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The *Journal of Communication Inquiry* emphasizes interdisciplinary inquiry into communication and mass communication phenomena within cultural and historical perspectives. Such perspectives imply that an understanding of these phenomena cannot arise solely out of a narrowly focused analysis. Rather, the approaches emphasize philosophical, evaluative, empirical, legal, historical, and/or critical inquiry into relationships between mass communication and society across time and culture. The *Journal of Communication Inquiry* is a forum for such investigations.

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Editor’s Introduction

Once again this issue of *JCI* provides an interdisciplinary forum for critical scholars who are engaged in cultural studies. The articles in this issue explore a wide range of areas and tend to focus on ideology and representation, with a bow in some cases to political economic analysis. These articles provide some original critical interventions and explorations on educational television, radio disk jockeys, and the children’s program *Sesame Street*. The journal’s record of publishing an eclectic variety of cultural themes is well represented once again. The other articles deal with a huge diet industry trying to reclaim its lost position in public esteem and a creative explication of the wonders of the contemporary corporate museum. All of the authors try to deal with the growing intricacies of representation and the hegemonic challenges of contemporary capitalism.

Ronald Bishop presents a probing ideological analysis of the thematic shifts in television advertising related to the multibillion dollar diet product industry. In “Old Dogs, New Tricks? An Ideological Analysis of Thematic Shifts in Television Advertising for Diet Products, 1990-2000,” he chronicles an amazing representational turnaround by the diet industry, as its methods and advertising claims were vigorously challenged in the past decade. He points out that the industry was under intense scrutiny for making unsubstantiated claims and promises about their diet programs; eventually they turned it around by poking fun at their former advertising claims for their products. Bishop melds an ideological and textual analysis and layers that with a cultural studies framework. The author concludes that the diet industry deftly moved from quick weight loss claims in the 1980s to incorporating the theme of dieting to maintain health in recent years. He uses Althusser to argue that the diet industry took public and government objections to their claims and redeployed their advertising to “recolonize” dieters in the past decade.

Matthew Killmeier also provides a critical view of the work and cultural practices of disk jockeys in his article “Voices between the Tracks: Disk Jockeys, Radio, and Popular Music, 1955-60.” Killmeier uses Stuart Hall’s conceptual model of encoding and decoding to study their often convoluted cultural practices. The author sees this model as representing one of the central problematics of cultural studies, while providing insights about the centralized production of a cultural commodity as well as the use of these commodities in “a meaningful social interaction” between the disk jockeys and their listeners.
He also argues that these broadcasters played a key role in investing popular music with symbolic capital. The disk jockeys often thought of themselves as populists who were using a form of market democracy in the interaction between them and their young audiences. He concludes that this area provides an overlooked aspect of political economic and critical cultural approaches to media studies and popular culture.

Authors Elfriede Fürsich and Elli P. Lester Roushazamir deal with a more contemporary cultural artifact: the proliferation of the corporate museum. In their article “Corporate Expansion, Textual Expansion: Commodification Model of Communication,” they argue that the contemporary media landscape of increasing commercialization calls for a new model of communication that deals with today’s political economic realities. This is a detailed examination of how corporate discursive strategies are deployed in two corporate museums—one is the CNN Studio Tour and the other is The World of Coca-Cola, both located in Atlanta, Georgia. The authors develop their commodification model of communication to go beyond traditional modes of theorizing about how “text” has expanded to take in corporate expansion and to reorganize earlier notions of the public good in the process. They argue that their model helps to explain and critique cultural phenomena, such as the fusion of news/entertainment and advertising, which often blur the boundaries that separate and make industries distinct.

In “Women in Their Own Reflection: Self-Representation of Women Politicians in the Slovenian Press,” authors Maruša Pušnik and Gregor Bulc deliver an intriguing analysis of the discursive strategies “through which women politicians express themselves in the Slovenian press” (p. 413). The research focuses on public statements made by these women, actively mediated through the country’s dominant press. The authors succeed by using the tools of discourse analysis, representation, and self-representation to demonstrate how these politicians are often interpellated into the broader ideological framework of their own society. In that cultural and ideological process they demonstrate how the women do not often challenge the hegemonic order or the patriarchy and myths of Slovenian society. They conclude that their self-representations are very strongly connected to dominant social myths about femininity, and the politicians seem far from any effort to demystify these hegemonic discourses, as they often “spontaneously express their femininity through the dominant discourse, especially when challenged by journalists” (p. 427).

Finally, author Glenda R. Balas’s article “Domestic Values and National Security: Framing the Battle for Educational Frequencies in 1950-51” is a historical look at the battle for educational television channels. The author examined hundreds of written and oral statements that were delivered in the effort related to allocation of these channels. She concludes that the decisions that were reached regarding educational channels were a strategic compromise “of
vision that has cost public broadcasting not only its institutional identity but also a worldview” (p. 451). Balas details the endless compromises and discourses for noncommercial broadcasters as they tried to find an acceptable concept to “sell” to the often hostile Federal Communications Commission. This campaign for instructional television channels also featured a lively, often impassioned, debate by educators who argued that education could be markedly improved through the proper use of these channels. What one takes away from this article is the circumscribed nature of the debate, often excluding many other social actors who might have made important contributions. The system we have today is narrowly defined and has abandoned many possible social constituencies. Public service has become a teaching tool; the cost has been “a public mission, a broad-based audience, and an enduring institutional identity” (p. 431).

Gene Costain

The diet industry came under fire in the 1980s for making unsubstantiated promises to the millions of Americans who buy diet products and enlist in diet regimens. Instead of telling dieters that their products will help them quickly lose a great deal of weight, these companies now urge Americans to diet in a healthy fashion. They have rejected fad dieting and now preach weight management as the key to maintaining one’s health. Along the way, they have started to poke fun at the claims they previously made about the effectiveness of their products. This article applies textual and ideological analysis, layered on a cultural studies framework, to explore this stylistic shift. A textual analysis of commercials for these products reveals that their thematic focus has shifted from rapid weight loss to one or a combination of these themes: (1) that using the product is part of a well-balanced diet and will help the dieter limit fat intake, (2) that the dieter controls the evolution of this new “healthy dieting” lifestyle, and (3) that fad dieting is not part of this lifestyle and is to be rejected.

The diet industry came under fire in the 1980s for making unsubstantiated promises to the millions of Americans who buy diet products and enlist in diet regimens to help them lose weight. The industry was forced to acknowledge that most individuals who went on so-called fad diets ended up regaining all or most of the weight they had lost. Even high-powered celebrities like Oprah Winfrey told America that fad dieting was unhealthy. Oprah endorsed a “healthy” eating regimen, one that spawned a best-selling cookbook. In addition, physicians were doing a better job convincing Americans that fad dieting could threaten their health.

As a result of this scrutiny, the diet industry’s major players—Jenny Craig, Nutri/System, and Weight Watchers—saw their profits plunge. Nutri/System eventually filed for bankruptcy but has since reemerged, using the Internet to sell its weight loss regimen and prepackaged foods. More important, the diet industry’s message to the consumer has changed. Instead of telling dieters that their products will help them quickly lose a great deal of weight, these compa-
nies now urge Americans to diet in a healthy fashion. Weight loss is no longer a fad; it is a lifestyle, according to diet companies. They have (publicly, at least) rejected fad dieting and now preach weight management or weight maintenance as the key to maintaining one’s health. Along the way, diet companies have started to poke fun at the claims they previously made about the effectiveness of their products. Diet companies also have disavowed the stylistic techniques they had used to promote their products. This article applies textual and ideological analysis, layered on a cultural studies framework, to explore this stylistic shift. First, however, I offer a summary of recent developments in the diet industry.

The Demise of Fad Dieting?

Members of Congress would like to think that their attempts to bring shady industry advertising claims to light led many dieters to abandon fad diets and the staggering array of devices available today that allegedly help people lose weight. Instead, we are more obsessed with losing weight—and with using these “quick-fix” methods—than ever. In 1997, fenfluramine, part of the diet drug fen-phen, was taken off the market by its manufacturer, Wyeth-Ayerst, after hundreds of individuals filed lawsuits based on its damaging side effects. The news media extensively covered the lawsuits; readers and viewers heard numerous stories about individuals—some as young as eleven or twelve years old—suing Wyeth-Ayerst after using the drug had damaged their health. Physicians and public officials were outraged at how easily fen-phen had made it through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval process. In 1994, Congress eliminated a requirement that the FDA approve all ingredients in diet products. Diet companies no longer had to establish that their products actually worked before selling them to the public. But if the suits over fen-phen fueled distrust of the diet industry, it was only temporary. Consumers soon turned to a growing number of more risky over-the-counter weight loss products to help them lose weight. One in four people takes a weight loss supplement. Diet product companies now spend more than $100 million a year on infomercial time to advertise their products. Many smaller companies sell directly over the Internet. Complaints about fraudulent diet advertisements to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have risen sharply since 1997 (Winter 2000, A-23). As sales of diet programs like Jenny Craig and Nutri/System continue to decline, sales of diet pills and weight loss supplements have risen from $168 million to $782 million in three years (p. A-23). We spend $6 billion a year on fraudulent diet products. The FTC has tried to stem the increase; in 1997, the agency filed numerous actions against a number of diet companies, makers of products like the “Slimming Insole,” a device that allegedly enables an individual to lose weight through pressure on nerves in the foot. Congress
directed the FTC in 1990 to bring an end to unsubstantiated claims about product effectiveness made by these companies. This investigation, combined with the temporary public skepticism of fad or quick-fix weight loss, led these companies to abandon messages in their advertising about rapid weight loss. The FTC first filed actions against the makers of the liquid diets Opti-Fast, MediFast, and NutriFast. The agency ordered the manufacturer of Opti-Fast, the Sandoz Nutrition Corporation, to stop making false claims about the safety of the product and about its long-term effectiveness (Iazzeho 1992). The FTC then turned its attention to advertising for Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers, Nutri/System, Physician’s Weight Loss Center, and Diet Center. The FTC eventually charged the companies with making deceptive claims about how successful their clients were in keeping weight off (Vreeland 1995). Nutri/System, Physician’s Weight Loss Center, and Diet Center were first to settle their cases (Poulton 1997). At first, Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers contested the FTC’s allegations. However, Jenny Craig and its advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, settled with the FTC in 1995. The FTC reached a settlement with Jenny Craig two years later (Jansen 1997). After watching revenues drop by almost 20 percent and their stock hit an all-time low, Jenny Craig agreed to improve the substantiation in its ads about the success experienced by its customers in achieving or maintaining weight loss. The agreement also required Jenny Craig to require that consumer-experience testimonials either reflect the general results of customers or be qualified by disclosures about the generally expected results. Jenny Craig also agreed not to “misrepresent the performance, safety, or customer endorsement of any weight loss program and to have scientific data to back up future claims about weight loss and maintenance” (FTC reaches settlement 1997). The company was also required in its ads to clearly explain that weight loss is temporary for many individuals. The company paid $10 million to settle a class action filed on behalf of customers who accused Jenny Craig of creating misleading ads (Poulton 1997). It is ironic that companies taken to task by Congress in 1990 for allegedly misleading the American consumer now sit on the sidelines, their sales declining, watching small, largely unregulated companies swallow up their market share.

The Oprah Factor

Several other factors led diet product makers to change the messages in their ads. First, a number of celebrities, most notably Oprah Winfrey, who had trumpeted their dieting success, publicly disavowed fad dieting. Having regained the sixty-seven pounds she lost in 1990 on the Opti-Fast liquid diet plan, Winfrey came back in 1993 to promote the benefits of healthy eating and exercise. A best-selling cookbook followed. Self-styled lifestyle guru Susan Powter, whose “Stop the Insanity” diet program sold $50 million worth of
products in one year, warned potential customers not to call her program a diet. “Diets don’t work,” Powter claimed. “They never have and never will” (quoted in Vreeland 1995, 48). Pronouncements like these purportedly went a long way toward making quick-fix dieting “uncool” (p. 50). Second, the growing popularity of low-fat and low-calorie foods has threatened the larger diet companies. Makers of these products positioned themselves as being able to help individuals lose weight without the help of specialists (Vreeland 1995). There has emerged a general sense of dissatisfaction, if not distrust, with diet programs like those whose ads I explore here. Third, the medical community enjoyed more success in making people aware that most individuals who lose weight through fad dieting and by using diet products gain the weight back, progress that seems to have been at least partially undone, thanks to the renewed popularity of quick-fix diet products. Finally, the emaciated appearance of a number of celebrities, most notably Calista Flockhart of the television program *Ally McBeal*, reignited the debate over the role of mediated images in body image dissatisfaction among young women.

Against this backdrop, Weight Watchers, Nutri/System, and Jenny Craig saw their profits plunge. With the market share shrinking and the government scrutinizing their ads, the companies repositioned their products and changed their advertising strategies. The ad agencies that create commercials for these products responded to the FTC’s action by abandoning claims of product effectiveness for claims about how the products had high nutritional value and were part of a healthy lifestyle. Jenny Craig, for example, began calling its weight loss regimen “personal weight management.” Despite their efforts, Americans began abandoning their programs; the number of dieters fell from 65 million (in 1986) to 48 million in 1991. Weight Watchers saw a $45 million profit in 1992 turn into a $50 million loss in 1994. Nutri/System’s sales fell from $400 million in 1992 to $250 million in 1994. Between 1992 and 1995, Jenny Craig’s profits dropped from $36.8 million to $534,000 (Vreeland 1995). Revenue for commercial weight loss centers fell by more than $1 billion between 1990 and 2000 (Winter 2000, A-23).

It is risky to speculate that the change in advertising message precipitated the financial decline suffered by these companies. Still, the thematic shift is one worth exploring, since the diet industry has now co-opted our distrust in fad dieting to reinvigorate sales. Diet product manufacturers are not the only companies poking fun at themselves in ads; a number of recent ad campaigns have revolved around self-reflexiveness. Miller Beer’s 1999 campaign featuring the fictional character “Dick,” and Sprite’s recent “Image is Nothing” campaign poked fun at advertising excess, but at the same time these campaigns redeployed our skepticism about ads to sell products. Here, our savviness as dieters has been sold right back to us. The wisdom of dieting—of personal weight management, as it is now called—is never questioned. Instead of prom-
ising that their products will allow individuals to lose weight quickly, diet product makers now promise that using their products is part of a healthy lifestyle, a lifestyle that we can purportedly control. In the bargain, they promise that losing weight and being thin will still make us more worthy of everything, from success in business, to stronger family relationships, to love. This stylistic shift is at the heart of my research. I now turn to a discussion of the theoretical foundations that will guide my analysis of recent ads for the large diet companies.

Theoretical Foundations

This article marries textual and ideological analysis and layers it over a cultural studies framework. A key starting point is Gramsci’s (Hoare and Smith 1971, 57) definition of hegemony: a process by which a dominant group generates support for itself through the exercise of both moral and intellectual leadership. Popular culture is viewed as a “site of struggle” between powerful and subordinate groups in society, a “terrain of exchange” between them (Storey 1998, 13, 15). Understanding how we make popular culture from commodities “requires vigilance and attention to the details of the production, distribution, and consumption of culture,” Gramsci argued (quoted in Storey 1998, 129). Hegemony is achieved, or emerges, not through domination but through leadership and containment, as Grossberg (1991) explained. “It involves the colonization of popular consciousness . . . through the articulation of specific social practices and positions with ideological codes or chains of connotational significance” (p. 149). As will be discussed, the ads at issue are indeed a site of struggle between the diet industry, which tries to convince people to lose weight, and the dieter, constantly seeking to lose weight but skeptical of the methods available to do so. My research focuses on the attempt by diet companies to combat their tumbling market share by “recolonizing” (p. 149) dieters. In their post-FTC investigation ads, diet companies have tried to articulate a new range of behaviors but have done so in support of an ideology that still places a high value on one’s ability to lose weight. Thus, we should still try to lose weight, but we should do so in a healthy manner, avoiding dangerous fad diets and in constant vigilance of claims that a product can help us lose a lot of weight in a short time—thematic staples of previous commercials for these products. But are companies having any success in reshaping our relationship to weight loss? Have they convinced us that their healthier representation of dieting is “a direct reflection of the real” (p. 145). Sales for established diet programs would suggest that they have not. Still, it is important to explore how these companies have tried to sustain the ideology of weight loss by creating a slightly new system of meanings, one that promotes healthy weight loss as opposed to quick-fix dieting. Diet companies have co-opted our distrust in fad
dieting and used it to sell only slightly different versions of their products. In addition, they still promise that dieting will enable an individual to achieve the things he or she wants in life—acceptance, success, love. We are now told that this process of gaining acceptance is something we control. Dieting still makes us worthy of having these things, but we control how quickly we move down the path to worthiness. In short, diet product makers have successfully moved into the “ideologically safe harbors” discussed by Storey (1998, 124). They have, in effect, bought time for their products by deploying self-reflexivity, time that has allowed them to reshape the underlying message in their advertising. We have all moved past fad dieting together, these new ads seem to suggest. Ironically, they seem to be competing with themselves, with an earlier version of an ideology that represented rapid weight loss as real.

Of particular importance to the study is Althusser’s (1971) idea that ideological practices crystallize at the point when the subject is inserted into the language. It is the power of the text, Grossberg (1991) argued, “to locate the subject by producing its intertextual domain of experience that becomes the object of critical interpretation” (p. 146). We play an active role in the creation of what Grossberg called “an imaginary but lived reality” (p. 146). We are not merely manipulated by dominant groups. Indeed, we come to the text with “a history of textual or ideological existence” (p. 147). This position has one small catch: it allows for, even encourages, certain kinds of resistance. An analysis of these ads reveals how diet companies have tried to reconstruct the dieter’s identity and articulate the behaviors that sustain this new identity. In these messages, companies like Jenny Craig are attempting to reinsert the dieter back into the ideology of dieting, armed with a newfound skepticism for fad dieting.

My research builds on recent work by Torrens (1998), who argued that diet product makers have co-opted ideas from feminism to convince women to buy their products. Happiness, she argued, is attained only by “self-absorbed attention” to one’s body (p. 43). Women spend so much time trying to control their weight and maintain their appearance that they are unable to exert influence on more significant social and cultural matters. Ads for diet companies promote narcissism, she contends, “which concentrates women’s energies on themselves, their bodies, and their efforts to control their bodies” (p. 43). They show people who have transformed their lives through dieting—they are successful, happy, fulfilled because they are thin. Women, Torrens wrote, “are encouraged to believe that they control their bodies and their destinies, but the social structures that make and promote social meaning continue to exercise enormous power to determine how women’s bodies are used and understood” (p. 27). Thus, control over the lifestyle depicted in more recent diet ads “resides in the larger structures the dialectically construct social meanings” (p. 27). Our experience is shaped by a negotiated ideal that moves us to stay thin, no matter how
that ideal is embedded in messages. The ads simply provide the means for us to carry out our cultural mission. Twitchell (1996) cautioned that this behavior is not new and is not just a product of manipulation by the diet product industry. The desire to diet is not “imposed on an unwilling culture,” he argued. Advertising “is the folklore of a commodity culture. As such it articulates and redirects, but it does not invent behavior” (Twitchell 1996, 152).

I draw a final theoretical strand for this article from Stuart Ewen’s (1976) work on the history of advertising. Acting on the belief that they could create consumers and control the consumption of a product, ad agencies built their claims on the idea that the individual was “the object of continual and harsh social scrutiny” (p. 34). To achieve this goal, advertising agencies appealed to our desire to achieve “social prestige” through “appeals to instinct” (p. 35). The full range of our desires was “placed in the service of advertising’s basic purpose—to provide effective mass distribution of products,” Ewen noted. Advertising agencies did their best to “habituate men and women to consumptive life” (p. 37). Ads not only asked consumers to buy a product, they encouraged them to “experience a self-conscious perspective that he had previously been socially and psychically denied” (p. 36). In short, consumers should become more critical of themselves than about a product or the company that produced it. Consumption would empower us to rise above the “social failure” at the heart of so many ads, then and now. Our “critical faculties,” as Ewen argued, should be directed at ourselves and our relationships. This self-consciousness should be “in tune with the ‘solutions’ of the marketplace” (p. 38). In short, advertising tells us to search for the answers to life’s issues through consumption. I argue that diet companies, in the face of governmental scrutiny and growing skepticism about dieting, are changing the conditions for this search, in large part by engaging in self-reflexivity.

Quick Fix Gives Way to Good Nutrition

Commercials analyzed for this article were taken from television advertising campaigns created for Jenny Craig, Nutri/System, Weight Watchers, and Ultra Slim-Fast that ran between 1990, when Congress began hearings on the issue, and the present. The principal investigator selected these companies primarily because they were the targets of congressional scrutiny. Campaigns from this period were reviewed for significant thematic changes. A textual analysis of commercials for these products reveals that their thematic focus has shifted from rapid (quick-fix) weight loss to one or a combination of these themes: (1) that using the product is part of a well-balanced diet and will help the dieter limit fat intake, (2) that the dieter controls the evolution of this new healthy dieting lifestyle, and (3) that fad dieting is not part of this lifestyle and is to be rejected. Each of these themes will be addressed in turn.
Dieting Can Be Healthy

Faced with FTC scrutiny, Jenny Craig abandoned claims that its program would help dieters lose a great deal of weight in a short time. The company introduced friendly diet counselors whose task it was to assist appreciative dieters “every step of the way” as they tried to lose weight. Jenny Craig’s ads also moved away from simple cause and effect messages, to claiming that use of the product is part of an overall program of “personal weight management.” Thus, maintaining one’s health replaced quick weight loss as the dieter’s most important goal. The individual is seen as exerting a degree of control and of choice as they relate to dieting. In 1996, the company unveiled ads for its “Cut through the Fat” program, a nod to our obsession with monitoring fat intake. In one of the spots, we see a woman, moving in slow motion, at what appears to be a wedding, wearing a bright pink dress. “I was a bridesmaid at my sister’s wedding,” she recalls. “I felt fat.” We then see her standing at a microphone, making a toast. Thanks to “Cut through the Fat,” she claims to have lost forty-five pounds. The next-to-last shot in the ad shows the main character spinning, then opening her jacket to reveal her new trim waistline. “I feel better about myself,” she tells us.

Several Jenny Craig commercials during this period focused on how family treatment of weight motivates some to diet. In one 1991 commercial, a woman narrates video clips of her days as “Moose,” a name given to her by her husband because of her weight. She brings food out during a picnic and sits in a lawn chair, sticking her tongue out at the camera. After visiting Jenny Craig, her inaction turns into aerobics on a trampoline with her children, scenes of happy family interaction, and a proclamation—along with shots of “Moose” now wearing a dazzling sleeveless dress—that she is now “able to handle any eating situation.” The commercial ends with a would-be diet counselor telling individuals “not to go it alone.” We can lose “all the weight we want” with the help of a Jenny Craig counselor. Here, the counselor is portrayed as a medical professional, someone who dispenses advice about one’s health. That role would change significantly in the ensuing years, as I will show in the next section. In a 1996 Jenny Craig spot, a woman recounts her first look at last year’s family Christmas pictures. “I was just getting so heavy,” she said with disgust. Going to Jenny Craig, she exults, “made such a fantastic change” in her life. After losing weight on Jenny Craig, her energy level and self-confidence increased, to the point where she could play basketball with her husband.

Nutri/System embraced the weight management theme in its ads as the FTC was embarking on its investigation of diet ad claims. Emerging from a period of significant financial turmoil, the company announced in November 1993 that it had joined with pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson to create a “wellness” program that listed weight loss as just one of many ways to ensure good health.
Before the FTC investigation, however, Nutri/System ads tended to follow traditional thematic paths. One Nutri/System television ad from the early 1990s showed a line of men and women dancing in front of enlarged photos of themselves before going on the program. Dieting was portrayed as a public activity (Schwartz 1986). Characters proudly held up articles of clothing they wore when they were heavier. In a variation on the “before and after” technique, we are told one female dieter’s “old size” was twenty-two; her “NutriSize” was a svelte size eight. The commercial then urged us to hop on the Nutri/System bandwagon so that we might be able to NutriSize our lives. In subsequent ads, Nutri/System assured dieters that “once you change the head, the body’s easy,” while at the same time warning them that “the most abused substance in America is food.” Here, the company is climbing inside the head of the prospective dieter, portraying dieting as an individual decision. In the bargain, however, it criticizes fad diets and those who have tried many of them to lose weight. The word *abuse* conveys the impression that these individuals are somehow addicted to fad dieting and that they are morally bankrupt. Nutri/System seems to position itself here as the weight loss equivalent of a twelve-step program. The Nutri/System program offers a measure of salvation from the turbulent world of fad dieting. Nutri/System underscored its claims with an upbeat, gospel-like soundtrack.

