IN FOCUS: *Clueless*

Introduction

by MELISSA LENOS, editor

On June 2, 2013, some friends and I attended a "Quote-Along" event for Amy Heckerling's 1995 film *Clueless* at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Kansas City. Patrons were greeted at the theater door with giant inflatable "mobile" phones and brightly colored, fluff-topped ballpoint pens. The announcements for the event encouraged us to sing, shout, and "as-if" along with Alicia Silverstone, Stacey Dash, and Brittany Murphy—but only at approved moments, which were helpfully annotated with bouncing-ball-style text highlighted at the bottom of the screen. The Alamo chain, known for its themed events and dine-in theaters, also boasts a famously strict etiquette policy and encourages ritualized viewing behaviors. The theater emphasized this with a full-screen portrait of nineties-era Heckerling superimposed with the text, "At the Alamo Drafthouse, we do NOT disrespect Amy Heckerling."

My friends and I, almost certainly the only attendees old enough to have seen the original release of *Clueless*, observed the other audience members: young, female (the event was advertised as a "Girlie Night"), and wearing Heckerling-inspired approximations of nineties fashion in their matched plaids, kneesocks, and hats. The evening had a cheerful, slumber-party feel (Figure 1). In an additional nod to the new, younger *Clueless* demographic, the Quote-Along's countdown to Cher and Josh's (Alicia Silverstone and Paul Rudd) first kiss included a superimposed animation of Pinkie Pie (a character from the popular contemporary show *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* [Hub Network, 2010–present]) firing off a cannon filled with glitter confetti. The countdown ends, the characters kiss, and the cannon explodes to cheers from the audience.

When *Clueless* was released, some heralded it as Jane Austen for a new generation, and others pondered whether the target audience

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Figure 1. *Clueless* Quote-Along attendees, with "portable" phones. Image courtesy of Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas.

was familiar with Austen's *Emma* at all and saw the film as a possible "gateway" for interesting young audiences in Austen.[1] The film, part of the late-1990s trend of basing teen movies on classical literature, grossed $56 million—it was made on a $12 million budget—and is often listed among the top sleeper hits of the mid-1990s.[2] In terms of its more immediate impact, Douglas McGrath's 1996 adaptation of *Emma* (starring Gwyneth Paltrow in the title role) was a traditional period drama but included aspects

1 Kenneth Turan called Cher "a heroine that Austen would love," and Janet Maslin identified Cher as "nicely translated" contemporary Emma. Other reviewers, such as Jenna DeTrapani, lamented that contemporary teens would not "voluntarily read a classic novel without the education system forcing them into it," but suggested, "The answer is easy. Simply have them watch the 90's film *Clueless* first, then give them a fashionably cool copy of the book to read." The Jane Austen Society of Australia identifies *Clueless* as a potential gateway text for introducing Austen's work to younger readers and provides study guides for pairing the texts. Kenneth Turan, review of *Clueless*, Paramount Pictures, *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1995, http://articles.latimes.com/1995-07-19/entertainment/ca-25375_1_amy-heckerling; Janet Maslin, review of *Clueless*, Paramount Pictures, *New York Times*, July 19, 1995, http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=990CE7D6163AF93AA25754C0A963958260; Jenna DeTrapani, "Clueless about Emma? It's Time to Give Austen a Chance," review of *Clueless*, *Jenna Does Books* (blog), October 4, 2012, http://jennadoesbooks.com/clueless-about-emma-its-time-to-give-austen-a-chance/; Phillips Williams, "Books on the Big Screen (or the Small Screen)," Jane Austen Society of Australia, http://www.jasa.net.au/study/overview.htm.

2 As just a few examples, *Ten Things I Hate about You* (Gil Junger, 1999), based on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*; *She's All That* (Robert Iscove, 1999), based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*; and *Romeo + Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann, 1996). Bernard Weinraub, "*Clueless* a Surprise Hit on the Cheap," *Sun Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL), July 26, 1995, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1995-07-26/lifestyle/9507250264_1_desultory-films-inexpensive-commercial-film-rich-teen-age-girls.

of implausible twentieth-century feminism that some read as an unavoidable echo of *Clueless*.[3]

The film's influence and prescience are examined from several perspectives in this issue's "In Focus." Ben Aslinger's essay explores the film's refusal to adhere to traditional generic boundaries in its sound track, instead sampling hip-hop, rock, pop, and singer-songwriters, and so presaging our postalbum era of Spotify and Pandora. The postgrunge cultural lull following the death of Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain is further investigated by Alice Leppert in her consideration of the film's connection to teen magazine trends, particularly the "makeover" feature. Heckerling's relentlessly "happy" film created an unusual convergence of "intertextual excess" with *YM* and *Seventeen*, and with the explosion of the "teen"-themed subbrands of *Elle*, *Cosmo*, and *Vogue* in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The spread of *Clueless* Quote-Alongs to all Alamo Drafthouse theaters in the United States, as well as to the Prince Charles Cinema in London, suggests that interest in the film remains steady and attendance consistent enough to continue the event at regular intervals. Besides the repeated screenings, the announcements of myriad *Clueless*-inspired and related projects (from a Heckerling-directed *Clueless* "jukebox musical" to a successful Kickstarter-funded documentary, *Beyond Clueless*, on teen film from 1995 to 2004) reinforce that the film has transcended its original target audience and is not a relic of 1990s pop culture but a manufacturer of that culture, an important influence on later films, and a touchstone of teen transmedia.[4]

The Quote-Along I attended, along with BuzzFeed "listicles" and YouTube compilations, illustrates how Heckerling's hyperstyled world generation has lodged in popular cultural memory as a "true" 1990s, which includes our contemporary understanding of 1990s slang.[5] Jennifer O'Meara's essay identifies the significance of these linguistic structures and verbal play in the film's characterizations and narrative style.

Finally, Kyra Hunting considers how an early-convergence, pre-spreadable media text (see the roundtable discussion of the book *Spreadable Media* in this issue) exploded expectations of media franchises for girls. Through novelizations, television adaptations, dolls, accessories, and an early predictor of fashion-design apps (based on Cher's automated closet), the *Clueless* brand has proved its lasting influence and impact on our

3 I briefly discuss *Clueless* and *Emma* as related readaptations in my dissertation, "Déjà View: Cultural Functions of Hollywood Remakes" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2009).

4 Jennifer Vineyard, "Vamps Director Amy Heckerling on Her *Clueless* Reunion and Paul Rudd's AOL Account," *Vulture*, October 29, 2012, http://www.vulture.com/2012/10/vamps-amy-heckerling-interview.html; Charlie Lyne, "Beyond Clueless," funded on January 14, 2013, http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/charlielyne/beyond-clueless.

5 BuzzFeed's primary form of content is the "listicle," a compilation of funny or compelling information in list form that is popularly reposted on social media sites like Facebook. A recent search of the site produced more than twenty *Clueless*-related listicles, created within the past year, including Alice Bolin's "22 Life Lessons from Cher Horowitz" (August 5, 2013, http://www.buzzfeed.com/alicebolin/22-life-lessons-from-cher-horowitz-c7rq) and Leonora Epstein and Jen Lewis's "If Cher from *Clueless* Had Instagram" (September 12, 2013, http://www.buzzfeed.com/leonoraepstein/if-cher-from-clueless-had-instagram). The most popular current YouTube compilations based on the film are "The Ten Commandments of *Clueless*" (2:37, posted by "BuzzFeedPop," October 1, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQ4wMvUlgJY&feature=youtu.be) and "Every Outfit Cher Horowitz Wears in *Clueless* in under 60 Seconds" (0:58, posted by "WORN Fashion Journal," August 22, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6eLxe5hMzg&feature=youtu.be).

understanding of 1990s nostalgia, as well as how early convergence-driven franchises can be reinterpreted in the age of aggregation. *

Clueless about Listening Formations?

by Ben Aslinger

There's only one site I know of where David Bowie, Salt-N-Pepa, Jill Sobule, Coolio, Counting Crows, and the Mighty Mighty Bosstones coexist: the *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995) sound track. A mixture of hip-hop, rock and roll, singer-songwriter, and pop music, the *Clueless* sound track is remarkable in that production personnel largely eschewed strict genre boundary lines in favor of embracing a diverse musical palette. Although it might be overblown to compare the meaning-making capacities of *Clueless*'s compiled musical score to that of *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973), the film undeniably taps into Generation X sensibilities and a 1990s context wherein listening practices foregrounded reductive constructions of genres and demographics and selected parties in the music, television, and film industries sought to replace existing industrial discourses by revaluing musical hybridity and diversity. *Clueless* signals how clueless mainstream recording industry executives increasingly were as to actual listeners' tastes and behaviors; it illustrates one attempt to construct a listening formation that embraces musical diversity and hybridity over listening formations rooted in the narrow politics of genre. *Clueless* can be seen as an important genealogical moment in the shift away from artists and repertoire (A&R) personnel and music executives as power brokers in constructing adolescent sonic cultures. The film is part of a shift to an era in which directors, producers, and music supervisors place music in filmic, televisual, and ludic platforms and craft sonic palettes for specific demographics (for more on the ways that female producers propelled *Clueless* as a convergent phenomenon, see Hunting's essay in this "In Focus"). Karyn Rachtman, Capitol vice president of A&R and sound tracks, and Tim Devine, Capitol vice president of A&R, prepared the sound-track album; however, Amy Heckerling's adroit use of music in her film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and her incorporation of music into *Clueless* suggest that she played a definitive role in choosing musical tracks and

syncing music and image.[1] After Heckerling, deployments of the compiled popular music score in film and television would be increasingly treated as authorial flourishes from Hollywood players such as Greg Berlanti and Ryan Murphy. The music of *Clueless* signaled an increased hybridization of teen listening tastes. Listening tastes would become even harder to map and diverse listening practices even more mainstream, with the rise of Napster, Spotify, and emerging music-discovery apps that allow users to order, remix, and customize their pathways through networked and algorithmic listening.

