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The *Gilligan* Manifesto

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Television was first publicly demonstrated on April 7, 1927, and has become a fixture in almost every home in America. In its early days, people were enthralled by the new technology as well as its potential, and they regarded it as something magical (see Boswell and McConaghy). Backlash evolved over time, however, and as American society became more conservative, some Americans became disenchanted with television. The love affair officially ended in the 1950s when most of the public believed television was responsible for a surge in juvenile delinquency, considered one of society's greatest ills at the time. A November 1954 Gallup poll asking whether comic books and television programs contributed to juvenile delinquency, taken only months after the hearings on media and juvenile delinquency, showed seventy percent of the country placed some blame on both for teenage problems (Gallup).

A series of three congressional hearings were held regarding the impact of television content on viewers, and ultimately "the government castigated the industry for its deplorable programming" (Hoerrner). In 1952, a self-imposed industry code was established that defined the boundaries of television content with the intent "to foster and promote the commonly accepted moral, social, and ethical ideals characteristic of American life" (NAB 2b).

The backlash was inevitable in the 1950s when the role of television burgeoned in unexpected ways and intruded into private sectors: "The line between what happened in real life and what people saw on television began to merge; many Americans were now living far from their families in brand-new suburbs where they barely knew their neighbors. Sometimes they felt closer to the people they watched on television than they did to their neighbors and distant families" (Halberstam 195). This cultural transformation inspired numerous academics to evaluate the new technology. Among the most notable commentaries was Marshall McLuhan's in 1964, which argued controversially that the medium itself affects society and content has minimal significance.

In 1984, Neil Postman claimed that the limitations of how television delivers information obviate the possibility for substance: "You cannot do political philosophy on television. Its form works against the content" (7). While Postman has no problem with entertainment for the sake of entertainment, the crux of his complaint goes beyond television's limitations and asserts that "the problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining" (86). The most extreme position belongs to Jerry Mander, who in his 1978 book *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* found nothing redeemable about the medium. He argued, "Television suppresses and replaces creative human imagery, encourages mass passivity, and trains people to accept authority. It is an instrument of transmutation, turning people into their TV images" (Mander 349).

The criticism of television can be summed up as follows:

1. Content is devoid of merit because time spent watching precludes constructive activity.
2. Content has the potential to incite violence or promote dissent.
3. The medium adversely affects society through promoting entertainment as the most important attribute of any endeavor thereby breeding inertia.

It is interesting to note the paradoxical nature of these concerns. The fears are that television breeds passivity *and* antisocial behavior in reaction to either the content or the form. The brutal critiques of television emerge as a reaction to the disappointment that such a ubiquitous and revolutionary technology could fail to be socially revolutionary. Naturally, with any form of communication, there are deficiencies, but the persistent hope for television has been that it is possible to navigate around these limitations to exploit the form and produce programming that promotes actual progressive change rather than the spectacle.

In the late 1950s, Situationist International, a political and artistic movement, developed a new vocabulary with regards to revolutionary acts of art, which included the concepts of détournement and recuperation. Détournement is any action in opposition to traditional norms that attempts to alleviate some form of alienation. Recuperation is the process by which society renders threatening displays harmless either through assimilation or by providing more entertaining alternatives (Knabb 45-46).

Asger Jorn defines détournement as "'short for: détournement of pre-existing aesthetic elements.' The integration of past or present artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no Situationist painting or music, but only a Situationist use of these means" (*Internationale Situationiste*). Recuperation is often defined in the following way in relation to détournement: "To survive, the spectacle must have social control. It can recuperate a potentially threatening situation by shifting ground, creating dazzling alternatives by embracing the threat, making it safe and then selling it back to us" (Law 13).

The main preoccupation of the Situationists was to establish methods of détournement while avoiding recuperation. Ultimately, this is the explicit goal of all revolutionary movements. The most devastating complaint that could be levied against television is that the medium is inherently recuperative. Its function is to take in any image and spew out non-threatening versions by repackaging and presenting them as entertainment. If the medium is bereft of revolutionary possibilities and can only produce entertaining brain candy as Postman asserts, then "television is at its most trivial and, therefore, most dangerous when its aspirations are high, when it presents itself as a carrier of important cultural conversations" (16). In this way, the constructs that are deemed significant are in reality a spectacle devoid of any substance, which serves to diminish and trivialize culture.

