



Figura 1 - Capa da revista Superman © DC Comics

Superman and America



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Abstract: In the 1930s Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created Superman not just in response to the privations of the Great Depression, but also as a result of the frustrations of modern life with increasingly centralized power in government bureaucracies and private corporations. These were social concerns and Siegel and Shuster's early Superman looked to social solutions. By the 1970s such social concerns had turned inwards and individuals sought release from the stresses of modernity through self-improvement and increasingly individualistic behavior. The late 1978 film *Superman*, and its sequel, responded to these changing times. The films reassured Americans of their worth, at a time of great cynicism due to Watergate, and helped reshape values into a vision of America that aligned with the conservative agenda of Ronald Reagan.

Keywords: Individualism; History; Sexuality; Cynicism.

Introduction

Why Superman is one of the foremost cultural icons of the USA. Because the character has existed for over seventy years, trying to analyse its meaning as an icon, that is, just what does it represent, requires some attention to the development of the character over time and the uses it is put to at any specific moment. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Superman stood for some enduring values in American culture, values that might be loosely defined as the American Way: a loose amalgam of consumerism, liberal democratic values at home, and the projection of such values abroad even as if somewhat contradictorily as a justification for military actions. The Superman films from that period reasserted these values in the face of the social transformation of the 1960s and the political crises of the Vietnam War and Watergate. What follows then shows how a popular text (a comic book or a film) can function

as an active ideological agent in shaping a society's conceptions of its values by offering appropriate modes of behaviour.

Superman first appeared in *Action Comics* in June 1938. He continues to appear in comic books and numerous other media forms over seventy years later. There is no major study of Superman as a character, although Umberto Eco wrote several pieces on him in the 1970s, and more recently, a number of scholars have taken a run at analyzing parts of his mythos. Superman's appeal is wide and long: there are thousands of comic books and strips, hundreds of television episodes across live action and animated series aimed at adults and children alike, and several movies. His iconic status in American culture is as much due to longevity and volume as it is to what he represents. In this regard, the character symbolizes steadfastness in the face of change in that he has withstood the passage of time. However, Superman is no conservative.

Numerous writers across media have used Superman in full symbolic mode as a stand in for America, and through their tales about him tried to deal with the anxieties of change that time and history bring. An attempt to use Superman in this fashion can be seen clearly in the Superman movies from 1979 and 1980. In these movies, Superman rejects a prevailing cynicism about America and with some adjustments for the time reasserts the certitudes of the American Way.

Shortly before he died in 2006, the historian Lawrence Levine suggested that the Superman and other superheroes in the 1930s were a response to the complexities of modern life, particularly the centralization of power in the hands of corporate and government bureaucracies. To be sure, for Levine comic book superheroes were but one response and the importance of Superman for him was that he coexisted alongside other forms of coping and responding. Levine made a series of connections to a mood in 1930s American culture, linking diverse artefacts and people from detective novels, movies such *The Public Enemy* and the original *Scarface*, Woody Guthrie (in high myth mode singing of Pretty Boy Floyd), soap operas, the Marx Brothers and even Abbott and Costello, whose absurdist 'Who's On First' routine he saw as typifying the disenchantment and resultant anxiety of Americans in the 1930s. Levine also pointed to African American blues singers, such as Sonny Boy Williamson, who found the source of their frustrations in national charities and government agencies. Williamson, after suffering indifference and mistreatment by the Red Cross in the aftermath of the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, gave shape to his unhappiness and refusal to submit his dignity to welfare in song (LEVINE 2004).

By the late 1970s, anxieties had been turned inwards from institutions to individuals. As Levine notes, the solution to the anxieties of the 1930s was to teach people how to live with the institutions of modern society and so began the long march from Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) to the self help

and management/business books that have pushed History and even literature to the back of the store in bookshops today. Levine hints that such an accommodation meant a cultural shift from the Horatio Alger concept of hard work resulting in success to an ability to negotiate the complexities of administrative structures, a shift from substance to savvy. This transformation of American culture also put the character of the individual in greater self focus because how else was one to win friends and influence people if not by anticipating their needs and desires and the resultant endless quest to satisfy the needs of others produced deep seated longings for self fulfilment, which in turn produced grandiose fantasies of self. This aspect of American culture has been mocked, mapped, and marked by works such as the 1961 musical comedy *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978) and more recently the television series *Mad Men* (2007).