This piece is inspired by ongoing conversations in media studies on popular music sound tracks, music licensing, and the effects of music on spectatorship.[2] *Clueless* signals shifts in how Hollywood deploys the popular music sound track. The film also serves as an important genealogical moment that helps us historicize contemporary articulations of target demographics, subcultures, and compiled popular music scores.

As *Clueless* was based loosely on Jane Austen's *Emma* and was characterized by clever writing, critics focused primarily on other elements of style, narrative, and technique besides the sound track (for more on the *Emma* comparison and dialogue in *Clueless*, see O'Meara's essay in this "In Focus"). Aside from judgments on whether Heckerling was bastardizing Austen or updating Austen for the 1990s, critical responses of the time engaged with how the film was helping to redefine teen film.[3] Journalist Lawrie Zion wrote in 1996, "This is as much a landmark for the teen-flick genre as *Before Sunrise* is for on-screen romance."[4] Other reviewers explicitly compared the film to *Heathers* and contrasted it to Larry Clark's difficult and disturbing film *Kids* (for more on this comparison, see Leppert's essay in this "In Focus").[5] The *New York Times* put *Clueless* in conversation with films made popular by baby boomers, such as *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977), *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, 1983), and *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), positing that *Clueless* signaled the arrival of generation X and the return of the teen girl spectator to the multiplex.[6]

Clueless depicts, in broad brushstrokes, teen audio cultures in the 1990s under the swath of the "alternative" radio format and the selective uptake of hip-hop in white, middle-class taste cultures. The sound track is timely in its response to burgeoning indie rock, alternative, and riot-grrrl music scenes and modes of production, and it is

1 Brett Atwood, "Modern Rock Featured on *Clueless* Soundtrack," *Billboard*, July 8, 1995.

2 See Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, eds., *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Jonathan Romney and Adrian Wootton, eds., *Celluloid Jukebox: Popular Music and the Movies since the 50s* (London: British Film Institute, 1995); Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

3 Todd McCarthy, "*Clueless* Reigns as Teenpix Rise from the Dud," *Daily Variety*, July 21, 1995; Jennifer Wolcott, "Girl Power at the Movies," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 6, 1998.

4 Lawrie Zion, "Being in Love Means Talking a Lot," *Age* (Melbourne, Australia), March 21, 1996.

5 Peter Galvin, "From the Plethora of Teen Twaddle Comes Smart Satire with Street Cred," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 21, 1995; Elizabeth Snead, "Is *Kids* Morally Corrupt or a Cautionary Tale?" *USA Today*, July 28, 1995.

6 Bernard Weinraub, "Who's Lining Up at Box Office? Lots and Lots of Girls; Studios Aim at Teen-agers, a Vast, Growing Audience," *New York Times*, February 23, 1998.

timeless because it manages to deploy then-contemporary music and cover versions of older songs to represent teen growing pains and identity struggles. That Heckerling and the music team managed to respond so quickly to 1990s trends is interesting, given that film sound tracks have often struggled, compared to television programs, to move in sync with contemporary musical movements. That they managed, within the production norms and distribution window of Hollywood feature films, to be topical in their representation of youth cultures and gender, is even more remarkable.

Not all of the music in *Clueless* was contemporary, however. The Muffs covered Kim Wilde's "Kids in America" (1981), Jewel covered Eric Carmen's power ballad "All by Myself" (1975), and Counting Crows covered the Psychedelic Furs' "The Ghost in You" (1984). Most of the covers function as nondiegetic music. The use of covers would become more popular in television licensing; producers and directors became more interested in playing with master recordings and substituting a newer, perhaps cheaper version for a more expensive master-use license from an A-list artist. The use of covers in *Clueless*, along with the use of General Public's "Tenderness" (1984) in the closing credits, signals the importance of music from youth and early childhood to teen aesthetics. While symptomatic of 1970s and 1980s nostalgia, the use of these tracks also invites scholars to think through how listening histories are constructed. Cher (Alicia Silverstone), Dionne (Stacey Dash), and Tai (Brittany Murphy) would have heard these tracks played by parents, older siblings, or cousins. How have recording technologies and contexts of use (e.g., car radios, radio formats) influenced musical tastes? Is there an awareness and perhaps even fondness for some of our parents' musical tastes because we heard that music in the car? What does it do to teen taste and to taste and/or style itself to argue that teens use historical traces as resources? In a networked era in which the ideology of music discovery has become hegemonic, what role does the past play in the mix? During the preparation of this essay, I realized that I needed to remind myself of *Clueless*'s music, so I accessed the sound-track album via Spotify on my iPhone. With so much of the past and the present in reach, what are teen sonics today? What are teen playlists today, and just how clued in or clueless are we as older academics?

Heckerling explicitly capitalizes on references to popular music history, celebrity, stardom, and gender. Dionne's and Cher's names hearken back to earlier modes of popular music, given that they are named after two well-known female vocalists. Cher's partnership with Sonny Bono and Dionne Warwick's work with songwriter Burt Bacharach call into relief the role of gender and power in constructing music, sound, and the body. Different from Bono and Bacharach's masculine and perhaps even patriarchal presence in authoring Dionne Warwick's and Cher's star texts, Amy Heckerling emerges as a potent figure of female authorship. Obvious candidates for the manipulation of popular sound tracks include directors such as Cameron Crowe (*Jerry Maguire*, 1996; *Almost Famous*, 2000; *Elizabethtown*, 2005), but Heckerling's deployment of popular song signals the need for increased interrogation of the ways that musical placements in moving-image media represent and refract identity and alterity. How and why are feminist, queer, and minority filmmakers interested in the communicative properties of sound in ways different from those who inhabit more dominant subject positions?

While using Dionne and Cher to explore femininity and race, Heckerling also draws on Alicia Silverstone's star persona. Heckerling capitalizes on Silverstone's connection to rock culture and twists the ways that teen female bodies and subjectivities become connected to musical cultures, listening formations, and discursive genre constructions. Silverstone appeared in music videos for the rock band Aerosmith such as "Amazing" (1994), "Cryin'" (1994), and "Crazy" (1994) (for more on the Silverstone-Aerosmith connection, see Leppert's essay). In the "Crazy" video, Liv Tyler and Silverstone shed their schoolgirl uniforms, go on a road trip, enact a little bit of lesbian identity play at a strip-club amateur night, and go skinny-dipping in a pond with a sexy all-American farmhand. In many ways, these videos reinforce the patriarchal nature of rock discourse. While "Silverstone's reputation as a MTV Award–winning major babe" was considered a potential audience draw, Heckerling did something interesting by turning the largely silent spectacle into a complicated living, speaking character in a film that challenges rock discourse and its ideas about gender.[7] Heckerling told journalists, "I first responded to her [Silverstone] when I saw the Aerosmith video."[8] What is particularly interesting here are the conjunctures and disjunctures between music video and film; the affordances each form has (or does not have) for the representation and construction of gender; and how the connections between embodiment, visuality, and musicality can be framed in both forms.

During Tai's makeover by Cher and Dionne, Jill Sobule's "Supermodel" (1995) plays. The sarcastic tone of Sobule's voice, along with the lyrics, reinforces and subverts the role of media and fashion in constructing glamour and beauty standards. As a spectator, this sequence always reminds me of 1990s riot-grrrl musicians and indie rock artists such as Liz Phair, who were interested in fashion and other things that are often labeled as "girly" but sought to retain forms of agency by adopting ambivalent and complicated perspectives on popular and commercial culture. Sobule's choice to affect a teen girl accent and a particular Californian vocal uptick at the end of phrases combines with her performance on guitar to simultaneously endorse and satirize gender norms. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones write, "To move from 'voice' to 'vocality' . . . implies a shift from a concern with the phenomenological roots of voice to a conception of vocality as a cultural construct."[9] But how do we make sense of Sobule's vocal performance without falling back on platitudes such as labeling her delivery as "subversive"? Marion Leonard writes, "Often female rock performers appear to be labeled as subversive simply because they do not display or conform to particular modes of feminine behavior. To peculiarize such artists as 'subversive' naturalizes the relationship between biological sex and feminine gender patterns."[10] While many of us struggle with how to describe vocal and musical performance in media texts, Leonard

7 Rob Lowing, "Barneys and Bettys; Films," *Sun Herald* (Sydney, Australia), September 24, 1995.

8 Patrick McDonald and Mike O'Connor, "Girl with All the Clues," *Advertiser* (Adelaide, Australia), September 21, 1995.

9 Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, introduction to *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

10 Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 93.

reminds us that the stakes are formal, analytical, and political when we attempt to discuss sound and subjectivity.

The sound track also illustrates the ways that imagining nuanced white femininities and teen cultures often accompanies the sidelining of racial and sexual minorities. The first appearance of Murray (Donald Faison), Dionne's boyfriend, is accompanied by Salt-N-Pepa's "Shoop" (1993), with a shot of Murray's sagging jeans giving us a view of his swaggering buttocks; the film uses female hip-hop to further the spectacularization of the black male body. Other than "Shoop" and the inclusion of Coolio's "Rollin' with My Homies" (1995), the *Clueless* sound track reifies white and upper-middle-class constructions of the teenager.

When Christian (Justin Walker) picks up Cher, he plays Billie Holiday ("Miss Brown to You," 1935) on his car stereo. We soon realize that his Holiday fandom and love of the film *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960) mean that Christian is gay (as O'Meara's essay in this "In Focus" explores further, with reference to his use of language). Queer musicologists and popular music studies scholars have offered ways of rethinking how dominant discourses and mainstream filmic and televisual representations have represented gay male identifications with female divas. The complicated sonic palette of the film belongs to Cher and her friends, whereas Christian sonically is largely outside of their world. This dynamic is remarkably similar to what Mimi Schippers found in her ethnographic exploration of indie rock scenes, where there needs to be "a subcultural norm that marginalizes gay and lesbian people precisely so that participants can gender maneuver by queering sexuality and not 'become' gay or lesbian; that is, maintaining the heterosexist ideology that gay people are 'out there' and not 'in here' is as much a part of opening the space for gender maneuvering as is embracing feminist ideology."[11] The space for sonic maneuver in *Clueless* is decidedly heterosexual.