While this depiction of television seems to preclude insurrectionary impulses, hurdles of subjugation have been overcome in the past: "How do oppressed peoples unable (for the time being) to escape tyranny nevertheless construct worlds of their own?...the discourse imposed as public performance by the masters is inflected and subverted in ways that import little bits of this hidden transcript, sometimes visible only to the oppressed, sometimes forcing small modifications that rewrite the official discourse" (Robinson 43). Ultimately, one must work within the existing system to produce something that is "deliberately made to seem as recuperation to the powerful...so as to pull the wool over their eyes while also carrying out plans to resist" (Robinson 44). Unknowingly, Postman and Mander defined two of the properties that a program must contain to succeed in détournement – it must reject oppressive authority, and it must aim low in order to avoid meeting explicative expectations that the medium cannot fulfill, thereby escaping being detected as subversive by the governing powers. In addition, the medium's strengths should be exploited so that it presents the depiction of an alternate socio-political structure previously not seen nor experienced. I assert at least one television program has successfully met these criteria and averted recuperation: *Gilligan's Island*.

Radio and television writer Sherwood Schwartz conceived *Gilligan's Island* as a "social microcosm" where each character was very purposefully constructed (Schwartz 1). The premise of the show was simple: seven people from various walks of life – a skipper and his first mate, a millionaire and his socialite wife, a "B" movie star, a farm girl, and a high school science teacher – are all shipwrecked on a deserted island in the South Pacific: "Sociologically, Schwartz intended for the island to be seen as a microcosm, to demonstrate that to survive, people must drop their differences, respect one another's individuality, and consolidate their efforts...Of course, on *Gilligan's Island*, the castaways' differences are merely limited to socioeconomic class, intellect, sex, and profession. They still share major similarities: a common race, religion, ethnic origin, and nationality" (Green

10–11). While worthy of note, even if Schwartz had avoided those similarities, the island's society would remain unchanged because it was conceived in such a way that the only essential differentiating features among the stranded people that could persist would be their talents and desires. All manifestations of otherness would quickly disappear.

Schwartz had always intended the focus of the series to be about the "adventures and misadventures of forming a new little community" (Schwartz 5). Based on this concept, the series presented "stories that were a complete departure from usual situation comedy...*Gilligan's Island* had no cars, no stores, no schools, no phones. It was like no show the audience, or the critics, had met before" (Schwartz 194-195). Perhaps because his background was in biology rather than political science, Schwartz believed the society he conceived was a democracy (193), but in fact – as I will argue – it was a communist utopia.

While there are numerous types of democracies, their most salient feature is the existence of an elected government that establishes rule of law to protect its citizens and their property. Not only are these elements completely absent from the island, every effort by the castaways to introduce some element of democratic governance leads to social breakdown. The first emergence of an attempt to impose a vestige of democratic form comes in the episode, "President Gilligan," when both the Skipper and Mr. Howell vie for leadership of the island after they acknowledge that the island has no governor.

SKIPPER: Professor, will you tell these people who is in charge of this island?
PROFESSOR: Well, actually no one is.
SKIPPER: No one?
MR. HOWELL: No one? Good Heavens this is anarchy!
GINGER: I've got an idea. Why don't we vote? You know, like an election.
SKIPPER: Election?
MR. HOWELL: Election. I'll spend millions on my campaign.
SKIPPER: That's unfair.
MR. HOWELL: You're right it is unfair. Instead I'll buy the votes.