Commercials for Ultra Slim-Fast in the early 1990s featured a lineup of celebrity spokespeople, including entertainer Ann Jillian, talk show host Kathie Lee Gifford, weathercaster Willard Scott, and actress Shari Belafonte. An extremely thin Gifford claimed the product helped her lose “those stubborn last ten pounds” she gained when she was pregnant with her first child, Cody. Jillian also lamented about how much weight she gained during her pregnancy. Thanks to Ultra Slim-Fast, the story had a happy ending: Jillian lost fifty-five pounds. In the Gifford and Jillian spots, Ultra Slim-Fast relied on still shots of “before” photos of its spokespeople and on their heartfelt testimonials. Each recited the Ultra Slim-Fast regimen, almost like a mantra: “a shake for breakfast, one for lunch, and a sensible dinner.” The product was promoted as part of a healthy eating regimen.

Significant changes were made by the company’s 1994 campaign. Belafonte, strolling alone along a beach in a cutoff T-shirt and flowing pants, assured viewers that in addition to helping individuals lose weight, Ultra Slim-Fast was of the highest nutritional value and that consumers should not worry about the nutritional content. The product now interacts in our world: “The fat grams have been computed, the calories have been counted,” Belafonte says over a shot of the product’s slowly turning nutritional information label. In a later commercial from the same campaign, Belafonte, working at a fictional fashion shoot, turns to an Ultra Slim-Fast candy bar as a way to beat the “hungries,” something that, according to the spot, we all must face at
some point during the day. Here, we become part, or are interpreted as part, of the world revolving around the product and around concern with weight. In this spot, the product actually speaks for us; it puts a name on the “hungries.” In addition to showing the nutritional value of the product, the Ultra Slim-Fast commercials featuring Belafonte seized on our need to monitor the fat content of foods.

In addition to promoting its diet drink as healthy, the maker of Ultra Slim-Fast also tried to persuade dieters that it was a product of science. In 1996, the company introduced the “Slim-Fast Institute.” One Institute commercial began with white-coated characters scurrying around behind a pair of imposing glass doors, which open, allowing the viewer to pass through. Would-be scientists are shown eyeing test tubes and convening to discuss complex figures on a wall chart. The activity continues as we are told that Ultra Slim-Fast is nutritionally beneficial and that using the product is part of a healthy lifestyle. The Institute’s doors close as the commercial ends. Themes from the Institute series of commercials also appear in testimonial spots for Ultra Slim-Fast introduced at about the same time. The newer Slim-Fast spots were built on stories told by “typical” product users. In one spot, a woman wearing a clinging red dress, identified only as “Cathy Marie, age 31,” tells about how she uses the product: “a shake a day, substituted for lunch—sometimes for dinner.” We see a series of quick cuts, including a shot of her in a director’s chair. She stresses that the product is a nutritional supplement, not a weight loss aid. A new tagline introduced by the makers of Ultra Slim-Fast in this campaign underscores the product’s new positioning: “balanced nutrition for a healthy life.”

In a 1997 spot for the product, we see before shots of a young woman sitting on a stool, her mouth full of food, then a series of active after shots of the woman trying on a series of tight-fitting outfits and looking in the mirror as she tells about the health benefits of the product. She claims that thanks to using Ultra Slim-Fast, her energy went “through the roof.” The improvement in her appearance is welcomed, and the health benefits are a bonus. She bounces out of a clothing store, packages in hand, embracing her healthier lifestyle.

You’re in Control

During the past decade, diet companies have tried to persuade dieters that dieting is something they control, that they manage. In 1994, Jenny Craig replaced the counselors from its 1993 ad campaign with first-person accounts of how going to Jenny Craig helps even the least diligent dieter regularly face “crisis times with food.” Gone was the closing shot of a would-be counselor telling viewers how simple it was to join the program. In a 1995 commercial, a woman who lost weight on the Jenny Craig program now happily tells of how
she counsels others as they try to lose weight. Viewers see shots from her earlier appearance for Jenny Craig. She claims that she continues to reap the benefits of her decision to adopt the Jenny Craig lifestyle. We see recycled shots of her battle against weight and hear her announcement that she is now a counselor, helping individuals lose weight. She is a cheerleader. We see slow motion shots of her spinning to show off her new trim figure. When the announcer says, “Why wait another day?” the newly minted counselor says, “Did that announcer say ‘Why wait another day?’ Why wait another minute! Why wait another second!” to get help from Jenny Craig. Shots of the same counselor are featured in a 1997 Jenny Craig spot that assured viewers “We’re right by your side, and we’re for real.” Her identity clearly is conveyed through her link to the product and its use in a social context—here, sharing her knowledge about effective weight loss techniques with others.

Another Jenny Craig commercial from 1994 features before shots of a young woman, followed by a shot of her at the scale with her Jenny Craig counselor, celebrating their victory over her extra pounds. The woman, now shown seated at her home, recalls that when she reached her goal weight, her young son said, “Jenny would be proud!” A 1995 spot revolved around a young woman who wanted to lose weight to “dazzle” some former high school classmates at an upcoming reunion. Thanks to Jenny Craig’s personal weight management, she was “skinny . . . and happy.” No longer was the counselor a purveyor of medical advice; instead, she was now a friend, a colleague. The main character in another 1996 Jenny Craig spot says that she “felt like a team with my consultant” as they were “losing the weight . . . [and] cutting the fat out of my life.”

Lippert (1997b) argued that the move toward themes of self-actualization and empowerment stemmed from the realization by diet companies that individuals were becoming increasingly skeptical about fad diets. “Puffed up dieters have done it all, and they don’t believe in much, which may account for the new psychological vogue in dieting,” she wrote (p. 28). In one 1994 spot, we see a woman slowly swimming laps in a pool. Over tranquil piano music, we hear a strong female voice describe “that voice in your head that is so hard on your body” (Lippert 1997b). The spot ends with the narrator asking viewers to “imagine in its place a voice that speaks to your dreams and your body listens” (p. 28). Dieting is given an ethereal, almost spiritual quality.

Actress Cindy Williams (Laverne and Shirley) starred in a series of 1997 Jenny Craig spots that chronicled her attempt to lose weight. Williams lies on the floor, trying desperately to put on a pair of jeans. Giving up in disgust, she picks up the phone and calls Jenny Craig. Williams tells the unseen person on the other end of the line that she will be right over to begin the program. She is taking control of the issue. In a subsequent spot, the new, thinner Williams con-
fronts the old, heavier Williams. Jenny Craig followed the Williams campaign in 1997 with ads for its “A-B-C” program. Advertisements for the new program promised dieters that the plan was simple to follow. Now, dieters could exercise complete control over their involvement in the program. Life would not get in the way, and in the bargain, dieters could eat anything, so long as their portions met program guidelines. Even Monica Lewinsky, added to Jenny Craig’s roster of spokespeople in 1999 to appear in television ads for the company’s “low-carb menu option,” preached choice and control. In one ad, the former White House intern congratulates Jenny Craig for adding the option to its list of programs: “It gives clients just one more opportunity to have a different choice,” she claims. The old stylistic tools are still there: Lewinsky tells viewers that “one of the most amazing things about Jenny Craig for me is that I haven’t felt deprived on this program—at all.” But dieting is now a choice, something to be managed. By hiring Lewinsky, the company said it hoped to “reach countless others who struggle daily with eating and weight issues,” according to Jenny Craig CEO Patricia Larchet (Monica Lewinsky appears 1999). By taking part in the program, Larchet claims, “it is possible to make positive, healthy changes in your life—on the outside and on the inside.”

While both Nutri/System and Jenny Craig changed the structure of their ads, they did not completely change the underlying message that self-worth is determined by one’s ability to lose weight. Jenny Craig’s fictional counselors continued to encourage dieters to discover the person hidden beneath the weight. “When I reached my goal weight, we cried,” says one fictional Jenny Craig client. But now, the companies were telling dieters that dieting was a means of empowerment, of exerting control over one’s life. We can manage our eating like it is a business relationship. In 1993, Nutri/System moved further inward. A female spokesperson, in a tight close-up, warned viewers “if you’re thinking about dieting, please don’t.” The spokesperson then endorsed the creation of “a whole new relationship with food,” a claim that echoed the Jenny Craig spokesperson’s newfound ability to handle crisis times with food. The ad approaches us as dieters; it interprets us in our relationship to the product and to the act of dieting. We see shots of a Nutri/System customer before (a still photo) and after (active, lifting a child in the air) using the product. Nutri/System called their plan a “twelve-week turnaround.” Such a time constraint makes this a diet, despite the commercial’s claims to the contrary, since it hints at short-term behavior modification.

In a 1996 ad for Ultra Slim-Fast, family-motivated reasons for dissatisfaction with weight motivate the push for control. A woman with bright red hair, dressed in a gray blouse and black pants, recalls with visible disdain that her appearance went downhill after she got married: “We got married. I got comfortable. I put on twelve pounds.” Her plans for the summer apparently did not
include swimming: “I was not putting on a bathing suit,” she says. To bring her life under control, she turned to Ultra Slim-Fast. Again, the character rejects fad diets. “It’s hardly a diet,” says the young woman. We then see shots of the nutritional information on the can and hear the new product tagline. Now a convert to the Slim-Fast lifestyle, the woman thinks she can now hit the beach: “Maybe I should buy a bikini,” she says. Another 1997 Ultra Slim-Fast spot features a woman who has just had a baby. Unfortunately, childbirth left her overweight; the character reveals this as if it were an anomaly rather than part of the body’s normal changes during pregnancy. She says Ultra Slim-Fast not only helped her lose the weight, it has given her the energy she needs to “keep up with him”—her infant son. In both of these spots, the move toward using the product begins with an announcement by the main character that they had recognized the cultural evil of their ways. Both practically shout “I was fat” before extolling the virtues of the product. They almost sound like alcoholics admitting that they have problems with drinking.

Today, Slim-Fast’s ads revolve around the busy lives of their characters. In 1998, Slim-Fast introduced “Jump Start,” a powdered shake mix that dieters could use before going on the Slim-Fast plan. Dieters could lose “five pounds in five days”—then go on to lose all the weight you want,” according to an ad for the product. Ads for Jump Start featured busy people moving successfully through their lives—the product was promoted as “easy and convenient.” These ads concluded with a silhouetted character leaping into the air, seemingly thrilled that they had been able to achieve so much. Like Slim-Fast, Jump Start enables you to stay healthy while dealing with marriage, childbirth, and being a soccer mom. Instead of dieting “for me,” dieters are now encouraged to diet to keep up with what is going on around them. The product also gives us the energy to accomplish this. In a 1999 spot, a male character—a rarity in diet spots—claims that thanks to Ultra Slim-Fast, “my energy, on a scale from one to ten, is an eleven.” Feeling sluggish and unhealthy—not comments from friends or damaged family relationships—were the “wake-up call” he needed to start using the product, improve his health, and regain control of his life. By 2000, Slim-Fast was telling viewers that gaining weight should be viewed as a wake-up call, as it was for one male character, both to lose weight and to do so in a healthy fashion, without resorting to fad diets.

Weight Watchers angered journalists in 1993 when it hired former network anchorperson Kathleen Sullivan to walk dieters through her experience with the company’s “Quick Start” program in a series of commercials. Sullivan’s hiring came after a number of more lustrous celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey and self-help guru Susan Powter, publicly disavowed rapid weight loss and began preaching about healthy, low-fat eating (Vreeland 1995). Each commercial in the 1993 campaign was a progress report from Sullivan, in
which she reminded viewers how much weight she lost and how easy the program was to follow. Sullivan promised that the plan “is simple. It requires no meal planning. No tracking. Just minimal food preparation to start you on the road to achieving your goals.” Here, Sullivan was able to fit the diet into her life, rather than letting the diet dictate how she lived her life. She, not others, not the diet industry, would control her weight loss. In a second 1993 campaign, Weight Watchers claimed that what America needed was a good weight maintenance plan, not a diet. The company’s campaign jingle promised that attending Weight Watchers sessions would encourage the emergence of a “brand-new woman,” one who enjoyed the feeling of freedom provided by the program, even if it did encourage the adoption of dieting as a lifestyle.

In 1995, Sullivan’s walk was replaced with an aerial shot of her flight, aboard what appears to be a news helicopter, above a mobbed Weight Watchers center. Sullivan darted from the chopper as it landed and into the crowd while telling viewers they can eat at their favorite fast-food restaurants while still losing weight on the Weight Watchers plan. Back on the chopper, she divulges the program’s secret: “Cut the fat, not the food.” The enemy in the Belafonte and Sullivan spots has changed from extra weight to fat, but the goal is the same: weight loss. As Lippert (1997a) explained, the campaign “reversed the usual before/after diet trajectory.” The viewer is still interacting in the product’s world—here, we are carried to it via helicopter—but the identity of the dieter is now conveyed through the product. Instead of standing alone at the scale, as she had in the previous spot, Sullivan moves through a crowd of would-be dieters. The focus on control continued in later Weight Watchers campaigns. In 1996, the company introduced a program called “Weekends Off.” Customers could indulge themselves if they stuck with the regimen during the week. In a spot for the program, again featuring Sullivan, we see medium shots of well-dressed women enjoying rich desserts, as Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” plays in the background. A banner with the program’s logo unfurls as Sullivan calls the program “the perfect balance between freedom and control.” Again, dieters could control the influence of the program over their lives.

Fad Dieting Is Bad

The third major theme seen in the ads at issue is built on our growing distrust of quick-fix or fad dieting. In a 1996 ad for Jenny Craig, a woman about to embark on a cruise tells about how Jenny Craig helped her achieve the appearance she so fervently desired. The commercial concludes with her saying, “Those old diets—I think they’d be great confetti for my next cruise.” Nutri/System at one point warned its customers, “If you’re thinking about dieting, please don’t.”
The 1993 Weight Watchers campaign featuring Sullivan also engaged in a bit of self-mockery; in one spot, it showed a group of Weight Watchers attendees laughing as they watched a videotape of ancient, ineffective weight loss rituals. It is ironic that makers of diet products now use self-parody and nutritional information in their commercials, especially since consumers may have failed to notice the transformation of diet products from agents of rapid change to agents of maintenance. Weight Watchers introduced more self-parody in its 1996 campaign featuring the animated characters Brenda and Elaine. Much of what the characters discuss in these spots is their lack of success with what sounds like an endless series of fad diets. However, the characters also talk derisively about their weight and appearance. Thus, we see a combination of old and new stylistic themes. The spots focus on the ineffectiveness of fad diets but still attempt to move us toward embracing dieting as a lifestyle. In one spot, titled “Brenda and Elaine Go to the Beach,” the characters are extremely reluctant to reveal their bathing suit–clad bodies—a dilemma, the commercial implies, faced by most women. One of the characters says she is scared that “the strap of my bathing suit is going to snap and kill an innocent bystander.” Her friend replies, “I told you we should have dieted.” After a Weight Watchers spokesperson tells viewers that they can still join their plan for a limited time at a reduced price, Brenda tells Elaine, “It’s time to go in the water.” Elaine points out that it is now dark. “Exactly,” says Brenda. This spot urges viewers to adopt a weight-conscious lifestyle, not to go on a fad diet. Sadly, it also warns us not to show our faces—or bodies—in public until we have lost the requisite amount of weight for summer.

Weight Watchers received a great deal of publicity in 1998 when it contracted with Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of Wales, to serve as its spokesperson. Her celebrity led to numerous appearances on talk shows in which she talked about her own weight loss and the merits of Weight Watchers’ “1-2-3 Success” weight loss plan. The plan revolves around points assigned by dieters to the foods they eat, not unlike the exchanges well-known to long-time Weight Watchers customers. Ferguson’s spots stressed that staying on a diet is “the hardest thing in the world.” Indeed, in a spot that began airing early in 2000, a character, shown in a tight close-up, says “start a diet, cheat, start a diet, cheat—that’s the story of my life.” Thus, Sarah empathizes with those of us who have been through the fad diet ringer, so to speak. She congratulates dieters for making it this far. But we do not have time, the ads seem to tell us, for the behavioral modification that typically accompanies dieting. The new program, she claims, helps dieters defeat the angst and frustration that inevitably come from typical diets. No more counting calories or monitoring fat—the program converts these elements to “one simple number.” Thus, weight loss is easy for the dieter to control.
Conclusions

The ideology at work in recent diet ads is clear: fad dieting is out. Dieting to maintain health is in. During the past decade, diet companies have gone to great lengths to revise the discourse about dieting by distancing themselves from the kinds of risky behaviors scrutinized by Congress in the late 1980s. Instead of encouraging individuals to lose a great deal of weight quickly, they now poke fun at themselves and the regimens they used to promote. What we have seen, then, in these ads is a recasting of an ideological state apparatus, as Althusser (1971) might argue. In a 1999 advertising campaign for Special K cereal, supermodel Cindy Crawford tells viewers that eating Special K “isn’t one of those fad diets, where your weight goes way up one day, and then drops down the next.” Kellogg’s, the company that makes Special K, received considerable publicity both for the Crawford campaign and for a 1998 campaign that revolves around men talking about their weight and appearance in self-deprecating terms, as women purportedly do. Characters ask “Do I look fat?” and reluctantly recognize that “I have my mother’s thighs; I have to accept that.”

Althusser (1971) would argue that diet product makers are taking our objection to fad diets and deploying it to sell us the same products—to recolonize us, as Grossberg (1991) would argue. To do this, diet companies have simply restructured the “codes of connotational significance” at work in their ads. They laud us for our skepticism and encourage us to follow it through as we are reinserted into the revised discourse. A 1997 television ad for the diet pill DexaTrim shows a young woman talking about how she needed to lose twelve pounds. She talked to her doctor about using diet pills—a reference to the controversial diet drug fen-phen—but said her doctor warned her that the pills “were for people who were seriously overweight, not for me.”

These ads now promote dieting as a lifestyle, rather than an ascetic interruption in our lives. Weight maintenance has become an ongoing part of everyday life, like brushing one’s teeth. As Cash and Henry (1995) explained, “normative discontent” with our bodies is now the rule, not the exception. Low-fat, low-calorie diets are promoted as satisfying and healthy. Recent ads for diet products support this notion. Instead of portraying dieting as something ascetic or out of the ordinary, these ads proceed from the assumption that dieting is ingrained in all of us, as a cultural code, and that we now view dieting as part of our ongoing effort to stay healthy, not as an extraordinary behavioral regimen. As Twitchell (1996) explained, these ads did not invent dieting; they simply articulate the need to engage in dieting and have redirected our attention from fads to health. We are encouraged to see dieting, in the guises offered by diet product makers, as a path to better health. We now understand that crash
diets are not effective and that most of us regain the weight we lose while on them, a fact not lost on diet product makers. With this in mind, they jumped happily aboard the good health bandwagon, couching their promises of weight loss in messages that promote health maintenance and a sense of peace. In the past, before and after shots and family-driven stories of dissatisfaction with weight and appearance drove product sales. Today, the new stylistic kids on the block are nutritional value, scientific validity, and the alleged health benefits (emotional and physical) of these products, deployed against a backdrop that emphasizes dieting as a lifestyle. Nestlé, maker of the Sweet Success diet drink, in 1996 repositioned the product as a nutritional supplement. Gone was the claim made in earlier television ads that weight loss could be achieved while the dieter was “indulging in luscious chocolate.” Ads from 1996 and 1997 revolved around a slow-motion shot of the nutritional information on the product’s label and of harried individuals in work and family situations who do not have the time to sit down for regular meals. In one ad, a busy executive on the phone frantically uses an umbrella to snare a can of Sweet Success that has rolled off of her desk. As she struggles, the commercial claims that the product “has all the protein of a chicken salad sandwich and all the calcium of a cup of yogurt.” Underscoring this claim is a low-angle shot of the can sitting on the woman’s desk, making it appear enormous—almost as if she were ready to worship the product. The commercial concludes with the woman, alone and disheveled, sitting on the floor behind her desk, finally enjoying the product, back in control of her life.

To be sure, diet companies have made this stylistic shift in the name of self-preservation. It is not clear, given the continued success of risky quick-fix diet aids, if the shift has stopped the decline in market share discussed earlier. Still, Ewen (1976) might argue that the more mainstream diet companies are once again trying to elevate their products “to the realm of a truth” (p. 69)—to reestablish the connection between consuming diet products and getting what we want out of life. The diet industry simply took another path to naturalizing the meanings contained in the messages (Fiske 1987, 14). But the effect, I argue, is the same: ads for these products may cause us to look for the solutions to our problems by purchasing a commodity. Where once our relationships took on the character, to borrow Lukacs’s words, of life in the midst of a fad diet, they have now begun to resemble our pursuit of thinness through purportedly healthy means. The ads promise that we now have control over dieting—it no longer controls us. This amounts to the kind of “phantom objectivity” (quoted in Ewen 1976, 70) posited by Lukacs that on the surface seems rational but that covers up “the fundamental relations of the world” (p. 76). The frenetic pace of life and its impact on health, not strained family relationships or low self-esteem, is at the heart of the ads analyzed here. These ads promise a measure of control in an otherwise crazy existence, a craziness that is itself thor-
oughly contrived. They have created the illusion that we have all banded together to defeat fad dieting. They nurtured our skepticism and then forged a new truth based on the idea that weight loss—gradual weight loss—was vital to maintaining one’s health. Along the way, they have once and for all established dieting as a lifestyle. No longer do diet products promise simple boosts to self-esteem; through consumption of this commodity, we can take a step closer to realizing our true potential—but only a step, since this kind of fulfillment could only take place by continuing to consume these products. This is not true change—it is a “spectacle of change” (Ewen 1976, 87); diet companies have simply co-opted and mobilized our distrust of fad diets to sustain market share. In short, we have been congratulated for being able to spot fraudulent fad diets and then told to get back in there and keep dieting—this time to be healthy, not thin.

References


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Matthew A. Killmeier

Voices between the Tracks: Disk Jockeys, Radio, and Popular Music, 1955-60

While much historiography on U.S. radio and popular music of the postwar period portrays disk jockeys as having a large degree of freedom, this article challenges this rendition and argues that their autonomy was constrained by a number of institutional and industry pressures. Based on discourses in industry and lay publications, the author argues that disk jockeys were pressured by recording industry largess and station management, which constrained their autonomy and public representations and contradicted the democratic ideology articulated by the U.S. broadcasting industry. Rather than neutral arbiters of public tastes, disk jockeys were complicit in a concerted effort to endow undifferentiated commodities with symbolic capital.

It’s safer than stealing, more legal than gambling, easier than loafing, and it beats working.

—Ira Cook, disk jockey at KMPC Los Angeles, reflecting on his profession (“Songs of Sixpence” 1957, 104)

With the advent of television in the United States in the late 1940s, radio, the dominant mass medium, began to undergo significant changes. One key element in the array of changes was disk jockeys (DJs), workers who have been, for the most part, passed over by media historians. Although numerous biographies, autobiographies, and surveys of popular music focus on DJs, the profession has not been critically evaluated (Barlow 1999; Chapple and Garofolo 1977; Douglas 1999; Eberly 1982; Fong-Torres 1998; Garay 1992; Harper 1989; Keith 2000; Montgomery 1986; Passman 1971; Sklar 1984; Slate and Cook 1963; Smith 1989; Williams 1998). To correct this shortcoming is the general aim of this article.