It is nevertheless striking that Heckerling embraced a musical palette that took emerging tastes and scenes seriously when those closest to the film's music (journalists, editors at mainstream music magazines, and recording industry personnel) clearly struggled to make sense of music and gender. In *Clueless*, women rock and women pop—a far cry from the "women in rock" label that was (and sadly, sometimes still is) used to label and profile female riot grrrl, punk, and rock musicians. Norma Coates writes, "The designator itself delineates hegemonic space. 'Rock' is separate from 'women.' 'Women' are only related to rock by being allowed 'in.' The 'in' of 'women in rock' has a contingent feel about it, an aura of something that will never be complete, never fully integrated with the whole."[12] By embracing genre hybridity, *Clueless* rejects the tenets of rock discourse and the ways that rock discourse sidelines the contributions of women as artists and listeners; it suggests that there are alternative ways of imagining gender and music. *Clueless* was an early harbinger of how mainstream media industries would struggle to deal with the complicated and diverse musical habits of listeners. The film also demonstrates how a female author could negotiate

11 Mimi Schippers, *Rockin' out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 149.

12 Norma Coates, "(R)evolution Now: Rock and the Political Potential of Gender," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 61.

industrial structures and anticipate audience demands for more complicated constructions of sonic cultures. And to think it happened back when we still bought CDs. ✻

"Can I Please Give You Some Advice?" *Clueless* and the Teen Makeover

by Alice Leppert

Hitting theaters in midsummer, mid-decade, *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995) was poised to make maximum impact on teen culture. Coming on the heels of Kurt Cobain's suicide and suburbia's love affair with gangsta rap, *Clueless* steered white, middle-class teen culture in a different direction—one that director Amy Heckerling described simply as "happy."[1] As Catherine Driscoll has pointed out, *Clueless*'s release date sandwiched it among the teen social problem films *The Basketball Diaries* (Scott Kalvert, 1995), *Kids* (Larry Clark, 1995), and *Dangerous Minds* (John N. Smith, 1995), but by contrast, "*Clueless* did not take itself seriously, promoted with tag lines like 'Sex. Clothes. Popularity. Whatever.'"[2] Peter Travers, reviewing *Clueless* alongside *Kids* in *Rolling Stone*, pinpointed the film's departure, and its comedic tone, noting, "The materialism in *Clueless* is almost as scary as the hopelessness in *Kids*. Whatever."[3] Instead of reveling in teen angst and rebellion, *Clueless* painted a picture of teen life that looked glossy, carefree, and familiar. Angela Curran has suggested that the film is a parody of teen advertising, yet the film's form, narration, and visual style also evoke teen magazines.[4] While these publications have long featured embarrassing moments and personal crises, the general address to the reader is one of hope and aspiration. Advice for making over one's appearance, wardrobe, social life, and

1 Twink Caplan, Amy Heckerling, and Bill Pope, "Creative Writing," *Clueless*, directed by Amy Heckerling, "Whatever!" ed. (1995; Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2005), DVD; on the suburban popularity of gangsta rap, see Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin' but a 'G' Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 82–87.

2 Catherine Driscoll, *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 58.

3 Peter Travers, "Kids Today," *Rolling Stone*, August 10, 1995, 61.

4 Angela Curran, "Consuming Doubts: Gender, Class, and Consumption in *Ruby in Paradise* and *Clueless*," in *Hollywood Goes Shopping*, ed. David Desser and Garth S. Jowett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 239.

romantic entanglements abound—characterized by a notably can-do tone—and the magazines are splashed with the bright colors and bold fonts that pepper *Clueless* and its promotional materials. In borrowing—and simultaneously mocking—the mode of address and visual style of teen magazines, *Clueless* engages in the sort of intertextual excess that Valerie Wee argues characterized teen media of the late 1990s while simultaneously making over teen fashion and media culture.[5] Marking a shift away from the mainstreaming of grunge fashion and music, *Clueless*'s engagement with teen magazines and teen fashion paved the way for the ascendancy of a late-1990s teen culture marked by the "happy," "whatever" attitude that begat a return to preppy, ultra-girly fashion and squeaky clean pop stars, all despite Cher's (Alicia Silverstone) own eventual revelation that she, herself, is clueless.

Cher introduces herself as a makeover expert in one of the first books in the *Clueless* young adult book series, *Cher's Guide to . . . Whatever*, a tongue-in-cheek how-to manual that borrows liberally from the film's dialogue. She announces, "Everyone has a gift. Everyone has a talent. Mine is makeovers."[6] As proof of her ability, she claims, "Even Josh, who was always all serious and flanneled out, credits me with bringing out his lighter side. He laughs more now and reads paperbacks."[7] With her constant disdain for the "grunge" fashion statements made by the "loadies," Tai (Brittany Murphy), and Josh (Paul Rudd) (all clad in plaid flannel, dark colors, and baggy pants), Cher (and to a lesser extent, Dionne, played by Stacey Dash) endorses the opposite: cheery, preppy fashions epitomized by kneesocks, plaid skirts, and sweater sets. Alicia Silverstone's persona had already made this fashion and attitude transition in her wildly popular series of Aerosmith videos that initially attracted Heckerling's attention, beginning with her grungy rebel look in "Cryin'" and ending with her Catholic schoolgirl uniform in "Crazy."[8] While in "Cryin'" Silverstone's character seems wholly unstable and feigns suicide to get back at an ex, by the time "Crazy" rolls around, she's joyfully cutting class, going on a road trip with a girlfriend, and skinny-dipping. In *Cher's Guide to . . . Whatever*, Cher distances herself from Silverstone's "Cryin'" look (which featured trips to a body-piercing and tattoo shop) by admonishing the reader, "Navel piercing and tattoos—get over it!"[9]

When Cher and Dionne decide to make Tai over, the film sounds its death knell for grunge. Upon meeting Tai, Cher and Dionne size her up with a point-of-view shot that carefully examines her appearance, tilting up from her yellow skater-style sneakers and baggy pants to her oversized flannel shirt and makeup-free face, as Cher's voice-over condescendingly dubs her "adorably clueless." Cher tells Dionne that her "mission is clear," which conveys the same tone of urgency that Angela McRobbie locates in the British teen magazine *Jackie*, whose tone "is chatty, friendly yet didactic and

5 Valerie Wee, "Selling Teen Culture: How American Multimedia Conglomeration Reshaped Teen Television in the 1990s," in *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*, ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 87–98.

6 H. B. Gilmour, *Cher's Guide to . . . Whatever* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995), 2.

7 Ibid.

8 Rich Cohen, "Ballad of a Teenage Queen," *Rolling Stone*, September 7, 1995, 44ff.

9 Gilmour, *Cher's Guide*, 6.

imperative. But the assumption upon which all this work is based is that these routines and rituals are absolutely necessary."[10] US teen magazines follow the same paradigm. *Teen*'s September 1995 issue promised: "Anyone can be more popular—especially you! . . . Keep reading to learn all of the secrets you need to know."[11] When Tai expresses interest in Travis (Breckin Meyer) and marijuana and reveals that she will turn sixteen in May, Cher asserts her dominance, telling her, "My birthday's in April, and as someone older, can I please give you some advice?" This joke pokes fun at Cher's self-appointed authority, but it also plays on the address of teen magazines. McRobbie notes that the columnists of *Jackie* are "like older sisters; young and trendy enough to understand the girls' problems but also experienced and wise enough to know how to deal with them."[12] In this fashion, Cher and Dionne "adopt" Tai, making over her appearance and attempting to help her land a popular boyfriend.

The makeover sequence, which is paired with Jill Sobule's "Supermodel" (1995) (part of the sound track that, according to *Billboard*, projected a "feel-good vibe" that departed from the popular modern-rock style), resembles teen magazines' makeover features.[13] In *YM*'s June–July 1995 issue, the feature "Makeover Special: Lighten Up!" decries one of its subject's "blotchy home hair coloring," which is the first thing to go in Tai's makeover, as the sequence begins with a shot of red hair dye going down the drain.[14] The camera tilts up to show Cher in control of the process, just as "Blake" in *YM* had "color director Michael Brimhall" fix her hair color blunder.[15] Tai's makeover proceeds similarly to *YM*'s, where the subjects have different professionals working on their hair, makeup, and styling, resulting in a professional photo that reveals the results. Dionne does Tai's makeup and passes her back to Cher for a wardrobe update. Cher cuts off a polo shirt to reveal Tai's midriff, a move that *YM* also suggested to bust summer boredom: "Break out the scissors. Turn a long shirt into a baby tee."[16] In case the results of the makeover were in question, when Tai arrives at school flaunting her new look, the sequence begins with boys nodding approvingly before the camera cuts to reveal Tai post-makeover. After securing the initial approval of the opposite sex, Cher treats Tai to a pseudoprofessional photo shoot, carefully posing her.

Cher and Dionne's makeover of Tai also alerts the viewer to the necessity of leaving behind early 1990s fashion, and the haste with which they perform the makeover (ostensibly the day they meet Tai) mirrors the tone of teen magazines. The short-lived teen magazine *All about You* (an offshoot of *Teen* magazine) heavily featured *Clueless* in its September 1995 issue, including a sweepstakes for "a furiously exclusive *Clueless* clear backpack," because "[t]he rule is 'accessorize or die' in *Clueless*."[17] Although the film itself is devoid of clear plastic backpacks, this sweepstakes helps reassert *Clueless*'s

10 Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 104.