As soon as the notion of a democratic election is introduced, the potential for corruption immediately follows. In fact, Mr. Howell does succeed in buying Ginger's vote by promising to produce her next movie. In spite of the campaigning, the improbable ensues and write-in candidate Gilligan, whose defining trait is his incompetence, is voted president with three of the seven votes. The Skipper expresses apathetic resignation over Gilligan's victory: "People have made their choice and whether it's right or wrong we're stuck with it." By accepting an outcome that the majority deem unfavorable, the castaways affirm and highlight an essential weakness of democracy: content is subordinate to form as witnessed by the prevailing sentiment that sustaining the system of government is more important than the quality of governance. It is worth noting that the same divisions of content and form seen in mediums of communication also emerge here in regards to modes of government. The real possibility that everyone on the island could perish as a result of poor judgment and irrational priorities due to inept leadership is less important than following electoral rules.

Ironically, Gilligan proves to be a wise but ineffective leader because the new form of government breeds apathy and alienation from one's labor even without the introduction of a capital-based economy. The remainder of the episode depicts the breakdown of cooperative life as the castaways pressure Gilligan to appoint them to high-ranking positions as a means of avoiding their communal responsibilities. Ultimately, even the absolute necessities for survival are neglected as the formerly productive island devolves into a state of bureaucratic inefficiency.

GILLIGAN: Unless the well is finished, we're going to run out of drinking water.
SKIPPER: That's very true Mr. President. We certainly do need a well.
[...]
GILLIGAN: Then how about helping me dig the well?
MARYANN: I can't help you Mr. President, I'm in the midst of settling a strike.
GILLIGAN: What strike?
MARYANN: Oh, the Secretary of Health and Welfare won't help me in the kitchen anymore.
GINGER: I'm not on strike. I have my own work to do now. How can I wash the dishes and build a hospital at the same time?
GILLIGAN: A hospital? What for? We don't even have a doctor!

GINGER: Well, when the hospital is finished, I'm going to build a medical school.

Experiments with the executive branch of government do not return in future episodes and the disintegration of their civilization is kept at bay until other elements of democracy are tested. Such is the case in "Gilligan Goes Gung Ho," where a legal system is introduced.

PROFESSOR: At this point, there's been no robbery, no murder, no crime of any kind on the island...and so gentlemen you can see the necessity for some form of legal authority here on the island.
SKIPPER: Exactly. What we need is law and order.
MR. HOWELL: I'll make a check out to the Policemen's Benevolent Society.
PROFESSOR: I suggest we elect a sheriff. And the sooner, the better.

The absence of problems is used as the justification for the introduction of a mechanism to prevent their occurrence; and once again, we are reminded that this system can be corrupted by money. In addition to establishing a code of law and a means of enforcement, another significant consequence results from this act: the creation of private property. Gilligan, who was appointed deputy, discovers Mr. Howell in possession of binoculars. While only moments earlier, these were accepted as communal property, now they have a specific owner, in this case the Skipper, with property rights that must be protected. Gilligan physically detains Mr. Howell who protests; however, the Professor defends the system.

PROFESSOR: Now, Mr. Howell, we all gave our word that we'd obey the law.
MR. HOWELL: I know, but...
PROFESSOR: We agreed to accept the Skipper as the sheriff and Gilligan as his deputy.
MR. HOWELL: I know...
PROFESSOR: And we must agree to obey their authority and to accept the penalty if we break the law.
MR: HOWELL: But the whole thing sounds so darn democratic.

Mr. Howell's complaint is precisely the point – voluntary subjugation *is* democratic. Again, form takes precedence over content in democratic institutions as the enforcement of law takes precedence over justice. Eventually, Gilligan finds lawful reasons to lock every one of the castaways inside a makeshift jail and an opportunity for rescue is missed when they are unable to signal an approaching plane. Gilligan is blamed for the failure, but clearly the indictment should be directed at the democratic system that routinely allows for individuals like Gilligan to exploit opportunities to abuse the spirit of the law in favor of the letter. Law enforcement does not reappear in future episodes and property is restored to its communal state.

