

## INTRODUCTION

“While Europe was tensely watching the crisis over Czechoslovakia, Herr Hitler, accompanied by eight of his generals, paid a surprise visit to the French frontier to-day.”

That is the way the newspapers talk about the world. These actual words were splashed across the *Star* on August 29, 1938. . . .

Of course, that is assuming that Britain, and the rest of Europe, really were at that time “tensely watching.” But were they? How many were more tensely watching the racing news and daily horoscope?

—Mass-Observation (1939, 8)

QUESTION—who attracted most U.S. press coverage in 1938?

- a) Seabiscuit
- b) Roosevelt
- c) Hitler; or
- d) Mussolini

ANSWER—the racehorse

—Jaroslav Pelikan (2005, xviii)

Beginning with Generation X (people in their 20s to early 40s) and all the generations that follow, multicultural is normal. . . . Their friends are all races, sexual preferences. They walk the walk of a nation.

—Ann Fishman, President of Generational Targeted Marketing  
(quoted in El Nasser and Grant, 2005a)

The disarray and disinterest of our mass media towards fulfilling its crucial democratic commitments gives me serious pause.

—William E. Kennard, Chair of the Federal  
Communications Commission (FCC) (2000)

**W**E ARE IN A CRISIS of belonging, a population crisis, of who, what, when, and where. More and more people feel as though they *do not* belong. More and more people are *seeking* to belong, and more and more people are not *counted* as belonging. *Cultural Citizenship* is concerned with the way this crisis is both registered and held in check in the United States, through practices of government, consumption, risk, and moral panic in popular

culture, specifically television. With economic welfare disowned as a responsibility of the sovereign state, and pushed onto individuals and communities, governing at a distance is the norm (Donzelot 1991). Traditional means of state control, via instruction or restraint, have been added to by a project of neoliberalism, which seeks to manage subjectivity through culture—ironically, the very thing supposedly imperiled by threats to belonging.

The term “culture” has earthy connotations. It derives from the Latin “colare,” which implied tending and developing agriculture as part of subsistence. With the emergence of capitalism’s division of labor, culture came both to *embody* instrumentalism and to *abjure* it, via the industrialization of farming, on the one hand, and the cultivation of individual taste, on the other. In keeping with this distinction, culture has usually been understood in two registers, via the social sciences and the humanities—truth versus beauty. This was a heuristic distinction in the sixteenth century, but it became substantive over time. Eighteenth-century German, French, and Spanish dictionaries bear witness to a metaphorical shift into spiritual cultivation. As the spread of literacy and printing saw customs and laws passed on, governed, and adjudicated through the written word, cultural texts supplemented and supplanted physical force as guarantors of authority. With the Industrial Revolution, populations became urban dwellers. Food was imported, cultures developed textual forms that could be exchanged, and consumer society emerged through horse racing, opera, art exhibits, masquerades, and balls. Cultural labor indexed the impact of this shift. *Poligrafi* in fifteenth-century Venice, and hacks in eighteenth-century London, wrote popular and influential conduct books, works of instruction on everyday life that marked the textualization of custom and the appearance of new occupational identities. Anxieties about “cultural invasion” also date from this period, via Islamic debates over Western domination.

Culture became a marker of differences and similarities in taste and status. The corollary in academia is that in the humanities, it is judged by criteria of quality and meaning, as practiced critically and historically. In the social sciences, the focus is on sociopolitical norms, as explored psychologically or statistically. So, whereas the humanities articulates population differences through *symbolic* means (for example, which class has the cultural capital to appreciate high culture and which does not), the social sciences articulates population differences through *social* ones (for example, which people are affected by TV messages and which are not) (Williams 1983, 38; Benhabib 2002, 2; de Pedro 1999, 61–62, 78n1; Briggs and Burke 2003, 10, 38, 60, 57; Mowlana 2000, 107; Wallerstein 1989).

Combining these two disciplines, I take my bearings from several sources. I am indebted most of all to cultural studies. By attending to inequality and

identity, cultural studies' reintegration of the humanities and the social sciences under the sign of popular democracy has provided "a riposte to the mandarin prejudice of high cultural journalism and the facile classifications of market researchers" (Maxwell 2002). In the context of moribund disciplines adrift in the detritus of Cold War professionalism, it offers "una salida de emergencia" [an emergency exit] (García Canclini 2004, 122).

Despite the dominant U.S. critique of cultural studies, it is not just about literature departments engaging in a partial makeover. Historical and contemporary analyses of slaves, crowds, pirates, bandits, audiences, minorities, women, and the working class have utilized archival, ethnographic, and textual methods to emphasize day-to-day noncompliance with authority, via practices of consumption that frequently turn into practices of production. For example, British research on the contemporary has lit upon Teddy Boys, Mods, bikers, skinheads, punks, school students, teen girls, Rastas, truants, dropouts, and magazine readers as its magical agents of history—groups who deviated from the norms of schooling and the transition to work. Scholar-activists examine the structural underpinnings to collective style, investigating how bricolage subverts the achievement-oriented, materialistic, educationally driven values and appearance of the middle class. The working assumption has often been that subordinate groups adopt and adapt signs and objects of the dominant culture, reorganizing them to manufacture new meanings. Consumption is thought to be the epicenter of such subcultures. Paradoxically, it has also reversed their members' status as consumers. The oppressed become producers of new fashions, inscribing alienation, difference, and powerlessness on their bodies (Leong 1992).

Virginia Postrel, then editor of the libertarian *Reason* magazine, and later a *New York Times* economics journalist, wrote a 1999 op-ed piece for the *Wall Street Journal* in which she described cultural studies as "deeply threatening to traditional leftist views of commerce," because its notions of active consumption are close to those of the Right. "The cultural-studies mavens are betraying the leftist cause, lending support to the corporate enemy and even training graduate students who wind up doing market research." Consumption seemed to be the key to this mantra, with production discounted, labor forgotten, the consumer sovereign, and government there to protect that sovereign (Frank 2000).

