

Katniss's three-person prep team embodies everything that she finds repugnant about the Capitol, from the stylists' high-pitched voices with the accent she finds so affected to their overwhelming preoccupation with fashion, social status, and parties. At the same time, she gradually grows fond of them—and so do we—as they fuss and flutter around her like exotic birds, doing their best to transform her to Cinna's specifications. As events unfold, the trio becomes genuinely attached to Katniss as well: while preparing her for her pre-Quarter Quell interview with Caesar Flickerman, each of the stylists in turn leaves in tears at the thought of her reentering the arena.

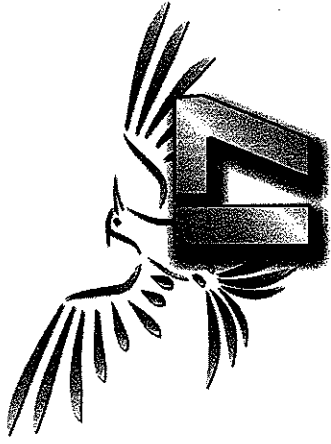
The prep team is actively promoting the horror of the Hunger Games, but the stylists are sympathetic, not evil, characters, and in this way they resemble the vast majority of the Capitol citizens. But how is the prep team's affection for Katniss and Peeta Mellark compatible with its bloodthirsty delight at the violent spectacle itself? What keeps the stylists from regarding *all* of the children in the arena as objects of affection? And why do the Capitol citizens generally remain so indifferent to the systemic injustices on which their comfort rests?

As we'll see, the more time and energy the Capitol citizens focus on body modification and their social lives, the more self-focused they become and the less likely they are to notice or care about political injustices that don't directly affect them. The frivolity of the citizens is actually used by the Capitol to strengthen its power. Examining how the Capitol does that provides insight into what's most troubling about the lives of the citizens not just of the Capitol but of District 13 as well—namely, their lack of self-directed significance.

### Fantastic Fashion and Shifting Focus

How can one capitalize the time of individuals, accumulate it in each of them, in their bodies . . . in a way that is susceptible of use and control?

—Michel Foucault<sup>2</sup>



## DISCIPLINE AND THE DOCILE BODY

Regulating Hungers in the Capitol

*Christina Van Dyke*

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms. . . . In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.

—Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

When Katniss Everdeen first arrives in the Capitol, she is both amazed and repulsed by the dramatic body modifications and frivolous lives of its citizens. Compared to the harsh conditions of her own District 12, the luxuries of the Capitol and the party-style excitement of the population at the prospect of the Hunger Games seems unforgivable. “What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol,” she wonders, “besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment?”<sup>2</sup>

It might seem strange to talk about regulating the *hungers* of the Capitol citizens, given that one of the most striking differences between the Capitol and the districts is that hunger doesn't appear to exist in the Capitol. The citizens never experience the gnawing sensation of an empty belly; their every appetite is satisfied as soon as it arises. In stark contrast to the poorer districts, especially areas like the Seam in District 12, in the Capitol rich food appears ready-made at the touch of a button, and the hardest choice families face at mealtime is what dishes to eat.

Furthermore, this abundance is taken for granted. For a meal to be considered a feast, all the stops must be pulled out. Consider the party at President Snow's mansion, where one table contains nothing but a purgative that allows people to fill their stomachs again and again, just for the pleasure of taste. This is not a world where the sort of hunger that Katniss has grown up with even exists.

*Hunger* is a word with myriad levels of meaning, however, and in its broadest sense can refer to any sort of appetite. Human beings hunger for food, for touch, for love, and for power. How we respond to those hungers—and how they are shaped—becomes integral to who we are and how we experience life.

Let's look more closely at Katniss's prep team. When Katniss first meets the three stylists, they appear so odd to her that she has difficulty seeing them as fellow human beings. As they strip her naked and examine her body prior to beginning their treatments, she compares the experience to being observed by a trio of outlandish birds. The main reason for this, of course, is how physically different from her they are—and these differences have been carefully cultivated by the team.