Ridicule of the justice system takes place in "Plant You Now, Dig You Later" when a dispute emerges over a treasure chest that Gilligan finds while digging a barbecue pit for Mr. Howell. Both parties claim ownership of the chest, so the Professor decides a trial should be held where he will serve as judge. Once again, Mr. Howell reminds the audience of the potential for corruption in this branch of government by trying to bribe the Professor. Shortly after the justice system is conceived, chaos erupts, as six additional cases must also be heard including two charges of tampering with witnesses, complaints of defamation of character, libel, slander, and the aforementioned attempt to bribe a public official. With each experiment at imposing some vestige of civilization, we see the system feed itself by creating the problems it was designed to solve. One valuable revelation does emerge from the trial. After the Professor deliberates on the case he decrees: "Ever since we were shipwrecked on this island, we've shared the hardships, the work, the fish we catch, the fruit, the water – everything. We've shared and we've shared alike. And I choose to look upon the treasure chest as one of the natural resources of this island. By custom and usage de facto – it belongs to all of us."

With this declaration, the series can no longer be viewed as simply containing biting satirical elements that address the foibles of the American democratic superstructure, but as an active affirmation of communism. The Professor's judgment adheres to the central tenet proclaimed in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property" (Engels and Marx 80). This principal extends beyond this single episode because the castaways' communal lifestyle is one of the major defining components of the show: "The castaways live according to the Marxist ideal, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.'

Economically, socialism prevails. The castaways share the island's natural resources equally, and currency is never issued" (Green 92). With the absence of currency, the society is unavoidably classless despite the presence of the billionaire Howells. When the Howells are thought to have lost all of their money in the episode "Agonized Labor," the Skipper consoles them by stating: "I just want you to know, believe us, as long as we're all on this island together it's not going to make any difference to anyone of us whether you have any money or not." The qualifier – "as long as we're all on this island" – is significant in that it acknowledges that different rules apply elsewhere and human relations are mediated by the cultural forms which contextualize these relations.

The Howells, representing the pinnacle of success in the capitalist world, have the most to lose by adopting this new order, and they occasionally provide the obligatory spectacle of resistance. When survival is threatened due to vitamin deficiency in "V Is for Vitamins," their conscious act of assimilating to this society where they will no longer hold a position of privilege is expressed in a way that is poetic and touching. Each castaway has orange seeds that must be planted to produce the fruit necessary for their continued existence on the island. In this discourse, the seeds take on metaphoric properties about communal life, and wealth is defined in a wholly new way.

MR. HOWELL: Lovey, Lovey my dear, aren't they just beautiful?
MRS. HOWELL: You must be seeing something I don't see!
MR. HOWELL: No, I see thousands of orange trees, springing out of the ground!
MRS. HOWELL: Well, all I see are a lot of nasty pits!
MR. HOWELL: No, look beyond the horizon, beyond tomorrow! I see Valencia oranges, mandarin oranges, Navel oranges...we'll be up to our navel in Navels!
MRS. HOWELL: All those from these?
MR. HOWELL: Well it's not quite that easy. First of all we have to plant them.
MRS. HOWELL: Plant them? In the dirt? With our hands?
MR. HOWELL: Well, I believe that's the usual way.
MRS. HOWELL: Oh dear, then it's not for us.
GILLIGAN: C'mon, everyone's planting their seeds!
MR. HOWELL: Yes, unless we cooperate, we'll be going to the great orange grove in the sky.
MRS. HOWELL: OK. When we go Thurston, we go with clean hands!

Another notable feature of communism is the absence of religion. Such is the case on *Gilligan's Island*. Joey Green states, "For seven people marooned on an island, the castaways display surprisingly little philosophical or theological despair. The shipwreck fails to provoke any spiritual anguish, and the secular castaways remain strangely unaffected, refraining from both existential and religious quests. Curiously, they never question their fate or pray for cosmic intervention" (97).