America in the late 1970s was a nation in search of a better self. The 1978 movie *Superman* fit the mood of the times. In it, Superman makes a voyage not just from Krypton to Earth as a baby, but a voyage towards self-discovery. The movie opened in mid-December 1978, the very same week that Norton published Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*, a caustic indictment of a culture corrupted by its obsession with self-fulfilment. The book received a front-page review in *The New York Times Book Review* and entered the Best Sellers list. Seven months later, President Jimmy Carter addressed the nation in what is commonly called his 'malaise' speech, although his speech did not contain that word. Carter's speech responded to an energy crisis and what he took to a more deep seated problem an upsurge in cynicism among Americans about, as a *New York Times* report put it 'the future of the country and their own personal lives'. Carter told Americans 'too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence'. From the response to Carter's speech, it would seem Americans were only too happy to read

Lasch's work, or at least buy it to save their mortal souls, but having the President tell them that an energy crisis demonstrated their lack of a moral compass was beyond the pale. A jeremiad was all very fine and good, but the need for cheap gas was not a matter of sin, which even an angry god and Jonathan Edwards would surely have understood. A year and a half later, Carter learned the political costs of telling hard truths when Ronald Reagan swept him from office telling Americans that the country was 'still united, still strong' and declare in 1984 that he had effectively made it 'morning in America again'. However, before the 1980 election of Reagan, if Americans wanted to indulge in this sort of wispy nostalgic fantasy, in which memory as faith was cast in the service of a continuous greatness and righteousness, they could turn to *Superman* (BROYARD, 1978; KERMODE, 1979; SMITH, 1979; HOROWITZ, 2004).

Superman the movie was an enormous piece of puffery as are most blockbuster movies. Nonetheless, it holds up well, both technically and as a piece of narrative fiction. If Americans wanted to take a good look at themselves, as an advertisement for Lasch's book suggested they should, then the movie was an infinitely more pleasant picture of America than *The Culture of Narcissism*. The movie premiered on December 10, 1978 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC as part of a weekend of festivities in aid of the Special Olympics, with President Carter in attendance. According to Christopher Reeve, the movie received a standing ovation at its conclusion, although the *New York Times* reported a muted response. Perhaps some of the appeal of the movie for the weekend's crowd, which in addition to Carter included Ted Kennedy, Barbara Walters, Eunice and Sargent Shriver, Arnold Schwarzenegger (then simply a bodybuilder dating Shriver daughter Maria), Henry Kissinger, Alan Greenspan, Steve Ross (CEO of Warners), and Marion Barry, was the message of uplift it offered a cynical America. *Superman* put that cynicism on display, but rejected it both directly in dialogue and indirectly through the good triumphing

over evil plot (REEVE, TOLCHIN, DE WITT).¹

The film set a mood of cynicism through the scenes in the *Daily Planet* newsroom by evoking two other films; the genre humor and feel of the 1940 movie *His Girl Friday*, especially the fast cracking, make wise dialogue in a scene early in *Superman* when Clark first meets Lois Lane in Perry White's office, and the general *mis-en-scene* of the busy newspaper city room as depicted in the 1976 movie *All the President's Men*. The humor of *His Girl Friday* fit the general absurdist response to the perceived indifference of social institutions in the 1930s. Giving the *Daily Planet* on film the look and feel of the newsroom in *All the President's Men* neatly evoked the Watergate scandal. The *Daily Planet* is very much a character in the movie and the newspaper and the traditions of crusading newspaper reporters ties the 1978 *Superman* movie to the 1938 comic book. Director Richard Donner sets up this scenario in the movie's opening sequence. The movie opens with a cinema curtain parting, complete with a soundtrack incorporating the noises of a curtain being drawn. Then to the sound of film running through a projector the words: June, 1938, appear on the screen followed by the fade in of a comic book cover that reads *Action Comics* and which has an illustration of two rocket ships fleeing an exploding planet. A hand turns the page and a boy's voice says: 'In the decade of the 1930s even the great city of Metropolis was not spared the ravages of the world wide depression. In the times of fear and confusion, the job of informing the public was the responsibility of the *Daily Planet*, a great metropolitan newspaper, whose reputation for clarity and truth had become a symbol of hope for the city of Metropolis'. The scene then dissolves from the comic book to a live scene of the *Daily Planet* building and the spinning globe on top and then pans to the night sky and stars and the opening credits roll as the camera sweeps through space over the stirring John Williams score. In 1978, it may have been an easy connection for an audience to understand that the fear