Each member of the prep team has adopted a different "look" through the widespread Capitol practice of dramatic body modification: Octavia has dyed her whole body green, Flavius wears bright orange corkscrew curls and purple lipstick, and Venia complements her spiky, aqua-colored coiffure with elaborate

golden tattoos around her eyes. Katniss is also struck by their high-pitched, accented voices and their quick, darting patterns of movement.

The prep team has literally *embodied* Capitol society's preoccupation with fashion, entertainment, and social status. Katniss sees the results as not just unusual but also unnatural. To a girl who grew up in the Seam, where clothing is primarily protection from the elements and simple cleanliness is a luxury, the elaborate Capitol fashions are nothing short of bizarre. When Octavia bemoans Cinna's refusal to let the team make Katniss "something special," Katniss wonders what they want to do: "Blow up my lips like President Snow's? Tattoo my breasts? Dye my skin magenta and implant gems in it? Cut decorative patterns in my face? Give me curved talons? Or cat's whiskers? . . . Do they really have no idea how freakish they look to the rest of us?"<sup>4</sup>

The short answer to Katniss's last question is, of course, "No!" In the social world of the Capitol, fashion statements like Venia's tattoos and Octavia's skin color are the norm; natural, unmodified bodies like Katniss's and Peeta's are the ones that look freakish.

The distinction between *natural* and *normal* is key to understanding how the citizens' self-centered lifestyles play into the Capitol's exercise of power. According to French social theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), a society functions in large part through the creation and negotiation of widespread standards of appearance and behavior that unify the members of that society. The prevailing social standard defines what's normal, regardless of whether it's natural in a physiological sense. Wearing clothes, for instance, is a powerful social norm throughout Panem (albeit one Johanna Mason certainly feels comfortable violating); using implements to eat one's food is another. Neither of these norms is particularly natural.

Although a few social norms are common to most cultures, the variation among norms is a large part of what differentiates

one culture from another. Norms about what animals are acceptable to eat, for instance—chickens? grubs? dogs? pigs?—vary widely among societies and are part of how we distinguish one culture from another.

Social norms allow us to participate in, and identify ourselves as belonging to, a particular culture. They're also important ways in which power functions in a culture—something we can see most clearly if we think about the common reactions to someone's violating a social norm. If you were at an Applebee's in Indianapolis and your group was offered dog meat as a substitute for beef in your hamburgers, the reactions around the table would probably range from shock and disgust to sheer outrage. Those reactions are not just typical of how we respond to the violation of social norms within our society; they are also part of how societies are regulated.

Think of how Effe Trinket reacts to District 12 tributes who eat their food with their hands or how most people in North America would react to a woman with hairy legs and armpits. Now think of the person who is violating that social norm and how she's likely to respond to those reactions. Social disapproval is a powerful force, causing most people to feel strong pressure to conform to social norms. Norms are also self-perpetuating: the more people conform to a particular norm, the more powerful that norm becomes, the stronger the reaction to someone who is violating it is, and the stronger the pressure to self-correct to that norm is.

The nature of the social norms that are prevalent in a particular society also reveal a great deal about the power structures in that society. In District 12, for instance, social norms include keeping one's head down and avoiding attention (as opposed to dressing flamboyantly and living ostentatiously), keeping any dissatisfaction with the government quiet (as opposed to publishing newspapers full of grievances), and avoiding large social gatherings. These norms reflect, among other things, life under the repressive system of a government that is likely to crack down on anyone who draws attention or resists openly.

In the Capitol, however, social norms include adhering to outrageous fashion trends and placing a great deal of importance on lavish parties and other elaborate forms of entertainment. This speaks of widespread privilege and abundant resources, as well as a lack of economic and political consciousness.

### The Hunger of Docile Bodies

[Capitalism has] to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern.