Additionally, as Karl Marx attests, this kind of social order permits great opportunities for individual freedom unavailable to most in capitalist societies: "In a communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, to fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic" (Marx 161). After Pancho Hernando Gonzales Enrico Rodriquez, the deposed dictator from the Republic of Equarico, fails in his attempt to take over the island and subdue the castaways in "The Little Dictator," he has the following exchange with Mrs. Howell:

RODRIGUEZ: I am ready.
MRS. HOWELL: Ready for what?
RODRIGUEZ: To be executed.
MRS. HOWELL: Oh don't be ridiculous.
RODRIGUEZ: Well, then you're going to exile me, of course.
MRS. HOWELL: Well, I never heard such nonsense.
RODRIGUEZ: Then what will become of me?
MRS. HOWELL: You will become a member of our little community.
RODRIGUEZ: You mean become one of the masses?
MRS. HOWELL: We don't like to think of ourselves that way. We're a free society and you will be free to do or become whatever you want.

In spite of the confines of being trapped on a deserted island, the notion of greater possibilities persistently recurs. Driving this theme, of course, is the need for new and varied plots to keep the viewers interested, which is one example of the symbiotic relationship between the practice of détournement in *Gilligan's Island* and the structural form of the medium that conveniently provides reinforcement. A diminishment of imaginative restrictions is necessary to sustain the entertainment value of the program whereby depictions of freedom become inexorably fused with the social context. While other contemporary primetime family-based sitcoms engaged in similar creative indulgences, shows such as *I Dream of Jeanie*, *Bewitched*, *The Munsters*, *The Addams Family*, and *My Favorite Martian* all were founded on decidedly fantasy premises completely divorced from real-world scenarios. Whereas the more grounded programs – *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *Dennis the Menace*, *My Three Sons*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *Family Affair*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* – all celebrate the solace of structure and well-defined roles as the foundation for stability and social order.

The premise for *Gilligan's Island* – a handful of tourists find themselves shipwrecked due to a devastating tropical storm – is a conceivable scenario. In fact, the plausibility is so tangible that hypersensitivity to inconsistencies have emerged with a degree of tenacity hardly experienced by any other television program. Questions about Ginger's extensive wardrobe and the inability of the Professor to fix the boat despite being able to make a radio out of a coconut have become ingrained in popular culture. It should be noted that the Professor never actually makes a radio out of a coconut, as none would be needed because there already is a radio on their possession. The spirit of the question is marginally valid because the Professor did construct things such as a lie detector, a Geiger counter, a battery charger, jet pack fuel, and nitroglycerine. However, carpentry clearly is outside of the realm of skills he demonstrates, which predominantly falls within the realm of biology, chemistry, and electrical engineering. Russell Johnson, the actor who played the Professor, addresses this question in a lecture he delivered at M.I.T. where he noted: "the Professor has all sorts of degrees, including one from this very institution – and that's why I can make a radio out of a coconut, and not fix a hole in a boat" (qtd. in Gallagher).

The premise was made all the more plausible – even palpable – in that it echoed the pervasive obsession with surviving a nuclear holocaust at that time. In addition to duck and cover drills, only two years prior to the filming of the series' pilot, *Fortune* magazine published an article that revealed plans made by New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, U.S. Congressman Chet Holifield (D-CA), physicist Edward Teller, and military strategist Herman Kahn to create an extensive network of underground fallout shelters across the United States to protect millions of people in the event of nuclear war (Burck 122-125). In this way, *Gilligan's Island* stands out as a rare example of an optimistic depiction of a post-apocalyptic world, albeit in the guise of an innocuous analogue.

Every communicative medium possesses its own set of strengths and weaknesses when conveying ideas; however, it is important to note that each sector has forms that also impact how content is conveyed. For instance, one can write prose, poetry, or expository essays, to name just a few. Television has numerous broadcast formats including drama, documentary, infomercial, and sitcom, among many others. The sitcom is characterized by self-contained episodes with regularly appearing characters who remain largely static, and events that resolve themselves by the conclusion of the episode ("Situation Comedy"). Since everything reverts back to its original state at the end of an episode, any possibility for persistent change must fail. While exceptions exist, this feature defines the sitcom form.