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To more fully understand 1950s radio, and much of U.S. popular culture, the role of DJs in the changes taking place in the radio and music industries needs to be engaged in a sustained manner. This article is concerned with the roles and practices of DJs vis-à-vis the popular music taste publics they helped to engender and the radio and recording industries they worked for, either directly or indirectly, during the period of 1955-60. The central aim of this article is to clarify the various roles and practices of DJs through engaging primary discourses and secondary sources. Specifically, the article seeks to interpret the work of DJs within the processes of the production and consumption of popular music during the 1950s. The article will also analyze the roles played by DJs in the intertwined processes of their encoding and decoding of cultural goods. It will be particularly concerned with examining the contributions to the practices of production, circulation, and distribution/consumption. In addition, it will engage how the work of DJs contributed to creating and sustaining symbolic capital in these cultural goods. Situated between the radio and recording industries and the public of radio listeners, DJs exerted a large degree of influence on the content of radio, sales of records, and 1950s popular culture.

Unlike their bourgeois peers in the realm of high art (such as critics and impresarios), scholars of popular culture, who tend to focus on producers and consumers, have relatively overlooked DJs. In broad strokes, the general thrust of recent scholarship on media and culture can be situated within two general approaches. The first approach—critical and/or Marxist approach—focuses on the problem of the determination of media practice and the ideological function of media. The second approach—cultural, audience, or reception studies—generally focuses on the consumption of media texts by audiences, and, in contrast to the former approach, oftentimes renders audiences as actively struggling over the meanings of media content and resisting preferred or ideological interpretations (Sholle 1991, 81). By limiting their focus to these particular elements of popular culture, they neglect the critical role played by intermediary impresarios such as DJs. This is an oversight the article aims to investigate. Consumers, like their peers in the art market, are part of taste publics in which mediated popular cultural forms become the vessels of meaningful interactions despite, or alongside, their status as commodities.

In one respect, DJs were important impresarios of popular music, serving as critics, unprofessional pollsters of popular tastes, and cultural ambassadors between artists and listeners. They were also crucial components of the increasingly intertwined 1950s radio and recording industries and helped to promote and propagate sundry products, which they oftentimes disliked and even reviled.
Theory, Sources, and Methodological Approach

The work of Stuart Hall (1990) is especially pertinent in understanding the processes of cultural production and consumption in this context. Hall develops in his essay “Encoding, Decoding” a theoretical model of the processes of cultural production, or encoding, and those of cultural consumption, or decoding. This model encapsulates the central problematic of cultural studies—on one hand the centralized production of cultural commodities and on the other the use and consumption of such commodities in meaningful social interaction. Hall argued that particular moments in these interlinked processes are part of a larger structure. He posited that we should think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments—production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction. This would be to think of the process as a “complex structure in dominance,” sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence. (Hall 1990, 91)

Hall’s (1990) work allows for the analysis of particular processes, which retain their distinct character yet are situated within a larger structural process where they constitute unique modalities. The typology of the practices of production, circulation, and distribution/consumption provide for an informed analysis of the key processes DJs participated in. While Hall’s work is insightful and nuanced, his emphasis on macro levels of analysis and structure does not capture, in the detail desired, the processes of meaning making. To bolster this weakness in Hall’s work, the insights of Paul Hirsch (1991) are relevant.

Like Hall, Hirsch (1991) examined cultural production and consumption, albeit from the perspective of institutional sociology, but focuses on the roles played by individual gatekeepers rather than on overarching structures. Hirsch examines how producers and consumers mutually influence one another in an ongoing process that produces cultural goods. Hirsch’s (1991) work draws attention to the importance of “surrogate consumers,” such as DJs, in brokering cultural goods produced by cultural industries to various consumers (p. 321). These surrogate consumers are key to the success of cultural goods, Hirsch argued, in industries where the products are “marginally differentiated,” such as radio and popular music (p. 324). Although strongly downplaying the role of consumers in the selection and valorization of cultural goods, Hirsch’s work suggests the importance of surrogate consumers in the creation of what Pierre Bordieu (1993) calls symbolic capital among lower-
middle-class and working-class audiences. DJs in the 1950s, as surrogate consumers, played a role in the valorization of cultural goods, helping to invest them with a degree of symbolic capital they otherwise lacked as undifferentiated products.

Bordieu’s (1993) work on cultural production and consumption is enlightening in this respect. Bordieu emphasized the process through which objects and commodities become invested with what he calls symbolic capital, which he described as the social and cultural values attached to cultural goods that invest them with cachet and meaning and provide ideological cover, thereby downplaying, if not obfuscating, their status as commodities (p. 75). While not eschewing the insights of Marxian cultural theory, Bordieu offered a nuanced theoretical rendering of cultural production and consumption that more fully captured the complex processes whereby objects and commodities become meaningful social objects and the role class plays in these processes. Although his essay is focused on particular components of bourgeois high culture—the art and book publishing fields—it offers pertinent insights for the analysis of popular culture as well.

With regard to this work, Bordieu’s (1993) insights point toward the value of an examination of the ways DJs worked to invest popular music with symbolic capital, although the structures of the radio and popular music industries and the class of the participants differ. However, despite the differences, Bordieu’s work is critical to understanding popular culture, and his theory can be adapted to work on popular culture. Having summarized the theoretical framework, we will now turn briefly to a discussion of the methodical approaches employed.

This is a cultural historical article largely based upon primary discourses regarding DJs. There are two main categories of discourse. The first are drawn from The Billboard, an industry newspaper chosen because it is aimed at radio and recording industry insiders that features weekly charts used by DJs, and regularly contains columns and news items aimed specifically at DJs. These discourses are focused toward audiences steeped in the machinations of the radio and recording industries. The second category is discourses drawn from publications aimed at general audiences, whose awareness of DJs and the industries they serve is limited. To offer a meaningful interpretation of these two categories of discourse, the article will draw on pertinent secondary sources for contextual information and employ a heuristic framework predicated on two theoretical concepts.

The heuristic framework makes use of the theoretical concepts of interpellation and representation. Interpellation is a key concept in an important essay by Althusser (1970). In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser argued that ideology circulates, in part, through interpellation, which hails individuals as subjects. Interpellation is the process through which discourse
speaks to, and individuals recognize themselves as, subjects. Following Thompson (1990), ideology is used in this context, and throughout the article, as meaning in the service of power. Interpellation suggests how individuals were hailed as specific subjects, disk jockeys, within the nexus of practices constituting radio during this period. In particular, interpellation is useful in analyzing the insider discourses found in *The Billboard*, as they are written for an audience of subjects.

The second theoretical concept drawn upon is that of representation, specifically as it has been used in the work of Hall (1997). Hall (1997) argued “representation connects meaning and language to culture” (p. 15). Thus, the theory of representation integrates, and provides a typology of, the ways meaning is constructed, circulated, and interpreted within a cultural context and complements the theory of interpellation. The theory of representation is particularly suited to analyzing and understanding the discourses circulated to a general public regarding DJs, as it prefigures an examination of language, meaning, and culture, thus providing for considerations of socioeconomic and cultural factors that underlie, or bear upon, discourses. With these theoretical and methodological frameworks in mind, we will now turn to a brief overview of the remainder of the article.

The bulk of this article is divided into three distinct but interlocking parts. The first part, the structure of 1950s radio, is a historical overview of pertinent elements of the political-economic structure of the radio and recording industries of this period. It provides crucial information for understanding the contours of the dynamic changes in radio during this time. The second part, democratic ideology, is an analysis drawn from primary discourses that probes the ways in which public proclamations of DJs and radio and recording industry operatives reinforced, and provided justification for, the structure of the industry and prevailing practices. The third part, DJ autonomy, is an examination and analysis of primary source discourses, and secondary source insights, aimed at evaluating DJs’ practices and roles in light of their everyday work.

**Structure of 1950s Radio**

Radio and broadcasting in America changed drastically after World War II in ways that created a space for DJs as impresarios situated between the circulation and distribution/consumption of popular music. One key factor was the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) held broadcast licenses until after the war, when the number of stations increased dramatically. In 1940, there were approximately 800 AM stations. Following World War II, the number of stations grew to 950 in 1945 and by 1949 totaled 2,100. By 1956, there were approximately 3,000 AM stations.
Another structural change was the decline of the networks and the rise of television. The three major networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS, began to focus on the new medium of television and their interest in radio declined precipitously. While in 1947 more than 97 percent of radio stations were network affiliates, by 1955 the number was 30 percent (Ennis 1992).

These new, independent stations, licensed at lower power than many of the existing, dominant stations, were also encouraged to program recorded music. Thus, the content of radio during the 1950s shifted from the more linear forms of the so-called golden age toward an emphasis on disjunctive content in the form of recorded popular music. Linear is defined as programming that had distinct quasi-autonomous demarcations, established narrative flows and was structured so listeners would generally have to take in an entire program to understand and enjoy it, and was developed within lengthy temporal segments (fifteen, thirty, or sixty minutes). In contrast, programming is disjunctive in the sense that temporal segmentation (i.e., the four-minute pop song) and narrative are structured for listeners frequently entering and exiting the aural soundscape. Of course, music has always been a staple of U.S. radio broadcasting since the 1920s, but its increase as a percentage of content in the 1950s represented a departure from the soap operas, comedy shows, children’s serials, and variety shows that were a prominent feature of network radio from the late 1920s until the early 1950s. Indeed, by the mid-1950s, it was the majority of programming. For example, 60 percent of the average station’s programming hours were composed of record shows in 1954 (Eberly 1982, 174).

An important departure in the increase of music as broadcast content in the 1950s was that this music was recorded. In terms of the political economy of the industry, recorded music was, in many cases, the only feasible choice for smaller stations with limited resources and no network connections—a practice encouraged by major labels that provided gratis disks to important stations and DJs and offered inexpensive record subscription services. Furthermore, regulatory decisions affected the use of recorded music as broadcast content. Earlier actions by the Department of Commerce institutionalized a bias toward live music on radio and against recorded or so-called canned music “by relegating stations transmitting recordings to less desirable frequencies” (Smulyan 1994, 95). Baughman (1992) also noted federal regulations required broadcast licensees to distinguish transcriptions (recorded disks) from live musical performances (p. 67). However, such restrictions began to wane with the increase in the number of stations during the 1940s and 1950s. As the high-powered, clear channel licenses had long been distributed, postwar licensees were often lower power and were allowed to program phonograph records (Ennis 1992, 136). Radio in the 1950s thus became more competitive...
and more local in orientation. Stations no longer enjoyed the monopolistic status they once had.

Broadcasting to a mass audience fell out of favor in the 1950s. That programming should appeal to the greatest number, established radio industry practice since the late 1920s, was gradually abandoned in favor of what in the 1950s became known as modern radio, or segmentation of audiences, and is now called narrowcasting. This programming model recognized that rather than a mass audience, there were many different audiences. The differences recognized were not only those of taste or preference but also the different places and circumstances that framed listening practices (Douglas 1999, 225).

Narrowcasting arose in part due to the increasingly competitive environment of 1950s radio. Segments of the listening population formerly ignored, such as African Americans and youth, became desirable audiences to seek out. The dynamics of these structural changes affected the established political economy of radio practices. While advertiser-supported radio production remained the norm in the 1950s, the sources of revenues and their relationship to programming changed. With the decline in network programming, national advertising revenues attached to these programs decreased. Network programming, Hilmes (1997) noted, was produced under the auspices of advertising agencies for sponsors. In essence, the sponsors were the producers of programming, and radio networks and their affiliated stations served as carriers. In place of network-carried programming with attached sponsorship, 1950s radio produced its own programming—mostly in the form of recorded music—and sold “spots” to local and national advertisers (Midgley 1948, 274).

Spot and local revenues increased throughout the 1950s. “Between 1946 and 1958 advertising on radio by local businesses quadrupled” (Douglas 1999, 225). Changes in advertising revenue were accompanied by changes in programming content. Recorded music emerged as the dominant form of content during this period in part because it was inexpensive and readily available. Radio stations had to sell themselves to local advertisers and listeners.

The radio station as programmed product necessitated constant publicity on the part of the station. The contours of the political economy of 1950s radio pushed stations to concentrate on creating and maintaining a unique identity. Structural changes in 1950s radio “made the radio audience more than ever a station audience” (Lawton 1961, 43). While 1950s radio was more competitive and local in orientation, it was still a profitable industry, albeit in altered configurations.

Along with changes in broadcasting, structural changes in the music industry contributed to the use of recorded music as programming content. World War II affected the structure of the recording industry. Limited consumer dollars and rationing of key materials affected the production and sales of the
recording industry during World War II. Records were in limited supply during the war, as a key component of manufacturing, shellac, was rationed. Following the war and the lifting of the recording ban, recording resumed with verve, but the industry was changing. Small independent labels that emphasized African American and hillbilly music emerged throughout the United States. This period also saw the introduction of two new record formats. In June 1948, Columbia (owned by CBS) introduced the vinyl, twelve-inch, 33 1/3–rpm micro-groove, long-playing (LP) record. Six months later, RCA-Victor’s vinyl, seven-inch, 45-rpm record debuted (Ennis 1992, 133). The structural landscape of the 1950s recording industry was dramatically different than the pre-war period, with a greater number of labels—an increasing number of which were independents—and new record formats. These changes affected cultural aspects of 1950s recorded music and radio.

One important shift in popular music in the 1950s was the recognition and targeting of youth by the recording industry. The emergent category of the American teenager was recognized as a distinct social, cultural, and economic entity (Marchand 1982). While the musical preferences of adults and youth were ostensibly similar prior to the 1950s, during the 1950s the recording and the radio industries—which were becoming more closely intertwined—treated them as distinct.

The youth market was a boom for the record industry. “By the late 1950s teenagers were buying more records than adults . . . record sales nearly tripled in five years, from $213 million in 1954 to $613 million by 1959” (Douglas 1999, 227). General economic prosperity and a concomitant focus on teenage consumption shifted the attention of the broadcasting and music industries to the tastes and increasing disposable income of youth. While teens represented one of the new audiences that 1950s radio was concerned with, music content alone was not sufficient to reach these listeners—1950s radio was brokered by DJs.

In summation, the plethora of changes in the political-economic structure of the radio and recording industry created a space for DJs. Specifically, the increased number of stations, with the majority of independents without network affiliation, cultivated an aggregate demand for a greater number of radio workers including DJs. The nonlinear content of 1950s radio in the form of recorded music also required the presence of surrogate consumers or impresarios—in this case DJs—who could provide narrative continuity and individual human presence. Furthermore, the shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting and the concomitant shift from national advertising to local required that 1950s stations appeal to increasingly individualized demographic segments of the audience via the establishment of a unique station identity—a process spearheaded by DJs. Finally, the increasingly competitive environment of 1950s radio required stations to function as a programmed
product that consistently publicized itself as a unique outlet, which was a task DJs were uniquely positioned to perform.

Democratic Ideology

DJ’s in the 1950s enacted a democratic ideology upon which their profession rested. This was drawn from the long-standing commercial broadcasters’ mantra, which can be summarized as “We give the public what it wants.” This ideology nicely distilled the vague FCC requirement that stations operate in the “public interest” and was a euphemistic conflation of democracy with the capitalist marketplace. Adorno (1990) argued,

The promoters of commercialized entertainment exonerate themselves by referring to the fact that they are giving the masses what they want. This is an ideology appropriate to commercial purposes: the less the mass discriminates, the greater the possibility of selling cultural commodities indiscriminately. (P.310)

Although DJs played a central role in promoting the products of the recording industry, crucial to their credibility and ostensibly their stations’ FCC licenses was the perception they were responding to public demand, not creating or unduly influencing it. A critic of the time noted that the DJ desires only to please the public, and so serve his sponsor—and thus himself—by “playing the music the public wants.” So he avidly watches the trade’s weekly sales surveys and spins the records that sell—a statistical approach to culture. (Bernard 1957, 80)

Although instances that clearly refuted it were circulated in insider and public discourses, DJs were careful to maintain this democratic ideology. It served to insulate them from negative public backlash by meshing with an ethos cultivated and sustained by commercial popular culture. Whether DJs actually believed this ideology is disputable and irrelevant, as it functioned as a rhetorical keystone of the profession.

The insider and public discourses exhibited one of three interrelated but distinct themes that elaborated on the democratic ideology or demonstrated its enactment: the use of polls and/or surveys, the use of the charts, and the necessity of DJs’ being in touch with public taste.

A common way DJs exhibited their democratic ideology was by querying listeners via polls and/or surveys, so as to ascertain what type of listening fare the public wanted. More often than not, the targeted publics of the DJs’ polls and surveys were teenagers. For example, Jack Chenoweth, a DJ at WCUE Akron,
makes the rounds of all Akron area high schools in the station’s Newsmobile. He interviews youngsters at each school and polls their favorite records, with engineers piping in the platters from the station. The show is tagged “Teen-age Tastes in Music” and Chenoweth estimates it has upped his teenage listenership [sic] nearly 200 per cent.5

Chenoweth enacted and reinforced the democratic ideology by going directly to his audience. That this technique was represented as wildly successful in expanding his audience suggests it was good for business too. Reported in insider discourses, such practices hailed readers as part of an industry where fulfilling the cultural wants of listeners made everyone a winner. Feedback via mail or other indirect means was also an effective method of polling and/or surveying listeners. During a 1955 aircheck on WINS New York, Alan Freed breathlessly summarized his show to the listener as

the top 25 rock and roll hits of the week. And you made it all possible with your record purchases all over the rock and roll kingdom, and with your cards, letters and telegrams to tell us what ya’ like.6

Incorporating the democratic ideology into the everyday programming discourses was a common practice that effectively conveyed it to the public. Other DJs not only polled teen audience members but also featured them on their programs, so listeners could actually hear the democratic ideology enacted. For example, a DJ at WHEC in Rochester featured a panel of youths on his show.

Teenagers are enlisted as programming geniuses at WHEC, Rochester, NY, according to jockey Ferland. Every Saturday on his show, “Spins ‘n’ Needles,” Ferland interviews a panel of five youngsters, and asks them to vote for the record they think “most likely to succeed.” The winning disk is then spun at least once a day for the next week by every jockey on the station.7

The polling of listeners provided an important reinforcement of the democratic ideology. Gary Aldridge, a DJ at KMCM in McMinnville, Oregon, featured panel discussions by high school students on his record show.8 Similarly, “Okey Dokie, WBOK, New Orleans, tests his records on a group that visits the studio every day to determine which records should be played most on the air.”9 DJs who did not directly poll or survey their listeners could nonetheless gauge public taste, and bolster their democratic ideology, by relying on the charts.

Charts purporting to summarize the popularity of songs were put together by DJs, industry insiders, record distributors, jukebox operators, and trade papers. The latter were considered the most credible, and The Billboard was the standard used by many DJs and programming directors to ostensibly assess public taste. The charts were recognized as a successful tool for programming
but were also used to exemplify DJs’ commitment to the democratic ideology. By using the charts to guide programming, DJs maintained the democratic ideology with concrete guides represented as quasi scientific and accurate. Implementing the charts implicitly implied to the public that DJs not only maintained and ritualistically performed the democratic ideology but objective instruments that measured public taste legitimately undergirded it. As these charts were represented to be partially composed of DJs’ input, it gave them an added index of credibility among insiders and added to their popularity. One trade paper reported “record promotion men note that the indies [sic] are ‘list-happy’ these days, with either jockeys or their stations mailing out local ‘Hits of the Week’ lists compiled from listener requests to local dealers and record labels.”10 In addition to polls and/or surveys and the charts, DJs were interpellated by industry discourses to be in touch with public tastes.

During 1954 and 1955, several popular artists had hits that defied the established boundaries of the charts, which served as an opportunity to reiterate the democratic ideology. For example, Elvis Presley, initially considered to be a country artist by the recording and radio industries, had hit songs listed on the R & B, pop, and country charts in The Billboard. This occasioned the publication to admonish its audience to keep up with public tastes.

There’s little doubt in the trade that the jockeys who have made it big in recent years have been those who . . . have been able to keep up to the minute with, and even to anticipate, the new trends, even when they seemingly blossom out in all directions.11

Insider discourses interpellated the successful DJs as those in tune with the public, who provided it with what it desired. The music-radio editor of The Billboard sounded a cautionary note, reinforcing the importance of the democratic ideology: “The deejay who lets his interest lapse is in danger of having the field pass him by. He will be outpaced by more alert deejays who are quicker to sense the public’s music taste and who are hip to the developing and overlapping musical patterns.”12 Despite such proclamations of the democratic ideology, some discourses revealed the relations of power usually masked by it.

Although the democratic ideology was a commonly proclaimed mantra in insider discourses, occasionally contradictions emerged. For example, The Billboard reported on how DJs’ practices allowed the recording industry to rank-order singles, a practice that openly revealed how the democratic ideology served to obfuscate the incestual promotional efforts of the radio and recording industry.

The big swing toward the programming of LP material by deejays this year has developed a prime source for the selection of “sleeper” sides to be issued as
singles, according to Mercury veepee [sic] Art Talmadge. By way of systematizing this “self-selective” method of picking “pre-tested” singles, Talmadge has ordered all field men to report immediately any apparent deejay devotion to one strip in the album.13

It was no secret in insider publications such as *The Billboard* that many records were undifferentiated commodities to be pushed on an oftentimes recalcitrant public. An item about a promotional campaign waged by this publication suggests the industry was not only giving the public what it wanted but actively and concertedly stimulating those wants. “*The Billboard* will launch its Operation Pushpop, 1955 version. The project is designed to help keep business ‘jumping,’ to counter public indifference to music and records during the summer months.”14

Following the payola scandal, which revealed the disingenuous claims of the democratic ideology in a sustained, dramatic public ordeal, insiders did not abandon the democratic ideology. Rather, some sought to reassert it, while acknowledging that a few practitioners could abuse their roles as surrogate consumers. Paul Ackerman, music-radio editor of *The Billboard*, offered this assessment to readers of *The Nation*:

> It is axiomatic in the music business that a “bad” song or record—by which is meant a song lacking in commercial appeal—can never prove a hit no matter how much plugging it gets, legitimately or illegitimately. . . . But it is also axiomatic that a “good” song—i.e., a song with commercial appeal—must receive adequate plugging if it is to achieve its hit potential.15

Although the democratic ideology suffered damage because of the payola scandal, it continued to be a key component of DJs’ public personas and the industries he or she served. That it is still in wide circulation in the United States, albeit in historically modified form, attests to its strength.

**DJ Autonomy**

A central concern of DJs during this period, one shared with many other workers, was autonomy. *Autonomy* is defined as the extent to which DJs could exercise, as employees, control over their work, without extraneous influences beyond those they faced as radio workers. Autonomy conveyed DJs’ statuses were not corrupted by disreputable practices, and they remained honest to their vocation. Situated as visible, important individuals within the process of encoding and decoding, DJs played many different roles. They were employees subject to the constraints of station management; surrogate consumers influenced by artists, record labels, and distributors; representatives of advertisers whose products they promoted for sustaining revenues; impresarios who
oftentimes received direct feedback from listeners; and federally licensed workers whose livelihood was bounded by distinct parameters. In these sundry roles, DJs often exercised only moderate autonomy, yet their identities and public personas depended on successfully projecting themselves as autonomous.

In relative terms, however, DJs of this period did have a greater degree of autonomy than in earlier and later periods. Although DJs existed as early as the 1930s, the DJs of the 1950s were unique. Unlike most of their predecessors, 1950s DJs had a large degree of programming freedom and were themselves performers, not just announcers. As intimate mediators between the recorded music they played and the audience they cultivated, DJs also hawked sponsors’ products and services, communicated the news, and advertised themselves and their stations. Stations in the 1950s had to create a distinct identity that would distinguish them from their rivals. “The disc jockey was a local creature,” a crucial, human aspect of a station’s unique status (Eberly 1982, 279). This was achieved through repetitive slogans, publicity stunts, and, most important, radio personalities.