Of course, for some 1960s mass-society theorists, and many of us in cultural studies, commercial culture does indeed represent the apex of modernity. Far from being supremely alienating, it stands for the expansion of civil society, the first moment in history when central political and commercial organs and agendas became receptive to, and part of, the broader community.

New forms of life were necessitated by industrialization and aided by mass communication, and the population became part of the social, rather than excluded from political-economic, calculation. The number of people classed as outsiders diminished in mass society, along with a lessening of authority, the promulgation of individual rights and respect, and the simultaneous development of intensely interpersonal and large-scale human interaction. The spread of advertising broke down social barriers between high and low culture (Shils 1966, 505–6, 511; Hartley 1998), paradoxically preparing the way for niche-targeted “citizens of the future,” who “don’t wear conformist jumpsuits, live in utilitarian high-rises, or get [their] food in pills” (Postrel 2003, 4–5). But the change toward a popularly available array of stylistic choices and forms of social participation is accompanied by a shift from building and acknowledging a national popular culture to technologizing and privatizing it. For once all classes have been incorporated into society; technical forms of knowledge and systems of commodification must govern the problems and promises these masses bring with them (Martín-Barbero 2003, 38).

If we follow Postrel (and certain textual reductionists), the dominant strand of U.S. cultural studies lost political economy as its animator, in favor of some ghastly, scholarly mirror of the post-welfare state. The substructural corollary would be the way in which gentrification guts working life for proletarians and minorities, as it creates a space of safety, entitlement, and groove for corporate gays, white liberal feminists, frat boys and sorority girls who are keen to wear black clothes and eschew suburbia until the children arrive, and people like my friends and me (to the extent we are not covered by any or all of the above categories). Does this mean cultural studies is now the handservant of capital?

No, it does not. Many leading practitioners have always blended political economy with cultural studies.\* And much has changed since the Simple-Simon, academic-reader-as-hegemon narcissism that plagued U.S. cultural studies through much of the 1980s and 1990s, via professors earnestly spying on young people at the mall, or obsessively staring at them in virtual communities. Political economy has reasserted itself, as it always does. Sociologist Vincent Mosco starts from the power of cultural myths, then “builds a bridge

\*I am thinking of such U.S.-based writers as Dave Andrews, Stanley Aronowitz, Michael Bérubé, Ben Carrington, Paula Chakravartty, C. L. Cole, Michael Curtin, Susan G. Davis, Susan Douglas, John Downing, Philomena Essed, Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Faye Ginsburg, David Theo Goldberg, Herman Gray, Larry Gross, Lawrence Grossberg, Ed Guerrero, Michael Hanchard, Robin D. G. Kelly, Doug Kellner, Laura Kipnis, Mariam Beevi Lam, George Lipsitz, Cameron McCarthy, Anne McClintock, Lisa McLaughlin, George Marcus, Jorge Mariscal, Randy Martin, Rick Maxwell, Rob Nixon, Norris Nunley, Constance Penley, Dana Polan, Andrew Ross, Dan Schiller, Ellen Seiter, Ella Shohat, Lynn Spigel, Bob Stam, Tom Streeter, and George Yúdice. Despite their prominence, their work is often taken to be apolitical-economic, or not to stand for cultural studies in dominant public characterizations. Hmm.

to political economy” in his excoriation of neoliberal fantasies about empowerment, insisting on “the mutually constitutive relationship” between political economy and cultural studies as each mounts “a critique of the other” (2004, 6–7). In the words of media studies critic Richard Maxwell, we must

identify ways to link a critique of neo-liberalism and a cultural studies approach to consumption . . . not by issuing nostrums against the pleasures of shopping[,]but by paying attention to the politics of resource allocation that brings a consumption infrastructure into the built environment (2002).

This has already been achieved in cultural studies beyond Britain, the United States, and their white-settler academic satellites (Israel, Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa/New Zealand). The sociologist Arvind Rajagopal notes that because television, the telephone, the Internet, and the neoliberal are all new to India, “markets and media generate new kinds of rights and new kinds of imagination . . . novel ways of exercising citizenship rights and conceiving politics” (2002). We see the evidence in media-activism-scholarship organizations such as sarai.net in New Delhi. Anthropologist Rosalía Winocur has noticed that since the fall of U.S.-backed dictatorships, talk radio in Latin America has offered a simultaneously individual and social forum for new expressions of citizenship. In the context of decentered politics, emergent identities, minority rights, and gender issues, the radio has created a public space that transcends old ideas subordinating difference and privileging elite experience (2002, 15, 91–93). These are exemplary instances of the work that understands the importance of material conditions in the formation of subjectivity.

This book poses questions of political economy. The United States has become the least socially mobile advanced Western economy. Frankly, it is not a First World country for a fifth of its inhabitants. Although income inequality gradually decreased between the Great War and Vietnam, the process went into reverse, starting with Jimmy Carter’s Presidency. Thanks to a gigantic clumping of wealth at the apex of the nation, there is now a poor, unskilled, and ill base: forty-six million residents are indigent, fifty-two million are functionally analphabetic, and forty-four million lack health insurance. By contrast with European welfare systems, the capacity to exit poverty for good has diminished over the last two decades of neoliberalism, and the proportion of national income held by the extremely rich is two to three times the level in France or Britain. Race and gender massively stratify access to money and net worth, and the gaps are widening. Black men earn 73 percent of the hourly wage rate for

