that difficult terrain. It is through the continued use of

these interpellative building blocks of Americanness and un-Americanness that the characters in *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* continue to exist. Using those building blocks of their character archetype, each character gains the tools required to enunciate themselves in the screen, and if interpellation is successful, potentially enunciate themselves in their viewers as well. Enunciation occurs through the intersections of the real world and the visual and temporal elements that educate viewers about a Captain Americanian model of idealized American citizenship.

In addition to the insight I have provided on the rhetorical import of these select episodes, this study has also informed the field of Communication Studies in two ways. First, it contributes to the discussion of constitutive rhetoric by examining the ways in which popular culture constitutes citizenship. Not only do popular media entertain, but they educate, invite us in, and potentially constitute us as citizens. While producing citizens in this way, media texts also have the power to re-boot, so that they may re-interpellate both the current and the next generation of viewers—this is especially true for the superhero genre because it infuses children's media with nostalgia for parents. Also, with the advent of streaming technologies such as Netflix and Hulu, viewers can go back and re-watch media texts at a low cost, giving those texts staying power in a genre that is constantly growing. This also means that the ideological apparatus of those texts, and of the screen that projects them, remains long after the initial viewing process as it lays dormant in our minds. It may haunt viewers by always being there, ready for the viewer to recall in a moment of need. While this thesis focuses on the superhero genre, that capacity may exist in other types of mediated texts. Whatever the genre, the screen has the ability to teach viewers about who the text says they are, and who the text says they should be.

The second contribution this thesis makes to the field of Communication Studies is to argue that an understanding of the ways in which ideographs are constituted rhetorically is relevant to theories of active and passive viewership. My analysis demonstrates that particular dimensions of a message may become salient for the viewer at any given time, and that multiple elements work together to create an ideograph. Furthermore, not all attempts at interpellation are successful. What is important is to identify the interplay between the many elements that comprise the ideological apparatus and create a constitutive rhetoric within the text.

The superhero genre has boomed in the contemporary media scene, and for that reason, these texts deserve deeper analysis both from a rhetorical criticism and a media effects standpoint. While some media consumers will not care about superhero texts, this study has illuminated the potential of a constitutive media effects paradigm that allows for simultaneous active and passive viewership. I do not believe this phenomenon to be limited to superhero texts. Other viewers might find the same transformative experience watching a primetime drama or a romantic comedy. What matters is the dominant ideologies the text displays—the ideological apparatus.

Limitations

There are many limitations to a study like the one done in this thesis. Constraints of space and time prevented an in-depth analysis of every episode or each character in the series *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. Consequently, the main limitations of this study are the sample size, the focus on hyper-masculinity, and the singular western viewpoint.

The sample size of this study is extremely limited but still provides useful critical insight into how a media text constructs an ideological apparatus within itself. The superhero genre has immense breadth. It spans a variety of mediums, each with different stories and constraints.

There are a multitude of characters within a given superhero universe and multiple universes from which to choose. Each of those characters are complex and provide additional insight into this complicated web of intersections that make up the superhero genre. For the purposes of this study, I needed to limit the medium, number of episodes, and number of characters that I analyzed.

I chose an animated television series instead of the recently popular Hollywood films because it allowed me to analyze how the visual and temporal elements of these characters interact across multiple episodes. Marvel has only released one of its two planned *Captain America* movies for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and the Winter Soldier does not appear in the first film. Furthermore, the film would only provide a singular narrative from which to draw. The ideological constraints of a singular event might not be as informative as analyzing how characters perform across events. To address this concern, I selected two episodes from one series that aired on Disney XD and only in the United States. This allowed me to analyze how the characters performed over time while providing a clear object for study. There are also too many characters within these select texts for a preliminary analysis of character archetypes. For this reason, I selected one character from each of the character archetypes of superhero, super villain, and anti-hero. I chose Captain America, Red Skull, and Winter Soldier because the characters are interrelated, their stories are interwoven, and they provided opportunity to critically assess how each character archetype interacts with the others. This small sample size of medium, episode selection, and character selection helped to establish a preliminary study and future research can broaden the scope of this study.

A second limitation of this study is the hyper-masculine nature of each of the characters, specifically, and the genre more generally. Because this study was a preliminary examination, I

selected characters and episodes because of their interrelatedness. I did not consider whether including a female character changes the dominant reading of Americanness within these select episodes. Examination of other characters will yield additional insight. Men and women in superhero cartoons may perform masculinity and femininity differently, they may gender bend, and they may not follow gender roles at all. All of these may change how the text constructs Americanness.

Historically, superhero texts pornify their female characters making them objectified as a supporting character but rarely a lead. The exigence for creating a hyper-masculine text is borne out of the target demographics for animated superhero cartoons—generally 8-14 year old boys. Hyper-masculinity in shows targeted at young children could lead to problematic gender binaries if neither the text nor the parents address the gendered nature of the messages. In the case of "Code Red" and "Winter Soldier," there are two significant female characters: Ms. Marvel and the Wasp. Some viewers may identify more with one of these characters than they do with the male characters, and the framing of their character archetypes would have drastic influence on these viewers' understanding of the dominant reading of the text.

A final limitation of this study is the Westernized ethnocentric viewpoint of the study. I chose three Anglo-Saxon, White, Western characters (two US-American, one German), all of whom perform hyper-masculinity. I chose two episodes out of forty-four possible episodes in the series. I chose one series out of a litany of possible series within the superhero genre that stretches across multiple mediums. A more expanded examination of the rhetorical strategies employed in the series, the history of these and other characters, and the ideologies of superhero texts, in general, would provide a tremendous amount of additional information on the

interpellative effect of superhero texts, and the possibility of a constitutive rhetoric for other groups than the ideal American citizen.