¹ The advertisement for *The Culture of Narcissism* appeared in the *New York Times*, May 6, 1979, p. 269.

and confusion of the Depression was as much a threat to the USA as the Watergate shenanigans of President Richard Nixon and to understand the *Daily Planet* as akin to the *Washington Post*. Elsewhere in the movie Perry White makes the link explicit when he says that he wishes the name of the yet unnamed Superman 'to go with the *Daily Planet* like Bacon and Eggs, Franks and Beans, Death and Taxes, Politics and Corruption'. To be sure, politics and corruption had gone hand-in-hand in the USA before Nixon, but in the 1970s Watergate seemed a particularly seismic event that threatened systemic destabilization.²

Although such cynicism is evoked throughout the movie, Superman never expresses it himself. Indeed, he stands firm against its expression. In a key scene in the movie where the audience and Lois learn much about Superman's powers and character through her interview with him; she asks: 'Why are you here; there must be a reason for you to be here?' And Superman replies: 'Yes I am here to fight for truth and justice, and the American way'. Lois laughs in reply and says: 'you are going to end up fighting every elected official in this country'. To which Superman responds: 'I'm sure you don't really mean that Lois' and Lois says: 'I don't believe this' and Superman replies: 'Lois, I never lie'. Superman, or at least his scriptwriters, understood that if Americans felt that all their elected officials were corrupt, then they simply wanted to be told by someone that this was not the case and the nation still held out its promise to the world. As if to drive this point home, the movie's next scene showed Superman flying Lois around the Statue of Liberty in a long swooping shot the length of which forces the viewer to ponder the Statue and perhaps remember the inscription thereon and the accompanying ideology of America as a light on the hill to the rest of the world.

This theme of Superman as standing for what is good for and good about America, even as this shifts over time, is expressed again in the final moments of the film when Superman overcomes Lex Luthor's plot to create valuable real estate in Nevada by using

diverted nuclear missiles to set off major earthquakes causing California to sink into the sea (it's a comic story so the illogic of land increasing in value after a major disaster can safely be ignored). He delivers Luthor and henchman Otis to jail. The jail's warden thanks him, saying: 'This country is safe again thanks to you'. To which Superman replies: 'No sir, don't thank me Warden. We are all part of the same team'. Superman then flies off to the rising strains of Williams's theme and in a loving shot flies towards the camera with a beaming smile and almost winks in the manner of George Reeves's Superman from the 1950s television series *The Adventures of Superman*.

Much of this content is hardly surprising and it is almost commonplace to comment on it. After all, for a hero of Superman's mythological dimensions it is to be expected that he engage with the *zeitgeist*. However, it is the movie's other theme, Clark/Superman's journey in discovery of himself, which perhaps says more about the moment.

The first quarter of *Superman* shows the destruction of Krypton, his voyage to Earth and discovery by the Kents, his early years, and then following the death of Pa Kent his decision to go in search of himself. This quest leads Clark Kent north. In his pack, he carries the crystal like material that accompanied him from Krypton in his craft. On reaching the Arctic circle, he throws this crystal into the water and it generates a new structure, a Fortress of Solitude, within which he is able to communicate with a disembodied form of his dead father Jor-El. Having left Kansas in search of himself Clark's first question to Jor-El is: 'Who am I?' Since, I am neither an alien from outer space, nor adopted, it may seem churlish of me to suggest that he is Clark Kent; or perhaps rather I should say that at this point in the movie he is Clark Kent. Superman has a dual identity and any attempt to argue against such would be patently stupid. He is after all, in the words of the radio and television series, 'Superman who disguised as Clark Kent', but it would also be misguided to rely on the afore mentioned phrase to argue, as both Jules Feiffer and Quentin Tarantino through

For instance, the threat of impeachment led Nixon to resign. By the time of, or perhaps because of, Bill Clinton's presidency impeachment no longer carried as much systemic gravitas. John Patterson, 'Cape Fear', *The Guardian* July 7, 2006, p. 5, makes a similar argument to mine about the original Superman movie, but I read his piece after writing the bulk of this essay.