white people, and women fifty-six cents on the male dollar. In the two decades from Carter to Bill Clinton, the wealthiest 1 percent doubled their share of national pretax income, to 18 percent. From 1979 to 2000, the top 1 percent of incomes increased by 194 percent, the top 20 percent by 70 percent, and the bottom 20 percent by 6.4 percent. In 1967, chief executive officers of corporations were paid twenty-four times the average wage of employees. In 1990, they received 107 times that amount. By 2005, the ratio was 431 to 1—up from 301 to 1 just the year before. The national minimal wage in 2005 was US\$5.15 an hour. Had it risen at the same rate as executive pay over the previous fifteen years, the hourly rate would have been US\$23.03! The Congressional Budget Office reports that across the late 1990s, the wealthiest 1 percent of U.S. households had a greater combined income than the poorest 40 percent. Over George Bush Minor's first term, profits rose by 60 percent, and wages by just 10 percent. In 2004, after-tax profits for corporations grew to their highest proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since the Depression (Skocpol 2004; Thelen 2000, 552; Freeman 2004; *Economist*, 2005h; Talvi 2005a, 10; "Breaking" 2005; Jeffery 2006; Yates 2005; Anderson et al. 2005, 1–2; Hutton 2003b, 133, 148; Taibo 2003, 24).\*

This bizarre reconcentration of wealth in the hands of the ruling class is unprecedented in world history since the advent of adult electoral franchises. No wonder the *Economist* captioned a photo of the Queen of England greeting Bush Minor and his wife as "Liz, meet the royals" (*Economist*, 2005h). Even those bastions of bourgeois comfort and onanism, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, run repeated, sizeable stories on the new Gilded Age of the twenty-first century and its reorganized class relations (Lexington 2005, 32). Those with the highest levels of income and education are most likely to participate in lobby groups and vote in Presidential elections, while those with the lowest are least likely to do so. This is in accordance with the positive salience of the state in their lives. The role of government has been redefined, at least rhetorically, from a sometimes feisty agent stabilizing labor and capital via redistribution, to a mendicant servant of capital with some residual duty of care to the citizenry (American Political Science Association Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy 2004, 3–5; Jencks 2004; Crouch 2004, 23, 40).

Yet, many residents embrace the United States ideologically. Why? Demographic change, public-policy fashion, and the political economy of the media have altered U.S. citizenship. Sectarian allegiances below and across the level

\*Of course, the United States has a massive and efficient welfare state. It's called Israel, and its citizens are subsidized by an average of US\$500 a year from the United States (Mann 2003, 54).

of the sovereign state have displaced models of national unity, while managerialist and neoclassical discourses of scarcity have deregulated the social, recasting the population as consumers and believers in a way that differentiates between social groups via a fine, culturally precise grain. These reactionary forces have borrowed the categories and tactics of progressive cultural politics, and trumped it in the process. We said we were cultural citizens, so they said they were, too.

Commodities have been a key to this process. They elicit desire by wooing consumers, glancing at them sexually, and smelling and looking nice in ways that are borrowed from romantic love, but reverse that relationship. People learn about correct forms of romantic love from commodities. Sociologist Wolfgang Haug's term "commodity aesthetics" captures this division between what commodities *promise*, by way of seduction, and what they are *actually about*, as signs of production (1986, 17, 19, 35). For the public, this is "the *promesse du bonheur* that advanced capitalism always holds before them, but never quite delivers" (Benhabib 2002, 3). In media terms, the price paid for subscribing to cable or satellite access (exchange value) takes over from the programs being watched (use value). The sociologist Jean Baudrillard maintains that all products purchased within capitalist societies involve the consumption of advertising, rather than objects themselves. Such is the contest for newness. The culture industries are central to the compulsion to buy, through the double-sided nature of advertising and "the good life" of luxury: they encourage competition between consumers, at the same time as they standardize processes to manufacture unity in the face of diversity. For all the pleasurable affluence suggested by material goods, the idea of transcendence has been articulated to objects. Commodities dominate the human and natural landscape. The corollary is the simultaneous triumph and emptiness of the sign as a source and measure of value. Baudrillard discerns four "successive phases of the image." It begins as a reflection of reality that is transformed when false information displaces a representation of the truth. Then these two, delineable phases of truth and lies become indistinct. The sign comes to refer to itself, with no residual need of correspondence with the real. It simulates itself (Baudrillard 1988, 10–11, 29, 170), as "human needs, relationships and fears, the deepest recesses of the human psyche, become mere means for the expansion of the commodity universe" (McChesney and Foster 2003, 1). Commodities hide not only the work of their own creation, but their postpurchase existence as well. Designated with human characteristics (beauty, taste, serenity, and so on) they compensate for the absence of these qualities in everyday capitalism via a "permanent opium war" (Debord 1995, 26–27, 29–30).

But the commodity form cannot be dismissed out of hand. Clearly, alternative models of citizenship and consumption must go beyond standard critiques of, say, cultural imperialism (watching U.S. drama will turn rural people around the world into Idaho potato farmers) or feel-good invectives about socially responsible shopping (purchasing environmentally sound toilet paper and free-range chicken will transform the world, one roll/wing at a time). At certain moments, even leftists resisting authoritarian politics embrace ideologies of liberal individualism and free choice via consumer preference. At other times, they may foreground work rather than consumption in a struggle for collective justice. Consumption can threaten the Right when it is tied to radical social change, linking issues of labor and circulation across industries and in public debate. Production and consumption must be understood as equal parts of an enterprise—the enterprise of social justice.