The ninety-eight episodes of *Gilligan's Island* were written, or co-written, by a total of sixty-two different writers, although the dramatic aspects "for virtually all the first year's episodes, and many of the following years' episodes as well" were conceived by Schwartz at the time he pitched the series to CBS (Schwartz 122). While many praised these writers for their talents, including executive producer William Froug who readily admits that he did not like the show, there was nothing remarkable about their creative background. Many wrote for other contemporary shows such as *The Andy Griffith Show, Bewitched, The Flintstones*, and *My Favorite Martian,* all of which are devoid of any latent political agenda other than affirming the status quo. While Froug praises everyone who worked on *Gilligan's Island* (except, perhaps, Schwartz), he nevertheless confesses, "I resigned myself to producing a series I found increasingly trivial and uninteresting" (219).

When Schwartz conceived of his isolated island where people must learn to live together, at some point he made the decision that vilifying the doctrine of competition would facilitate cohesion. This choice was likely an unconscious one and ramifications were not considered. Consistency of content for *Gilligan's Island* was maintained both by the writers adhering to this fundamental theme that inevitably led to the emergence of communism on the island, as well as by the precepts of the sitcom form that preclude anything but the reassertion of a show's premise. The traditional method for recuperation assured the series' détournement regardless of who was writing the episode, so long as the episode stuck to formula. The revolutionary elements of *Gilligan's Island* could not be recuperated because they were presented as if they had already been recouped. The images of desire depicted were incompatible with assimilation and too compelling to allow for a more entertaining distraction. With the structure defined in a specific way, any writer working within the confines of the sitcom form had no options but to reaffirm its essential state. Ironically, the sole impediment to communication is the way the presentation detracts from itself, thereby leading many to disregard it as trivial. Nevertheless, the self-sustaining process of perpetual détournement is probably the most astonishing achievement of the series. In this way, *Gilligan's Island* succeeded where the Situationists and many other revolutionary movements have consistently failed.

Remarkably, this process of détournement even works against attempts by the show's creator to impose conventionality. In one example, Schwartz writes: "There wasn't any obvious preaching about the sanctity of marriage vows. No lecturing or moralizing. But it was, nevertheless, the accepted view on *Gilligan's Island* that matrimony itself was not to be treated lightly, no matter how broad the comedy that surrounded it" (Schwartz 191-192). Despite Schwartz's intentions, marriage *is* trivialized in his communist utopia. "In Mr. and Mrs.???," the Howells hear a radio report that the Reverend Buckley Norris who married them is a fraud, and they are not legally married. Mr. Howell suggests that they marry immediately after they are rescued, but Mrs. Howell insists that he move out of their hut and that she be addressed by her maiden name Eunice Wentworth. Eventually, they learn that the report was in error, and it was the Reverend Boris Nuckley who was a fraud. They reconcile after hearing the news, but in the end, they bicker and Mr. Howell is thrown out of their hut once again. The legality of marriage is depicted as laughably frivolous as the bonds of their relationship are irrationally affected by the completely arbitrary status of an absent third party. In spite of Schwartz's personal beliefs and intent, on this island the institution can only be portrayed as slapstick, although it should be noted that bonds of camaraderie are taken very seriously in every episode.

The desire for rescue is another persistent feature in the series: "In the broadest sense, the theme of 'rescue' could be taken as a cunning portrayal of the persistence of counter-revolutionary impulses. The only element which grants a sense of cohesion to this 'community' is the unfaltering obsession of every character's desire to return to their respective differences. For the inhabitants of *Gilligan's Island*, the way ahead is the way back; transcendence is nothing more than recuperation" (Reyes 358). Imbued with pathos beyond the show's reach, one could intuit that each character secretly desires to stay on the island, but can never voice this wish for fear of being accused by the other castaways of sabotaging efforts to be rescued. This scenario would explain why the other castaways depend on Gilligan to foil rescue attempts (sixteen times) and why greater precautions are not taken to prevent visitors from leaving the island without them. After each possibility for rescue is lost, it seems that they feign disappointment and only half-heartedly chastise Gilligan who accepts his role as scapegoat.