11 Alison Bell, "The Secrets of the Popular Crowd," *Teen*, September 1995, 62.

12 McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 93.

13 Brett Attwood, "Modern Rock Featured on 'Clueless' Soundtrack," *Billboard*, July 8, 1995, 8.

14 "Makeover Special: Lighten Up!," *YM*, June–July 1995, 76–79.

15 Ibid., 76.

16 "10 Things to Do When There's Nothing to Do," *YM*, June–July 1995, 92.

17 "Win, Win, Win! It's a No-Lose Situation!," *All about You*, September 1995, 14–15.

fashion IQ after *YM* labeled Cher and Dionne's signature mini-backpacks "over" and declared plastic backpacks to be the current trend.[18] *All about You*'s "School Wear" feature is essentially a love letter to *Clueless*, delineating the "cool" trends (pleated skirts, knee-high socks, twin sets, floral patterns, and black) and the "super-cool" styles (A-line skirts, thigh-high stockings, plaid, stripes, and baby blue), all of which describe a majority of Cher, Dionne, and Tai's costumes in *Clueless*.[19]

Seventeen was promoting some of these trends a year earlier in its September 1994 issue, which dressed Mayim Bialik in thigh-high stockings and plaid, but *Clueless* and the fashion issues of 1995 dramatically lightened the color palette and added frilly flourishes like the faux fur and feathers that adorned Cher's costumes, ditching Bialik's "'no-color' color palette of black" and her "trusty Doc [Martens]."[20] A snowboarding-themed fashion feature in *Seventeen*'s November 1995 issue asked, "Ready to bag the oversize boys' stuff? Board Bettys shred the slopes . . . in gear that's fitted, furry and totally girly. . . . [S]weetest in sorbet shades" of soft pink, lavender, and baby blue.[21] The photographs feature furry and feathered cuffs on jackets and peeking out of sleeves, and one snowboarder even (inexplicably) wears an A-line miniskirt. Just as Tai had to ditch her baggy skater-style pants, so snowboarders needed to learn to "shred" in miniskirts. The following fashion spread goes in another direction but still declares the end of a "masculine" trend, announcing, "Bye-bye, biker chick: Leather's new look is more tender than tough."[22] The feature shows the reader how "bad-girl black leather" can "look sweet," and the answer is to pair a leather miniskirt with a feminine top—just like Cher does.[23] Although these fashion spreads do not directly reference *Clueless* by name, the film's fashions had a far and very real reach, according to *Newsweek*, which noted the film's "cute" aesthetic is "for sale in malls everywhere. Macy's stocks Mary Janes, bright plastic barrettes, baby-doll dresses, knee socks and overalls—all in baby-pastel palettes. Bloomingdale's has made 'Clueless' *required viewing* for junior buyers."[24] Furthermore, Contempo Casuals, the teen fashion retailer where Cher has her epiphany about needing to make Mr. Hall (Wallace Shawn) "sublimely happy," was losing money and closing stores when Wet Seal bought the chain the same month *Clueless* was released. Wet Seal's president lamented, "Women's apparel has been soft, and the junior market has been softer than the rest of the industry."[25] By February 1996, Wet Seal was turning a profit for the first time in four years.[26]

18 "Fashion Faves," *YM*, September 1995, 30.

19 "School Wear," *All about You*, September 1995, 67.

20 Elizabeth Brous, "Mayim in Bloom," *Seventeen*, September 1994, 225.

21 "Snow Way," *Seventeen*, November 1995, 131–135.

22 "The Leather Report," *Seventeen*, November 1995, 136–141.

23 Ibid., 139.

24 Karen Schoemer and Yahlin Chang, "The Cult of Cute," *Newsweek*, August 28, 1995, 55 (original emphasis).

25 Quoted in Hope Hamashige, "Contempo Casuals to Be Sold in $1-Million Deal Retail: Wet Seal Will Use Existing Stock to Acquire the 239-Store Women's Clothing Chain from Neiman Marcus Group," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1995.

26 Debra Hazel, "Wet Seal Makes a Splash with Teens," *Chain Store Age*, March 1997, 43.

In addition to making over Tai and teen fashion at large, *Clueless* and Cher emulate and poke fun at teen magazines' dating advice and "real-life" horror stories. Cher relentlessly coaches Tai on how to attract Elton's (Jeremy Sisto) attention, rapidly running down a list of dos before they arrive at a party and providing tips and direction throughout the evening. Tips of this kind are a staple of teen magazines, where, as Rosalind Gill points out, "the commodity on offer is *knowledge about boys.*"[27] While Cher's tips are clearly intended to be comical ("look like you're having fun and you're really popular"), they are in many ways more practical than *YM*'s tips, which include "challenge him to a Tetris tournament" and "Log on to the Internet, and find him in a special-interest chat room."[28] Despite Cher's confident didacticism when it comes to dating, she falls short in her own seduction attempt, which further calls her "expert" status into question. She positions the viewer on the receiving end of her dating advice, laying out multiple steps via voice-over in her plan to attract and seduce Christian (Justin Walker), but she fails to read the signs of his homosexuality. Upon seeing him flirting with a male bartender and brushing off female admirers, she exclaims to Tai, "Look how he ignores every other girl!" Perhaps Cher had read too many teen magazines. A dating advice feature in *YM* suggests, "He's cool with coupledom" if "his head doesn't do a 180 every time a cute girl walks by," ignoring the possibility of nonheteronormative sexuality in the same way Cher does.[29] Indeed, Meenakshi Durham has shown that both *Seventeen* and *YM* ignored any possibility of "alternative sexual orientations" in their 1996 issues.[30] The film, however, lingers on Christian's flirtation, cutting from the long shot of the interaction that signifies Cher's point of view to a medium shot that more clearly reveals the tenor of the conversation for the viewer.

Christian further confuses Cher (and confounds *YM*'s logic) by calling when he said he would. The film emphasizes the gravity of his call by opening the scene with a low-angle close-up of the phone accompanied by Richard Strauss's "Also sprach Zarathustra" (1896), prominently associated with *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968). *All about You* backs up Cher's excitement, listing "He calls you frequently" and "He asks you out again" among "seven signs that say 'he's interested.'"[31] Cher's preparations for her night with Christian resemble the makeup tutorials in teen magazines with extreme close-ups of applying eye shadow, lipstick, and lip liner. Heckerling marks Cher's rules for having boys over as ludicrous when Cher declares, "You should always have something baking" in voice-over as she drops a store-bought roll of cookie dough onto a cookie sheet. The camera quickly tilts down to follow the cookie dough's free fall and abruptly stops as it lands with an audible thud. Despite her careful planning, Cher's night with Christian quickly devolves into a story worthy of the "embarrassing moments" feature, a teen magazine staple, when she falls off the bed in attempt to look sexy and Christian rejects her advances.

27 Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 185.

28 "15 Ways to Grab That Guy," *YM*, September 1995, 32.

29 Pamela Dell, "Will He Make a Good Boyfriend?," *YM*, September 1995, 48.

30 Meenakshi Gigi Durham, "Dilemmas of Desire: Representations of Adolescent Sexuality in Two Teen Magazines," *Youth and Society* 29 (1998): 369–389.

31 Karen Murray, "50 Things Guys Think You Should Know," *All about You*, September 1995, 35.

Cher not only suffers embarrassment worthy of *Seventeen*'s "Traumarama" page; she also has a near-death experience similar to the "real-life" features (e.g., "I Had a Secret Deformity," "Why I Starved Myself").[32] Cher's experience being robbed at gunpoint visually looks much like *YM*'s feature "I Was Held Hostage by a Crazed Gunman."[33] This article appears much grittier than the rest of the magazine, using white type on a black page, title and subtitle in yellow and red, and text boxes using uneven Courier New font, as though a serial killer had typed them out on an old typewriter. The mise-en-scène of the *Clueless* scene uses a similar color palette, strikingly different from the vibrant colors and bright lighting that characterize the majority of the film. Once Elton leaves Cher stranded in a liquor store parking lot in the seemingly menacing Sun Valley, Cher's soon-to-be-ruined red Alaïa dress stands out against the drab dark-gray concrete of the parking lot and surrounding buildings. A large yellow sign advertising money orders looms over the robber's shoulder, marking the area as a lower-income one where Cher does not belong. After the robber leaves, a high-angle extreme long shot reveals Cher looking vulnerable and alone beneath the flashing red and yellow "Circus Liquor" sign. As Cher gets up, her voice-over rehashes her story conversationally, much as the girls do in the "real-life" features, which are typically written in first-person "as-told-to" style: "[T]he evening had turned into a royal mess. Sexually harassed. Robbed. I didn't know the number of the party, so I couldn't call Dionne, and Daddy would kill me if he knew where I was. There was just one person left to call, and I really, *really* didn't want to call him." Teen magazines' "real-life" stories often conclude with images of the previously in-peril or distraught storyteller laughing with her supportive boyfriend, and Cher's ends similarly, as her ride home with Josh drives a wedge between him and his girlfriend and sets him and Cher up as a future romantic pair. The comedic tone of the scene—where Cher tries to negotiate with the gunman to save her dress—points to the incongruity of these dark, grisly features in teen magazines. Who has time to challenge boys to Tetris tournaments and cruise the mall for swimsuit sales when one has a "secret deformity" or a "crazed gunman" to worry about?

Though Cher is clearly a comic figure, Driscoll argues that *Clueless* "invites admiration of her. However 'clueless' she turns out to be, Cher's knowledge and taste are not dismissed."[34] This combination of aspiration and knowing humor similarly describes the relationship that teen girls have to teen magazines. Makeover and fashion features are obviously instructive, with the intention of inspiring consumerist replication, including indexes listing where to purchase particular products (e.g., "Totally Necessary Cool Summer Stuff You Shouldn't Live Without").[35] Yet the embarrassing-moments sections, quizzes, and confessional narratives inspire giggling and schadenfreude, thus allowing the reader to feel superior to those who are less fortunate or more clueless. Teen viewers and readers certainly "got the joke" about Cher's cluelessness, but many

32 Leslee-Ann Richardson, "I Had a Secret Deformity," *YM*, September 1995, 60–62; Sabrina Solin, "I Was Dying to Be Thin," *Seventeen*, November 1995, 124–129.