Journalist Naomi Klein's remarkable chronicle of corporate malfeasance in marketing, and activism against it, wagers "that as more people discover the brand-name secrets of the global logo web, their outrage will fuel the next big political movement, a vast wave of opposition squarely targeting transnational corporations" (1999, xviii). The liberal governance model *can* be progressive when it operates in the interests of human needs rather than individual satisfaction, quickening the breath of anxious conservatives and neoliberals in the face of collective consumer action. The decline of the British economy and state across the 1970s was exemplified in punk's use of rubbish as an adornment: bag liners, lavatory appliances, and ripped and torn clothing. But capitalism has appropriated the appropriator. Even as the media set in train various moral panics about punk, and cultural studies responded by valorizing it as a subculture, the fashion and music industries were sending out spies in search of trends to market. The contemporary equivalent is Coca-Cola hiring African Americans to drive through the inner city selling soda and playing hip-hop; AT&T paying San Francisco buskers to mention the company in their songs; performance poets rhyming about Nissan cars for cash, simultaneously hawking, entertaining, and researching; and Subway sandwich commercials supposedly "shot by real teenagers." This is the delightfully named "viral" or "peer-to-peer" marketing, characteristic of such campaigns as McDonalds' "365Black." It associates the company with civil rights via African American athletes endorsing its products in commercials, and hip-hop musicians receiving remuneration each time one of their songs referring to the company is played on radio, emulating Kanye West "mentioning" nineteen brands on four singles in 2004. Such campaigns are meant to distinguish McDonalds from the tokenism of Black History Month, in concert with new uniforms designed in the hope that young African American employees will wear them socially



and make them stylish (McChesney and Foster 2003, 12; Piccalo 2004; Ouellette and Murray 2004, 9; Ford 2005; Graser 2005a and b; MacArthur 2005b).

There has been relatively little survey research into consumer boycotts and their opposite, buycotts, but a 2002 study revealed that half the U.S. population engaged in such practices—higher numbers than for other forms of civic participation like churchgoing or volunteerism. After the 2004 Presidential election, Buy Blue emerged as an online advisory bureau for progressives anxious to patronize companies that were pro-environment and anti-conservative. The coyBOTt software package has revealed interesting correlations between boycotts, brand popularity, and corporate cultural sponsorship (BuyBlue.org 2004; Keeter et al. 2002, 8–9, 20–21; Costanza-Chock 2002). Examples include the ecoconsumerism of Greenpeace, chronicled in *Ethical Consumer* magazine as an “economic vote” via “shareholder activism,” whereby social movements purchase a financial stake in polluters and change corporate conduct (Newell 2001, 92, 99). This induces apoplexy in fossil-fuel capitalists and their political and intellectual allies. Similarly, because of racist hiring practices, Denny’s restaurant chain has been boycotted by leftists in the United States, some of whom, conversely, boycott the Working Assets long-distance telephone service, which donates a portion of its proceeds to left-wing causes. Clearly, with consumers targeted by a culture-driven economy, their identities come to be points of sociopolitical and commercial organization. The desire of capital to sell to major U.S. minorities over the past hundred and fifty years has both enabled and *been enabled by* the hyphenated political-economic actions of Jewish, African, Mexican, Central and Northern European Americans. These actors are simultaneously interest groups and customers. As the first African American major-league baseball player, Jackie Robinson, put it: “Every human has a vote every time he makes a purchase” (quoted in Glickman 1999, 8).

The turn of the twenty-first century saw the uptake of ethical principles by International Shareholder Services (ISS). ISS acts as the proxy advisor for many large institutional investors, such as mutual and pension funds. It exerts major influence on votes at over twenty thousand shareholder meetings a year. Previously a stalwart of the Right on issues of social responsibility, in 2002 ISS changed its position, astonishing outsiders by recommending votes in favor of renewal-fuel research and anti-sexual-discrimination policies by ExxonMobil stockholders, and against child labor in Marriott hotels. ISS did so because it had determined that “being perceived as a good corporate citizen might affect shareholder value” by appealing to socially concerned investors. Put another way, for the first time, ISS judged that being on the same side as environmentalists and unions made sense and cents, in keeping

with studies that correlate high stock valuations of companies with strong pro-environmental programs. Whereas growth in professionally managed assets in the United States is about 15 percent annually, the figure is 40 percent for those with mandates for “social responsibility.” Trillions of dollars are at stake (Cordasco 2002, 9; Keeler 2002). Corporations are aware that mutual funds serving academics and unionists want to see social as well as financial value flowing from their investments. For example, the California Public Employees’ Retirement System controls more than US\$186 billion in pension funds for nearly one and a half million people, many of whom are educators and unionists (Keeler 2002; Alperovitz 2005). This imperative became urgent with the multiple disgraces of U.S. big business under Bush Minor, and Third World issues such as child labor and pharmaceutical pricing (Maitland 2002, 10). When some public pension funds lost US\$300 billion to the Enron scandal, they grew more interventionist about their investments, leading to aggressive criticism from business front organizations as part of the Republican Party’s “shadow civil society” (Greider 2005; Schell 2005, 6).

But more than 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies appear in “socially responsible” investing portfolios, which use the Dow Jones Industrial Average as their metric! From worthy origins in opposition to apartheid, the American War in Vietnam, and polluting firms, many of these entities have turned into corporate shills whose massive secrecy belies their claim to ethical conduct. The World Economic Forum’s list of the “100 Most Sustainable Companies in the World” includes corporations that bribe officials, provide false accounts, and are mass polluters, but are sold as appropriate for progressive investors (Hawken 2004 and 2005). Even relatively responsible firms elude any critique of capitalism. Consider the 2004 holiday season pitch made by the outdoor equipment company, Patagonia, based on the fact that it allocates 1 percent of revenue to conservation:

There’s no such thing as a free lunch. The air we breathe in big gulps.  
The snow we slide on every chance we get. We can’t take any of it for granted. This holiday season, when you give the gift of Patagonia to your near and dear ones, you’ll also be giving back to the environment. Since 1985, we’ve donated 1% of our sales to grassroots enviro groups. Shop Patagonia and give back (Patagonia 2004).