—Michel Foucault<sup>5</sup>

Part of what social norms do is to create corresponding hungers within us. We want to belong, to be part of a group, and social norms function as guidelines for how to do that. Also, when the basic physical hungers can easily be satisfied, we are left with lots of time, energy, and resources to devote to less vital needs. As a result, arbitrary social norms tend to assume greater importance.

In the Capitol, for instance, the incredible abundance of resources leaves the citizens with ample time to focus on the social norms of fashion and entertainment. In fact, the large amount of time the citizens have on their hands helps to explain *why* the social norms in the Capitol are so complex, widespread, and elaborate: the citizens have little else to occupy their attention. Once in place, those norms give rise to correspondingly complex and demanding hungers, with each citizen's sense of identity increasingly centered on the particular ways he or she chooses to fill those hungers.

Think of the bewildering range of options that a shower in the Capitol offers for beautification; it's easy to imagine Octavia or Flavius dithering over exactly which foam and which scent to choose. It's just as easy to imagine them placing a great deal of importance on their decisions and judging their friends and

their coworkers on the decisions they make. ("Grapefruit scent? He's trying too hard." "Banana foam rinse? So bold!")

Very few people in the Capitol appear to have meaningful occupations; the districts provide all of the real work necessary for meeting basic needs. It's in fretting about how to keep abreast of constantly fluctuating fashions—such as whether feathers or beads are the best way to put one's own spin on a new trend—that the hungers of the Capitol citizens for belonging, for meaning, and for self-expression are expressed.

In a surprising way, then, hunger plays a crucial role in the lives of the Capitol citizens: they organize their lives around satisfying their complex desires just as surely as Katniss and Gale Hawthorne have organized their lives around satisfying their more basic hungers and keeping their families from starvation.

How the citizens satisfy their hungers plays an important role in their turning a blind eye to the injustices of the Hunger Games. In a society that places a strong emphasis on fashion and entertainment, the constant practice of self-surveillance ("Ooo—the stubble on my legs is getting noticeable") and self-correction ("I'd better shave my legs again") turns attention away from other concerns. The citizens' efforts to keep up with constantly changing styles (such as stenciled cheekbones and gem-studded collarbones) transform them into "docile bodies": "bodies whose forces and energies are," in the words of feminist philosopher Susan Bordo, "habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement.'"<sup>6</sup>

The Capitol citizens are motivated primarily by an externally generated sense of self-worth and importance; their energies are directed toward subjecting themselves to the dictates of a fashionable society and transforming themselves accordingly. For the most part, they base their assessment of whether their lives are going well or badly on the extent to which they've succeeded at "improving" themselves to fit the latest style.

In sharp contrast with Katniss, who's constantly thinking about how her actions will impact *others*—her family and her community—and who's determined to protect her sister and her mother, the prep team's docile *self*-focus means that the stylists experience even the televised horrors of the Hunger Games in personal terms: "I was still in bed!" "I had just had my eyebrows dyed!" "I swear I nearly fainted!" Everything is about them, not the dying boys and girls in the arena.<sup>7</sup>

All of this self-centered preoccupation with their bodies actually reinforces the power of the Capitol over its citizens—and the rest of Panem. It also helps to explain how sincere and earnest people like Octavia and Venia can willingly, albeit obliviously, participate in the injustices of the Hunger Games.

### Discovering Discipline in the Capitol

Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.

—Michel Foucault<sup>8</sup>

In *Mockingjay*, Plutarch Heavensbee explains the meaning of the imperial Roman phrase *panem et circenses* ("bread and circuses") to help Katniss better understand how the Capitol functions: "The writer [the ancient Roman satirist, Juvenal] was saying that in return for full bellies and entertainment, his people had given up their political responsibilities and therefore their power."<sup>9</sup> This in a nutshell is the relationship between President Snow and the Capitol citizens.

But there's still much to be said about how an entire people abdicates its power in exchange for abundant resources and ready entertainment. Indeed, it turns out that the same process by which the citizens become "docile bodies"—a process of subtle but powerful social discipline—is also integral to their willingness to go along with the political status quo.