33 Lisa Cramer and Laura Muha, "I Was Held Hostage by a Crazed Gunman," *YM*, June–July 1995, 52–55.

34 Driscoll, *Teen Film*, 59.

35 "Totally Necessary Cool Summer Stuff You Shouldn't Live Without," *YM*, June–July 1995, 80–81.

also wanted to emulate her. Labeled 1995's "It Girl" by *Newsweek*, Silverstone made the teen magazine rounds in promoting *Clueless*, where she repeatedly testified to her own cluelessness.[36] In a cover story in the July 1995 issue of *Seventeen*, Silverstone claims that she is "more like the oddball in *Clueless* who Cher finds and tries to transform. This girl is really awkward and doesn't have a clue about what she's doing. It's like they wrote it about me."[37] The bigger blow to her teen-queen image came in *YM*'s September 1995 issue, when Silverstone revealed that she hates clothes, shopping, and bathing and refuses to shave her legs.[38] On the one hand, these articles manage to critique the kind of ideal identity teen magazines foster. Yet the fact that Silverstone—Aerosmith sex goddess and *Clueless* queen bee—claimed to be an insecure "klutz tomboy" further endorsed the possibility of the makeover plot and the malleability of teen identity that is so central to *Clueless* and teen magazines alike.[39]

The teen magazine landscape changed significantly in the latter half of the 1990s and into the 2000s. Cynthia Fuchs suggests that post–Spice Girls teen magazines "venerate heterosexual girlness as it is currently practiced in the United States and other places inundated by commercial hyperproductivity, including tips on makeup and clothing, advice on interacting with boyfriends and parents, and keys to pleasurable celebrity worship."[40] *Sassy*, once something of a riot-grrrl champion popular with girls in the alternative, grunge, and punk music scene, folded in 1996, officially evacuating the *grrr* from mainstream media aimed at teen girls.[41] Indeed, whereas riot-grrrl performers often appropriated girly fashion to critique misogyny, a string of new teen magazines, including *Elle Girl*, *Cosmo Girl*, *Teen Vogue*, and *Teen People*, all of which launched between 1998 and 2003, promoted a blithe adoption of girly fashion.[42] *Clueless*'s glossy look and instruction in the rules of dating, fashion, and popularity helped pave the way for the girly culture of the late 1990s. ✻

36 Schoemer and Chang, "Cult of Cute."

37 Quoted in Malissa Thompson, "Alicia Silverstone," *Seventeen*, July 1995, 93.

38 Dennis Hensley, "Alicia Unplugged," *YM*, September 1995, 56–58.

39 Ibid., 56.

40 Cynthia Fuchs, "Too Much of Something Is Bad Enough: Success and Excess in *Spice World*," in *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*, ed. Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 351.

41 Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock," in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, ed. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (New York: Routledge, 1994), 250–274.

42 Marion Leonard, "'Rebel Girl, You Are the Queen of My World': Feminism, 'Subculture' and Grrrl Power," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 230–256.

"We've Got to Work on Your Accent and Vocabulary": Characterization through Verbal Style in *Clueless*

by Jennifer O'Meara

In her introduction to this "In Focus," Melissa Lenos notes that Quote-Along screenings of *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 2005) are well attended on both sides of the Atlantic. It follows that when audiences derive additional pleasure from speaking words back to the screen, the dialogue must contain notable properties in the first place. Upon *Clueless*'s release, praise was frequently leveled at its use of language. In his review for *Cineaste*, Tom Doherty noted that "almost all the humor in [the film] is verbal—a patter of quotable epigrams, asides, and ironic by-play."[1] Similarly, reviewer Peter Stack stated, "One of the curious delights of this film is how verbal it is."[2] He praises Heckerling for capturing "the essence of teen-speak . . . so well that you feel as if you're eavesdropping." In fact, before writing the screenplay, Heckerling spent considerable time around her characters' real-life counterparts; she watched plays and debates at Beverly Hills High School, attended skateboarding contests, and loitered beside groups of girl in clothing stores.[3] This partly explains why comedy scholar Andrew Horton describes Heckerling as having a "razor-sharp ear for teen talk and slang."[4] He elaborated: "Heckerling has made "'As if' and 'Hello!' . . . everyday phrases for millions of viewers. Everyone has their favorite lines and exchanges [from the movie]."[5]

Despite this, *Clueless*'s dialogue has received little in-depth analysis. The accompanying essays here go some way to address this by referencing the film's verbal style from a variety of angles: Kyra Hunting identifies how the film's linguistics flow "across the franchise,"

1 Tom Doherty, "Clueless Kids," review of *Clueless*, Paramount Pictures, *Cineaste* 21, no. 4 (1995): 14–17.

2 Peter Stack, "'Clueless' Knows a Lot about Teen Spoof," review of *Clueless*, Paramount Pictures, *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 19, 1995, http://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/FILM-REVIEW-Clueless-Knows-a-Lot-About-Teen-3027999.php#ixzz2U7yU5Ghq.

3 Jean Firstenberg and Amy Heckerling, "Harold Lloyd Master Seminar," interview at the American Film Institute, September 1995, http://www.jasa.net.au/study/ahinterview.htm.

4 Andrew Horton, *Laughing Out Loud: Writing the Comedy-Centered Screenplay* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 116.

5 Ibid.

including books and a CD-ROM, and in her essay on the use of makeover, Alice Leppert makes an interesting comparison between the tone of Cher's (Alicia Silverstone) condescending, didactic, and urgent comments about Tai (Brittany Murphy) and that of teen magazines. My essay focuses on the significance of verbal dynamics to the narrative as a whole and to characterization in particular. As well as outlining the characters' notably different communication styles, I consider Heckerling's skillful incorporation of irony and slang.

Cher's Overstated Speech. Cher's verbal style is generally marked by hyperbole, as captured through the constant exaggeration with adverbs: she is "brutally rebuffed" by a teacher, whom she later plots to make "sublimely happy," in turn making the other students "utterly grateful." She also emphasizes with adjectives; her life is "a royal mess," and her father works on "a gazillion depositions." Roz Kaveney rightly identifies *totally* as Cher's "standard emphatic."[6] *Totally* in general goes where *completely* would, with characters totally "revived," "paused," or "choked." Heckerling also incorporates *way* as a substitute for *really* throughout. Cher has "a way normal life," insults are "way harsh," and quotes can be "way famous." Even negatives are phrased with emphasis, as when Cher describes the damage done to her shoes as "so not fixable." But the dialogue is also self-aware and reflexive; late in the film when Cher describes the cartoon series *The Ren and Stimpy Show* as "way existential," Josh (Paul Rudd) asks if she has any idea what she is actually saying. Arguably, he asks this on the audience's behalf, and Cher's reply ("No, why? Do I sound like I do?") encourages us to reconsider how much of what she says has been purely for effect.

Although Cher has a rich vocabulary, including terms like *capricious* and *replenish*, Heckerling uses her to represent a tendency for young people to verbally stall. Cher opens her two-minute debate in class with content-free warm-up phrases such as "So, OK, like," and she continues to use up her time with "but it's like" and "so I was like." Meaningless phrases such as "and all" further contribute to Cher's excessive speech. As she tells Josh, "I can drive and all . . . and since you're not doing anything and all." Cher's verbal style is also marked by ironic contrasts between current slang and historical references, as when she compares Tai to "those Botticelli chicks." Heckerling also derives humor from Cher's failed attempts to speak in an anachronistic idiom when she paraphrases from a book, "'Tis a far, far better thing . . . doing stuff for other people."

Verbal Alignment with, or Separation from, Cher. As an only child with a deceased mother, Cher has a close relationship with her litigator father, Mel (Dan Hedaya). Carefully crafted dialogue is crucial to demonstrating this dynamic, when Cher copies elements of Mel's verbal style and, perhaps less obviously, he copies hers. Cher's incorporation of legal jargon is foreshadowed when she explains, in the opening voice-over, that Mel "gets five hundred dollars an hour to fight with people," proudly adding that "he fights with me for free." When Mr. Hall (Wallace Shawn) subsequently lists

6 Roz Kaveney, *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from "Heathers" to "Veronica Mars"* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 119.

her as being late for class twice, she cuts him off with "I object! Do you recall the dates of these alleged tardies?" Similarly, having learned "never to accept a first offer" from Mel, she considers her school grades "a jumping off point to start negotiations."

At various points, both Cher and a lawyer who works for her father refer to Mel as "going ballistic." The description is apt, given how often and how furiously Mel shouts, particularly down the phone. His trademark expression "No!" is often bellowed repeatedly, something recalled when he tells Josh, "Go, go, go, go!" However, Cher also uses the technique on her father, forcefully shouting "Daddy, no!" when he tries to eat something bad for his cholesterol. Mel eventually shows a softer side, and his affection is revealed when he almost literally mirrors Cher's words back to comfort her: she expresses a sense of inferiority that the object of her affection is "one of those do-gooder types," but Mel reminds Cher of all the "good-doing" she does for him. Similarly, when Cher successfully negotiates better grades, Mel's pride is captured by the unlikely response, "Fabulous." In this way, when he adopts Cher's style of speech, the impression is that it is a reward for her successfully adopting *his* aggressively persuasive verbal style.