The Right’s glorification of consumers rarely endorses organized political action by them. When the *Economist* proudly announces that consumers “are kings” because of new technology and transparent costs (does that mean see-through price tags?) it is referring to an “All-seeing, All-knowing,” surveillant,

selfish, shopper—not a socially engaged collective force (Markillie 2005, 3). Eulogies to public opinion and rational choice do not carry over to endorsements of social activism. People are sovereign when they purchase, but magically transmogrify into “special interests” when they lobby; hence the formation of the Business Roundtable in the 1970s to combat consumer movements from the very top levels of executive action, rather than through discrete trade associations. Absent an ongoing fabric of democratic control, consumer activism will always be an irritant rather than a systemic counter to corporate destructiveness. For one thing, “consumer democracy” gives the wealthy more votes than the poor. Most U.S. activists are affluent and highly educated, so the practice ironically mirrors the unrepresentative plutocracies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The impact on, and inclusion of, working people in such actions is frequently problematic. And ethical consumption is difficult to sustain when, for example, numerous items with distinct production histories are bundled together, as in electrical equipment. Boycotts and buycotts require high levels of organization and sustained commitment, and they often end with apparent success, only for corporations to resume their nefarious activities in a quietly efficient manner (Baudrillard 1999, 55; Micheletti 2003; Hutton 2003b, 84; Hutton in Giddens and Hutton 2000b, 47; Keeter et al. 2002, 21; Frank 2003; Monbiot 2003, 56–58; Shaw 1999, 111).

It seems to me that the neoliberal Right is winning struggles enacted over culture, sometimes in concert with the cultural studies Left—when valorizing difference as a marketing concept; and sometimes in concert with the reactionary Right—when making nationalism into a cultural and commercial norm. This is possible because while there are superficial differences between a collectivist ethos and individualistic utilitarianism, they share the precept that ethico-aesthetic exercises are necessary to develop the responsible individual, amenable to both self-governance and niche cultural commodification (Lloyd and Thomas 1998, 121). “Good taste” becomes a sign of, and a means toward, better citizenship. Ethico-aesthetic exercises favor bourgeois manners for a circumscribed set of individuals in one period, and stratified access to resources on the basis of divers demographics slicing at one another. Pan-ethnic categories characterize the U.S. census, media and consumer markets, and political voting blocs. They efficiently clump people into five “American” types—European, African, Latino, Native, and Asian—as state and capital embark on the colonizing and policing of territory and subjectivity, of space and historiography (Shapiro 2001, 118). This is done in the *service* of capital accumulation; under the *sign* of national protection and individual choice; and via the *technology* of television.

The anthropologist Néstor García Canclini places a particular focus on the media as *loci* of problems such as insecurity and pollution, and practices such as difference and development. He examines culture in terms of difference, inequality, exclusion, and exploitation as much as similarity, equality, inclusion, and justice (2001b, 12 and 2004, 43). As the cultural historian Ravi Vasudevan eloquently explains, through the media, via regulating and stimulating access, content, and conduct, the state frequently exercises duty of care and control (2001, 62). The U.S. government began regulating the media's audiovisual output because Congress feared that radio amateurs had interfered with messages from the *Titanic* calling for aid (Cook 2005, 255). An “*actuarial gaze*,” a visual management of threats and responses, characterizes the contemporary “cultural political agenda,” with the media simultaneously a mirror and a site of creation, reflection, policy, and action, which binds the everyday to spectacle, the private to the public (Feldman 2005, 206–7). Citizenship is effectively incarnated in an array of sites across the media, via such techniques as vox populi, demonstrations, public-opinion polls, and magical incantations (for example, “the American public is . . .”) (Lewis et al. 2005, 19). Today, the most important “site of the world risk society is not the street[,] but *television*” (Beck 1999, 44).

## TELEVISION

The word is half Greek, half Latin. No good can come of it.

—*Guardian* editor, CP Scott (quoted in Wasko 2005, 1)

TV is king.

—Title of song by The Tubes

[T]hat terrible turning inward, which means the less you know about the world, the less you want to know about it, and therefore the less a ratings-obsessed industry decides to tell you

—BBC journalist John Simpson on U.S. television news (2005)

Since its inception, TV has been regarded principally as a means of profiting and legitimizing its controllers, and entertaining and civilizing its viewers. In the words of the famous BBC executive Huw Wheldon, its mission is “To make the good popular, and the popular good” (quoted in Airey 2004). A nice phrase, but the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu sees these as competing rather than consistent imperatives. He refers to a duel between “populist spontaneism and demagogic capitulation to popular tastes” and “paternalistic-pedagogic television” (1998, 48). As the philosopher Theodor Adorno said, while there are

problems with “cultured snobbism,” populist TV disempowers audience knowledge in the key areas of public life affected by politics. Half a century ago, he moaned that viewers were discerning when it came to high technology, which they regarded as a sign of their power as consumers, but were not exercised by public affairs (1996, 89, 139).

When veteran newsman Edward R. Murrow addressed the Radio-Television News Directors Association in 1958, he used the description/metaphor that television needed to “illuminate” and “inspire,” or it would be “merely wires and light in a box.” In a famous speech to the National Association of Broadcasters three years later, John F. Kennedy’s chair of the FCC, Newton Minow, called U.S. TV a “vast wasteland” (1971). He was urging broadcasters to embark on enlightened Cold War leadership, to prove that the United States was not the mindless consumer world that the Soviets claimed. The networks would thereby live up to their legislative responsibilities to act in the public interest by informing and entertaining, and go beyond what he later recognized as “white suburbia’s Dick-and-Jane world” (Minow 2001). They responded by doubling the time devoted to news each evening, and quickly became the dominant source of current affairs (Schudson and Tifft 2005, 32). Twenty years later, Ronald Reagan’s FCC head, Mark Fowler, celebrated the reduction of the “box” to “transistors and tubes.” He argued in an interview with *Reason* magazine that “television is just another appliance—it’s a toaster with pictures,” and hence, in no need of regulation, beyond ensuring its safety as an electrical appliance (1981).\*