Life in the Capitol is highly *undisciplined*, in the traditional sense of the term. But the incredible freedom that the citizens appear to enjoy merely masks the ways in which the Capitol builds, exerts, and maintains control over them. Foucault points out that people discipline their bodies in obedience to their culture by devoting time, energy, and resources to transform themselves to fit social norms. When Flavius thinks he can't leave the house without his "face" on, or when Octavia spends all her free time shopping for the perfect hair accessory because she couldn't dream of facing her friends without it, it's a sign that they have become disciplined, docile bodies. Their constant conformity to social norms has made them unthinkingly obedient to the rules of their society.

The demanding social norms of extreme body modification and utter absorption in fashion and entertainment also discipline the citizens by training their attention away from economic and political concerns. Here's Bordo's description of the process (amended slightly to fit the context): "Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many [Capitol citizens]—they are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification."<sup>10</sup>

Even the arrangement of the citizens' physical living spaces—with their spacious closets, enormous television sets (under Capitol control), and constant surveillance via security systems—plays an important role in disciplining the citizens into unreflective obedience. The citizens' natural desire for originality and self-expression is channeled into "safe" outlets that draw attention away from the harsh realities of the injustices that make their lives possible.

President Snow encourages the narcissism that keeps the citizens happily occupied decorating their hair with strings of twinkling mice-shaped lights instead of wondering how it would feel to watch their child be chosen in the reaping. He also maintains his absolute control over the Capitol by

carefully controlling what information the citizens have available and by issuing sanctions for violating the established social norms.

The consequences for violating norms (loss of job or social ostracism, such as when Tigris, the former Hunger Games stylist, takes her cat-loving body modification too far and becomes grotesque even by Capitol standards) are just harsh enough to motivate the majority of the citizens to keep their attention focused where it's been trained, instead of challenging the status quo or even looking more deeply into it.

The Capitol citizens who join the fight against President Snow's regime—Plutarch and Fulvia, Cressida and Messalla, and Castor and Pollux—come from Snow's inner circle, have a journalistic mindset that drove them to push deeper for knowledge, or have suffered terribly at the hands of Snow's regime. The vast majority of the citizens remain docile bodies, content to avoid trouble and live out their superficial, self-centered lives of comfort.

It's often said that privilege is invisible to those who have it. This is certainly true in the Capitol: Katniss's stylists have no idea that it's actually an insult when, after scrubbing, polishing, and buffing her body, they "compliment" her by saying she looks "almost human!" The world of excess in which they live is so normal to them that they see deviation from those norms as unpleasant and undesirable. Who, after all, would *want* to hunt for food or have visible scars?

A world in which the Capitol citizens see their lives as perfectly normal breeds a sense of superiority that leads them to view people from poorer districts as *abnormal*, even subhuman, and in need of fixing. Their perception of their lifestyle as the norm also blinds them to the actual workings of the power systems that make it possible. Katniss is able to guess exactly which districts are rebelling based on her stylists' complaints about the unavailability of their favorite products. The team is oblivious to the true significance of

the shortages due to its privileged ignorance of the effects of rebellion.

In the end, the people of the Capitol are highly disciplined—and by mechanisms that remain completely invisible to the vast majority of the citizens. That's a large part of what makes us somewhat forgiving of their participation in Snow's regime. "Who knows who I would be or what I would talk about if I'd been raised in the Capitol?" Katniss wonders as she watches her prep team listen earnestly to her mother's instructions on how to construct her signature hairstyle. "Maybe my biggest regret would be having feathered costumes at my birthday party, too."<sup>11</sup>

Though understandable, the frivolous, self-centered lives of the Capitol citizens seem neither admirable nor desirable to Katniss, and they are clearly meant to not seem so to us, either. But the lives of the citizens of District 13, the district that attempts to replace Snow's regime with its own institutions of power, are equally unappealing.