Just as dialogue aligns Cher and her father, it reveals Christian's (Justin Walker) unsuitability as a potential romantic partner *before* he is revealed to be gay. In contrast to Cher's constant hyperbole, Christian's verbal style is notably understated. He downplays impressive things, describing Cher's mansion as a "nice pile of bricks," and is unfazed when Mel attacks him, responding casually, "Hey, man, the protective vibe, I dig." Another efficient verbal connection is Tai's speech, highlighted when she remarks to Cher, Dionne (Stacey Dash), and Murray (Donald Faison), "Wow, you guys talk like grown-ups." Cher subsequently criticizes Tai's speech when she tells her, "We've go to work on your accent and vocabulary," with the first step being Cher's instruction for Tai to use the newly learned *sporadic* in a sentence. Such comments take on greater significance and humor precisely because Heckerling distinguishes Tai as a verbal outsider through poor grammar, frequent use of the word *shit*, and general inarticulacy. Tai leaves sentences unfinished ("you guys want?"), uses double negatives ("my buns don't feel nothin' like steel"), and fails to understand terms like *R&R*. Furthermore, while there are no explicit references to where Tai lived before Southern California, actress Brittany Murphy performed the role with what Gayle Wald describes as a "vaguely 'New York' accent."[7] Therefore, although Tai is initially marked out as different because of her appearance, her linguistic differences are equally noticeable and are largely enduring, although she begins to adopt a few elements of her peers' speech.

Exchanges between Dionne and her boyfriend Murray also play a crucial role in the film's vernacular. Most of the conflict in their relationship is a direct result of his word choices, a dynamic introduced when Murray accuses Dionne of "jeepin' around" behind his back. Dionne repeats his slang back to him questioningly and then translates it into proper English; "jeepin" refers to "vehicular sex." Highly articulate throughout, Dionne has an even more impressive vocabulary and ear for phrasing

7 Gayle Wald, "Clueless in the Neocolonial World Order," *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory*, 42 (1999): 51–69.

than Cher. In addition to using words like *kvelling*, *derail*, and *distinction*, she suggests Josh is going through a "post-adolescent idealistic phase" and tells Tai that it "speaks very highly of [her]" to be seen with them in school. Although Murray verbally disrespects Dionne throughout, Heckerling addresses the issue reflexively in an early scene:

> MURRAY: Woman, lend me fi' dollars.
>
> DIONNE: Murray, I have asked you repeatedly not to call me "woman."
>
> MURRAY: Excuse me, Ms. Dionne.
>
> DIONNE: Thank you.
>
> MURRAY: OK, but street slang is an increasingly valid form of expression. Most of the feminine pronouns do have mocking, but not necessarily a misogynistic undertone.

Here Murray effectively issues a disclaimer on all subsequent condescending remarks, such as when he refers to Cher and Dionne as "bitches," in addition to providing a context for the film's abundant use of "street slang." Another of Murray's distinguishing verbal traits is parroting back words, either his own or those of another character. He uses repetition to undermine someone's contribution, as when he responds to Cher's "not even" (a term Cher uses instead of "not possible") with a "yes even." Similarly, in a performance for his male friend's benefit, Murray mimics Dionne's annoyed words in a patronizing high-pitched tone:

> DIONNE: OK, that's it.
>
> MURRAY: That's it.
>
> DIONNE: You wanna play games?
>
> MURRAY: You wanna play games?

"Street Slang Is an Increasingly Valid Form of Expression." Another notable feature of Heckerling's dialogue is the wide range of terms used to describe certain recurring plot points, such as characters smoking marijuana. There are no references to the drug by the word *marijuana* or its other most familiar name: *weed*. Heckerling opts for more creative terms instead: Tai refers to her "buzz" from the "smoke" or "herbal refreshment," whereas Cher distinguishes between users being "fried all day" and "spark[ing] up a doobie" to "get laced at parties," at which point she becomes "baked." Travis (Breckin Meyer) refers to its medicinal properties when he calls it "chronic shit." Other phrases particular to Cher and friends include "ralphing" as an alternative to "vomiting" and "surfing the crimson wave" in reference to menstruation. Such terms tap into the absurdity of everyday slang in that they are often only tangentially related to the words they replace.

Heckerling's skill as a comedy writer also comes through in the range of insulting labels applied at both the individual and the group level. In a world where appearances

are everything, Cher refers to unkempt bohemians as "loadies" and attractive males as "Baldwins." In a creative allusion to the work of the French impressionist, people who look better from far away are "Monets." A further acknowledgment that such slang is not necessarily intuitive comes when Murray refers to Christian as "a cake boy" when trying to reveal him to be gay. Cher and Dionne respond in unison: "A what?" The girls have finally come across an unfamiliar label, and their confusion likely extends to the viewer as well. Actual names also become a source of humor: Cher refers to Billie Holiday as "him," and Travis's last name, Birkenstock, aptly brings to mind the footwear brand associated with hippies. When Cher's respect for Travis begins to increase toward the end of the film, this, too, is configured verbally; having previously referred to the "bonehead things" that "loadies" like Travis say, Cher describes *herself* as "such a bonehead."

Narrative Progression through Dialogue. *Clueless* also makes speech a prime focus through a host of other tropes. In addition to learning how to argue persuasively from her father, Cher and friends have an entire class dedicated to "debate." Indeed, the students are so accustomed to giving speeches that Cher delivers one on the ineffectiveness of the school's physical education program *during* PE class, while Travis reacts to hearing that he was the student most often late to class by thanking (in detail) everyone who contributed to his tardiness. Conversational games are also paramount in the characters' social circle. The point is made explicitly when, to make another guy jealous, Cher advises Tai to "act like Travis is saying something funny." More generally, the persuasiveness of Cher's speech depends on her willingness to bend the truth. She not only creates elaborate excuses so teachers will improve her grades but also fabricates a compliment from Elton (Jeremy Sisto) so that Tai thinks he likes her. When Tai usurps Cher in terms of popularity, this, too, is signaled through speech; Cher's story is rudely cut off by a student who instead wants to hear more from Tai.

Reflexive Quotes and Irony. As I noted in my introduction, many of the film's expressions have become immediately recognizable since its release almost two decades ago. Although it seems unlikely that Heckerling anticipated this, the film shows an awareness of dialogue's potential durability. In a fitting commentary on its quotability, Cher remembers which lines Mel Gibson said in the film version of *Hamlet* and therefore trumps Josh's academic girlfriend, who misremembers who said what in the play. As Hugh H. Davis sums up, the exchange "signifies Cher's superior knowledge of Shakespeare through pop cultural manifestations" and serves as a reminder that students often derive their knowledge of literary classics from film adaptations.[8] Also, in a subtle reference to the song "Summer Nights" in *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978), Amber (Elisa Donovan) urges Tai, "Tell me more, tell me more." Cher's cluelessness

8 Hugh H. Davis, "I Was a Teenage Classic: Literary Adaptation in Turn-of-the-Millennium Teen Films," *Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 1 (2006): 52–60.

also extends to the secondary sources she quotes, as when she credits a study guide for Shakespeare's renowned Sonnet 18:

> DIONNE: [reading what Cher wrote] "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May but thy eternal summer shall not fade." Phat! Did you write that?
>
> CHER: Duh, it's like a famous quote.
>
> DIONNE: From where?
>
> CHER: Cliff Notes.

I noted earlier that Cher's speech is marked by ironic contrasts in word choices, but this is just one strand of a consistently ironic verbal style. Suzanne Ferriss notes that Cher's voice-over is used to reveal "the glaring gap between the heroine's perceptions of events and the events themselves."[9] Laura Carroll praises the use of voice-over for similar reasons, noting that when Cher narrates, it is "always in a fashion that allows the viewer to sense the ridiculousness of the contrast between her private interpretations and public events."[10] The voice-over is also well integrated with Cher's diegetic dialogue and can be viewed as an extension of her constant advice to Tai and, to a lesser extent, the other characters. Indeed, Josh refers to Tai as being "under [Cher's] tutelage," with the voice-over addressing viewers as though they, too, can benefit from her advice.

The film also employs dialogue hooks in an ironic way.[11] Dialogue hooks are generally used to increase cohesion between scenes by answering a question in a scene (visually or verbally) that was posed at the end of the previous one, but Heckerling instead uses several cleverly humorous overlaps. When Cher and Josh finally kiss, her voice-over plays on viewer expectations—"Well, you can guess what happened next"—and cuts to a marriage ceremony before she exclaims, "As if! I'm only sixteen, and this is California not Kentucky." *Only then* are Ms. Geist (Twink Caplan) and Mr. Hall revealed as the bride and groom. Similarly, in an earlier scene, Dionne gasps dramatically after Cher lists what she ate that day, but the real source of Dionne's shock is revealed as what she sees (Ms. Geist and Mr. Hall sharing a bench), not Cher's meager list of food. Irony also aligns Cher further with her father; at one point he announces that he, Cher, and Tai (whom he has just met and shouted at for sitting in his seat) are going to have "a nice family dinner." There are also ironic markers of class, as when

9 Suzanne Ferriss, "Emma Becomes Clueless" in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 122–130.

10 Both Andrew Horton and Laura Carroll rightly identify this as key to keeping the viewer on Cher's side, since it "safeguards against the possibility than an unsympathetic audience might attribute Cher's meddling to ill will or an inflated ego." Laura Carroll, "A Consideration of Times and Seasons: Two Jane Austen Adaptations," *Literature Film Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2003): 169–176. For Horton's discussion of the voice-over, see *Laughing Out Loud: Writing the Comedy-Centered Screenplay* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 116.

11 David Bordwell, "The Hook: Scene Transitions in Classical Cinema," *David Bordwell's Website on Cinema* (blog), January 2008, http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/hook.php.

Cher divides food donations into boxes of entrées and appetizers, or when she tries to explain the significance of her expensive dress to the man robbing her at gunpoint:

CHER: This is an Alaïa.

ROBBER: An a-what-a?

CHER: It's like a totally important designer.

ROBBER: And I will totally shoot you in the head.