DJs, as long as they produced high ratings, in many cases were given great latitude in programming, which was intimately tied to the persona they projected to the audience. For example, DJ Alan Freed who rose to fame at WJM, Cleveland, and later WINS, New York, “picked the music for every show. Freed had four hours to fill with music, and he put the show together according to his personal likes and dislikes” (Sklar 1984, 19). The creative control DJs had was linked to their new status as relatively autonomous individuals in radio.

Prior to the 1950s, DJs and radio announcers “spoke in the past tense and usually the third person” (Douglas 1999, 230). In contrast, the DJs of the 1950s came across as unique individuals through their programming and the interpersonal style of their address. Douglas (1999) noted that

DJs usually made a point of emphasizing the closeness and familiarity between them and the audience by acknowledging that “I” the DJ try to deliver what “you” the audience like or request, and implying “I” the DJ know and care a lot about “you.” (P. 230)

Questions seemingly directed to individual listeners further conveyed connections previously absent in radio. DJs “dedicated” songs to listeners, conveying a sense of interaction between DJ, listeners, and recording artists. This type of address conveyed a sense of intimacy between DJs and their audiences. The sense of familiarity was extended to promotional announcements DJs conveyed. This style of talk “represented a conscious turning away from official ‘announcer speak’” (Douglas 1999, 236).
Furthermore, successful DJs of this period took on personas and nicknames, such as “Mad Daddy” and “the Big Bad Bird,” which made them memorable and distinguished and conveyed their unique identity to listeners. However, as employees of radio stations, DJs oftentimes did not retain creative control over their personas. For example, *The Billboard* reported,

Rock and roll jockey Clarence Haymann Jr., formerly known as Popper Stopper at WMJR, New Orleans, has resigned that post to join WBOK, same city. He’ll work under his own name at WBOK, since the “Popper Stopper” tag belongs to WMJR.16

Indeed, despite the representation of uniqueness DJs’ personas conveyed, they oftentimes had no input in selection of on-air names.17 Thus, while DJs commanded a relative degree of autonomy, it was constrained by their status as workers, whose economic role was to produce and sustain audiences for advertisers.

These and other tensions are further explored below, particularly as manifested in discourses regarding hit making, personal versus public taste, and salaries and outside interests.

An important role the successful DJ played was hit maker, whereby he or she claimed to have the ability to predict and/or make a recording a hit. The skill of hit making was linked to notions of autonomy. The machinations of the process differed—some purported to have an innate sense, others scientifically based insights—but they never claimed to impose an unwanted or unworthy record on a gullible public, which would violate the democratic ideology of the industry. Rather, like the art dealers Bordieu (1993) describes, DJs “consecrated” artists and their works, investing them with symbolic capital.

For example, Bill Randle of WERE, Cleveland, one of the most successful DJs during this period, was a self-proclaimed hit maker who relied on his insights and statistical indices to predict hits. A profile in *Time* summarized Randle’s success by noting that he “predicted every tune but one that appeared among the first five bestsellers in 1954.”18 Randle offered the following explanation of his predictive powers:

I weed out those [records] that are obviously bad and play the rest on my program to get listener reaction. Then I feed the results into a machine. I’m the machine. I’m a Univac. It’s so accurate that I can tell my listeners “This tune will be No. 1 in four weeks.”19

Randle, like many DJs, conveyed his unique but seemingly objective capabilities, reinforcing his capacity to consecrate popular music, but, importantly, with knowledge gleaned from public tastes. In addition, these passages show how representations of DJs tapped into powerful cultural currents, such as the
faith in science and technology, for metaphors to convey their talent. In addition to having predictive powers, Randle is also represented as intervening into, but not controlling, the production and circulation of popular artists. In 1953, he heard a struggling male quartet called the Canadaires. He clipped their manes and changed their names to the Crew-Cuts, fixed them up with a tune (Crazy 'Bout You Baby) and sweet-talked Mercury into releasing it. It smashed, so did their Sh-Boom; this week another Crew-Cuts tune that Randle heard on an obscure label, a noisy item called Ko Ko Mo, is rifling its way up the bestselling ladder.30

Significantly, Randle is represented as recognizing and facilitating talent and exercising individual autonomy rather than creating a calculated commodity at the behest of the cultural industries. This discourse connects with long-popular stories circulated about artists in general, and creative people in particular, whereby the artist is oblivious of, or unaware of, the public and the market for cultural goods and is helped along by an impresario. Indeed, as Bordieu (1993) argued, such “disavowal” of economic interest on the part of the artist, and his or her impresario, is a critical component of the economic and symbolic capital of the bourgeois art world. Although represented as hit makers and predictors, an individual DJ’s tastes were oftentimes presented as at odds with the public’s tastes.

Many popular DJs were not fond of the musical fare they played, which raises questions about the degree of autonomy they exercised. For example, Alan Freed, a DJ in Cleveland and later New York credited with popularizing R & B and rock and roll (he claimed to have coined the term), is reputed to have preferred classical music. Bill Randle, who played popular musical fare, was supposed to like jazz. Furthermore, annual polls conducted by The Billboard suggested divergence among the artists and songs most played by DJs and those they liked.31 This was conveyed both in discourses aimed at insiders and those aimed at a general audience.

That DJs’ tastes often differed from the material they played was not a secret in popular representations. Indeed, in the Time profile of Bill Randle, he clearly indicates he does not care for the music he plays.

Does he like the things he plays? Not at all. “I’m a complete schizophrenic about this,” he says cheerfully. “I’m in the business of giving the public what it wants. This stuff is simply merchandise and I understand it.”32

Similarly, a profile of successful DJ Howard Miller of independent Chicago station WIND, is forthright about his disdain for the disks he spins. “Nine out of ten records I play, I don’t think are good records.”33 In addition to diverging
tastes, the salaries of DJs and the outside activities they were involved in challenged their autonomy on numerous levels.

Although definitive aggregate information on the compensation DJs received is not available, primary sources indicate great latitude between DJs in minor markets that lacked substantial advertising revenues and those at successful stations in major markets. DJs in these latter markets could command enormous salaries. For example, Howard Miller, a DJ at Chicago’s WIND, received $350,000 annually from the station in 1957. Cleveland DJ Bill Randle made $100,000 from station WERE, in which he also owned stock, and received an undisclosed salary from WCBS, New York, where he did a weekly record show. His actual compensation was probably much greater, as he was reported to pay out $30,000 in 1954 in expenses for personal appearances and to employ twenty college students “who work out the statistical techniques he uses to chart the hit potential of records.”

Even DJs in smaller markets in the Midwest could command relatively high salaries, although they paled in comparison to their major market peers. Bob “Coffeehead” Larson, a DJ at WEMP in Milwaukee, a small, independent, 5,000-watt, twenty-four–hour station, made $25,000 or more annually in 1956 “from his radio work and from what he calls ‘extra-curricular’ activities such as free lance commercials and personal appearances.” However, for the majority of the DJs, the compensation was much lower. For example, Joe Smith, a DJ implicated in the 1959 payola scandal, made a $6,000 annual salary during the late 1950s (Fong-Torres 1998, 101). Despite union representation, DJs did not bring home impressive salaries. Scale wages for DJs and news staff at KFWB in Los Angeles were $155 per week in 1961 when workers went out on strike (Fong-Torres 1998, 123). In a magazine article from 1957, the author noted the average DJ salary “in a small to middle-sized city is sixty to ninety dollars a week. At stations of greater wattage in cities of metropolitan rank, the going rate is a hundred to a hundred and fifty.” Divergent salary levels affected DJs’ autonomy, as the lesser-paid DJs were more susceptible to influence from the recording industry, artists, and record distributors. However, their better compensated peers were by no means insulated from such influence. All DJs, as they were the important fulcrum points between the record industry and the consumer, were targets of interests that challenged their autonomy.

As the recognized key players in the dissemination of popular recordings, the autonomy of DJs as independent surrogate consumers was precarious. In many instances, their salaries were low enough to make them vulnerable to the economic and psychological largess offered by record distributors and labels. Public discourses often represented the DJ as insecure, corruptible, and weak. Such rendering tapped into concerns about moral, psychological, and mental
health in the United States and served as exemplars for anticommunist and nationalist critics who claimed “Americans were getting soft.”

Insider discourses also interpellated DJs as part of the intertwined radio and recording industry and actively advocated reciprocal business success. In an editorial, *The Billboard* sought to quell the rumbles of some discontented DJs who said they were overlooked for gratis disks and general recording industry attention.

Radio broadcasts 300,000 recorded sides a day. Radio dips into records for its vast programming needs. The recording industry, on the other hand, has in radio its greatest exploitation medium. Thru [sic] the facilities of the station and the programming capacity of the disk jockey, expensively produced merchandise can be moved profitably. . . . This duality of interest, this interdependence, benefits the radio listener and the record buyer. . . . It helps set the pattern of the cultural fabric of the national. . . . It is incumbent every jockey, station manager and record label to take a sensible view of the matter and set aside petty irritations in the interest of the common good. . . . The record manufacturer. . . . must realize stations and jockeys are his chief means of promotion. And both parties must bear in mind that one is of vital necessity to the other. Either is the lock, and the other the key.

The cozy relationship between DJs and the recording industry was frequently detailed in insider discourses in *The Billboard*. Such examples interpellated the DJs as a necessary part in the structure of the recording industry and suggested such activities were acceptable—even normal—for DJs. Common insider discourses included tales of how DJs helped retailers move records. Hailed as an invaluable asset to the recording industry, such repeated insider discourses suggested DJs could cash in on their influence and begged the question, “If I’m so important, shouldn’t I be compensated?” In addition to helping to buoy record retailers and the recording industry, DJs were able to raise their economic stature.

DJs were able to use their public notoriety to develop outside income from various sources. Big influential DJs, such as Alan Freed and Dick Clark, were able to secure outright publishing credits on recorded songs or be credited as coauthor, thus gaining access to lucrative royalties from hit recordings. Clark was also part owner of a record label, an interest he had to divest himself of following the 1959 payola scandal. Freed brokered concerts in New York, using his power as an important hit maker to book big name artists for lower fees than they could command in other venues. Freed and other influential DJs, such as Bill Randle, also appeared in Hollywood films, as did their lesser-known peers Ed Bonner, Buddy Deane, Ed McKenzie, and Bob Clayton.

Lesser-known DJs were able to parlay their influence into lucrative outside endeavors as well. Many DJs received gratis or discounted disks from labels
that they could sell to used-record dealers. More enterprising DJs and radio stations were directly involved in the sale of records during this period. In addition to surreptitious business arrangements and what one Billboard reporter described as “hush-hush management contracts” with recording artists, many DJs engaged in public business activities. Indeed, insider discourses detailed the breadth of activities DJs were engaged in.

Among the diverse activities embraced by jockeys today are song publishing and writing, motion picture and TV acting, talent management, recording (both as an artist and manufacturer), book authorship, movie production, retail record distribution, concert presentations, newspaper writing, travel tours and the staging of record hops.

What is striking about these insider discourses is the general acceptance of the DJs’ outside activities and interests, which would figure centrally in the payola scandal.

The discourses throughout this period routinely detail various outside activities DJs supplemented their income with. What would later be held up in public discourses as representations of the egregious excesses of the industry are reported in The Billboard as everyday practices. Rather than negatively commenting on these practices, the discourses interpellate the DJs as part of a profession in which the intertwining of the radio and recording industries is a positive and normal state of affairs, where making some “quiet” money on the side was a normal part of the process.

**Conclusion**

DJs in the 1950s played important roles in investing popular music with symbolic capital for radio listeners, but their freedom to practice this role was constrained by the political economic structure of the radio and recording industries. Their potential influence on the radio-listening and record-buying publics exposed them to a host of powerful industry operatives who exploited their inadequate compensation and vulnerable status. Although important impresarios and surrogate consumers, DJs were unable to exercise an adequate degree of autonomy in face of the increasingly intertwined radio and recording industries, which exerted an inordinate amount of power and were ultimately a complex structure in dominance in U.S. popular music.

The findings of this article challenge the professed democratic ethos of the U.S. culture industry to be a hollow ideology that served to obfuscate concerted industry attempts to regulate and control the encoding and decoding of popular music and suggest historiographical renderings of DJ autonomy need to be moderated to reflect the constraints these workers faced in practice. The
findings also indicate the importance of identifying and assessing the role of cultural industry workers in the encoding and decoding of popular culture, particularly those who, like DJs, served as intermediaries between the culture industry and taste publics. The article exemplifies the value of exploring the “specific modality and conditions of existence” of circulation and distribution/consumption in analyzing how cultural commodities are consumed as meaningful, socially significant texts (Hall 1990, 91).

This article points toward an overlooked aspect of critical cultural and political economic approaches to media studies and popular culture and a fruitful area for convergence in cultural commodities and consumption (Lee 1993). Rather than situating media and the cultural industries as totalizing entities that impose undifferentiated commodities on naive audiences (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972) or simply suggesting audiences read and resist media texts, in effect evading or poaching upon preferred encoded meanings (de Certeau 1984), this article suggests the value of engaging the influence of uniquely situated critics, impresarios, and surrogate consumers. Like critical work on advertising (Jhally 1987), this article suggests the importance and value of engaging how media texts—shorn of their traces of social labor and emerging as relatively undifferentiated cultural commodities—are endowed with social meaning by intermediaries in the linked processes of circulation and distribution/consumption. In short, if critical cultural scholars are to adequately account for the impact of media texts on publics, it is incumbent that we weigh the sundry ways meaning is encoded and decoded and critically consider how all texts are situated in contexts, and informed analysis and interpretation must weigh the impact of context and intermediaries.

Notes

1. Douglas (1999) noted, “Between 1946 and 1951, the number of small stations, between 200 and 1,000 watts, increased by 500 percent” (p. 224).

2. For example, the radio show “One Man’s Family,” a serialized, dramatic show revolving around a fictional extended family, was linear in that the show assumed a degree of familiarity with the numerous characters and past shows to completely comprehend and appreciate. This is not to suggest that all listeners met these criteria but rather that the show was presented to them in this manner.

3. Douglas (1999) observed that “the postwar proliferation of lower-power stations meant that stations’ listening audiences, on average, had dropped from 60,000 to 30,000, and thus there were more stations vying to sell smaller audiences to local advertisers” (p. 233).

4. Columbia records was purchased by CBS in 1939. Columbia and CBS radio programming proved quite profitable for the network in the 1950s. Indeed, Boddy (1990) posited they sustained CBS’s early TV endeavors, which were unprofitable (p. 72).


9. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Paul Ackerman, “Payola; Sing a Song for Sixpence,” The Nation, 5 December 1959, 415.
17. “Early in the history of Top 40, many DJs, entering a profession that would put their names in high profile, were given no choice in the matter of those names. They were issued, not unlike fatalities to an Army recruit or a number to a new prisoner, and accepted without debate, or even discussion” (Fong-Torres 1998, 89).
19. Ibid., 56.
20. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
29. Indeed, Hirsch (1991) noted, “promotional campaigns aimed at coopting institutional gatekeepers are most likely to require proportionately large budgets and illegitimate tactics when consumers’ awareness of the product hinges almost exclusively on coverage by these personnel” (p. 327).
31. For example, at his first annual “Rock ‘n’ Roll Ball” held in New York in 1955, the concert grossed $24,000 and featured artists such as Joe Turner, Fats Domino, and Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters. “Freed Ball Takes 24G at St. Nick,” The Billboard, 22 January 1955, 13, 16.
33. “Palisades DJ to Sell Disks at Cut Rates,” The Billboard, 3 December 1955, 16.
35. Ibid.

References


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Corporate Expansion, Textual Expansion: Commodification Model of Communication

The authors argue that the contemporary situation of media saturation and hypercommercialism calls for an alternative model of communication that accounts for the current political-economic conditions. This study shows how corporate discursive strategies contribute to the expansion of hegemonic corporate interests and how they redefine public communication. The authors analyze two corporate museums, The World of Coca-Cola and the CNN Studio Tour, as discursive spaces (i.e., text). In support of the authors’ concerns, they develop the Commodification Model of Communication. This model moves beyond the traditional “four theories of the press” to theorize how the text has expanded to accommodate corporate expansion by equating earlier concepts of public goods and services with private interests. By using the contradictory textual strategies of authority and choice, corporations work to normalize private, profit-oriented communication and thus solve what they pose as a problem, the cacophony of unlicensed public communication.

Whether attributed to the postmodern era or the effective extension of monopoly capitalism into global capitalism, the late twentieth century was witness to unprecedented concentrations of capital. On the forefront of these developments were media mergers, widely celebrated as bringing economic windfalls by linking formerly disparate industries—for example, film, music, fashion, sports, tourism, technology—and equally widely criticized as limiting the diversity of and access to communication channels. The impact of these trends on public communication should challenge scholars to seek appropriate theories and methods to accommodate a substantively altered media environment.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm’s (1956) four theories of the press, while furnished occasional updating, provided satisfactory normative expectations upon which to develop models for analysis. However, sometime during the later part of past century, shifts in economies, technologies, and cultural phenomena undermined those rationales. Siebert’s model situates the press specifically in the political realm; the four models (authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet-totali-
tarian and even its later addition developmental) are all based on the assumption that the political system (especially national politics) molds the respective communication system. Two major developments over the past decades defy this assumption: one is the rapid corporatization and conglomeration of the media industry into an oligopoly structure, especially in the last decade of the past century, and the other one is the declining significance of national political sovereignty in view of intensifying globalization.

Our project is not the first attempt to challenge the four theories. Since their introduction in 1956, scholars have offered adjustments to the original four theories, including additions such as “development theory.” Other researchers have reworked, adapted, and renamed these rationales to compensate for inconsistencies in the original framework. Most recently, a consortium of scholars at the University of Illinois (the same institution that housed the authors of the original four theories) mounted an extensive critique of the premises of that approach, focusing on its liberal ideology and cold-war rhetoric. What differentiates their work is that these scholars scrutinized the theoretical assumptions rather than simply “remapping” the field to conform to current realities (Nerone 1995, ix). Following this critique, Nordenstreng (1997) provided a distinctively new approach that shies away from a “universally valid typology” (p. 107) by proposing a set of paradigms and roles that in various overlapping combinations constitute different national communication systems or journalistic practices.

What all these endeavors have in common is that they attempt to connect communication to the political realm and tend to prioritize mass media as instruments of information exchange and the political discourse, thus echoing the original connection between the “press,” journalism, and the nation. The ownership structure of the media is acknowledged but mainly as one of many interfering factors. Our contribution to this debate is to depart radically from these assumptions by reevaluating the importance of the economic foundation of mass communication as much as the communicative reach of the corporate structure.

We argue that the contemporary situation calls for an alternative model of communication that identifies more precisely contemporary political-economic conditions: the Commodification Model of Communication. This model advances from the premise that media—including news and entertainment media—are nearly fully integrated in the global capital economy. Global media companies can operate almost anywhere regardless of form of government; legally or not, media messages reach a global population. This expansion of media reach parallels the expansion of a new media text. The text is constituted as a site of determination, a site where productive and interpretive communities meet and where the heterogeneous social factions can interpret freely but only within the confines of the text itself. This text increasingly
homogenizes the diversity of possible interpretations thus advancing corporate strategic goals.

The proposed Commodification Model of Communication helps us clarify how the text has expanded to accommodate corporate expansion and how that text reworks earlier concepts of public goods and public services to equate those with corporate (private) interests.

By using the contradictory textual strategies of authority and choice along with more obvious corporate promotions, corporations work to normalize private, profit-oriented communication and thus to solve what they pose as a social problem—the cacophony of unlicensed public communication. We prefer the term model to theory or paradigm to show our departure from an ideal or a normative “map” (Nerone 1995). This model comprises a distinctive set of strategies that govern contemporary mass communication. We suggest in our final section that this “new mode” undermines all other democratic rationales or theories of communication.

To advance our argument we analyze two corporate museums, The World of Coca-Cola and the CNN Studio Tour as discursive spaces (i.e., the text) that exemplify the rift between private and public communication and show how those texts work to naturalize privatization. Both museums provide examples of how corporations shape and influence collective memory by constructing themselves as an integral part of local, national, and global cultural practices. We draw on mass media research, in particular cultural studies influenced by political economy and on research in the area of museum studies. Our case studies, which would appear to be peculiar choices for investigating the relationship between communication and society from a liberal perspective, exemplify the contemporary reality of media conglomeration. These museums ground our theorizing about the altered conditions of communication and the factors that structure the public sphere. Coca-Cola as one of the biggest companies in Atlanta, has erected The World of Coca-Cola or, as locals refer to it, the “Coca-Cola Museum” in one of the prime tourist locations downtown, with tourists and school classes alike lining up to see the exhibition, drink free Coke varieties from all over the world, and buy Coke memorabilia in the museum store. The CNN Studio Tour in CNN’s Atlanta headquarters literally turns its working environment into a CNN museum where the sets, workers, and office space all are to be gazed at. Both tours emulate a traditional museums’ broad social, educational, and cultural function (but with Coca-Cola or CNN as their creative center).

The primary concern of this study is to show how corporate discursive strategies as exemplified by two corporate museums contribute to the expansion of hegemonic corporate interests and how those texts (the museums) redefine public communication while promoting those corporate interests. In support of these concerns, we developed our Commodification Model of Communication.
A More Complex Concept of Mass Media

The most current edition of *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory* (McQuail 2000) describes how traditional mass communication theories have focused on the ties of media systems to prevailing political structures. These models tend to fall into one of two categories, that is, dominance or pluralism. Seibert, Peterson, and Schramm’s (1956) four theories and McQuail’s categories share the primary concern with national political formations, although McQuail’s formulation is more nuanced and not shored up with cold-war terminology. But, McQuail concluded that “we still lack a developed set of critical perspectives and tools of analysis that theory should be able to provide” (2000, 482).

Our proposal for a new theoretical model asks for a more complex concept of mass media. Even the earliest advocates of cultural studies recognized the breadth of the terms mass media and culture industries. Many scholars favored a more inclusive concept of culture industries beyond the traditional media such as print, radio, and television. The economic trends of the past few decades add another argument for a broader conceptualization of mass media. The technological development of digitalization and a political climate that fostered deregulation stimulated a merger mania and a rush for global markets under the buzzwords of synergy, vertical integration, and convergence. The mass media industry with comparably high profit margins, strong cash flow, and its potential for growth in international markets made it a dominating industry. Currently, as Mosco (1996) reminded us, “it is increasingly difficult to distinguish among publishing, broadcasting, telecommunication, and information services . . . [and] nonmedia firms like banks, insurance firms and retailers” (p. 13). By using a media company (CNN) and a nonmedia company (Coca-Cola) and their corporate museums as a text (normally not considered a media text) in this study, we exemplify and problematize the widened circumference of mass media and cultural industries.

Schiller (1989) and others who follow in his tradition of scholarship believe (as do we) that a free and open system of public communication is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for democracy. McChesney (1997) argued that beside a balanced wealth distribution and “a sense of community,” a “democracy requires that there be an effective system of political communication . . . that informs and engages the citizenry, drawing people meaningfully into the polity” (p. 5). Bagdikian (1988), Herman and Chomsky (1988), along with Schiller and McChesney documented a trend of corporate influence, conglomerations, and globalization of media and other business corporations as evidence of the contraction of public expression. We add to this stream of research by analyzing the textual dimension and actual discursive strategies employed
in this process that ultimately normalizes corporate interests as stewards of public communication.

We have referred to globalization, as do many others before us, but the term itself needs to be clarified. Globalization indicates a multifaceted range of political, economic, and cultural developments shaped by increased transnational production and consumption. Meiksins Wood (1998) preferred the term universalization instead, a global trend guided by the “imperatives of accumulation, competition, commodification, and profit-maximization” (p. 45). The universalization of those imperatives means that this hegemonic system depends only upon itself to correct or compensate for its internal contradictions. Thus, we argue it is necessary to advance a comprehensive and integrated model of communication system that theorizes these developments. One of the problems of the current era of media-saturated hypercommercialization is that it tends to be experienced as a postmodern aesthetic form devoid of political meaning (Jameson 1984) or celebrated as a utopia of ultimate individual freedom aided by new technology (e.g., Negroponte 1995).