### Going Underground: Discipline in District 13

A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved.

—Michel Foucault<sup>12</sup>

Life in the underground compound of District 13 contrasts sharply with the carefree, indulgent life of the Capitol. District 13's rigid control of its citizens' personal and political lives keeps it running in the face of almost insurmountable odds. But the people pay a steep price, since they're disciplined to stoic compliance with a system that allows virtually no room for individual expression. On the surface, it would be difficult to imagine anything that is less like the Capitol citizens' frivolity. Yet it becomes painfully clear as events unfold that neither

system of control can satisfy Katniss's hunger for a meaningful life—and for similar reasons.

Foucault described *discipline* as a process that channels the forces of individual bodies for social ends. One of the most striking features of the disciplined, or "docile," body is how its energies are directed: first, toward increasing economic efficiency as both a producer and a consumer, and second, away from questioning political institutions and structures.<sup>13</sup> We've already seen how the Capitol does this. A quick look at living conditions in District 13 shows that President Coin also has this dual process down to a science.

The use of physical space is crucial. In District 13, every citizen is monitored and given a rigid schedule that fixes his or her location every minute of the day; the living quarters are impersonal and bare bones; food intake is strictly regulated according to height, weight, and physical activity. Deviation from the rules is not tolerated; the prep team's incarceration is the result of Octavia—whose gentle plumpness is unthinkable under this regime—taking an extra piece of bread at dinner.

The guard's bemused reaction to Katniss's horror at discovering her prep team chained and beaten betrays an outlook shaped by constant compliance to a highly structured system: "They were warned. Still they took more bread.' The guard pauses for a moment, as if puzzled by our density: 'You can't take bread.'<sup>14</sup> Knowing your place in the system and unquestioningly obeying the rules and regulations are the hallmarks of life underground.

In the Capitol, the citizens unthinkingly participate in the political system largely because they're distracted; their attention is diverted from politics onto self-centered desires. In District 13, the citizens unthinkingly participate in the political system because of deeply ingrained habits formed through their continual obedience to the myriad rules and regulations imposed by President Coin. The effects of this constant compliance are gradual, cumulative, and dramatic.



Foucault's description of an eighteenth-century soldier is also an accurate portrait of the typical citizen of District 13. The District 13 citizen is "something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit."<sup>15</sup> If you enact this process on the scale of a whole society, you get a populace that literally embodies obedience.

From the perspective of the Capitol, Katniss is a threat because she exposes the hidden mechanisms of power and draws attention to the ways the system exerts its control. From the perspective of District 13, Katniss's unforgivable sin is her inability to take orders. In neither system is there a place for the life that Katniss longs to lead, one in which she can decide for herself what to do. At first blush, the hidden discipline and excessive luxury of the Capitol look nothing like the incredibly regimented life of District 13. But both have the same outcome: a lack of genuine autonomy that leaves the citizens with only those outlets for self-expression that are approved and tightly controlled by their governments.

### Mastering Modification with Cinna

Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.

—Michel Foucault<sup>16</sup>

When Katniss's prep team is transported to District 13, the stylists appear ridiculous, even pathetic. Their attempts to carve out unique forms of self-expression that would be at home in the Capitol's context of excess leave them far outside the bounds of acceptability in President Coin's strictly regulated underground regime. Yet the message of the Hunger Games is not that body modification is necessarily a bad thing.

Indeed, throughout the series, the stylist Cinna brilliantly demonstrates that body modification can be both a genuine form of self-expression and an effective means of resistance to the dominant power structures.

Cinna is a master of subtle (and not-so-subtle) forms of resistance through the manipulation of appearances. He modifies his own appearance to draw attention to certain features and seems to be guided more by an internal sense of purpose than by mere capitulation to the whims of Capitol fashion. At their first meeting, Katniss notes that his "only concession to self-alteration seems to be metallic gold eyeliner that has been applied with a light hand. It brings out the flecks of gold in his green eyes."<sup>17</sup> She's struck not by how ridiculous he appears but rather by how attractive he is. Cinna's appearance reassures her and helps to gain her trust.