Bill in *Kill Bill* have done, that Clark Kent is the disguise and so reveals Superman's view of humans as downtrodden meek weaklings (FEIFFER 1965: 18-19). In the movie, and numerous other versions, Superman is raised as Clark Kent, and it is as Clark Kent that he grapples with the problems of his super powers. The identity of Superman/Clark is duality. As *Time* magazine noted in 2002 'Clark Kent's sad-sack persona is as essential to fans as Superman's ability ... it's not enough that superheroes fight our battles. We need them to suffer our heartbreaks, reflect our anxieties, embody our weaknesses'. And in *Superman* No. 299 in May 1976 Superman himself confirms the duality of his identity (PONIEWOZIK, 2002, p. 77). In the movie then, when Clark asks this question of Jor-El, it is about another part of him and one that is developing as he grows older and that he must learn to control. It is not hard to see such a struggle as a metaphor for puberty, but since Clark is eighteen in the film when this meeting takes place, it is puberty delayed. Nonetheless, it is metaphorically similar, since he has to master, what it means to be an adult, a super man. Clark then undergoes several years' tutelage from his ghostly father in order that he can be Superman. Christopher Reeve in the Superman suit does not appear until fifty minutes into a two and a half hour movie. Superman too had to struggle to realise himself.

When Superman eventually arrives in Metropolis in the film what spurs him to action, to reveal himself to the world, is the threatened death of Lois Lane, a woman who we of course know is his love interest, but whom in the movie he has just met. To be sure, he goes on to perform a number of heroic acts in that same evening, including saving Air Force One from a likely crash landing, and stopping various minor criminal acts. But, it is saving Lois from a potential fall to her death following a mishap with a helicopter on the roof of the Daily Planet that is central to the arrival of Superman. In other words, Superman's sole motivation to act is self-interest centred on Lois. Once having acted,

he enjoys the adulation, a point, to be sure, Donner wished to make since the Director's cut of the movie includes a scene in which Superman, having performed a night of super deeds returns to the Fortress of Solitude to talk again with the ghostly image of his father. Jor-El asks in a rhetoric fashion 'You enjoyed it?' and then advises, 'don't punish yourself for your feelings of vanity ... simply control it'. Here then is Superman's destiny in the 1970s simply controlling his feelings of vanity. The language of the script conveys an uncertainty about whether vanity is something to over concern oneself with since it is, 'feelings of vanity', not vanity itself that Superman needs to contain. And, lest that seem like a simple enough thing surely for Superman to do, in the denouement of the film, he fails to do so and yet still emerges as a triumphant hero. Twice, in the course of the film, Jor-El tells his son that he must not interfere with human history: first, in his rocket ship on the way to earth, and second, during the instructional period at the Fortress of Solitude. However, when Lois Lane suffocated in her car because of an earthquake set off by one of the missiles, Superman, despite already having saved millions of people and prevented major and minor disasters, decides to reverse the course of history by spinning the earth backwards and so reversing history. He does this despite again hearing in his mind Jor-El's command not to interfere as he sets off on his task. Again, it is not the sheer improbability of such actions and events that is worth discussing, but rather the morality of the moment. Superman's love for Lois Lane, or perhaps it is his need for Lois Lane's attention and affection, causes him to break a strict command from his father. That Superman's motive is about his desire and his desire alone is demonstrated in that having discovered that he can reverse history he does not reverse it so that his adoptive father Jonathan Kent does not suffer the heart failure brought on earlier in the film by playfully racing with young Clark. It is not the unfettered love of a son for his parents that motivates Superman's actions, but romantic and sexual love of a man for a woman.

The movie was the first time Superman used his time travelling ability to consciously change history. For instance, in a 1963 story, featuring Superboy, 'The Last Days of Ma and Pa Kent' he discovers the cause of his parents' death, but rather than travel back in time and prevent it happening, he mourns the event. In addition, during one of his earlier travels Superboy tells his father Jonathan that they must not 'do anything to change history'. In another Superboy story from 1960 he decides to travel back in time and save Lincoln, but the writers make the point that trying to change the past is futile. Time travel and the irreversibility of history seem to have been much on the mind of Jerry Siegel, who returned to DC for a few years in the early 1960s, since he wrote several stories with this theme (DORFMAN, 1963; SIEGEL, 1963; SIEGEL, 1960). The point here is that a view of history as sacrosanct stopped Siegel and other comic book writers from providing happy endings to stories in 1963 and their view was that for Superman to interfere with history would be morally repugnant. By 1978, such reservations had disappeared most likely because of the collapse of certainty with America's defeat in Vietnam and the criminal action of Watergate. There are implied notions of history and human agency in all of these doings. In 1963, it was clear enough to the writers of Superman that History was continuous and an event changed in the past would have unknown consequences in the future. Whatever the course of humanity, it was understood that what had happened had happened. Humans indeed made their own history and any being that had the luxury of transgressing time needed a moral code of leaving humanity to its free will. By 1978, sexual love was a good enough reason to ignore these dictates even as they were enunciated over and over.