A contemporary model of communication must take into account how the effects of capitalism’s reality are played out in the United States and abroad. Media is, after all, an industry producing capitalist realism (expanding Schudson’s description of advertising). Since the end of the Cold War, capitalism, especially U.S.-style neoliberitarian capitalism, has become normalized as a global credo. A Commodification Model of Communication emphasizes the convergence of political economy with corporate culture and communities by focusing research on media as environmental rather than only productive. This study analyzes some of the discursive strategies employed for this hegemony-sustaining work, highlighting how corporate communication serves a decisive role.

Museum as Text

It is not new to regard the museum as part of the culture industries; Schiller (1989), for example, notes its particular history as highly identified with high culture, remarking on this distinction vis-à-vis other mass communication institutions. Previously, Raymond Williams (1980) noted the museumlike verisimilitude of stage sets. He used an analysis of sets to comment on the social construction rather than the technological construction of text as meaning. Like a museum, stage sets are carefully designed and constructed, and yet their significance derives less from their craft than from their silent yet authoritative ability to evoke and guide audience responses. Williams’s point, important at the outset, forms a backdrop to political-economic–based cultural studies. We found three different approaches to analyze contemporary museums; they shared the assumption that contemporary museums are part of a meaning-
making system and within the sphere of mass communication. These three are Schiller’s (1989) modernist version, Baudrillard’s (1983) postmodern one, and Huyssen’s (1995), which understands the museum as institutions catering to the search for authenticity and the desire for the “real.”

Schiller (1989) argued that previously museums were clear in their identification with dominant class interests, while currently “museums have been enlisted as a corporate instrument. . . . At the same time, [they] maintain the appearance of a public resources and a site of public creative expression” (p. 2). In Baudrillard’s terms, Schiller points to the museum as a representation in which hegemonic social relations are re-presented as democratic. Baudrillard’s (1983) view is one of absolute musealization: “When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning . . . it is a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyper-real whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence” (pp. 12-13). Baudrillard’s style mirrors its message, but quite precisely he also states “the museum . . . is now everywhere” (p. 15). He argues that the postmodern era obviates the need for museums because among the infinite interplay of signs there is no real object to classify or display; the simulacrum serves as a deterrent to material obliteration.

Huyssen (1995), situated between the two competing views, clearly tried to position museums as a site of public resistance while acknowledging their compromised production. First, he showed that contemporary museums no longer are elite institutions produced and consumed by a few connoisseurs; rather, museums are a mass medium. However, cultural sponsorship is becoming increasingly commercialized, especially traveling exhibitions of famous works or artifacts, which draw large crowds and concomitant markets for affiliated merchandising. On the other hand, an increasing number of people have access to the exhibitions. He argued that a corollary to that trend is the postmodern rejection of metanarratives creating an “age that does not offer any clear consensus as to what actually belongs in a museum” (p. 22). Huyssen hopes that museums in postmodernity provide an outlet for experiencing authenticity in an otherwise mediated world.

The core theoretical distinction between these three versions of museum as text is how each locates power. Huyssen in the end elects the visitors as the ultimate agents of power: Baudrillard argues that power is irrelevant. Schiller clearly locates power within the corporate institution. Among these three perspectives, our Commodification Model of Communication would mostly be based on Schiller’s position. Yet, neither Huyssen’s nor Baudrillard’s insight should be ignored. Best and Kellner (1991) have made a persuasive argument regarding the efficacy of the insights of postmodern theories for critical cultural analyses. And finally, all three seem to argue that museums are now part of a larger meaning-making system, one in which close links tend to eradicate mere differences of form or genre.
We chose The World of Coca-Cola and the CNN Studio Tour as two texts to examine the issue of how two discursive strategies, authority and choice (often communicated through the now ubiquitous patterns of promotional communication), work within the museum to erode public communication by equating public good with corporate need and privatization. We examine explicitly corporate museums as they are at the extreme end of museal commercialization. In both, the commercial influence on media text is not limited to sponsorship and image management; they are the deliberate attempt of companies to create their own text. Here, these companies can regulate their version of both their own corporate history and indeed of world history.

In particular, Coke and CNN offered rich texts to study simultaneously. As a tourist attraction the Coke museum exemplifies this major Atlanta business with its high international penetration and recognition value. Coke is a worldwide icon of Americanism. CNN also relies on international penetration and recognition but is a more conventional representative of mass media. But both are loosely “culture industries.” The CNN Tour brings audiences face-to-face with the intersection of culture, communication business, and technology. The World of Coca-Cola helps show the relevance to our communication model to nonmedia corporate entities. Finally, both are located in Atlanta, permitting us, the researchers, repeated visits.

Case Studies

“Nothing Like the Real Thing”: The World of Coca-Cola

The World of Coca-Cola successfully uses many elements of a traditional museum. Located in downtown Atlanta adjacent to “Underground Atlanta” and city and state government buildings, it is easily accessible to its 3,000 daily visitors. The museum opened in 1990 in a specially designed, dome-style building. The outside is dominated by a giant illuminated Coke sign; inside displays include artifacts such as former and current advertising, television commercials, contracts, outmoded bottling equipment, coolers, and so forth. The exhibition covers three floors, ordered by date; visitors must take an elevator to the top floor where the exhibition begins and follow it down the next two floors.

The top floor introduces Coke’s history, its time line beginning with the company’s founding in 1886 and extending to the end of World War II. Two great halls divide the space. The first is dominated by “The Bottling Phantasy,” a construction (a “kineticsculpture” according to the visitors’ brochure) that imitates a bottling machine. To one side, a film First Things First shows repeatedly; its topic is early company history. The attraction in the other hall is a
reconstruction of an early soda fountain counter where an employee enacts a soda jerk preparing various Coke mixtures. Between the two halls, kiosks in the shape of Coke cans hold video screens; by touching the screen, short video clips illustrate world events and their connections to Coke. (The second floor provides more kiosks with more current history clips.)

The top floor area's last room is a state-of-the-art theater that shows a ten-minute movie featuring Coca-Cola CEO Roberto Goizueta (now deceased; facility toured in 1997-98) introducing dramatic visual footage shot in countries around the world. Not unlike an extended television commercial, it portrays the world’s diverse population all finding and enjoying Coke in their own locales.

The second-floor displays include the kiosks and Coke advertising from the 1950s to date. Audio sets allow visitors to listen to radio jingles sung throughout the years by popular artists and, in a far corner, a large screen runs television ads. The main attraction is two halls called “The Club Coca-Cola.” In one, visitors sample various Coke products promoted in the United States; in the other, products promoted internationally are available. The national hall is dominated by the “spectacular soda fountain” from which a stream of Coca-Cola apparently shoots through the air accompanied by blinking neon lights and futuristic sound effects until the Coke fills the cup of each visitor. The international hall with its soft drink product samples from other countries also screens ads from other countries. Here, for the first time since the short film on the top floor, seating permits visitors to pause; but at the same time, they sample the products and watch the ads.

The ground floor is a gift shop, “Everything Coke,” featuring Coca-Cola merchandise. All visitors must exit through the shop, which sells products in all price ranges (e.g., small refrigerator magnets, leather motorcycle jackets, but always bearing the Coke logo). In sum, the pavilion is professionally organized. The displays inform about the marketing and advertising strategies of the company during its more than 100 years of existence and also demonstrate how in each era Coke made positive contributions to society.

The World of Coca-Cola successfully exploits many elements of a traditional museum and creates a semiotically compelling space (Bal 1996) invested with the traditional museum’s cultural strategies. It could be described as a public relations manager’s (or integrated marketing expert’s) dream come true: people pay (six dollars in 1997-98) to hear, see, taste, and feel information about the company. The tour follows the strict regimen of “organized walking.” Whatever is said or shown is no longer simply advertisement but historical, social, and cultural education. The creators of the displays and the motivation fade into the background. Bal explained this as a convincing strategy of any museum:
Different museums speak different fiction, but, as I argue... what these fictions have in common is that they show their objects, not their own hand or voice. “Showing”... uses a rhetoric of persuasion that almost inevitably convinces the viewer of the superiority of [one] culture. Showing, if it refrains from telling its own story, becomes showing off. (P. 53)

This strategy helps Coca-Cola to “show off” as a vital cultural institution, no longer a commercial enterprise (i.e., the world’s largest producer/distributor or soft drinks). The following list aggregates some of the strategies employed.

**Educational setup.** By organizing the pavilion as a museum, Coca-Cola takes advantage of the modernist ideal of museums as educational institutions. Advertising and marketing campaigns more easily segue from suggesting internal business strategies to external cultural relevance. In the exhibition areas, from the beginning of the tour, the impact of visually and orally dynamic displays urges visitors to remain close enough to the displays to read informational messages; in turn, lines form that work to heighten anticipation as visitors follow the prescribed paths. All their “writings on the wall” (Bal 1996) must be scrutinized close up by visitors to join flashy displays with words that confer meaning. The film and soda jerk are especially compelling because each mimics familiar cultural forms. The first, feature films in a “real” movie theater; the second, a play on a “real” stage. The film is explicitly structured as First Things First (opening sequence) and “things you should know” (its theme). Correspondingly, tour guides occupy an educational role. We overheard one of them speaking to a class of school children:

Do you know why you are here today? You are going to learn something about Coca-Cola. About the history of Coca-Cola. But you will also learn something else. You will learn something about business. . . . What is business? [pauses briefly as if for an answer] When you go to a vending machine like the one behind you what do you put in? [pause] Money . . . and what do you get? Coke. . . . See that’s business.

Here the otherwise latent discursive strategy becomes blatantly obvious.

**Organized walking.** The World of Coca-Cola is a model for crowd control and queuing theory. The building is constructed to allow only one tour path. The right-to-left, walls-to-center organization, reinforced by many other public experiences, also tends to promote the lining up in front of exhibits, rather than more random wandering. This compelling spatial setting has a temporal equivalent. Each room seems to have a natural time frame. As part of our observation, we started going back and forth in the building, lingering in a room, skipping parts or repeating exhibitions we wanted to know better. This
always led to a feeling of awkwardness, fearing we would call attention to ourselves.

**International Coca-Cola.** The major theme of the exhibition—besides the nostalgia for Coke’s historical evolution—is Coca-Cola’s international and global reach. Many displays show ads or Coke packaging in various languages and alphabets and characters. The ceiling of the entryway is decorated with many national flags. The brochure proclaims, “Flags from over 200 countries where Coca-Cola is sold add to the pavilion’s international flavor” (Coca-Cola 1997, 3). The main film *Every Day Everywhere* helps encapsulate the international theme beginning with Goizueta’s introduction to what he calls in the first frames the “global magic of Coca-Cola.” He continues, “I captured on film just a few of the refreshing pauses enjoyed hundreds of millions of times a day all over the world everyday, everywhere.” The film changes to music and images of diverse people drinking, transporting, buying, or simply holding Coca-Cola. “Calling out to the world every day, can you feel it? An emotional wave riding high, it’s a feeling, it’s a part of everywhere, everyday that you live.” Friedman (1992) referred to this international theme as a sometimes naive “ideology of utopian internationalism.” He criticizes the construction of Coke as a positive global force:

> [Coke uses] the universal consumption of a commodity—Coke—which ties people together. Its implication is that if every person in the world drank coke, we would all live in peace and harmony … [as the song in the noted 1971 Hilltop commercial articulates]: “I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony/I’d like to buy the world a Coke to keep it company.” (P. 644)

**Global capitalism.** A feature of the preferred visitors is their assumed acceptance, whether consciously or not, of global capitalism and free enterprise as positive formations. The pavilion shows the world as a market and in particular one with a special affinity for Coke. Inequalities of different nations are taken for granted and Coke is portrayed as an agent of positive change and modernization. For example, in the main film a Western-style-dressed driver of a Coke truck in Egypt (singing an Italian opera aria as he goes about his work) dynamically restocks a Coke kiosk while some Bedouins in traditional dresses stand next to camels statically, watching the driver with particular awe. The short historical clips in the scattered kiosks also establish Coke as a positive modernizing force. For example, while the clips show social problems (war, economic depression in the 1930s), Coke emerges at the end of the clip as making beneficial contributions (e.g., Coke for GIs; Coke as the nonalcoholic choice during prohibition; Coke as refreshment for all, without discriminating against any race, class, ethnicity, or gender). This theme of Coke as an egalitarian drink is used consistently. One of the display boards states a quote of Andy
Warhol from 1975 that exemplifies this theme: “You know that the president drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke. . . . All the Cokes are the same and all Cokes are good.”

The egalitarian/modernizing theme obscures to the point of negating international controversies. Many governments, especially in the Third World (e.g., until recently in India), perceive the import and aggressive advertising of, among other Western goods, Coke as a threat to their national economies and sometimes to their national culture. Coke is criticized for changing traditional eating and drinking habits. In some countries, Coca-Cola is a potent symbol of problematic Americanization and its presumed consequences such as promiscuous lifestyles, decay of families, secularization, drug abuse, and disrespect for authority. These cultural disputes are omitted; they do not exist. Nor does the pavilion’s official “voice” challenge those arguments.

This omission is not noticed in the Coca-Cola exhibition because, as Bal (1996) argued, “display is so rigorously constative that its syntax confirms the structure of the affirmative sentence only, not leaving much room for other speech acts, such as question and other dialogic forms” (p. 10).

But this avoidance forces the creators to split the meaning of Coca-Cola; the overall message is paradoxically constructed. By erecting a museumlike pavilion, Coca-Cola positions itself as a major cultural force in the United States, no longer a trivial commodity (soft drink). However, when it comes to the cultural effects of aggressive economic globalization under the leadership of Western companies, Coca-Cola steps back and turns into a harmless product with no special cultural impact.

“News in the Making”: The CNN Studio Tour

The tour, which originated as a more standard “factory tour” when CNN first started operating out of the CNN Center in downtown Atlanta in 1987, is now a highly polished tour, involving an introductory film and exhibition. The entrance to the tour is in a fourteen-story atrium from which CNN’s Talk Back Live is broadcast live every weekday. The grandeur of the atrium is a mute testament to the size of Turner Broadcasting System (now owned by AOL Time Warner, Inc., which is the world’s largest media company). The CNN networks include CNN, CNN Headline News, CNN International, CNN Airport Network, CNN Radio, the CNN Interactive Web site; the Turner Entertainment Groups, which operate outside the CNN Center, owns the cable channels TBS, TNT, Cartoon Network, Turner Classic Movies, and Sports South. Turner also owns movie studios and TV production companies; Turner has rights to an extensive movie library, the significance of which is exemplified by the rights including merchandising for Gone with the Wind. Turner Companies also
includes the Atlanta Braves baseball team and its stadium and the Hawks basketball team.

One of the major themes of the tour becomes obvious in the atrium: the gaze on working people. The walls of the atrium are filled with the glass windows of offices facing inward; some display special posters and signs that play with this view, while others close themselves off with drawn blinds or curtains. The set of the talk show, Talk Back Live, also offers a workplace view. The talk show features a live participating audience, but many more people watch it from the sidelines and become a background for the show. Because of the condensing effects of lenses used in the show, the CNN Center often seems fuller and busier on television than an actual visitor may perceive it.

Before the tour, guests pass a metal detector, obtain an imitation “CNN Press Pass” for identification (a sign they have paid the tour fee) and are shown an introductory video. This leads to a ride on the atrium-spanning escalator to a plateau that houses an exhibition of different Turner projects. The displays have been changing over the years but now include illustrations from different Turner productions and public relations projects (e.g., the film Gettysburg, the Goodwill Tour), displays that explain different Turner enterprises, artifacts such as Peter Arnett’s jacket showing a secret lining that the war correspondent used in Iraq during the Gulf War, and a red banner given to Turner from the Chinese Television officials during telecommunication talks in 1987. Moreover, there are pictures from the “history” of the network and signs of Ted Turner’s personal achievements such as his trophy for winning the Admiral’s Cup. A wrestling Hall of Fame and special memorabilia from Turner athletes and teams round out the exhibition.

The guests have about fifteen minutes to see the displays before they are led by a guide through a labyrinth of hallways and stairs to the studio/newsrooms of CNN Headline News and CNN International. The tour permits a view into these production facilities from an elevated plateau behind glass. The tour guide explains the positions in the newsroom of news gathering, news production, and tape production. Here, the guide also shows the teleprompter, explaining it as a device used by anchors that rolls a script across a screen near the camera lens, allowing them to keep their eyes on the cameras. On another platform, visitors can see a screen that reveals what the anchors on duty do when they are off air because of a commercial break. A favorite part of the tour for many visitors is when they can play weather anchors in front of a blue chroma-key background onto which the weather map is electronically superimposed.

The tour passes several control rooms and supply rooms for commercials where the tour guide explains the complicated system of automated supply of commercials for each network. The tour stops at the CNN Graphics department where one sees several people—again through a glass—working on elaborate computers. Here the guide mentions the importance of graphics for mod-
ern television. The tour also stops next to what seems to be the entrance to CNN International in front of a huge world map to illustrate the location of the nine domestic and twenty international bureaus as well as the network of satellite connections that is necessary to keep up the operations. The final stop of the tour is directly at the Turner Store where visitors can buy a video or photo of themselves posing in a CNN news set, in front of a weather map, in a movie background, or with different animated characters. This store also offers a tremendous amount of Turner-related merchandising.

In general, the tour is professionally organized. The explanations are informative and for someone who has never seen television production, even educational. CNN definitely opens its workplace in an unprecedented way. Overall, visitors get the impression of a professional and routinized television news enterprise. In the newsroom, everything seems to be under control and surprisingly (but because of many commercial breaks), the anchors appear relaxed and even nonchalant. Similarly to the Coca-Cola museum, the CNN Studio Tour creates a semiotically compelling space. Even more than Coca-Cola, this tour follows the strict regimen of organized walking behind a guide. Displays in the exhibition area as well as the use of the studios as giant displays create a communicative and educational environment. Whatever is said or shown is no longer advertisement but education. The creator of the displays and the motivation fade into the background. CNN and the Turner System become an inherent cultural institution, no longer a commercial network.

*Integral part of history.* The very fact that CNN uses museumlike displays makes its work and brief history (founded in 1980) relevant and significant. One special strategy to render this relevance is employed repeatedly: CNN and the Turner Broadcasting System are established as integral to general history (CNN and Gulf War and other breaking news events) and nostalgia (Turner and *Gone with the Wind*, *The Flintstones*, etc.). The tour uses many elements of the museum while persuading people to pay (seven dollars) to hear more information about CNN. Following the regimen of organized walking in open areas with marked-off displays illuminated by explanatory captions, the tour uses space to communicate and educate; CNN and Turner become an inherent cultural institution, no longer simply parts of a large media corporation.

In the exhibition area at the beginning of the tour, the compelling effect of the display becomes obvious. The bullet-torn jacket of a war correspondent, the baseball from some important Braves games, or simply a picture of a current film project—again, all their included “writings on the wall” are scrutinized by tour guests trying to find the meaning for the display.

One main part of the tour is to gaze on working journalists. The image of routinized journalistic practice reflects the typical professional situation of journalism. As many journalism studies have shown (e.g., Tuchman 1973),
routine, clear task organization and strong hierarchical structure in a newsroom allow journalists to integrate and process most effectively the tremendous amounts of information they have to deal with on a regular basis. This organizational structure and professional strategies ensure day-to-day operations and help to cope with extreme, breaking news situations. Nevertheless, this image is counterproductive to the image CNN tries to convey of itself as the fastest and most effective station covering breaking news (its highest ratings are during times of crisis like the Oklahoma City bombing, Gulf War, etc.). The calm workplace also disappoints visitors’ anticipations of “a behind the scenes look at news in the making,” as an advertisement for the tour promises, expecting reporters and producers to race through the building. The quiet flow in the newsroom—belying the tour guides’ warnings to walk single file so as to stay out of the way—seems to contradict or at least banalize the achievements of the CNN reporters. On several occasions, visitors asked the tour guide whether it is always “this quiet” in the newsroom. Often the guide (and so does the virtual Studio Tour) tries to contextualize what visitors see by adding excitement:

On average, there are approximately 100 people in the newsroom, but during major news events . . . that number can exceed 200. (Cable News Network 1998)

Normally, it takes about 1½ hours from the time we get information on a story until it is on air, but during the Oklahoma City bombing we were on the air after 6 minutes. (tour guide’s comments)

During major news events, this newsroom operates amazingly efficiently, with each person knowing exactly what his role is to get the story as quickly as possible. (Cable News Network 1998)

Open newsroom. The CNN strategy to open the newsroom, integrating studios (where anchors and crews work) with control rooms (where directors and producers operate) and newsrooms (where journalists work on stories) is an innovation in workplace design. The viewer and the visitors are incorporated into the immediacy of the newsroom environment. The opening of space is done mostly for telegenic and aesthetic reasons, creating a backdrop that looks busy and high tech because of its display of people at work surrounded by computers and production equipment especially in opening and closing shots before and after commercial breaks.

This design also creates a unique workplace for the CNN staff constantly being under “coverage” (Herron 1993) as part of the set. The CNN Studio Tour adds another dimension to this coverage by daily allowing hundreds of studio tour visitors to gaze from behind glass at the workplace. This aesthetic strategy at CNN seems like an indication of what Jameson (1984) called the postmodern “depthlessness” and its emphasis on surfaces. By giving up any
traditional separation between frontstage and backstage in Goffman’s sense, the whole CNN enterprise becomes part of one set ready to be covered. CNN personnel never know when they will be part of the next establishing shot. CNN’s working environment becomes a model for the way CNN “sees” the world: only what can be covered is “real.” Production personnel doing their work are simultaneously portraying production personnel doing their work: all part of the same simulation in hyperreality and hyperspace (Baudrillard 1983). Even tour participants may become part of this aesthetic. A postmodern moment is captured by a journalist who describes his visit:

Kurt, our goofy-funny guide, soon . . . led us to an observation platform above the CNN newsroom . . . [where] the preempted anchor tried to look busy. Kurt assured us she was hard at work monitoring the news. “Looks like she’s working on a crossword puzzle,” another tourist whispered.

From there, Kurt took us to the Headline News studio, where we could see ourselves beamed to the world as part of the establishing shot of the newsroom. We’re the tiny dots in the background waving. (Auchmuty 1995, 5)

CNN’s aesthetic strategy creates an ongoing loop within which only that which is covered is real, reversing the traditional vantage point of covering (and thus more clearly interpreting) the real. The ultimate postmodern moment happens when the studio tour guests themselves become part of the media reality. (“We’re the tiny dots in the background waving.”)

With the CNN Studio Tour, the very subject matter seems to make it the prototype for a corporate (and postmodern) museum. It tries to fix the fleeting sequences of the never-ending twenty-four-hour visual/verbal information flow within an ambiguous cultural/commercial space.

Discussion

The Coca-Cola Company uses the museum as a way to advertise its product and to contribute to the Atlanta tourism industry. The choice of a museum typifies the borderless transition between cultural and commercial spheres (Jameson 1984) and renders a text that operates at many levels. Almost any response is an appropriate response, thus multiple and widely diverse readings are incorporated into the Coke experience. Also, Coke prevails upon visitors to experience Coke’s proprietary version of egalitarianism and modernization. The display’s message shows that Coke is no trivial commodity and that Coke is simply a harmless, frivolous product.

Both Coke and CNN provide similar reconfigurations of time. The distant past at the Coke museum is the pre-Coke era; time is activated with the introduction of the product. “Old fashioned” modifies artifacts dating from the 1930s. “At the late 1930s Barnes Soda Fountain, an old-fashioned soda jerk
will answer your questions... [and] play some... selections on an authentic jukebox" (Coca-Cola Company 1998). Descriptive words borrowed from standard museum language link modernist notions such as authenticity to technological relics. Friedman (1992), who also analyzed The World of Coca-Cola, was struck by the videos shown throughout as providing a surprisingly “progressive” interpretation of history; one video shows how labor asserted its interests during the early 1920s with positive humanistic results. However, since these events are part of the distant past, a primitive past signified by grainy black-and-white pictures, this history is thoroughly delinked from contemporary labor issues; also, of course, U.S. social or political history is always subordinated to Coke history.