This thesis is not completely hypothetical. In "Ghost a Go-Go," Gilligan professes his preference for life on the Island, which lends credence to the possibility that many of the accidents that interfered with rescues attempts were actually deliberate. He even introduces the notion that, other than the Skipper, his sabotage was performed with tacit consent. As preparations are made to leave when a boat is discovered, Gilligan and the Skipper have the following exchange:

SKIPPER: What's taking everybody so long?
GILLIGAN: Maybe nobody wants to leave.
SKIPPER: Of course everybody's anxious to leave, Gilligan.
GILLIGAN: I'm not.
SKIPPER: Certainly, everybody wants to get back to civilization.
GILLIGAN: I had fun here.
SKIPPER: There'll be people on the streets.

GILLIGAN: Pushing and shoving.
SKIPPER: And restaurants.
GILLIGAN: Waiting for a table.
SKIPPER: You'll get paid for a day's work.
GILLIGAN: Who cares about money?

Ultimately, the reason they cannot get off the island is that the state of permanent exile is a necessary condition behind the premise of the show. If they got off the island, the series that the audience had come to appreciate would end. In theory, the characters could persist back in civilization, but the context that defines them would be fundamentally altered that the show could not reasonably be called *Gilligan's Island*. This blatantly obvious statement carries ramifications, however. The question that remains is not whether they will be rescued, but whether they can free themselves of the belief that they need to be rescued.

As Laura Morowitz explains, "In *Gilligan's Island*, the escapism of travel...is transferred to television; the great escape does not exist in a far-off tropical locale, but everywhere at once in the form of a medium that conquered the world" (128). Television becomes not only a new medium of communication, but a new and greater mode of travel as well, because it can depict an imagined terrain. The medium might not "do political philosophy" as Postman asserts, but "maybe the deceptively lowbrow and predictable *Gilligan's Island* is cleverly layered with hidden meaning ambitiously addressing key social issues and philosophical themes, luring its captive and unsuspecting viewers into the realm of political and social consciousness" (Green ix).

There is an inescapable irony that one of the most syndicated programs in television history allegorically advocated for communism during the height of the Cold War. Outside of author Joey Green, no other writer has extensively considered the political structure depicted. In at least this one instance, television becomes a vehicle of détournement and McLuhan's assertion of the primacy of medium over content is negated, just as the civilization depicted in *Gilligan's Island* rejects the democratic emphasis on form. While at the same time, "Marx was keen to observe, beyond the philosophical logic, that for a proletariat to develop a consciousness beyond alienated resentment, they needed to be coddled a bit by the solicitous alternative vision" (Reyes 355-356). Through television, *Gilligan's Island* succeeds in providing a vision that forges a new mindset in the viewer.

The potential for subversion through feigning stupidity is explicitly acknowledged in "Nyet, Nyet – Not Yet," an episode that depicts a microcosm of the Cold War conflict. After a Soviet space capsule goes off course and lands just off shore of the island, there is mutual distrust among the cosmonauts, Igor and Ivan, and the castaways over each other's mission and intent.

IGOR: These Americans. They think they can fool us.
IVAN: Especially Gilligan. He acts too stupid to be stupid.
IGOR: Must be the cleverest one of them all.

This comment is followed by canned laughter. It is interesting to note that even the laughter on the show has been détourned. One of the primary sources for the laugh track used on *Gilligan's Island* was the sight-gag heavy *Red Skelton Show*, of which Sherwood Schwartz was the head writer. The laughter heard on *Gilligan's Island*, therefore, is laughter for Schwartz's writing, merely displaced.

Gilligan's Island is frequently, and erroneously, regarded as "inept, moronic" and "humorless" (Schwartz 161). The success of the show, and more importantly its capacity to endure as a broadly recognized component of popular culture after over fifty years, is a testament to its ability to resonate with something primal. Its greatest contribution may not be simply to provide entertainment that persists even to this day, but rather that it picks up where Marx left off by presenting an idealized depiction of a functioning communist society. Remarkably, *Gilligan's Island* reveals that the unconscious utopian vision of Western society – regardless of whether it is attainable – may be communism.

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