The producers of *Superman* conceived of the film as a single production with its sequel *Superman II*. Much of the two movies were shot at the same time, although production issues forced the setting aside of filming to complete *Superman* for its Christmas 1978

release. As released in 1980 though, *Superman II* was not Donner's film. When the father/son production team of Alexander and Ilya Salkind fell out with director Richard Donner, they hired Richard Lester to complete *Superman II*. And, although Lester reshot some scenes to give the movie a more comic book look, compared to Donner's epic vision, on the whole the story remained the same with some key exceptions. These are relatively easy to trace because in 2006 Warner released a DVD of Donner's restored version. Donner had planned to use the reversing the earth scenario as the finale to the second film, but moved it up to the first film in the rush to complete its production. Lester had to replace this ending. In Donner's vision, the ending of the first film segued to the beginning of the second with the rogue nuclear missile Superman pushed into outer space to explode in *Superman*, releasing General Zod, Ursa, and Non, three Krypton villains, from their imprisonment in the Phantom Zone at the beginning of *Superman II*. Lester replaced this with a newly filmed sequence in which terrorists take a hydrogen bomb to the Eiffel Tower and it is this bomb, when disposed of in space, that sets the Krypton criminals free. The major change Lester made was in the sequence of the love story between Clark/Superman and Lois.

In both films, Superman takes Lois to the Fortress of Solitude for dinner. In Donner's film, the pair retire to the bedroom after dinner for sexual intercourse. In Lester's version, Superman first has a conversation with his ghostly mother and determines to give up his powers so he can be with the woman he loves and after having forsaken his powers has sex with Lois. In Donner's version, he has a conversation with his father after sexual congress has taken place. The conversation in Donner's version is centred on the nature of happiness with Jor-El stating 'you can not serve humanity by investing your time and emotion in one human being at the expense of the rest'. When Superman asks what if he no longer wishes to serve humanity Jor-El replies 'is this how you repay their gratuity by abandoning the

weak, the defenceless, the needful for the sake of your selfish pursuits'. To which Superman replies 'Selfish! After all I have done for them ... at least they get a chance for happiness, I only ask as much, no more'. Jor-El replies 'Yours is a higher happiness. Fulfilment of your mission the inspiration you must have felt ... that happiness within you'. But Superman while acknowledging happiness in the mission finds greater happiness in his love for Lois and so decides to forego his powers for her. Note here that Superman foregoes his powers in Donner's version after sexual intercourse and not before. That intercourse has taken place is indicated by a stock in trade representation of Lois wearing the top of Superman's uniform as she watches this scene. The conversation in Lester's version is truncated. Donner's version places a greater emphasis on Superman's duty to serve humanity.

In Donner's film the conversation about individual happiness sets up a moral story about the reckless pursuit of such, which becomes evident shortly after when the non-super Clark discovers the three now super Krypton criminals have taken control of earth. Donner, setting up a moral in this manner, seems to run counter to his first Superman's film and its reversal of time, but Donner intended that that reversal of time to be the conclusion of the second film not the first, or perhaps the two films were originally intended to be one grand epic in the manner of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*. As originally envisioned by Donner, Superman's reversal of time would not have been purely selfish, since it would have saved many lives. At the same time though, Superman's father saves him giving up his ghostly existence, and so any existence at all, so that Superman can regain his powers. Actions then have no consequences because your parents are always there to bail you out, which suggest a perfect baby boomer world. But, just as so many stories in DC's comic book universe are known, but never really happened in DC's continuity, this film was not the one released in 1980.

Lester's *Superman II* follows much the same pattern with Superman's powers being

restored. For Superman fans, that follow the minutia of such things, Lester's version suggesting that sex with Lois was only possible for Superman after losing his powers, seems more appropriate. For instance in a review of the Donner version posted on Amazon.com a fan noted that:

In Lester's version, Superman talks to his mom about his conflict, then gives up his powers BEFORE he sleeps with Lois. The implication is that Superman can't have sex with a human unless he surrenders his super powers [his powers would make intercourse fatal]. But Donner has the sex scene first, and then has Superman talk to Jor-El and give up his powers.