The CNN Tour is perhaps the successful prototype of a corporate museum. Certainly like the Coke museum, it is also a gargantuan ad, this time for Time Warner/Turner Broadcasting, including its many networks and the products advertised on CNN. It also promotes the entire circuit of production-text-audience-consumption as one integrated whole. As it tries to fix the fleeting sequences of never-ending twenty-four-hour visual/verbal information flow within its ambiguously cultural/commercial space, it also sells discrete icons. These, sold in the gifts shop that visitors must pass through before leaving, are many of the same icons shown on the tour itself, blurring the boundaries between journalistic and commercial space completely.

CNN history begins before the founding of CNN, structured as BC[NN]—that is, that time period buried in the mists of early film and television—and AC[NN]—that is, essentially 1980—when television’s resources were marshaled by Turner into a comprehensive package of global news-sports-entertainment-advertising (and with the museum, tourism) as year zero. Displays such as one captioned “CNN and the Gulf War” exemplify this strategy of connecting world history to CNN history. The primitive past is evoked by 1960s cartoon characters (Flintstones) and the black-and-white movies bought and colorized/modernized by Turner Classic Movies. The modern era begins in 1980 with the launch of CNN and continues through the present (and into where?).

CNN’s aesthetic strategy creates an ongoing loop of coverage, reversing the modernist vantage point of covering and thus clearly interpreting the real. The studio guests themselves become real when they see themselves on a television monitor as tiny dots in the background waving to themselves. Does this appearance provide an opening for interrogating the display itself? Huyssen (1995) might argue so by pointing out that the form of museum invites responses that may undermine a purely corporate one. He hoped for a “surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries, opening spaces for reflection and counter-hegemonic memory (p. 15). However, we believe that the pleasure granted by inserting guests into the media reality may easily trivialize
and overwhelm any dissent. Following Schiller (1989), the CNN museum remains part of the “expanded corporate power . . . [influencing] especially the cultural activity and the visions that sustain people” (p. 3).

Coke and CNN restructure time and space not particularly by using the latest technology but by redefining social relations (the boundaries of class, racial, ethnic, and national identities) and the links between those relations and the understanding of public good. The here-examined saturation with corporate communication renders social relations increasingly fragmented, linked only by similar consumption patterns, design, lifestyle, and brand loyalty.

Corporate museums exemplify and demonstrate the corporate- and media-saturated environment. As the text overwhelms distinctions of real and false, the text increasingly performs its function as “a strategy of the real” (Baudrillard 1983, 13). The corollary to illusion is no longer possible (according to Baudrillard) or, in our own terms profitable, in that the real is no longer possible. Time and space are now both colonized by the transformations and spiraling requirements of global capitalism. The Coke and CNN messages that use the concept of the ideal museum to assert their meanings also operate within the compromised and contested history of museums, with their objectification of the Other, typically marginalized, colonized, natives from whom it was possible to extract and display an authentic culture. And despite the blurring of distinctions between high and popular culture, between art and artifact, between private collector and corporate sponsor, the museum has come to be a part of the marketplace without losing its cache as a repository of important objects, a serious cultural institution. Museums have been understood as somehow “belonging” to the public, to citizens, thereby providing at least a dimension of the public sphere. It should not be overlooked that even traditional museums have not always fulfilled their public potential. All too often, they have become sites of elite display and cultural canonization (Bennett 1995). Yet this does not hinder corporations to play with and to subvert the public ideal of the museum and its democratic potential. The CNN Studio Tour and the Coke museum are in Schiller’s (1989) understanding a deliberate attempt of large corporations to control cultural practices. In a postmodern sense, however, this attempt becomes a symptom of the postmodern disease: “Musealization in its many forms is the pathological attempt of contemporary culture to preserve, to control, to dominate the real in order to hide the fact that the real is in agony due to the spread of simulations” (Huysssen 1995, 30).

To analyze the text, itself often a transparent view of other aspects of the social formation, means working within a hegemonic representation. Thus, as researcher or citizen, one must remain vigilant regarding its seductions. As such, previous research about audiences from the pluralist notion of “active audiences” to more critical approaches (e.g., reader-oriented criticism)
excludes the fact that the constructedness of the text encompasses its consumption. That is to say, citizens, we, are implicated as text ourselves as we rapidly abandon our public spaces in favor of corporatized versions of previously publicly controlled, or at least contested, institutions (e.g., museums but also education, libraries, and others).

A New Mode: Commodification Model of Communication

As mass communication researchers struggle to understand media within this environment, it is imperative that we shed some of our preconceptions about form, genre, and the separations between industries. As we believe our analysis shows, naming the beast to whom the tentacles belong is no longer as simple as pointing out a type of government (normative views beginning with Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956), developments of technology, or noting that U.S. television exists to deliver consumers to advertisers (cultural research). Not to belittle the importance of either, the distinctions that those imply are not sufficient to begin to grasp the comprehensive nature of communication in contemporary society; this situation requires an analytical model that fully embraces the blurred distinctions of the current environment in which consumption is productive and political structures can be easily circumvented by corporate cultural structures.

Former models of communication (e.g., Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm’s [1956] four theories of the press: authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, Soviet-totalitarian and the extension concept: developmental) used to provide at least a normative explanation of how communication systems functioned in different parts of the world and how they interacted. However, those normative assumptions situated mass media and public communication within the political realm of nations. Based on our study, we see currently a very different (perhaps postmodern) communication model in place, grounded in economic influences and the cultural expansion of corporations. We argue that this model of public communication constitutes a significant change from the former rationales of mass media and public communication in general.

Our analysis of corporate museums shows how the (formerly public) space left either underfunded or hyperfunded exemplifies a mode of communication that is based on communication as always commodified. Our model insists on linking corporate communications such as traditional advertising and public relations with marketing, and therefore theorizes and analyzes all corporate communication as an integrated whole; this includes consumer’s participation. Changes in technology and market strategy are cited as providing the arena within which integrated marketing communication can flourish. This strategy extends into heretofore public spaces—from schools or pedestrian malls to our texts, museums, and the Internet. The new model of mass communication sig-
nifies the nature of mass communication under late capitalism, and its name, the Commodification Model of Communication, highlights the corporate basis of its origins, just as the older models highlighted their political origins. It positions the audience as a consumer, just as older models positioned audiences as citizens. Under the influence of this model, public spaces of discourse become increasingly privatized and commercialized while seemingly maintaining a public/democratic image and functions.

The model poses a significant and successful challenge to all other rationales of mass media. It challenges the social responsibility model’s chief purpose of the mass media (or public communication in general) to “raise conflict to the plain of discussion” (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956) by limiting access and communicative power to all groups in society. Instead, moments of uninhibited public communication are a problem to be solved by corporate public relations and integrated market communication; the chief purpose of which is not simply to sell products but to establish and normalize private for-profit corporations as important cultural authorities. In contrast, the model can coexist with totalitarian or authoritarian rationales since it is not directly connected to any political body or national politics but global economic strategy. It challenges the libertarian model (even if this is its closest precursor) by ignoring a watchdog role of media through privileging ratings-driven and advertising-supported media content (entertainment) over news. Moreover, it hollows the never-achieved libertarian ideal of a marketplace of ideas by monopolizing access and constituting the audience as consumers. With the arsenal of new technology, corporate cultural communication has escaped its limited domain of advertising and public relations and has moved into a more generalized one. Therefore, future studies should start at similar public-private intersections. Media analysis within our framework can help explain and critique phenomena such as the congruency among news organizations, imitations of news stories and entertainment products, the fusion of news-entertainment-advertising, and the blurred boundaries between what were previously distinct forms of communication, indeed distinct industries.

Another study could take up the potential for audience resistance and the autonomy of the readers of these corporate texts. Perhaps strategies for resistance can only originate outside these texts in movements that aim at undermining brand images and corporate credibility. While we do not want to deny the potential for resistance, our textual analysis stressed how corporations efficiently employ certain discursive strategies (in this case the logic of the museum) to preempt the audiences’ opposition.

Corporate communication is always directive, and yet, to be effective, it must mimic an increasingly open text. This contradiction is now endemic in every form of mass communication of which we have analyzed two examples. Because of its inherent motivational limitations, a corporate museum will
never be able to provide a space of “cultural contestation and negotiation” that Huyssen (1995, 35) envisions as the fundamental aspiration of a museum in postmodernity. Extending this finding to our communication model, our suggestion is that the texts generated within the new model are not forums of debate and engaged citizenship but hegemonic spaces for regeneration.

Notes

1. For a detailed overview of these approaches, see Nordenstreng (1997).
2. The Chinese writing is translated as follows: “Telecommunications transmits information, cooperation strengthens friendship.” Many visitors who see the banner comment on the censorship and communications control in China today.

References


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Women in Their Own Reflection: Self-Representation of Women Politicians in the Slovenian Press

The authors have analyzed different discursive strategies through which women politicians express themselves in the Slovenian press. Based on a constructivist paradigm, which defines gender as a discursively constructed category, the authors have applied discourse analysis to discover how women politicians articulate and reproduce certain dominant myths of femininity in accordance with hegemonic discourses, paying special attention to the notion of sexist language. Female politicians in Slovenia spontaneously express their femininity through different myths about women: woman as a body and sex object, woman as a martyr, woman as a loving and caring individual, and woman as an enigma and threat. As women politicians in Slovenia are interpellated in a broader dominant ideological discursive framework, they do not challenge hegemonic beliefs and myths in society.

Contemporary qualitative and quantitative studies—which try to discern the ways in which mass media represent or deal with different dimensions, problems, and ideological aspects of the concept of gender identity—usually focus on to what extent these aspects are created by media (e.g., Brunsdon, D’Acci, Spigel, 1997). The central idea of this project is somewhat different, since it explores by what means and strategies, and with what discursive effects, different individuals express their gendered identity; what are the modes and tones of their self-representation in the media? An area promising to offer especially fertile insights is the realm of political discourse, which in contemporary societies is still largely a hegemonic domain of male gender.

By putting this idea into an existing social reality, we focus on the self-representation of women, who enter the political discourse as its recognized

Authors’ Note: This article is based on a broader study of self-representation of women politicians in the Slovenian press, conducted in the Department for Communication Studies at University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, by Andrej Pinter, Alenka Kermelj, Darja Ivanuša, Darja Rogelj, and the authors. We would like to thank Hanno Hardt for his valuable comments, critique, advice, and endless stimulation during the process of writing this article; Breda Luthar for her constructive critiques; and Andrej Pinter for his indispensable contributions and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

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agents. Taking into account the broader understanding of “political,” which extends further than, for example, the workings of political parties, parliament, or government, the above characterization includes female individuals who shape the political life of a society through their formal or informal public appearances; thus, we included women who are members of parliament, state government, state administration, and other public offices to analyze the ways in which female politicians express their identity and the manners in which they relate it to sociocultural perceptions of gender within their discursive practices.

Our analysis is inspired by existing research on social myths about femininity (e.g., Macdonald 1995). We explore how these are—on one hand—subject to social negotiation and—on the other hand—reconstructed, recycled, and renewed through their use in communication processes. Our interpretative framework, therefore, derives from concepts like identity, ideology, discourse, myth, and gender. We imply in our analysis, and in the selection of a method, that femininity is constructed. This constructivist position (e.g., Ortner [1974] 1983; Kvande 1999; etc.) generally underlines that gender is constructed, shaped, and assessed socially, culturally, and historically and that gendered individuals are differently positioned within the social structure and populate different social realms and contexts; gender is never constructed in a vacuum, it is made rather than given. For example, according to Fabjančič’s (1999, 74) constructivist approach, women as political actors in Slovenia are represented in media texts not primarily as politicians but as carriers of dominant feminine stereotypes. Thus, discursive strategies through which women politicians express themselves are embedded in larger discursive formations.

The percentage of women politicians in Slovenia is one of the lowest in Europe, falling significantly behind the European Union’s average. Although there have been several attempts to reverse this trend, participation of women in politics has been strongly decreasing since the declaration of independence of the Republic of Slovenia in 1991, although the trend has been reversed since the last elections in 2000.¹

After the fall of communism, and the establishment of a parliamentary democracy, Slovenian media blossomed and the era of deregulation began. For example, in 1992 there were already eighty-four new newspapers, weekly and monthly papers, and magazines established. The broadcast media grew extensively as well. Thrown into the world of a market economy, all media faced new competitors and broader influences.

Our research focuses on public statements of women politicians as mediated through the Slovenian press. In the process, we analyzed forty-nine articles, interviews, diaries, and columns in four dailies and eight weeklies published in Slovenia between 1996 and 2000. This four-year period is also the time between two parliamentary elections, a fact that makes this study even more interesting and relevant.
Every known culture makes a distinction between men and women, and in every known culture women are considered, to some degree, inferior to men (Ortner [1974] 1983, 67, 69). Women are seen as closer to nature and identified with “something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself . . . and that is ‘nature’ in the most generalized sense” (Ortner [1974] 1983, 72; de Beauvoir [1949] 1997). Accordingly, there is something genetically inherent in the male species that makes men the naturally dominant sex and, therefore, privileged to be equated with culture or with “the products of human consciousness . . . by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature” (Ortner [1974] 1983, 72; de Beauvoir [1949] 1997). Women are seen as being closer to nature than men because of the natural procreative functions specific to women alone or—as de Beauvoir ([1949] 1997) suggests—because female animality is more manifest than the male one.

Nevertheless, the distinction between male and female is “a construct of culture rather than a fact of nature. Woman is not ‘in reality’ any closer to (or further from) nature than man” (Ortner [1974] 1983, 87). The main idea is that men and women are products or constructs of a complex system of factors and forces, which construct masculinities and femininities (Edley and Wetherell 1995, 37). Therefore, our premise is that femininity is historically variable and socially rather than biologically or naturally produced or constructed. This means that identities of men and women and their representations of men and women, including themselves, are always shaped by the current social discourse and dominant knowledge. In this sense, we use Foucault’s (1991) linkage between power and knowledge (power/knowledge). He argues not only that knowledge is determined by power but that knowledge itself is a form of power and that power is implicated in questions of whether and under what circumstances knowledge is to be applied. This power/knowledge phenomenon has the strength to change itself into common sense, a doubtless truth, which can regulate, discipline, and control other knowledges or discourses. What people know in contemporary times is just a particular knowledge, which is (was) dominant in specific situations, historical contexts, and institutional regimes. Foucault (1991) argues that we cannot speak of the truth; because there is a constant struggle over defining the truth, we can only see it as a discursive formation that establishes the regime of truth. Thus, the statement that women are less intelligent than men can or cannot be true. But if everybody believes (believed) that women are (were) less intelligent and (would) act on this belief, such action will have (has had) relevant consequences for women and will (has) become true in terms of its real effects. Also, Foucault is critical of the traditional conception of an independent, autonomous subject. He claims that subjects may produce certain texts, but it is the discursive forma-
tion that produces knowledge; that is, the subject cannot escape the discourse he or she is rooted in but must submit to its rules and conventions or to its dispositions of power/knowledge. Although an individual may become the object of power, he or she can never step out of or stand outside power/knowledge as its source and author. The subject is itself produced in the discourse.

We should bear in mind that the tension or the stability of every society is a mere product—or is present only within the specific discourse of a given moment. Thus, Vivien Burr (1995) asked why the distinction between men and women has become the dominant perspective through which to view the functions of society. The answer may be that it is just a state of stability—constructed and maintained through discourse and everyday interaction, when people are communicating with each other. By doing so, they actively construct the knowledge, which is then taken for granted and perceived as common sense (Burr 1995, 7). Each discourse is building up its own “nature,” which differs from the nature of other discourses. It provides us with “the truth and objective facts.”

Another concern relates to how a specific mode of discourse, like myth, may be applied to replicate established social forms—or as Bruce Lincoln would argue—how myth can be employed in “the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of society itself” (Lincoln 1989, 3). For a specific definition of myth we turn to Roland Barthes, who claims that “myth is a type of speech” (Barthes [1957] 1993, 109). Myth is by definition always communication, a message, a mode of signification, a form; it cannot be an object or an idea. Since myth is just a type of speech, Barthes ([1957] 1993) argues that “everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse” (p. 109). Some kind of social usage is added to pure or “real” matter. Women only become feminine when they are put into a social context, when the mythical speech is put into practice, when a certain type of speech is chosen by the historical context. Myths produce meaning, “a Myth is a kind of story told in public, which people pass on to one another. . . . Myths offer a lens which can be used to see human identity in its social and cultural context” (Warner as cited in Woodward 1997b, 248).

II.

Sexist Language

The most broadly featured example of women politicians denying their femininity—and femininity in society as such—is the fact that they do not use the vocabulary containing nouns, verbs, adjectives, and pronouns in feminine form. This sexist use of language stresses male predominance in society and
helps reproduce the male hegemonic discourse. Women politicians predominantly use a male-dominated vocabulary that clearly shows them to be interpellated by the dominant ideology. It is important to stress that the adoption of this kind of language is not characteristic only of women politicians but is widespread in society and sometimes even incorporated into feminist movements. Due to its common nature in press interviews and articles, we present only a few typical examples.4

For instance, Ljubljana’s mayor, Vika Potočnik, uses only singular and plural masculine forms for the word citizen (meščan, meščani), although the Slovene language distinguishes between masculine and feminine forms in both cases (meščanka, meščanke). She also addresses all residents of Ljubljana as “[male] citizens of Ljubljana (Ljubljancani)” (Potočnik 1999).5 Tea Petrin (1999), economics minister,6 when asked about restructuring some Slovene firms, said that Slovene companies “will have to produce the goods according to the quality and the price the [male] consumer wants”; she added that the restructuring program benefited Slovene companies in the form of “collecting their own sources, acquiring and introducing strategic management, lowering the costs, better management of production, increased productivity, centering on profitable products, co-operation with [male] advisers etc.” Barbara Brežigar, chief state prosecutor and head of the special prosecuting team for organized crime, constantly referred to her team as male prosecutors, although there were at least two women, including herself, in a five-person team. Jožica Velišček (1997b), a former general secretary of the Slovene parliament, defined her position as female secretary (sekretarka), but she still used a male-dominated vocabulary when referring to MPs (Members of Parliament). In an interview, she responded that “a bill remains in the process unless the [male] sponsors withdraw it before the second hearing. . . . The last word on the fact whether the bill will stay alive or not have [male] representatives.” Berta Jereb (1996), president of the Pensioners’ Association, also spoke only about male pensioners. “It is a fact that the living standard of [male] pensioners has not increased. . . . We have afforded ourselves the luxury of having the youngest [male] pensioners in Europe. . . . Seventy- or eighty-year old [male] pensioners who reached the maximum working age do not want to pay for the mistakes of others.”

Most interesting is the fact that women politicians sometimes identify themselves in masculine forms—when addressing themselves, they use a male-dominated vocabulary. Polonca Dobrajc (1999), a former MP, said, “As a [male] politician I cannot turn things round and round. . . . Maybe I am not a real [male] politician.” There are numerous examples concerning the use of a male-dominated language, which also intertwine with the myths of femininity.
**Woman as a Caring and Sharing Person**

Women who are recognized as political actors strengthen and reconstruct the image that the private sphere and the sphere of personal relations are the natural spheres of women. They are supposed to be mainly in their domain because of their expressiveness and are connected with emotionality, empathy, compassion, understanding, love, and the capability of handling personal relations.

This is very vividly represented in the case of Ljubljana’s mayor, Potočnik, who presents herself as a very gentle, devoted, and caring person. The title of the press interview, which was actually based on Potočnik’s (1999) own statement, is transparent—“Little Finger with the Mayor’s Chain.” She talks about her deceased parents and her siblings: “There were five kids in our family. I was the youngest and, therefore, my parents called me the little finger. I am the little finger” (Potočnik 1999). In Slovene, the phrase “little finger” characterizes something very gentle and vulnerable. She even used a diminutive. This kind of wordplay helps construct her image of a nice, gentle, vulnerable, and harmless person. Thus, at the beginning of the interview she says,

*The most important progress we have made is that there is no more bitter and fierce fighting between the parties in the City Council, however, this fighting was replaced by creative restlessness. . . . I would not like to boast, but during my mayorality many things have gotten better and I am very proud of the good results.*

Here she represents herself as a very modest person: she does not want to fight, she intends to stay calm and take care of others, including those who are not on her side—including her enemies. She represents herself as if her mission was to take care of all the people. She is a martyr whose duty is to live for others first. She constructs the myth of motherhood, too, by talking about birth, motherland, birthplace, daughter, and fertility. She represents herself as a good and devoted mother, talking about her daughter and repeatedly suggests that her daughter is her first duty and her greatest joy. For the construction of the myth of a caring and sharing person, it is important to note that she talks about her daughter for almost half of her interview:

*I have always respected family and family life. My most beautiful memories are about our table at home, which was modest, but spiritually extraordinarily rich when all the family sat at this table for lunch. I am trying to continue this kind of family happiness with my daughter, Ana; therefore, the moments when we sit down at the table and have lunch together are the most precious moments for me. This is also the proper time for a family chat. . . . And now I can hardly wait for my daughter, Ana, to return from her holidays, which she is spending on the island Vis. Life together with my daughter, Ana, in Ljubljana or anywhere else*
represents the most wonderful holidays I have ever had. Ana accompanies me wherever I go. Ana is eight years old and she represents the happiest times of my life. Living without her is just like turning the light off.

She is frequently repeating the words *daughter* and *Ana* although the reader already knows that this girl is her daughter and that her name is Ana. Repetition constructs an image and reminds readers that she is a very good and sensible mother. She also promises to do good things for people: she will take care of them and she will work “for the city and citizens, who have chosen me, so that they will feel good and safe.” She promises to work for better health care, social care, and a larger involvement of women in politics. Potocnik is also creating the image of a very understanding woman; for instance, she does not want to sound harsh when talking about the traffic problems in Ljubljana:

> It is true that other cities employ a more consistent and stricter policy of punishment than we do in Ljubljana, although in my opinion, punishment is not the right solution to our problem. In our city, we will not massively introduce car wheel locks, this is also what I have promised at the beginning of my mandate.

In another interview she argues for “a soft strategy,” as “all troubles should be solved patiently and tolerantly” (Potocnik 1998). She is the one who wants to be emollient; she wants to care for all Ljubljana citizens very patiently and devotedly. She constructs the myth of woman as a caring and nurturing person, devoted to “her people” and, thus, creates the image that even in politics women stay soft, devoted to others, caring for them, and always working on behalf of their emotions, because a woman’s first and main task is to take care of others. It is also not decent for a woman to hurt others, and she is very careful not to “point the finger (even) at bad guys.”

A former MP, Polonca Dobrajc, tries to look tough, cool, and like “one of the boys.” For example, she says that when the welfare of the state is at stake, only expertise matters (Dobrajc 1999). But a few moments later, she argues that as a woman she is very personally and emotionally involved in politics, suggesting that in politics there are not enough emotions and personal involvement and that, as a woman, she can improve the situation. “But one should get involved in politics emotionally and personally, because you never decide just for yourself.”

Jožica Veliček, a former secretary general of the parliament, appears to reject the myth of woman as a caring and nurturing person, while actually constructing it. In her press interview, she argues that expertise is the most important and only subject worth talking about, only to talk about her family anyway. But she uses a good discursive strategy to produce this perspective: “Although I do not find this information so important, I would like to tell you something about my son” (Veliček 1997a). The journalist did not explicitly ask her to
talk about her family but merely to introduce herself. Yet, she talks about her family almost through one-third of the interview, constructing the myth of motherhood, of a good and self-sacrificing mother, a loving and caring wife, and an obedient and working daughter:

My son is 23 years old, and he is a graduate student at the Faculty of Law. I really do not want to boast, but he is a very good boy, active, dynamic, hard working, and he is also doing many other things, above all, he likes computers. Together with my partner we are a very busy family, we see each other mostly in the mornings and we are always together for the weekends—we completely dedicate that time to each other and substitute what we have lost during the week. . . . I also have to mention my mother, who helps me a lot.