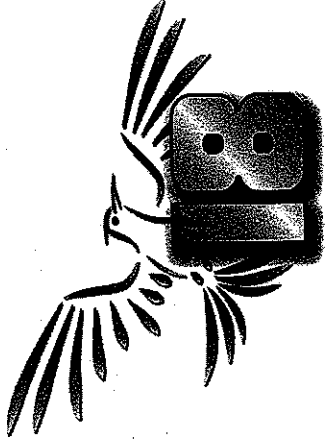
Again and again, the ways Cinna chooses to present Katniss help her to gain a deeper understanding of her situation and her role. In making her the girl on fire, he creates not only a vision of her that the rest of Panem can latch onto but also one in which she can find strength. Through the nuances of his presentation of her before and after the Games, he guides her to a better understanding of how to negotiate the treacherous political terrain in which she finds herself.

For instance, when he transforms her from a savage wreck into a sweet-looking girl glowing by candlelight, she's able to see how playing the love-struck teen just might preserve the safety of the people she loves. When he turns her into a mockingjay on live television in front of all of Panem, she understands that she has just galvanized the rebellion. Cinna is the first person to give Katniss courage and hope. His talent for highlighting aspects of her true self helps her to visualize the full range of possibilities available to her. Her transformation from someone who is only playing a role to someone who accepts and even embraces her importance as the Mockingjay has everything to do with Cinna's belief in her and, of course, her belief in his designs.

The difference between this sort of transformation and the excesses of the Capitol, on the one hand, and the asceticism of District 13, on the other hand, is the difference between an internally generated sense of self and an unthinking conformity to externally generated norms. Ultimately, for Katniss to find a meaningful place in a society where she can feel at home, she needs to find a space where social norms are not aimed at control and bodies are not constantly disciplined for political ends. As Foucault observed, none of us can escape being shaped by the norms of the society in which we live. But we can, like Katniss, resist becoming docile bodies; we can struggle to change the norms that would subdue us.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 194.
2. Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2008), 65.
3. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 157.
4. Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2009), 49.
5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 141.
6. Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity," in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 166.
7. Collins, *The Hunger Games*, 354.
8. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:86.
9. Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2010), 223.
10. Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity," in *Unbearable Weight*, 166. (The original passage has *women* in place of *Capitol citizens*.)
11. Collins, *Catching Fire*, 38.
12. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 136.
13. Foucault stated, "Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)." *Ibid.*, 138.
14. Collins, *Mockingjay*, 48.
15. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135.
16. *Ibid.*, 93.
17. Collins, *The Hunger Games*, 63.
18. Many thanks to Barrett Emerick and Gabe Kruis for helpful comments on an earlier draft—and to Anna Pasnau for being so excited that I got to write this in the first place.



## "ALL OF THIS IS WRONG"

Why One of Rome's Greatest Thinkers  
Would Despise the Capitol

Adam Barkman

Suzanne Collins packs the Hunger Games trilogy with allusions and images that call to mind the glory and gore of Rome. Characters with Latin names like Claudius, Caesar, Octavia, Romulus, Brutus, Aurelius, and Castor populate Panem, which is itself a reference to the expression *panem et circenses*, Latin for "bread and circuses," the Roman formula for keeping the people docile and content. Even the name of Panem's ruling city, the Capitol, is a reminder that Rome was once called the Capital of the World. And, of course, the story centers on the brutal Hunger Games, Collins's postapocalyptic take on Roman gladiatorial combat, the *circenses* of *panem et circenses*.

Despite the power and glory of Rome, the trilogy makes one thing abundantly clear: "All of this"—the Rome-like Capitol and its gladiatorlike Games—"is wrong."<sup>1</sup> It's safe to assume that very few readers would disagree with that statement, but why is that? It's not Collins's job as a novelist to spell out the moral principles that make that judgment so compelling, but by calling