As does Murray, the robber draws attention to Cher's questionable vocabulary when he spins her term *totally* for his own effect. Here, Heckerling derives humor from temporarily transferring one character's verbal style to another. Similarly, in the closing scene Murray says to Josh, "I'm telling ya, man, I'm completely buggin'," and Josh responds "I'm buggin' myself." The other characters laugh because Josh's incorporation of Murray's slang is endearingly awkward. However, it is only because Heckerling develops such distinctive verbal styles for each character that giving the same words to the "wrong" character becomes a source of humor. Alternatively, the spreading of language from one character to another can signal a strengthening in their relationship.

Distinguishing Verbal Style in Other Teen Films. Heckerling was by no means the first writer of youth films to attach such significance to dialogue, with Doherty describing "transient teen slang" as an iconic aspect of the youth film subgenre.[12] For example, David T. Johnson noted how Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* (1993) explored "the ways adolescents use, bend, and shape language" two years before *Clueless*.[13] The same could be said for Whit Stillman's hyperarticulate youths in *Metropolitan* (1990) and *Barcelona* (1994). Yet the influence of Heckerling's dialogue is evident in the abundance of verbally rich youth films and television programs that have emerged since the end of the century. *Mean Girls* (Mark Waters, 2004) borrows heavily from *Clueless* in its use of labels and its charting of the life cycle of slang; for example, a running joke is made of one character's attempt to make an arbitrary word, *fetch*, popular. Similarly, Roz Kaveney cites *Clueless*'s creative use of slang as an influence on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s "constant verbal invention."[14]

In comparing *Clueless* to Jane Austen's *Emma*, Kaveney also makes the point that both show awareness "that convincingly imagined worlds are those in which more characters than the central ones say interesting things."[15] My article did not focus on comparisons between the film and Austen's book (on which it was loosely based), but it did demonstrate how Heckerling's group of characters not only "say interesting things" but also have distinctive verbal styles. Just as an actor can deepen characterization by repeating certain gestures, particular phrasing, words, and manners of

12 Tom Doherty, "Clueless Kids," review of Clueless, Paramount Pictures, *Cineaste* 21, no. 4 (1995): 14–17.

13 David T. Johnson, *Richard Linklater*, Contemporary Film Directors (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 29.

14 Kaveney, *Teen Dreams*, 119.

15 Ibid.

speaking can equally create a discernible pattern. Although this may not always be of much consequence to the plot, Heckerling *does* make a feature of speech as dramatic action, both by foregrounding debates, lies, and arguments and by uniting and dividing characters on the basis of communication style. ✻

Furiously Franchised: *Clueless*, Convergence Culture, and the Female-Focused Franchise

by Kyra Hunting

In the summer of 1995 a low-budget comedy that Paramount picked up after Fox put it in turnaround became, in lead character Cher's parlance, the "totally prominent" sleeper hit of the season.[1] Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* became a nearly instant teen classic, influencing the language, fashion, and style of a generation and challenging the popular opinion that a film whose core audience was teen girls wasn't financially lucrative. While Heckerling's film has received limited academic attention, primarily as an adaptation of *Emma*, the significance of *Clueless* extends beyond its cinematic iteration. The success of the film became the foundation for a complete multimedia brand, including a television show, a video game, and twenty-one novels. Heckerling and Paramount Pictures (purchased by Viacom) turned the teen flick into a franchise targeted at tween and teen girls as a niche market. *Clueless* has been credited by industry observer Isabel Walcott for starting the wave of teen films in the late 1990s by having "opened people's eyes to the fact that if they could get teenage girls to come to a movie, they could make a killing," although *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) usually receives credit for the industry trend.[2] Similarly, while *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB, 1997–2001; UPN, 2001–2003) and *Dawson's Creek* (WB, 1998–2003) have been discussed as shaping the niche market for television targeted at teen girls and innovating convergence media for that market, they were in fact predated by the *Clueless* television show (ABC, 1996–1997; UPN 1997–1999).[3]

1 Chris Nashawaty, "Clueless," *Entertainment Weekly*, October 12, 2012, 26–35.

2 "I Know What You Saw Last Week," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 7, 1999, 01L.

3 Will Brooker, "Living on Dawson's Creek: Teen Viewers, Cultural Convergence and Television Overflow," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2001): 456–472.

Tracing the history of the film *Clueless* reveals an extensive franchise that exemplifies media convergence centered on girls. This history destabilizes media myths that discursively posit the franchise as masculine or frame the female-driven franchise as a novel phenomenon.

A perusal of the trade press reveals that Hollywood "discovers" that girls and women can support a media franchise fairly frequently. The achievements of *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998–2004) and *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008; Chris Weitz, 2009; David Slade, 2010; Bill Condon, 2011, 2012) were met with ebullient press accounts touting the surprise of these franchises' financial success. Summit ended up with *Twilight* because larger studios passed on it, largely because of the conventional wisdom that "female-driven properties aren't always the safest bet."[4] A common narrative is that *Sex and the City*, *Twilight*, and *High School Musical* (Kenny Ortega, 2006) changed this attitude, as "films playing mainly to women . . . have gradually been seeping into Hollywood's consciousness."[5] The acknowledgment of these female-centered franchises is important but all too familiar. After *Clueless*'s success a number of films targeting this audience followed, leading the *Guardian* to argue that "Hollywood has reacquainted itself with the young female audience," a process that apparently required repeating ten years later.[6]

When *Clueless* became a television show, it, along with *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (ABC, 1996–2000; WB, 2000–2003), represented the crest of a similar televisual wave.[7] Picked up by ABC after a bidding war, *Clueless* was paired with *Sabrina* to round out its family-oriented TGIF programming block and to attract young female viewers.[8] A year later, *Clueless* was moved to parent company Viacom's fledging UPN network to attract a similar audience. *Clueless* staked out an audience for its multimedia franchise that would later define the WB with programs like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which the *Hollywood Reporter* originally described as "sort of 'Clueless' meets 'Dracula'"; *Dawson's Creek*; and *Felicity* (WB, 1998–2002).[9]

Clueless can be seen not only as the start of a wave of 1990s teen films and an early iteration of niche teen programming but also as a strong example of convergence culture through its multimedia franchise, driven by the conglomeration that characterized the mid-1990s. The movie *Clueless* had originally been conceived as a television show called *No Worries*, when Fox asked Amy Heckerling to develop a television show about high school focused on the popular kids.[10] Although Fox ultimately abandoned the project, in part because it desired a greater number of central male characters to attract male viewers, Heckerling persisted in her vision for the television show and pushed for it to be made when the studio suggested a *Clueless* sequel.[11] *Clueless*'s

4 Pamela McClintock, "Almighty 'Twilight' Femme Fans Fuel Big B.O.," *Variety*, November 24, 2008, 42.

5 Pamela McClintock, "Femmes Show More Muscle," *Variety*, November 10–16, 2008, 6.

6 Emma Forrest, "The Future Is Female," *Guardian*, December 16, 1998, 6.

7 *Sabrina* aired alongside *Clueless* and was also owned by Paramount Network Television.

8 Cathy Dunkley and Lisa de Moraes, "Primping for 'Clueless,'" *Hollywood Reporter*, January 26, 1996.

9 Michael Farkash, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," *Hollywood Reporter*, March 10, 1997.

10 Nashawaty, "Clueless," 26–35.

11 Ibid.; Kristen Baldwin, "As If You Like It," *Entertainment Weekly*, September 13, 1996, 92.

industrial history was, from the outset, cross-media in nature, which influenced its shaping into a brand. After the film's success, Viacom aggressively extended its story world across both media and merchandising. Viacom-owned Simon & Schuster released the first *Clueless* book, a novelization of the film, less than a month after the film's release and four more books, each one month apart, before the television show premiered.[12] Less than a month after the television show's premiere, the novelizations were rebooted to fit the television show with *Cher's Furiously Fit Workout*, featuring the image of Rachel Blanchard, the television Cher, on the cover.[13] Simon & Schuster produced sixteen total novelizations based on the television series and an additional five books based on the film, extending *Clueless*'s language, characters, and story world into new spaces and situations.

Simultaneously, Viacom's Consumer Products Division effectively extended the *Clueless* brand through a licensing deal with Mattel, which created a line of fashion dolls and accessories around *Clueless* and developed a *Clueless* CD-ROM game. It also made deals with approximately twenty licensees to make clothing, jewelry, nail polish, stationery, and even electronic gadgets like phones and digital organizers.[14] While the *Clueless* brand lacks the longevity of the franchises that have typically received scholarly attention, at the time it was considered an important franchise in the retail trade press, in part because girls were believed "to be a tough group to reach with licensed toys," and *Clueless* effectively engaged that market.[15] Although this commitment to merchandising and licensing might appear to point to a facile interest in "passive" consumption, a practice frequently articulated onto women, on closer inspection *Clueless*'s licensing efforts were deeply integrated with the text, extending the text's world and participatory pleasures. Debbie Petrasek, vice president of strategic property development for Viacom Consumer Products, described a careful approach to licensing a property, noting that "the days of just slapping a logo on a toothbrush are over."[16] Less clearly interactive elements of the *Clueless* brand, such as apparel and dolls, were constructed following play and consumer patterns in ways that would both encourage viewing of the television series and extend the experience of the program's world.[17]

The concept of world making as key to franchises and convergence may appear to privilege male-identified genres like fantasy and science fiction, but the *Clueless* franchise was able to construct a unique and specific world for its Beverly Hills high schoolers.[18] *Clueless* features a slang-saturated and deeply referential linguistic style, discussed by Jennifer O'Meara, which flows across the franchise. The novels' voice consistently apes this style, packing numerous pop-culture references into single sentences

12 H. B. Gilmour, *Clueless* (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 1995).

13 Randi Reisfeld, *Cher's Furiously Fit Workout: Clueless* (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 1996).

14 "Marketers to Leverage Brands for Girls," *Discount Store News*, November 18, 1996, 37; Robert Scally, "Strategy Shifts to Building Brands out of Properties," *Discount Store News*, March 17, 1997, 21.