Sonja Lokar is president of the Women’s Forum of the Associated List of Social Democrats (ZLSD party). She connects the political left with certain female characteristics and claims that the most left-wing core inside ZLSD is the Women’s Forum, “which is always on the side of those who have only their own heads and hands, but are willing to help each other anyway” (Lokar 1997). She explains that the Women’s Forum “cares about real people” and, thus, constructs the myth of the Christian mother, who cares for others and who is unconditionally giving herself away for them. Responding to whether the left orientation of the Women’s Forum is some kind of religion, Lokar says, “We are obsessed with values. And these left-wing values are as old as Christianity, as old as an archaic current oriented to cooperation in the history of our species.” She explicitly claims that “emotions are very important in politics . . . without emotions one cannot understand anything, neither can one decide and take steps.” She adds that women have done much to improve the situation. “In the last ten years women in this party have done a great deal, and we have become an example of a women’s group, which has proved how to make things better step by step.” She connects the messianic principle—complete devotion to others—with her group. Through the entire interview she uses we, which constructs the “gender imagined community,” from which men are excluded, because they are deprived of specific characteristics. This is even more evident in Slovene, because its grammar indicates the feminine plural form; she uses the word to polarize politicians, those (female politicians) who have specific characteristics and others (male politicians) who do not. For instance, she talks about herself crying in Belgrade during the last parliamentary session of the Yugoslav Communist Party when Slovene communists informally seceded from the Yugoslav Communist Party.

Those tears were not the tears of my emotions, but the tears of realizing what is going to happen. When we were leaving the congress, I knew that war is coming. . . . I was crying because I was afraid that people were going to die and that this would first happen in Slovenia.
She actually denies that her tears were caused by emotions, instead, they were "rational tears," because she was thinking rationally rather than emotionally. On the other hand, we can easily deconstruct her words and show that emotions led her to cry. Her words help build the myth of devoted women, who put others first and care for them, although she wants to be seen as a tough and rational woman. Her idea is to bring emotions into politics, although "I do not mean that one should panic or act thoughtlessly and hysterically in politics."

Another example of how women help produce the myth of a caring and sharing woman may be found in the writings of Spomenka Hribar (1999), a former, though still publicly active, politician. She says,

Many people come to me because of injustices, which happen to them. And what can I do as a person outside political structures? More or less nothing. The whole thing has structural implications. The state doesn’t operate as it should. It causes me great pain and anger that there are many more injustices now than in the former regime. The manner in which workers, residents in denationalized flats are dealt with—it is impossible to believe it!

Reflecting on the possibilities of reconciliation with "our past," she writes about suffering during World War II. But she only mentions women: it appears that in those days mostly widows and sad mothers rather than widowers and sad fathers suffered. She stresses the roles of women, who are naturally given the ability to give birth to children and to take care of them. Men are thereby denied the right to suffer after the loss of a child, for instance. Hribar also recounts personal histories from that time and tries indirectly to show herself as a caring, sympathetic, and maternal woman: “Tears were kept inside. What pain. What loneliness. What weakness.”

**Woman as an Enigma and Threat**

What do women want, what do they desire? These are the questions asked by the dominant male discourse, which constructs the feminine enigma while covering the woman and her body with a veil of mysteriousness, danger, and untrustworthiness as a seductress. Macdonald (1995) argued that this myth is built and rebuilt through entertaining the question of “what do women want” instead of “who is the one who is asking this.” Her key argument in constructing the enigma of femininity is “the location within which woman is set, and the authority or lack of it with which she speaks” (Macdonald 1995, 105). When this question is asked and answered by the dominant ideology, it creates the myth of woman as mysterious and dangerous. Interestingly enough, we found women politicians who actually contributed to the construction of the image of women as femme fatale, monsters, and she-devils—mysterious in their motives and irrational in their behavior.
Boža Grešovnik (1999) reproduced this myth by calling herself “a wounded beast.” She suggests that it is in her nature to become enigmatic and dangerous when somebody attacks her “territory.” In such cases—for example, when her daughter was allegedly threatened by another politician—she acts like an animal and cannot act rationally. “You want to protect your child, you become a wounded beast.” In addition to her protective and mothering posture, she creates the image of herself as mysterious, unpredictable, and, thus, very dangerous. One should beware of her, because she could become a lethal beast. When asked whether leaving her own political party means capitulation, she replied, “No, I will probably not join another party.” The word probably revivifies enigma and impulsiveness, keeps the tension and inherent danger, and also constructs her as a threat and as someone who acts to surprise.

Lokar (1997), president of the ZLSD’s Women’s Forum, also represents herself according to this myth by saying, “I am very aggressive and many people have told me so, but I do not think this is one of my deficiencies.” On the other hand, she suggests that insisting on being aggressive is an advantage, and she is proud, because many people agree, and consequently, are afraid of her. When told by a journalist that he saw this kind of anger of Slovene women politicians at the Yugoslav Communist Party congress, and that he felt that women would leave the congress, she replied,

“One should not behave like this, one should think very precisely, what to do and why . . . We judged that this kind of action would not be useful to anybody, neither to the women’s movement nor to the left wing in Slovenia.

Here she argues first that such responses are prohibited and irrational (one should think!), only to suggest afterward that women are actually allowed to behave in such a way and that they may act irrationally and enigmatically. It seems that Lokar is saying that women are allowed to do so, because it is in their nature to be mysterious but that they decided against it. Even more interesting is the following sentence: “We are expecting the party management to tell us how it sees the situation of women in our party.” She uses the pronoun it (in Slovene: ono) when naming the leadership of the party. In this context, she wants to remain powerful and enigmatic, since it (ono) suggests that both women and men can be party leaders. This implicit suggestion also makes her very mysterious.

Potočnik, the mayor of Ljubljana, told the interviewer that her older brother likes to say that “in our family there are two brothers, two sisters and one woman politician.” She continues, “at that moment his and my mischievous white teeth light up and we start to laugh” (Potočnik 1999). Potočnik is very proud of this characterization, which gives her power and makes her unusual. She becomes mysterious and dangerous and, therefore, superior to ordinary
people and even superior to her male siblings. With her response, she is constructing two myths simultaneously: woman as a caring person and woman as an enigma and threat. Earlier she had suggested to be against “the policy of punishment” but afterward she argued that “we should use some of these beasts” (i.e., wheel locks on cars). These two contradictory sentences make her very enigmatic, and we never know what she is up to. She could well say one thing but do something else instead. Her own sentences make her a very tough, dangerous, powerful, and mysterious person—a woman politician, as her older brother would say.

Vera Kozmik, former director of the Bureau for Women’s Politics, is a factual embodiment of enigma and threat. She presents herself as irrational, different, full of humor, and ultimately unpredictable. She offers completely unexpected, even contradictory, answers and usually introduces new subjects rather than answering questions (Kozmik 2000). Consequently, she acts dangerously, and her activities become irrational and unpredictable. At the same time, she claims that such mythologism of women exists:

> Many creative women in the world’s history were—just for being different, special, determined, inventive, and self-confident, and therewith a threat to traditional, patriarchal society—proclaimed mad, hysterical. If a woman steps out loudly, she is taken for being hysterical and eccentric. A man, on the other hand, would seem perfectly reasonable doing the same thing. People would say: “He finally slammed the door.”

Since she had been compared with Benazir Buto and the Iron Lady Margaret Thatcher by her interviewer, Kozmik replied that these two women surely would be more successful in Slovene politics (Kozmik 1996). She indirectly admitted that women politicians in Slovenia are not as determined and successful in political struggles as they should be.

An extraordinary example of an enigmatic woman is Barbara Brezigar, chief state prosecutor. She expresses opinions authoritatively, systematically, and accurately. She never comments on her private life and stresses her ability to be objective, rational, and sovereign. She constructs a picture of herself as a cold-blooded, mysterious, enigmatic, and tough-minded person who wants to be recognized as a threat. That she does not want to look personally involved is clearly visible in her reserved and stern mode of address, especially when journalists ask personal questions. We can notice a depersonalization in her style of speech. She struggles to build an image of an objective situation even though questions may refer to very personal issues. For example, questioned why she would start prosecuting when she already turned down a case, she replied, “This kind of action is in the power of the state’s attorney to find out whether there is new evidence or circumstances which show that criminal acts have been committed” (Brezigar 1999a). She wants to stay “outside” and remain
personally uninvolved, and she rarely uses the personal pronouns I or even we but usually answers by referring to the third person (he, state’s attorney, they, government, by law, etc.) (Brezigar 1997, 1999a). She reinforces her self-image with statements like, “Courts in Slovenia are passing sentences that are too mild. We should put longer and tougher sentences into practice” (Brezigar 1997). By saying that it must be so, she constructs herself as an enigmatic authority. However, Brezigar is not insensitive to a feminist discourse. Having heard that—compared with Zdenka Cerar, main state prosecutor—she is heartless and cold, while Cerar is a good mother, she replied, “I agree, we are mothers at home!” (Brezigar 1999b). Her response firmly locates the role of mother at home and not in the office. However, she does not entirely neglect her femininity, not even at work, despite the fact that she conveys that expertise rather than emotions are important at work. “Most important is his [sic] choice—personal feelings and emotions have nothing to do with a prosecutor’s professional work” (Brezigar 1997). Although she seems like “one of the boys,” she still argues that at work “personal relations are the most important thing” (Brezigar 1999a). Here she obviously refers to the fact that she had very good personal contacts with prosecutors from the European Union, because she is a woman capable of warmth. She even expresses doubt that after her replacement, the new chief prosecutor (whom she addresses as a man, although at the time her replacement was still unknown) will be capable of such relations and this could be fatal for the state of Slovenia (Brezigar 1999a).

In Slovene culture, women are mostly described by their weakness and dependence rather than by power and influence. Brezigar represents herself as a woman defined by existing myths of femininity but challenging them on different levels. Thus, Brezigar’s femininity is revealed only on certain occasions.

**Woman as a Body and Sexual Object**

In Western culture, women are often treated as objects of a male gaze. More interesting, however, is that these press interviews reveal that women politicians in Slovenia represent themselves, reluctantly or not, according to the myth of woman as a sexual object and body. Although the myth is rarely called upon in the self-representation of female politicians, there exist telling and vibrant examples.

For instance, Potočnik helps recreate the myth in her account of a meeting with Hillary Clinton during her visit to Ljubljana. She admitted that “Hillary Clinton impressed me very much” by her “interesting character and attractiveness” (Potočnik 1999). She found Hillary Clinton to be a woman politician whose attractiveness is a great advantage.

The most colorful example is the case of a former MP, Polonca Dobrajc, who had been represented by the media as the best-dressed woman in parliament.
One of the interviewers introduced her as a very elegant, sexy woman with an attractive figure and continued, “She came to our arranged meeting in jeans and a black leather coat. A real lady. As always” (Dobrajc 1999). Asked whether she feels good when told that she is the best-dressed woman in parliament, Dobrajc tried to deny this label and to defy the dominant ideology; yet, she also responded to it by saying that a woman—even as a politician—must look good and sexy to meet a man’s gaze. Good looks, it seems, is a necessary requirement for any woman who wants to be either a good woman or a good woman politician:

No. It would mean much more to me, if somebody told me, that I was good at presiding over meetings, that my speech was excellent or something similar, which is actually connected to my work. But all other things . . . public ratings, my appearance, clothes. I do not know, but I think this is a matter . . . I really do not know of what. In any event, in my opinion obviously this also has to be included. (Dobrajc 1999)

On a similar occasion, when Dobrajc had changed her image, she was asked whether she wanted to attract media attention to prompt the publication of her picture. Her brief answer, “I do not preoccupy myself with such things,” explicitly denies recreating the myth in question. However, later in the same sentence, she adds, “Yes, I really changed my haircut, but that was some time ago, in the spring of '97.” She explicitly confirms that women are supposed to look good. It seems that she wanted to say that she looked better then and suggested that it would be better if the media published only photos with the new haircut. She implied that she liked herself much more with a new hairdo and that she looked even better now, constructing an image of a sexy and good-looking woman, who is, therefore, also an object of man’s pleasure.

**Woman as a Martyr**

Women politicians are constructing this myth in the sense that women have yet to become somebody, but this also means that they must relinquish many things. The idea that women are inferior to men is taken for granted and becomes a natural position.

Potočnik distinguishes between nature and culture when she talks about relations and equality between men and women. It seems that she equates men with culture and technology and women with nature. Women must fight to reach the level of culture:

So it is necessary to take care of the order and relations between nature and the technologies man has invented, and respect them both. So it is necessary to take care of the balance between a man and a woman, because these two poles are
essentially and creatively intertwined and life without one is not possible. (Potočnik 1999)

She tries to say that a woman has to fight to become a woman politician, while it is in the nature of a man to be a politician. But she also suggests that men should not forget why it is so—because women are sacrificing themselves by taking care of humankind.

Dobrajce evokes the myth of a woman as martyr who should never complain and should shoulder the entire burden; for instance, she comments on the mother of two sick children who was selected for the Slovene Woman of the Year award: “To carry the burden and also your own fate without moaning and eternal complaining.” A model for every woman.

Lokar also offers a strategy for women who must constantly fight, while men are in a naturally privileged position (Lokar 1997). Her idea is that a woman politician should not retire because she is not allowed to become passive: “I would not have retired, if I had had a job when my mandate in Parliament ended. I was working really hard to get a regular job, but I did not get one. Afterwards I made the unpleasant choice to retire.” Her suggestion seems to indicate that retirement is a rather unpleasant choice for a woman politician, because it demonstrates her inability to do the job. The myth of martyrdom is constructed by women politicians who say that women must fight until they die because they are in a naturally subordinate position. Although they often explicitly identify this statement as a product of ideology, they still behave as though subordination to men is a normal state for women who are supposed to be closer to nature.

Conclusion

Women politicians—whose self-representation in the Slovene press was analyzed here—are discursively rooted in established myths of femininity and in their social roles and behaviors. Since they combine the role of politician and woman, they are often challenged in their public statements to reflect on different forms of these myths. Consequently, socially predominant perceptions of femininity occur even more often in their discourse than in any other circumstance.

Thus, self-representations of women politicians are strongly connected to dominant myths about femininity. Moreover, these women seem far from demystifying or deconstructing hegemonic discourses and behaviors. Consequently, the dominant discourse of women is not reproduced only by their male counterparts or the media but also by women politicians who contribute significantly to it as they are subjected to that discourse. As the majority of the exam-
ples shows, women politicians spontaneously express their femininity through the dominant discourse, especially when challenged by journalists.

Ideology, as Althusser (2000, 72-73) argued, strongly affects a person’s subconscious and forms a kind of knowledge that is presented through discourse as common sense, doubtless reality, and knowledge that is present in a person’s discourse even if one is persuaded that this kind of knowledge does not exist because one tried to neutralize it. Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects:

It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are “obviousness”) obviousness as obviousness, which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the “still, small voice of conscience”): “That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!” (Althusser 1998, 161)

The myths of femininity, which are strongly present in the discourse of women politicians in Slovenia, are generally considered common and given to Slovene society and culture. They are not questioned by women politicians as hegemonic. Moreover, it may well be that an adherence to such myths extends beyond women politicians to other members of imagined communities (Anderson 1998) even to the most exposed ones, like athletes or artists. And here is another reason to suggest that the icebergs of prevailing myths of femininity are not likely to melt soon.

On the other hand, women are not a homogenous group. They are separated at least by class, age, educational background, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. There are more possibilities for (media) representation of women, but we should also bear in mind that audience responses to these new possibilities can result in new myths and the reconfiguration of the old ones.

Notes

1. After the 1990 elections, there were 15 percent of women MPs (Members of Parliament) in Parliament; after the 1992 elections, 13.3 percent; after the 1996 elections, 7.8 percent; and after the 2000 elections, there are 12.2 percent.

2. Foucault uses discourse or discursive formation to refer to groups of statements, which provide a way of representing a particular topic, concern, or object. These statements might be produced across a number of different texts and appear at more than one institutional site but are connected by regularity or underlying unity. In his later work, this was tied in with a greater attention to the apparatuses and institutions through which discursive formations operated (Nixon 1997, 302).

3. By mythical speech we mean not merely verbal or written discourses but also symbolic ones; for example, spectacle, gestures, costume, icon, musical performance, sport, photography, and so forth. The function of the myth is not to make things disappear but to distort them. “Myth hides nothing” (Barthes [1957] 1993, 121).

5. Of course, it should be mentioned here that the Slovene language, apart from many other languages, contains a vast possibility of forming feminine forms of nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives, but this possibility is very rarely used by both men and women. In the given examples, because of the nature of the English language, we are forced to use male to stress the male-dominated vocabulary used by women politicians presented in this article.

6. In Slovene, a female minister is called ministrica; the noun is derived from the masculine form minister. The stated examples of women politicians’ functions can also be described by the feminine form of appropriate nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs, but we decided to use an English version without noting the difference between the two languages as it would take up too much space.

7. The Slovene language has three possibilities to express gender. The pronoun on expresses male gender. The pronoun ona expresses female gender. But the neutral pronoun ono does not define whether the speaker refers to the male or female gender.

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Domestic Values and National Security: Framing the Battle for Educational Frequencies in 1950-51

The 1950-51 battle for educational channels produced 914 oral and written statements, achieved 11.7 percent of the spectrum, and ushered in a television system dedicated to formal, in-school instruction. The campaign for instructional channels for American schoolchildren was a lively and passionate discourse by educators who believed U.S. education would be markedly improved through the use of television technology. Many were convinced that their efforts were nonprofit television’s last chance for spectrum space, and they joined in a successful effort to produce the electromagnetic framework that stands today as channels for public television. Even so, the strategic decision by the Joint Committee on Educational Television and National Association of Educational Broadcasters to promote a specialized, in-school use of noncommercial TV was a move that abandoned other constituencies and narrowly defined educational television as instructional. A public service became a teaching tool, and the cost was a public mission, a broad-based audience, and an enduring institutional identity.

Taking its cues from the homebound and postwar culture of the 1950s, non-commercial TV developed at the intersections of domestic bliss and a nationwide silencing of dissident speech. Caught in the middle, pinioned between two dominant ideological social forces, educational television evolved to satisfy them both. The 1950-51 battle for educational channels produced 914 oral and written statements, achieved 11.7 percent of the spectrum, and ushered in a television system dedicated to formal, in-school instruction. After two years of campaign planning, the result was a compromise that restricted noncommercial broadcasting’s sphere of influence largely to the classroom and silenced much of its progressive potential.

The plea for instructional channels for American schoolchildren was a lively and passionate discourse by educators who believed U.S. education would be markedly improved through the use of television technology. Many were convinced that their efforts were nonprofit television’s last chance for spectrum space, and they joined in a successful effort to produce the electro-
magnetic framework that stands today as channels for public television. Even so, the strategic decision by the Joint Committee on Educational Television (JCET) and the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) to promote a specialized, in-school use of noncommercial TV was a move that abandoned other constituencies and narrowly defined educational television as instructional. A public service became a teaching tool, and the cost was a public mission, a broad-based audience, and an enduring institutional identity. Writing in 1993, Williard Rowland observed,

As late as the early 1990s, there remained little evidence of public broadcasting leaders (including board members, chief executives, senior managers, and producers in the various national, regional, and local station organizations) being able to write or speak at length and in depth about the philosophy, history, and social expectations of their institution, let alone the broader realm of related questions about its role in American culture, politics, and social order. (P.167)

I argue that this indecisive lack of purpose by U.S. public broadcasters in the present has its roots in the past and the choices made, in part, by broadcast reformers in the fall of 1950. The allocation hearings of 1950-51 offered a rare opportunity for national examination of U.S. broadcasting practice, policy, and structure. Listener groups were forming, mothers were writing letters to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and newspaper columnists continually offered critique of educational radio and commercial television. A popular discourse about culture and communication had emerged, and a nation was listening as broadcast reformers and FCC commissioners gathered to chart the future of educational television. Educational broadcasters’ decision to settle for a depoliticized, school-centered, and distinctly secondary public television system cut this conversation short, truncating noncommercial broadcasting’s public mission and crippling its internalized sense of confidence and purpose.

A central purpose of this article is to define the social, political moment in which educational TV channels were allocated and to explore how dominant social aspects of the 1950s helped define the shape of U.S. noncommercial television. I suggest that the educational model—tied to values of privacy, home, service to children, and national security—acted to constrain the public potential of noncommercial broadcasting. Developed in the invisible “cultural air” of postwar domestic life, the system’s family values paradigm was also a compromise hammered out in a social landscape of paranoia and anxiety about loyalty oaths and the cold war. Notions of a lively, combative public were clearly at risk during this period of American history (May 1989), and what survived as noncommercial broadcasting was, in part, what could be negotiated in a difficult moment of rigid gender roles, discourses of suburbia, and the Red Scare.
This is not to suggest that noncommercial media’s “educational compromise” resulted entirely from the social context in which the frequencies were allocated in 1950-51. Indeed, several public media scholars have argued that the history of noncommercial media in the United States has been marked generally by indecisiveness, weak leadership, and failed commitments to diverse constituencies; they argue that these characteristics have been overarching factors in the system’s lackluster performance in public service broadcasting (Aufderheide 1992). By focusing on the response of 1950s broadcast reformers to their social environment, I hope to offer insights into how the movement’s rhetorical arguments and political strategies not only resulted in an instructional model for noncommercial broadcasting in the short term but also advanced an organizational culture that continues to stymie progressive action by public broadcasting.

I also explore the discussions of the FCC hearings, looking specifically at reformers’ arguments for spectrum space. As a rich and lively debate produced by committed education professionals, this testimony stands as proof entered into evidence of educational broadcasting’s claim to frequencies. These portions of the record provide a slice of a largely unrecorded piece of broadcast history produced by a group of people whose names and faces have been forgotten. The recovery of their voices seems useful. At the same time, in efforts to present a case they could win, noncommercial broadcasters made choices that privileged instructional rhetoric, excluded speakers from the social and political margins, and constructed an audience partial to mainstream expectations of school and TV.

An Institution in Crisis

Welling (1996) suggested that U.S. public media originated in early public notions of American broadcasting that not only viewed the airwaves as a tool for participatory democracy but also bound broadcasters in a “direct creative relationship to the communities they serve[d]” (p. 21). The concept that radio and television should enable public speech, community attachments, and democratic practice resonates with the work of public sphere scholars Hannah Arendt, John Dewey, and Jurgen Habermas. Each argues for a lively, protected discursive space that embraces difference, fosters free and open debate of public issues, and enables purposeful action. This site of protected speech differs for each; Arendt (1958) wrote of the Greek polis, Habermas (1996) cited the coffeehouses and salons of Enlightenment Europe, and Dewey (1927) looked to the town hall meeting. These theories of the public sphere are not unproblematic. Not only are each idealized conceptions but Arendt and Habermas both described spaces that were highly exclusionary. Even so, each acts as an important model for conceptualizing discourse as an enabler of public life and
policies for the common good. Importantly, the public sphere is seen as a mechanism by which private people are transformed into public citizens with obligations to the community.

The work of these three important theorists of public life can usefully inform an investigation of institutional purpose for American public media. Indeed, there is evidence throughout noncommercial broadcasting archives that a number of educational broadcasters have believed that nonprofit media could invigorate discussion, engage a working democracy, and promote cultural diversity as a staple of American life. For example, Hartford Gunn (WGBH/Boston), Donley Feddersen (WTIU/Indiana University), and a small group of station managers worked together to refine the system’s “Declaration of Principles” in December 1978. Their report described the value of cultural diversity, commonness, and democratic discourses:

> The strength of our nation depends on the ability of our people to govern themselves wisely. Only an informed and enlightened citizenry can shape its own future and assert the inalienable rights of individuals while guarding the essential interests of society. Knowledge and understanding are the foundations of a democracy. (A declaration of principles 1980, 10)

Similarly, Robert Blakely (1971) adopted the phrase “broadcasting for public purposes” as the most descriptive name for public broadcasting; he argued for community governance of the airwaves:

> Broadcasting for public purposes is new, incomplete, malnourished and neglected. But it holds the seeds of larger things. Its potentialities will be discovered and developed only as large numbers and many groups of the American people come to regard it, not as an institution, but as their instrument to use for the purposes that matter most to them. (P. 10)

Finally, Ira Robinson (1930, 3), an early day advocate of noncommercial radio, was committed to the popular expression: “To my mind the radio is the voice of the public.” Like Arendt, Dewey, and Habermas, these noncommercial broadcasters seemingly desired the creation of a modern polis that could transform private people into active citizens with responsibilities to the life of the common.