Minow’s and Fowler’s expressions gave their vocalists instant and undimmed celebrity (Murrow already had it as the most heralded audiovisual journalist in U.S. history). Minow was named “top newsmaker” of 1961 in an Associated Press survey, and he was on TV and radio more than any other Kennedy official. In an irony of ironies, the phrase “vast wasteland” has provided raw material for the wasteland’s parthenogenesis, as the answer to questions posed on numerous game shows, from *Jeopardy!* to *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (Minow and Cate 2003, 408). The “toaster with pictures” is less celebrated, but it has been more efficacious as a slogan for deregulation across successive administrations, and remains in *Reason*’s pantheon of famous libertarian quotations, alongside Reagan and others of his ilk. Where Minow supports public culture’s restraining and ultimately conserving function for capitalism, Fowler represents capitalism’s brooding arrogance, its neoliberal lust to redefine use value via exchange value. Minow decries

\*Not surprisingly, Alfred Hitchcock had said it earlier and better: “Television is like the American toaster, you push the button and the same thing pops up every time” (quoted in Wasko 2005, 10).

Fowler's vision, arguing that television "is not an ordinary business" because of its "public responsibilities" (Minow and Cate 2003, 415). But Fowler's phrase has won the day, at least to this point. Minow's phrase lives on as a recalcitrant moral irritant, rather than a central policy technology.

Fowler has had many fellow travelers. Both the free-cable, free-video social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the neoclassical, deregulatory intellectual movements of the 1970s and 1980s, saw a people's technology allegedly emerging from the wasteland of broadcast television. Portapak equipment, localism, and unrestrained markets would supposedly provide an alternative to the numbing nationwide commercialism of network television. The social movement vision saw this occurring overnight; the technocratic vision imagined it in the "long run." One began with folksy culturalism, the other with technophilic futurism; both claimed in the name of diversity. These visions even merged in the depoliticized "Californian ideology" of community media, which quickly embraced market forms (Mullen 2002; Barbrook and Cameron 1996). Neither formation started with economic reality. Together, they established the preconditions for unsettling a cozy, patriarchal, and quite competent television system that had combined what was good for you and what made you feel good, all on the one set of stations—a comprehensive service. The enabling legislation that birthed and still governs the FCC promised this service, supposedly guaranteeing citizens that broadcasters serve "the public interest, convenience and necessity." This promise was part of a tradition that began when CBS set up a radio network in the 1920s founded on news rather than its rival NBC's predilection for entertainment (Scardino 2005). Yet, in place of the universalism of the old networks, where sport, weather, news, lifestyle, and drama programming had a comfortable and appropriate frottage, highly centralized but profoundly targeted consumer networks emerged in the 1990s that fetishized lifestyle and consumption over a blend of purchase and politics, of fun and foreign policy.

Similarly, cyberbarian technophiles, struck by the "digital sublime," attribute magical properties to communication and cultural technologies that supposedly obliterate geography, sovereignty, and hierarchy—a new truth-and-beauty combination that will heal the wound of the division of labor. Thousands, perhaps millions, of flowers bloom in this libertarian cornucopia. Or, at least, that is what some analysts and businesses project from the amnesia and awe occasioned by the fog of hot air between them and reality (Mosco 2004). As ever, these ahistorical celebrants have not investigated equivalent claims from the past that the print medium would educate the entire population, that radio's ethereal qualities would cure cancer and contact the dead, or that TV would unite the world—fantasies associated with new communications

1	Yahoo! News	24.9 million
2	MSNBC.com	23.8 million
3	CNN.com	21.3 million
4	AOL News	17.4 million
5	Gannett Newspapers	11.3 million
6	NYTimes.com	11.2 million
7	Internet Broadcasting	10.9 million
8	Knight Ridder Digital	9.9 million
9	Tribune Newspapers	9.0 million
10	USAToday.com	8.6 million
11	Washingtonpost.com	8.5 million
12	ABC News Digital	7.7 million
13	Google News	7.2 million
14	Hearst Newspapers Digital	6.9 million
15	WorldNow.com	6.2 million
16	Fox News	6.0 million
17	CBSnews.com	5.9 million
18	BBC News	5.1 million
19	Advance Internet	4.5 million
20	McClatchy Newspapers	3.6 million

**FIGURE 1.** Top 20 online news Web sites, June 2005. *Source:* U.S. Home & Work, Nielsen/Net Ratings

technologies, from positive as well as negative sides. Each one of these new technologies became increasingly empty commodities in the United States, hollowed out by the wider political economy. So when Yanquis go online in search of news, they visit sites owned by major conglomerates (see Figure 1).

Fowler's footprint has left a large space. He introduced a system whereby broadcasters could renew their licenses by mailing him a postcard, thus avoiding the unpleasantness and bother of meeting their critics in open session before the FCC. And self-regulation? In 1982, the networks agreed to screen fewer than ten minutes of commercials per hour during prime time and on children's shows. Twenty years later, neoliberal dogma diminished that sense of social responsibility, such that fourteen to seventeen minutes of advertising each hour became the norm. Doctrines of Fairness and Right of Reply, local evaluation of stations, laws to encourage racial equality in hiring—all have been deemed unnecessary, as diversity and debate are measured not by personnel, texts, or interpretations, but by numbers of outlets and varieties of

technology. Even the National Association of Broadcasters' Code of Conduct has been held to violate antitrust legislation. Meanwhile, the craven 1996 Telecommunications Act allowed unprecedented consolidation of ownership across media until Bush's FCC began its dread work. The last ten years have seen the U.S. media go from being controlled by fifty competing companies to five. The environment is oligopolistic, with 90 percent of top cable stations owned by the firms that run the networks and cable systems (Copp 2003).