15 Andrew Collier, "Toy Sales Biz Plays Catch-up," *Hollywood Reporter*, February 7, 1997.

16 Scally, "Strategy Shifts," 21.

17 Andrea Haman, "Special Report: American International Toy Fair: Mattel Clued In to Fashion Dolls," *Kidscreen*, February 1, 1997, 33.

18 This popular assumption has been discussed and problematized by Derek Johnson, in "Devaluing and Revaluing Seriality: The Gendered Discourses of Media Franchising," *Media Culture Society* 33, no. 7 (2011): 1082.

and peppering conversations with slang, as did the television series and the CD-ROM game, which is described in its tutorial as "way point and clicky."[19] Tiger Electronics' hands-free phone included prerecorded phrases from the film, and its electronic organizers used *Clueless* slang to name their functions. While fashion is an important component of many teen programs, it plays a formative thematic role in *Clueless*, and the franchise's specific relationship to style contributes to the unique fantasy world it constructs. Purportedly, Viacom recognized the cultural value of the *Clueless* brand partially because, as Alice Leppert mentions in her contribution to this "In Focus," Bloomingdale's was requiring merchandising managers to watch the film.[20] The fashion component of the film was consistently conceived as integral to the franchise, with Petrasek claiming, "What *Clueless* has to stand for is a complete fashion brand" that was "synonymous with trend fashion."[21]

Fashion as a form of self-expression played an important role in the narrative and character development of the film, television series, and novels, something Alice Leppert examines. In the franchise's other iterations, fashion also played a vital part, and much of what appeared to be simple merchandising or promotion was fully integrated into the franchise's narrative components. Before the television series even premiered, it established a partnership with the apparel company Wet Seal and Contempo Casuals, which advertised the program in its stores, featured the show's actors in its ads, and provided clothing for the series' first thirteen episodes.[22] While clearly a potentially lucrative joint-marketing venture, this partnership also employed the franchise's signature mix of bubblegum adolescent consumerism mixed with parody of that same adolescent culture. Fashion partnerships provided consumers the opportunity to engage in the fashion-centered self-fashioning and social bonding imaged in the franchise, but the television show simultaneously included snarky jokes about those same brands. The various branches of the *Clueless* franchise frequently worked together to provide a consistent fashion-based experience for the franchise. The film's costume designer, Mona May, not only also worked on the television series but also collaborated with Mattel to ensure that the *Clueless* dolls matched the show's style. Fashion is ingrained in the franchise's DNA; *Clueless*'s cast had up to fifteen costume changes per episode, versus the television average of three, and Cher frequently sought solace in the mall.[23] The closet organization software on Cher's computer remains a frequent referent for *Clueless* fans and is still evoked in discussions of fashion apps.[24] Cher's "bespoke software" is aped in Mattel's *Clueless* CD-ROM, which, along with games, quotes, and simple puzzles, includes a program that allows players to mix and match the clothes in Cher's closet while allowing them to take control of their own style by designing clothes and importing personal images.

19 Team Smartypants! Inc. and Mattel Media, *Clueless CD-Rom* (Mattel Interactive, 1997).

20 "Clued-in," *Children's Business*, June 1997, 31.

21 "Marketers to Leverage," 37; Haman, "Special Report," 33.

22 Jonathan Davies, "'Clueless' Not Shoeless: Clothing Tie-in for Sitcom," *Hollywood Reporter*, August 20, 1996.

23 Erin Gebroe, "Film Meets Rag Biz to Mutual Gain," *Variety*, November 1996, 18–24, 102.

24 Erica Swallow, "The 'Clueless' Closet Is Real, and You Can Own It," *Mashable*, March 4, 2013, http://mashable.com/2013/03/04/clueless-closet-fashion/.

An association with technology and new media has further linked convergence culture to male audiences, who are considered the stereotypical early adopters of games and technology. *Clueless* contradicts this stereotype by incorporating electronic media extensively into the franchise. *Clueless* coincided with the girls' games movement and Mattel's efforts to enter that market space with titles like *Barbie Fashion Designer*.[25] The *Clueless* CD-ROM therefore fits into a sometimes problematic tradition of "pink games" in its attempt to attract young girls as software consumers, but it also extends not only to the world of *Clueless*, with locations on the CD-ROM mimicking Cher's house or the mall and mini-games taking place at her friends' lockers, but also to the franchise's existing investment in new technologies. The CD-ROM re-creates Cher's fashion software, but it uses a cell phone, a crucial touchstone in the characters' lives, as a navigation device. Using *Clueless* novel author Randi Reisfeld and actors from the show, it integrated a number of linguistic, stylistic, and ideological elements from other sectors of the franchise, remaking them as an interactive digital experience. Tiger Electronics created a number of *Clueless*-branded electronic gadgets, including a phone with a headset, a voice changer, and an eavesdropper detector, as well as a "dear diary" electronic organizer that mimicked a personal digital organizer and a variation that focused on beauty and fashion, including advice and quizzes alongside an organizer and address book. Scholars such as Louisa Stein and Will Brooker have effectively demonstrated that female-driven franchises can engage fans with new-media offerings, and *Clueless* represents an exceptionally early instance of this phenomenon.[26] Mattel and Tiger Electronics deployed the *Clueless* brand to attract young women to games and electronic gadgets during a period when female technology consumers were considered underserved and difficult to reach.[27] As a franchise, *Clueless* included not only more traditional items like apparel and dolls but also a variety of electronic media, thus privileging technology in a way that is reflective of the film and television shows, which displayed cell phones and computers as key to the characters' lifestyle. In these iterations of the franchise, its stereotypically feminine themes—friends, boys, and fashion—become the core elements of software and technology products.

The importance of world building and digital media to the *Clueless* franchise is particularly significant in light of popular press and academic discourse that has tended to associate franchises with predominantly male audiences.[28] Substantial work has been done on both media franchises and convergence culture; however, this work has frequently focused on more prominent, male-oriented examples like *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977–2005), *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999–2003), and *The*

25 "e3 Preview: State of the Edutainment Market," *Children's Business*, June 1997, 14.

26 Brooker, "Living on Dawson's Creek"; Louisa Stein, "Playing Dress-up: Digital Fashion and Gamic Extensions of Televisual Experience in Gossip Girl's Second Life," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 3 (2009): 116–122.

27 Marla Matzer and Bernhard Warner, "Where the Girls Are," *Brandweek*, October 14, 1996; "Proving Once Again," *Hollywood Reporter*, July 21, 1995.

28 This is critiqued by Derek Johnson in his work "Devaluing and Revaluing Seriality," and by Melissa Click, in "'Rabid,' 'Obsessed,' and 'Frenzied': Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom," *Flow* 11.04 (2009), http://flowtv.org/2009/12/rabid-obsessed-and-frenzied-understanding-the-gendered-politics-of-fandom-melissa-click-university-of-missouri/.

Lord of the Rings (Peter Jackson, 2001–2003).[29] While this may simply be reflective of the larger-scale audiences and budgets of male-oriented franchises, it can inadvertently perpetuate the assumption that franchises are primarily targeted at male viewers and male creators, and are based on stereotypically male genres or themes. Examining female-centered franchises, even those smaller in scale, like *Clueless*, can allow for a more well-rounded image of what constitutes a franchise and how franchise elements may interplay in different ways.

Given the association of franchises with male creators, like J. J. Abrams and George Lucas, and male fans, *Clueless* represents a particularly important case study. Not only was the *Clueless* franchise clearly and aggressively targeted at girls; it was also consistently shaped and driven by the voices of women producers. Amy Heckerling created and wrote the film and television show, and women helmed many of the franchise's other key components. The novelizations of *Clueless* were penned by female writers H. B. Gilmour and Randi Reisfeld; Viacom Consumer Products vice president Debbie Petrasek spearheaded *Clueless*'s licensing deals to build the *Clueless* brand; and a group of women—Jesyca Durchin, Jan Bozarth, and Christine Donadio—were the producers behind the *Clueless* CD-ROM. Given that women are underrepresented in leadership roles in media, the presence of women at the head of nearly every element of this franchise is particularly remarkable.

Although many iterations of the *Clueless* franchise were ultimately dwarfed by their contemporaries, the *Clueless* brand continues to be influential with fashion blogs, YouTube videos, and even a Spring line from Wildfox that pays homage to *Clueless*. Even though *Clueless* unquestionably does not have the prominence of many of the franchises of its era, its history is one worth remembering. It provides an important instance of a female-driven franchise, and it reflects a number of important changes that the media industry was undergoing in the mid-1990s. *Clueless* appeared only two years after Viacom purchased Paramount in the wake of the repeal of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules, or "fin-syn," and the franchise evidences many of the possibilities opened up by the era's media conglomeration. The *Clueless* novels appeared under Viacom-owned Simon & Schuster imprints, and the series was moved to Viacom-owned UPN after ABC abandoned it. *Clueless* began showing on UPN during its third year on the air and also premiered when television narrowcasting, particularly gender-based narrowcasting, was still relatively new. The franchise also coincided with a period of growth in merchandise licensing and a push for software targeted at girls.[30] As a result, *Clueless* appears to stand at the center of a perfect storm that helped to create and sustain it as a multimedia franchise. Moreover, *Clueless* provides an instance of a franchise built and shaped entirely around young women and girls, a decade before *High School Musical* or *Twilight*, and also driven by a team of women creators, producers, and executives. Examining *Clueless* as a franchise, and not merely as an important film, allows for a different image of what a multimedia franchise has looked like and

29 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

30 "Marketers to Leverage," 37.

can look like—and can help place work on contemporary female-centered franchises like *Gossip Girl* (CW, 2007–2012) and *Twilight* in the context of a historical tradition. Considering *Clueless* allows us to look at popular discourses that frame franchises as primarily for men and to reply, in the immortal words of Cher, "as if." ✻

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