This begs the question, if Superman can have sex with a human, why give up his powers? It makes no sense! Changing the order of these scenes completely undermines the human story and conflict at the core of the film (SUPERMANFAN, 2006).

Such a coupling resolved a long-standing tease for comic book readers of whether or not Superman and Lois would ever consummate their relationship. Those who read the comic book in the 1960s, like myself, had been fed a diet of 'imaginary tales' of one sort or another in which Superman and Lois wed. But, in the 'real' DC world, Superman always avoided such bonds. The otherwise genial Superman showed a misanthropic streak about the institution of marriage. In 1971 the science fiction author Larry Niven's satirical article 'Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex', suggested that Superman would kill Lois if they engaged in intercourse. The glee with which Niven described the demise of Lois bordered on the pornographic. The film in both versions is not so graphic merely showing a morning after scene of the two in bed together. But, Superman's desire for Lois is at the core of the story in both *Superman* and *Superman II* in both its versions. While the restored Donner version may get this muddled

as far as Superman's physiology, it does at least offer somewhat more of a meditation on the motivations and issues at stake in Superman becoming human, and although Superman's action is still selfish, at least it is not simply for the sake of sex. Lester's version is more concise on this point and is much clearer that Superman can only be with Lois by being human, but in this regard being with is presented as centrally about sexual congress. Lester's *Superman II* then fits more closely the Superman of the first movie in that his motivations are more personal and expressed more basely than perhaps in Donner's original vision (NIVEN, 1971).

Superman and *Superman II* generated enormous box office revenues and *Superman* with its \$289 million is still in the top 200 of the all-time worldwide box office receipts. The movies then had enormous appeal. Some of this appeal can be traced to the marketing effort of the Salkinds through publicists Gordon Arnell and June Broom. As Rayna Denison recounts, press releases stressed the scale of the movie setting up expectations of quality and an epic grandeur. A full year and a half before its release, the producers took eight full pages of advertising in the trade journal *Variety*. Denison documents the scale of this campaign that also involved cross-promotional efforts with Pinewood Studios and Dolby Laboratories. At around the same time as the advertisements in *Variety* the *New York Times* ran a three-quarter page piece on the film with accurate plot descriptions of what later turned out to be two films. In discussing special effects with Christopher Reeve, the reporter Susan Heller Anderson elicited the response 'who cares about some guy in blue tights flying around? ... What makes him a hero is how he uses his powers. It's about believing, rather than being cynical. ... [Superman is] here fighting for truth, justice, and the American way' (DENISON, 1997; HELLER, 1977). The appeal then was to the potential cynics, or the generation that grew up alongside the television series *The Adventures of Superman*, a generation that witnessed the defeat in Vietnam and Watergate, and for the

film to succeed they not only had to believe that a man could fly, but believe again in the American way. These two movies, with their direct appeal to the 1950s television series, gave Superman in this incarnation a symbolic unity with the previous versions. Moreover, it legitimized the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s because Superman lends his virtue to that transformation. If, as anthropologist Renato Rosaldo observed, we long for stable worlds even as we destabilize them, then Superman, a symbolic mythic figure, helped overcome any disquiet by refiguring virtue, but yet still promoting the American way. In these two films Superman makes America feel hope again in the face of the cynicism around him (ROSALDO 1989: 108).

Reeve played Superman in two more movies *Superman III* and *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*. *Superman III* was less a Superman movie and more a comedy vehicle for Richard Pryor. Unfortunately it did not work particularly well either. As Christopher Reeve wrote, the less said about *Superman IV* the better. But Reeve did say it was a mistake to introduce a political note, Superman as anti-nuclear crusader, to the movie. That may well have been a mistake because it moved Superman from the centre and placed him ever so slightly to the left of centre. The American Way is after all a somewhat nebulous set of social and cultural values that would translate politically in to something akin to Arthur M. Schlesinger's *Vital Center*. Doubtlessly, Reeve saw the earlier Superman movies as resolutely non political, but as I have argued here they were deeply political helping reinvent an American confidence in itself while at the same time incorporating some liberal social values, particularly a sense of one's individual needs overriding social needs, into what was essentially a conservative vision of an America reborn (REEVE, 1998, p. 203, 225, DANIELS, 1998, p. 146; SCHLESINGER, 1949).

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