Many of these institutions are corporate conglomerates for whom the traditions of journalism are incidental to their core business. After arms manufacturer General Electric purchased NBC in 1986, and tobacco beneficiary Lawrence Tisch bought CBS the following year, these stations commenced programs of disinvestment and disemployment, with news divisions subjected to similar profit expectations as entertainment sectors. NBC eliminated 30 percent of news employees in the five years to 1992. Overall, there has been a decrease in network news correspondents by a third since Tisch and his ilk appeared on the scene. The drive for a Tayloristic, scientifically managed control of input has caused topics to be tested in advance on advertisers, rather than being spontaneous reactions to stories of import. Currently, there is also an unprecedented interpenetration of corporate and media power, via overlapping directorates. The notion that the media perform a special function of critique by virtue of their commitment to the public interest is thoroughly compromised when as at mid-2005, the 118 people sitting on the boards of the top media companies were directors of 288 other national and global corporations. The impact on diversity has been predictable. On-camera, current-affairs appearances by adults are largely restricted to white men and "right-wing blondes," apart from anti-affirmative action or Beltway-*servidor* minorities. The notion of audience sovereignty is equally compromised. Seventy-seven percent of the United States public wants the Fairness Doctrine—which the FCC abjures—reinstated, while of the people writing in to complain about sex on television—which the FCC regards as crucial—almost 100 percent come from one group, the Far Right moral panicker, the Parents Television Council. And the new populism has not been a success with audiences. Ratings have plummeted during the era of "soft" news. As Andrew Heyward, then President of CBS News, put it after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the networks are in a struggle for "survival of the samest" and are "uncannily similar," because news has become "a commodity." Unprecedentedly, CBS and ABC lost viewers at that time of crisis, so quickly did they return to game-show programming, entertainment news, and other genres. It's all about cutting the cost of production, not satisfying viewers (Barkin 2003, 89; Schechter 2003a; Phillips 2005; Lloyd 2005, 74; Benton Foundation 2005; McChesney and Foster 2003, 2; Douglas



2005; *EXTRA!* 2005a, 5; Heyward quoted in Elkin 2003; Boyd-Barrett 2005; Smith 2003).

Rather than acknowledge that changes in news format and content have been driven by business priorities, U.S. network TV personnel invoke the audience. In former CBS news anchor Dan Rather's 2002 words: "if you lead foreign you die," because "the public has lost interest in international reporting" (quoted in Schechter 2003b, xl). For his part, media mogul Rupert Murdoch proclaims that "Internacional no vende" [The international doesn't sell] (quoted in Leguineche 2002, 16). Leaders of the industry bemoan the fact that a "shorter attention span among the public forces reporters to make the news fast and exciting" (Carnegie Corporation 2005, 4) without backing this up empirically, or indicating why foreign news is slow and boring, even as they continue to assume that the US is "a beacon of good journalistic practice" (Carnegie Corporation and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2005).

In this book, I am concerned especially with citizens' knowledge of US foreign/military policy and corporate/governmental conduct in areas of basic needs and the environment. In lamenting the state of the news media, I am adding to a long and rather repetitive complaint about journalism in terms of quality and theme, a strain that goes back to seventeenth-century Western Europe. Also, I am buying into the gendered reactions against lifestyle programming of antediluvian TV executives, such as muscular British Conservatives Alasdair Milne and Lord Taylor of Warwick (Briggs and Burke 2003, 3; *BBC News Online* 2004; Leonard 2001). The recursive and sexist nature of these concerns inevitably posits some better, other time, a utopic moment when the media were free from nationalism, statism, commodification, or the everyday. I am all too aware that there never was a time of adequate U.S. reportage of the questions that animate my work, but the democratic deficit run up by the contemporary U.S. media transcends anything in my lifetime, or what I have found in other countries and language groups I have lived in, visited, and studied. It may be an old moral panic, but the risks are different when we are talking about the impact of U.S. power over and ignorance regarding peace, militarism, and the environment.

Consider foreign policy and international relations. The international political content of news has diminished significantly since Fowler, excusing and excluding U.S. citizens from a vital part of the policy process—informed public comment, dissent, and consent. Given the expansion of U.S. power

over the last quarter of a century, and the decline in political participation by its citizens, it is noteworthy that TV coverage of governmental, military, and international affairs dropped from 70 percent of network news in 1977, to 60 percent in 1987, and 40 percent in 1997. In 1988, each network dedicated approximately two thousand minutes to international news. A decade later, the figure had halved, with about 9 percent of the average newscast covering anything “foreign.” Between May 2000 and August 2001, just 22 percent of network news was international—ten points below, for example, its British and South African equivalents, and twenty points below the German. Of that U.S. coverage, just 3 percent addressed U.S. foreign policy. In 2000, three stories from beyond the United States, apart from the Olympics, made it into the networks’ twenty most-covered items, and all were directly concerned with domestic issues: the Miami-Cuba custody dispute over Élian Gonzales, the second Intifada, and the bombing of the USS Cole off Yemen (*On the Media* 2002; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2002; *New Yorker* 2001; Pew Research Center 2005, 43; Calabrese 2005b).