While the series is now available on Netflix, and in-part available on *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes's* website, its ideological constraints remain extremely limited to a US-American view on the world. Superhero cartoons produced in Europe or Asia may produce similar results if they utilize similar rhetorical moves. A study that employs the type of criticism undertaken in this project could, for example, determine whether Japanese manga promotes particular versions of Japanese citizenship.

Future Research

While this study was a preliminary examination of the constitutive effect of Americanness in these select episodes from *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, there are many additional avenues for future research. First, future research could identify additional building blocks of the ideograph "Americanness." Visual and temporal elements are only two of many possible avenues. Future research could examine additional elements that comprise a character in order to determine the role of these components in constituting Americanness. Second, future research could identify and assess additional character archetypes. While superhero, super villain, and anti-hero are the most general of the character archetypes in the superhero genre, a deeper analysis of each character's roles in relationship to other characters may provide additional insight. Whether or not the text positions the character as a guardian, mentor, sidekick, crony, or vigilante will change the character's relationship to Americanness. Future research also should consider the character's narrative function in more detail, focusing specifically on characters as protagonists, antagonists, deuteragonists, etc. Fourth, studies that examine superheroism and citizenship in the future could place sex, gender performance, and

sexuality at the center of the analysis. The superhero genre is hyper-masculine in nature, but fantasy/science-fiction is also amenable to producing queer and gender-bending identities. Male and female characters, masculine and feminine characters, homosexual and heterosexual characters may all perform Americanness in different ways that are informative to the constitutive rhetoric of the text and the ideograph of Americanness. In future research, I hope to explore these additional components of Americanness expressed by other characters and identities. Supporting characters provide many opportunities for research, and as I continue to study these texts, I plan to look at how they function as well.

Finally, this study has focused on the constitutive dimensions of the text, but future research can expand to measure the media effects dimensions as well. Future research could utilize a controlled environment to examine a particular viewer's capacity for simultaneous activity and passivity during media viewing. A controlled environment would also assist in determining which visual and temporal elements are effective in interpellating audience members, and whether viewers process those elements actively or passively. Additionally, the researcher could measure the affect of attention and memory on the narrative to see which elements of the episode are processed as background information that may assist in constituting the audience without the audience knowing it does so. Perhaps, with the right stimuli, those passive elements of the text could also guide viewers towards the dominant reading of the text, in the case of this thesis, Americanness or un-Americanness.

The next step for this research is to run a pilot study to measure if visual and temporal elements of the episodes have a significant impact on either the viewer's experience of viewership and/or citizenship. A qualitative study with open-ended questions will assist in developing a reliable and valid Likert-type scale. The benefit of such research is that the

researcher can then do a pre-test/post-test model to see if these or any other texts are able to change a viewer's feelings about their own Americanness. In doing so, the researcher may be capable of measuring whether or not the ideological constraints of media texts are capable of transferring from the screened reality back into the real world with the viewer. In addition, this type of study would inform the researcher about the impact of extended viewership. Watching one episode may fail to interpellate a viewer, especially if the viewer is uninterested in the subject matter. An entire season or an entire series may have a stronger interpellative effect. Finally, this type of research will make constitutive media effects more apparent. While study of news media has shown that television can change viewers' polity, and studies on the effect of watching superhero cartoons have shown that children and adults alike develop a parasocial relationship of the text, neither study informs how the text itself might function as a constitutive rhetoric for viewers.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ For research on news media and participatory democracy see: Rasa Erentaite, Rita Zukauskienė, Wim Beyers, and Rasa Pilkauskaite-Valickienė, "Is News Media Related to Civic Engagement? The Effects of Interest In and Discussions About the News," *Journal of Adolescence* 35 (2012), 587-597; Alan S. Kaufman, "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," in *Responsibility NOMOS III*, ed. C. J. Friedrich, (New York, NY: The Liberal Art Press, 1960), 272. 266-289; Tina Nabachi, *Deliberative Democracy: The Effects of Participation on Political Efficacy*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 83; Amy Parsons, and Nina Howe, "Superhero Toys and Boys' Physically Active and Imaginative Play," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 20 (2006): 287-300; Carol Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 42. For parasocial relationships and superhero studies see: Keren Eyal and Alan M. Rubin, "Viewer Aggression and Homophily, Identification, and Parasocial Relationships with Television Characters," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 47 (2003): 77-98; Elizabeth M. Purse and Rebecca B. Rubin, "Attribution in Parasocial Relationships," *Communication Research* 16 (1989): 59-77; Rebecca B. Rubin and Michael P. McPugh, "Development of Parasocial Interactive Relationships," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 31 (1987): 279-292; Ariana Young, Shira Gabriel, and Jordan L. Hollar, "Batman to the Rescue! The Protective Effects of Parasocial Relationships with Muscular Superheroes on Men's Body Image," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49 (2013): 173-177.

Final Thoughts

This study has examined the constitutive dimensions of Americanness as a possible outlet for developing one's citizenship. While it is only a preliminary examination of these select episodes, it has shown that the texts display a dominant reading that seeks to inform viewers about what idealized American citizenship looks and feels like. Utilizing visual and temporal elements to display Americanness and un-Americanness, *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes* seeks to form a community of ideal American citizens who are always-already prepared to heed the call should the day come when they too need to be supercitizens.

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