As NBC news producer Steve Friedman notoriously intoned after the Cold War, “there isn’t anything geopolitical left” (quoted in Calabrese 2005b, 272). The main broadcast networks have closed most investigative sections and foreign bureaus—other than, of course, in Israel. Where ABC News once maintained seventeen overseas posts, now it has seven. CBS has one journalist covering Asia, and seven others for the rest of the world. Parochialism is the watchword. Numerous academic studies have found the networks incapable of devoting attention to other countries other than as dysfunctional or threatening to the United States, even when covering successful democratic elections. It should be no surprise that a 2002 analysis of U.S. newspapers with circulation over a hundred thousand found that 80 percent of their editors had negative views of TV network coverage of international stories. Meanwhile, Australia’s national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, has offices in London, New York, Port Moresby, Singapore, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi, Tokyo, Washington, Bangkok, Amman, Beijing, Brussels, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Moscow, and Nicosia (Chester 2002, 106; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2002; Compton 2004; Higham 2001; Golan and Wanta 2003; Pew International Journalism Program 2002; Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2001). Last I looked, Australia had a population of nineteen million people, but they seem to think it’s worth knowing about billions of others.

When the Yanqui media elect to venture beyond the fifty states, it becomes abundantly clear that some people’s problems matter more than others. In 2003, Médecins sans Frontières [Doctors Without Borders] listed ten humanitarian disasters that barely rated a mention on network television, such as

famine in Angola, and civil war in Somalia, Liberia, Colombia, and Sudan. In 2003, two million people died from AIDS in Africa; total coverage of the disease on network news that year amounted to thirty-nine minutes (Lobe 2003a and 2004). Nicolas de Torrente, director of the U.S. branch of the Médecins, put it this way: “Silence is the best ally of violence, impunity and contempt . . . these enormous catastrophes don’t seem to exist for most Americans” (quoted in Rotzer 2003). In place of such coverage, we are offered reality television, a strange hybrid of cost-cutting devices, game shows taken into the community, cinéma vérité conceits, scripts that are written in postproduction, and ethics of Social Darwinism, surveillance, and gossip (Ouellette and Murray 2004, 8–9). To repeat, all this is a direct response to deregulation and conglomerate takeovers—*not* consumer sovereignty.

Don Hewitt was the originator of *60 Minutes*, which began in 1968 and quickly drew the highest ratings on television, making CBS News profitable for the first time. Decades later, Hewitt admitted that his creation had “single-handedly ruined television,” by establishing the expectation that news reporting be profitable through an entertainment-based cult of personality. News divisions have been fetishized as individual profit centers, rather than their previous function as loss leaders that gave networks a character and “endorsed” other genres. The celebrity aspects of contemporary newsgathering derive from decisions to air *Inside Edition* and *Entertainment Tonight* against network news in the late 1980s. By 1990, the latter had doubled coverage of star gossip. Across the fifteen years since, executives in charge of network news have increasingly lacked any serious background in journalism, and have focused on stories that look like Hollywood productions, promote the network’s programs almost as much as they report on nonmedia events, and follow strict binary oppositions between good and bad—when they bother to stride beyond midtown Manhattan and Botox Beverly Hills for stories. The epithet once used to deride local news television in the United States (“if it bleeds, it leads”) today applies to network news, where the correlation between national crime statistics and crime coverage shows no rational linkage. The drive to create “human interest” stories from blood has become a key means of generating belief in a risk society through moral panics about personal safety, which occupied 16 percent of network news in 1997, up from 8 percent in 1977. Pondering coverage of Michael Jackson’s child-molestation trial in 2005, horror novelist Stephen King argued for a divide within popular culture, telling journalists that he and they had different duties to the public: “My job is to give them what they want. . . . Your job is to give the people what they need.” Disobeying his dictum, by 2005, local TV news was basking in 50 percent profit margins, while national news continued to lose ground in a vainglorious attempt to make money (Schudson

and Tift 2005, 32, 38; Hewitt quoted in Barkin 2003, 53; Barkin 2003, 9, 51; Smith 2003; Calabrese 2005b, 271–72; Carter 2005; *New Yorker* 2001; Lowry et al. 2003; Thussu 2003, 123; King quoted in *EXTRA!* 2005b, 5; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2005).

The old commercial television networks have survived, still delivering advertisers the closest approximation to a national audience, and doggedly offering a mix of programming. The only change is now they account for less than a fifth of the time Yanquis spend watching television, and have lost the commitment to thorough journalism that developed their newsgathering reputations of old. TV matters as much as ever, but increasingly via cable. During the 2004 U.S. presidential election, of the 78 percent of U.S. citizens who followed the campaign on television, 47 percent did so via cable news (the respective figures for the 2000 contest were 70 percent using television, of whom 36 percent relied on cable). But the claim from the 1990s that twenty-four-hour news channels would compromise the capacity of corporations and governments to obfuscate is now laughable. Rather, cable news has pioneered nonunionized, multitasked, low-wage news labor, with workers required to write, speak, and appear in multifarious formats and genres, without increases in numbers, resources, or pay scales. Low budgets meet fragmented audiences, and money can be made from small numbers of viewers. Web journalism has not led to originality, because of intense recycling, with wire services rapidly displacing primary reportage as sources. Web newsrooms are experiencing massive staff cutbacks despite improved readership numbers, such that they now rewrite copy rather than generating it. There is concern amongst U.S. reporters that the quality of their work is diminishing as a result of corporate pressure to increase revenue (Webster 2005, 378; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2005; Robinson 2004, 99; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2005; Schechter 2005b; Barkin 2003, 85; Calabrese 2005b, 273–74; Raphael 2004, 123–24; Schatz 2003, xvii; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2005; Pew Research Center 2005, 43; Carnegie Corporation 2005, 3). Laurie Garrett, a Pulitzer, Polk, and Peabody prizewinner, left U.S. journalism in 2005 with a stinging memo:

All across America news organizations have been devoured by massive corporations, and allegiance to stockholders, the drive for higher share prices, and push for larger dividend returns trumps everything that the grunts in the newsrooms consider their missions (quoted in *Editor & Publisher* 2005).

Even Roger Ailes, head of the Fox News Network, admits that “journalism in cable sometimes is light because the depth of investigative research isn’t