Despite such commitments by individual broadcasters, critics argue that the absence of an institutional identity built on shared public goals has prevented noncommercial broadcasting from acting as an agent of the public sphere. Communication scholars have focused on U.S. public media’s growing commercialism, class bias, lack of service to diverse and underrepresented groups, and failure to develop as a clear alternative to commercial media. Robert Avery (Avery and Pepper 1980) and Williard Rowland (1993)—media scholars who
have analyzed public broadcasting policy since the late 1960s—have long argued that the system acts only as a “palliative” to the weaknesses of commercial broadcasting. Patricia Aufderheide (1992) wrote that public broadcasting falters in the complicated, competitive media environment initiated by cable and new media because it has never developed a coherent vision of “publicness;” and Ralph Engelman (1996), B. J. Bullert (1995), James Ledbetter (1997), and Charles Guggenheim (1996) all argued that public television marginalizes productions committed to citizenship, cultural diversity, and social change. William Hoyes’s (1994) analysis focused on the commercialization of public broadcasting and the ways in which a growing dependence on private sector funding has pushed public TV, in particular, to gear programming to the tastes of upscale viewer-donors and corporate underwriters. The result, he said, is class-based “quality TV.” Finally, that public TV offers few programs for ethnic minorities, working people, the elderly, rural America, and social activists has been of special concern to James Day (1995, 20), who called public broadcasting a peripheral organization that operates at the edges of American social life. He bemoaned public television’s “vanished vision” of comprehensive and diverse service. Marilyn Lashley (1992, 95) agreed with Day that PBS offers few programs for ethnic minorities; she posited that this is due largely to small numbers of minority managers and producers in public TV and the system’s practice of developing programming for an ideal donor-type seen generally as white, middle class, and professional.

Observers inside the system bring similar charges that noncommercial broadcasting operates without visionary leadership and that it has become increasingly timid, oriented to the bottom line, and a victim of internal struggle and infighting. A 1989 study commissioned by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting identified a series of systemic problems troubling public television, including not only a lack of money and excessive bureaucracy but also rising costs of competing with cable TV, political and financial interference, declining program quality, and a lack of leadership (Producers Reject 1989, 53). Seven years later, a 1996 study by America’s Public Television Stations offered similar conclusions, reporting that public television is fragmented and lacks internal allegiances; stations distrust their national organizations, which earn that distrust by fighting among themselves; and public TV lacks a decision-making apparatus for making bold and creative programming decisions (PTV 1996, 17).

Critical approaches to public broadcasting focus on diminished audience support, battles inside and out, lack of leadership, and the absence of a foundational philosophy of publicness. Perhaps not surprisingly, these are not new worries. For years, critics—many of them public broadcasters—have claimed the system operates without a sure sense of purpose or identity. Returning to his office at the Rockefeller Foundation following the Allerton House meetings
of 1949, project planner John Marshall bemoaned the narrow perspective of educational broadcasters who had attended the session. Writing in his personal desk diary, Marshall (“Memo,” n.d.) noted,

In general the response to all this was somewhat disappointing. [Charles] Siepmann volunteered the opinion that little could be expected from this particular group. [Thomas] Baird’s view of them is that they are incredibly timid without prestige in their own institutions and apparently unaware of what they could do if they were to recognize their real freedom to act.

The 1950s Family: Safety from War Abroad and Ruin Within

Elaine May (1988) reported that the early 1950s saw a boom in weddings and births. Reversing a century-long decline in the U.S. birthrate, these post-war Americans established a pattern of early marriage and large families that held through the early 1960s. Some scholars suggest the success of 1950s marriages was tied inextricably to these unions’ perceived ability to comfort and protect spouses and children in an “age of anxiety.” Despite a nostalgia that would later depict the 1950s as idyllic years of hula hoops, sock hops, and poodle skirts, this decade was in fact an era of national fear and insecurity. Exhausted by sixteen long years of economic depression and global war and eager for respite, Americans found themselves living in a world threatened by McCarthyism, communism, polio, and the bomb. The safe harbor promised by enemy surrender aboard the Missouri had not been forthcoming, and as the nation entered the 1950s, political rhetoric fanned the flames of paranoia about communist infiltration in American life. Adlai Stevenson, in his race for the presidency in 1952, declared, “We cannot let our guard drop even for a moment. The only assumption is that no place is safe” (Carter 1983, 13).

The bomb that brought a declared peace for World War II ushered in the cold war, and while politicians fretted over Soviet secret agents burrowed like moles into U.S. society, American soldiers were fighting and dying again, this time in Korea. A police action became a prolonged conflict, one the country could not seem to win, and the jaunty self-confidence Americans had known at the end of World War II took on new shades of doubt. In the last analysis, wide-scale war was averted. On 27 July 1953, after thirty-seven months of fighting and 2,000,000 deaths—80 percent of them civilians—the United Nations negotiated a tenuous peace (Carter 1983, 56). Even so, the threat of a thermo-nuclear holocaust seemed a real and present danger for most American families, for if America had the bomb, so did the Russians. A technological wonder had become a threat to world existence.
The 1950s family-centered culture also took shape amid the anticomunist witch-hunts of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the FBI. The rhetoric and tactics of Joseph McCarthy created a climate of fear, as the Republican senator from Wisconsin reported lists of Reds in education, entertainment, religion, the military, and the government. He spoke of spies throughout the country, in every sector, and announced a vigilance to ferret them out. The social effects of McCarthyism were profound, working to pit neighbors and colleagues against one another and to silence voices of dissent in America. Sigmund Diamond (1992, 3-4) wrote that some Americans—including university presidents and deans—joined McCarthy in stigmatizing alternatives to existing national policy as subversive, “sometimes out of agreement, sometimes hopeful that a display of bloodlust would buy immunity for them.” In other cases, Americans feared judgment of treason through association. In December 1953, in the midst of national efforts by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the FBI to deport foreign-born citizens, I. F. Stone’s Weekly noted,

The suffering in terms of broken families and disrupted lives is beyond the most sympathetic imagination. As serious is the moral degradation imposed by spreading terror. People are afraid to look lest they be tempted to help, and bring down suspicion on themselves. (P. 35)

McCarthy and J. Edgar Hoover and the resources under their control were silencing alternative, radical, liberal, and progressive discourses in an overtly ideological war on difference and dissent in America. The effect was a narrowing of acceptable discourse and an intimidation of artists, writers, teachers, labor leaders, broadcasters, and political activists.

The ideology of the 1950s family, then, was as much about safety in the world as it was domestic satisfaction. If the treaties of wartime victory could not provide a sense of security for the American citizenry, promises of abundance and family ties could. The home stood as a physical and psychological fortress against illicit sexuality, suicide, juvenile delinquency, and nuclear war; it provided security in a world that threatened, almost at any moment, to blow apart. Suburban family culture—romanticized on the weekly sitcom Father Knows Best, with shady streets, white ruffled curtains, and friendly neighborliness—seemed a safe place indeed from the ravages of war abroad and ruin within.

This was also the social environment in which noncommercial television presented its case and achieved a presence, however marginalized, on the radio spectrum. The space in which arguments for educational television frequencies developed was tied directly to the FCC’s “freeze” on television licenses, announced 29 September 1948. The large number of commercial applicants,
reception interference among competing signals, and questions about color television led the FCC to put all applications for television licenses on hold. This hiatus, which ultimately lasted four years, granted nonprofit broadcasters time to design a strategic campaign for educational channels. Fueled philosophically by “vision seminars” sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and coordinated by the JCET, the project’s charge was to articulate a coherent argument for noncommercial allocations and recruit witnesses to support it. The effort was directed by I. Keith Tyler, on loan from the Bureau of Educational Research at Ohio State University (Blakely 1979, 9-14).

The FCC convened from 27 November to 8 December 1950, to hear reformers’ testimony advocating set-aside space on the spectrum for educational television, and Frieda Hennock, the commission’s most ardent supporter of non-commercial broadcasting, produced a bundle of unsolicited mail to support her position (see public opinion n.d.). Those letters, components of a campaign that put seventy-six witnesses on the stand in favor of public media, were women’s letters. Handwritten, many on personalized note paper, more than half from women who identified themselves as “Mrs.,” these notes brought a scathing assessment of commercial broadcasting. Three major lines of critique emerged: inferior quality of commercial programs, intrusive and adverse impacts of advertising, and television’s potential to educate American children. Almost all requested dedicated channels for the instruction of children. One letter read, “If one citizen’s approval can help you . . . lift the U.S. above the mental level of Howdy-Doody, here it is.” Mary L. Sanders of Tuckahoe, New York, noted, “The T.V. advertising has reached a new low. My son took his T.V. set to the attic this fall.” From Flushing, New York, came this short note: “We the Mothers’ Club of P.S. 24 feel one Channel of Television should be kept open for educational purposes.” Mrs. Donnell J. Smith of Arlington, Virginia, wrote,

This would constitute a very worthwhile step to counteract the growing commercialism which will ultimately affect the thinking of children and adults alike until we are all going around with dollar signs reflected in the pupils of our eyes.

And M. Stewart, writing from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, said, “I for one don’t want to be put in that stupid percentage who aren’t interested in anything but comedy, variety, and crime. Let’s raise the level!” Only one letter—one of 544—specifically addressed the issue of broadcasting and public life. Marjorie F. Warner wrote, “America’s citizenship has much at stake in your campaign.” A discourse on home, school, child, and viewing, these letters spoke from the hearth of mainstream American life. Representing gendered roles of family and workplace, an absence of racial difference, and worries about popular texts and consumerism, these mothers’ notes argued for change
in public policy governing the television programs their children viewed at home. Correspondence from women in private spaces to one in public, the letters stand today as a repository of a set of American attitudes about media and society in the early 1950s.

Framing public problems in terms of the family, these values of domestic responsibility also set much of the agenda for the broadcast reform movement of 1950-51. As they appealed for educational channels, broadcast reformers cast their arguments in the cultural grammar of the time, assuming a gendered, child-centered society in which TV was a private family matter. Like the mothers writing to Hennock, noncommercial broadcasters were homebound; they made the care of children their first priority. Emphasizing family ties—not progressive public speech—educational TV took its place in the ranch-style home of the 1950s and settled in with an institutional mission that focused on the needs of middle-class children in school.

Constructing a Defensible, Coherent Argument: A Three-Pronged Petition for Instructional Channels

Although no educational broadcasters applied for television licenses prior to the FCC freeze on allocations in 1948, by late 1949 a movement had developed to seek as much as 20 percent of the spectrum for educational TV. Believing success was to be found in an articulate and tightly coordinated campaign, the broadcast reformers organized. They drafted materials, plotted central arguments, and cultivated the participation of prominent, well-spoken educators. Although the following telegram from NAEB president Richard Hull was distributed just a month and a half before the hearings, the JCET and NAEB worked for almost two years to construct eleven days of credible testimony.

If your institution desires participation educational TV hearings FCC in November imperative you attend joint strategy meeting NAEB, NEA, etc. 9:30 a.m. sharp Monday, October 16 Room 4439 Federal Security Building, 4th and Independence, Washington, D.C. Further details by letter. (Hull “Telegram,” RG 40/62/3)

The JCET presented its case from 27 November to 8 December 1950. In total, seventy-six witnesses and 838 written statements from colleges, universities, school systems, and public service agencies were produced in support of non-profit television’s bid for the spectrum (Paulu, RG 40/62/5).

Although Blakely (1979, 15) reported that farmers, labor, and religion were represented, the hearings were dominated by educators and educational institutions. All referenced, in one way or another, the preferred position of educa-
tion in American culture and television’s potential for instruction. Clearly, for these educators what was at stake was the use of television to provide a broad-based, mainstream educational service for American schoolchildren and, to some extent, adults at home. These rhetors—teachers, school superintendents, education commissioners, and university presidents—did not speak for public media’s loosely collected coalition of minority constituencies of the 1920s and 1930s. Rather, their discourse was framed within an invisible and unquestioned structure that presupposed noncommercial television as educational and its purposes as instructional.

Employing the rhetoric of the “electronic blackboard” and delineating themes of equal access, alternative service, and resource management, the broadcast reformers produced a three-pronged petition for reserved frequencies. They maintained first that educational broadcasting should have immediate access to the preferred and available technology of very high frequency (VHF), as well as ultrahigh frequency (UHF) reservations for future development. They further stated that the spectrum was a public resource subject to federal protection and that, as public domain, reserved frequencies were logically the preserve of public education. Finally, the reformers claimed that the assumptions and practices of commercial and noncommercial broadcasting made the two inherently different and incapable of sustained collaboration, requiring dedicated channels for educational broadcasting.

This was an old struggle with familiar arguments. The need for spectrum, airwaves as public resources, and noncommercial broadcasting’s alternative service were pivotal points in the broadcast reform movement of the mid-1930s, when a loosely organized coalition of nonprofit groups argued for a noncommercial spectrum set aside. There were, however, important differences in the 1950s fight for resources. As Engelman (1996, 27-30) reported, the battle for the airwaves in 1934 had involved a range of social and political interests, including educators, farmers, labor, the church, and civil libertarians. Although generally situated under the rubric of “educational radio,” the broadcast reform movement was not exclusively academic or instructional but rather included a number of groups whose needs were not being met by commercial radio. These early broadcast reformers viewed their mission as public; they sought to build a noncommercial media system that addressed the material, intellectual, and cultural needs of their communities. Predicated on commitments to free speech and the claim that the airwaves were a public good, these early-day broadcasters saw radio as the cornerstone of progressive reform. They produced farm extension programs in the Midwest; shows for the disadvantaged, immigrant, and working classes of New York City; and series for the labor community of Chicago. They broadcast political talk, local performance, and historical dramas for schoolchildren. Importantly, these broadcasters
viewed their audiences as citizens—not consumers—and they were committed to enlarging the public sphere through radio practice that granted voice to many levels of American society. In a campaign that privileged educational TV as instructional technology, these interests, the underserved audiences they represented, and their goals of broad social change largely evaporated.

Despite the narrow scope of reformers’ strategy, their testimony acts as an informant into a complicated moment in U.S. television history when commercial profits began to climb and educators were increasingly denied access to facilities and airtime. These texts—actual transcripts of witnesses’ statements in the FCC proceedings—take us inside the hearing chambers. We hear voices of dedicated teachers committed to their students, a health educator who spoke with authority about kinescopes and coaxial cable, and an agricultural organizer who decried the disenfranchisement of rural audiences by networks seeking “quality” demographics in their listeners. A more thorough examination of reformers’ central arguments follows.

**VHF versus UHF: Demanding Usable Spectrum Space**

In 1950, educational broadcasters knew firsthand the problems associated with an undeveloped distribution technology, as the system’s seventy-five FM stations aired radio programs most Americans could not hear (Jarrell, RG 40/62/3). Transmitting signals only one in five U.S. radios could receive at the time, educational broadcasters rightly worried that education’s TV channels would be relegated to the similarly inaccessible and undeveloped UHF band. In October 1950, UHF broadcasting was wholly experimental. The only UHF television stations on the air were broadcasting transmission tests, and UHF receivers had yet to be developed and placed on the market (NAEB, RG 40/62/5). For the commercial station applicant, the UHF band offered no immediate income potential; prospects for noncommercial use seemed equally dim. Educational broadcasters feared UHF allocations would banish them to a zone of silence for a decade or more, as revealed in this memo, marked “URGENT,” from WFIU’s manager Harold Skornia (RG 40/62/5) to Indiana University president H. B. Wells:

> Several proposals are before the Commission to save education space in the UHF. Here’s the joker on this: To cover the same distance on UHF as covered by VHF requires several hundred times the power and investment. The RCA pilot UHF station in Bridgeport has never been able to reach more than three miles, with a fringe of up to seven miles, regardless of power. Tubes that will take high power at such tremendously high frequencies will always be very expensive and will be short-lived. They will not be available except experimentally, for what RCA estimates as 20 years.
Education’s claims to immediate access of usable spectrum space were presented in General Counsel Telford Taylor’s opening arguments and repeated in virtually every statement thereafter. Noting that “all of the eight or nine million television receivers now in the hands of the public” were limited to VHF reception, Taylor (RG 40/62/3) requested that one VHF frequency be set aside for education in each metropolitan area and all major educational centers. He also asked that 20 percent of the UHF band be allocated for noncommercial TV.

Calling on the commission to maintain a vision of the future as it allocated frequencies in the present, other witnesses also argued for education’s right to immediate and long-term use of the spectrum. Following the lead of Howard Bevis (RG 40/62/3), president of Ohio State University—who called for the reservation of educational channels for “keeps”—they maintained that those stations prepared to begin broadcasting immediately should be granted VHF allocations, while UHF frequencies should be held, on reserve, for future use. Education’s case for frequencies necessarily hinged on arguments for accessible and exclusive spectrum space, long-term use, and nationwide coverage.

Public Domain:
Conserving Frequencies for Education

The claim that the spectrum was public property emerged early in the course of the hearing. Ultimately, witnesses for noncommercial television would call on the rhetoric of conservation to construct a double argument for educational allocation of the spectrum. They maintained that the airwaves, though invisible, were a natural resource and subject to federal preservation and that, as public domain, these reserved frequencies were logically and historically the preserve of public education. Belmont Farley (RG 40/62/3) cast the spectrum as a “peculiar property of the National Commonwealth” and called on the FCC to “secure the rights of education in the domain of the air.” W. C. Toepelman (RG 40/62/3) of the American Council of Education likened the airwaves to public soils, mineral reserves, timber, and watersheds. Harriet Hester (RG 40/62/3), representing the American Medical Association (AMA), argued that the radio spectrum was “provided by nature . . . [was] in the category of natural resources, and as such [was] the property of all the people.”

Historical precedent also figured in the reformers’ arguments for dedicated spectrum for educational TV. Of special importance was the land-grant movement of the 1860s, which sought to make higher education a broad-based community resource through the practical arts and sciences. This tradition of public education, especially prominent in the Midwest, carried a philosophic legacy that placed public lands in the service of education, privileged home-based and rural constituencies, and stressed democratic participation. Educational broadcasting had strong ties to the land-grant tradition. Not only
did early radio technology develop largely in the engineering laboratories of land-grant colleges and universities, these institutions were also among the first to operate AM stations (Bevis, RG 40/62/3). Even though many had been forced out of broadcasting by the early 1930s, Tyler (1933, 18) reports twenty-three land-grant institutions still owned noncommercial stations in 1933. All fulfilled broadcast commitments to extension and adult education, “reaching out to farms and homes to serve people where they lived” (Bevis, RG 40/62/3). This practice, noted Michigan State president Hannah (RG 40/62/3), was consistent with an education movement characterized by commitments to “common people” and the “revolutionary notion that the work of universities should be closely related to the needs of the people” and available to all.

(Non)Commercial Broadcasting: 
A Discourse of Differentiation

Announcing its decision against dedicated AM frequencies on 22 January 1935, the FCC admonished educators and broadcasters to work together to discover the potential of educational broadcasting (Hill 1942). Broadcast historians record this “partnership” as adversarial. As Leach (1983, 2) wrote, “Cooperation proved a hollow principle.” The incontrovertible differences between the premises, goals, and practices of commercial and noncommercial broadcasters surfaced again in educators’ testimony at the hearings. Taylor (RG 40/62/3) noted that educational broadcasting stood on “an entirely different economic base” and produced programs “from an entirely distinct standpoint” than for-profit media. Noncommercial television’s purpose, according to Bevis (RG 40/62/3), was to “inform, enlighten, and instruct,” and its focus on public service distinguished it from stations and networks intent on attracting large audiences and selling airtime for profit. Even in this discourse of differentiation, however, efforts were made by the educators to contain the potentially accusatory and acrimonious critique of an old adversary. As Taylor (RG 40/62/3) noted,

Our purpose here is not to excuse past failures [by educators] or level the finger of criticism at the commercial broadcasting industry. We recognize that the commercial broadcasters have their own difficult problems to solve, and if some decisions that have been made now appear unwise or shortsighted, nevertheless human fallibility is not peculiar to the radio industry.

Subsequent testimony was sprinkled with phrases of conciliation and praise: “we recognize the right of free enterprise to employ national resources in the economic interest of this nation” (Farley, RG 40/62/3); “no one can deny the advantages which commercial broadcasting has given us” (Hester, RG
40/62/3); and we have witnessed “valuable (though sporadic) activity on the part of commercial stations and networks in public service broadcasting” (Hull “Statement,” RG 40/62/3). A trustee of the University of Illinois predicted optimistically that stations “publicly owned, [can] operate side by side with private stations without friction” (Livingston, RG 40/62/3).

Despite the uneasy civility of these statements, the record itself was a less compromising witness, revealing an increasing unwillingness by commercial broadcasting to cooperate with noncommercial entities. As television developed into a profitable venture, stations and networks were allocating fewer production resources and less airtime to noncommercial projects. James Marshall (RG 40/62/3), Commissioner for the New York Board of Education, reported that the New York City schools had produced sixty-five television programs in the years 1945-47, but “in the past three years, our opportunities for cooperation with the local commercial stations have been almost nonexistent.” Robert Engler (RG 40/62/3), speaking for the National Farmer’s Union, maintained broadcasting’s potential to enhance farm life had been dissipated by commercial radio’s disregard for rural audiences. Constance Warren (RG 40/62/3), representing the American Association of University Women, found commercial stations reluctant to “release enough or appropriate time” from their paid programs to support education, and, finally, speaking on behalf of the AMA, Hester (RG 40/62/3) reported the only time available for kinescoping an AMA production was between midnight and 7 A.M.

In all cases, educators worried that the trend in television would follow that of commercial radio—refusing production services, cluttering content with advertising breaks, and pushing nonprofit programs to the margins of the broadcast day when few listeners were available. Earl McGrath (RG 40/62/3), a commissioner for the U.S. Office of Education, reported that educators found it impossible to get regular recurring broadcast time at hours most suitable for educational use, while Engler (RG 40/62/3) reported that some were being “squeezed out entirely by bids from high-powered and well-financed soap companies for desirable and expensive radio time.” In the face of the Protestant Radio Commission’s grim observation that “no commercial television station is attempting to do anything like an adequate job in the field of education” (Griswold, RG 40/62/3), Marshall’s (RG 40/62/3) questions for the future were ominous:

If this is true today in the early stages of television, what chance is there for education on commercial stations as sponsored programs increase in number and greater competition intensifies the battle for favorable time on the air?

The reformers agreed unanimously that the solution lay in reserved channels for noncommercial broadcasting. New York City’s director of radio Seymour
Siegel (RG 40/62/3) spoke for all nonprofit broadcasters when he said, “The City needs its own television station.”

In 1950, as educators argued for public resource management, they swam upstream against dominant ideology that privileged a socially responsible private sector working in the public interest. Although their claim that the airwaves were public property was consistent with the discourse of spectrum allocation, the inherent bias of long-term practice negated the power of this argument. It is not surprising, then, that the reformers’ case for public resources and public interest was challenged by members of the FCC and commercial broadcasting during the allocation hearings. As Blakely (1979, 17) reports, FCC commissioner Rosel Hyde disagreed that the radio spectrum should be considered a limited public resource. While some natural resources could be depleted, he said, “the radio frequencies continue on for use regardless of what immediate use might be made of them. . . . Hence the opportunity for the educator is always open, you might say.” Citing the FCC decision against set-aside frequencies on the AM band and the fact that no new noncommercial AM stations had gone on the air since the 1935 ruling, educational broadcasters argued that the commercial allocation of a channel closed education’s opportunity for that frequency as effectively as the physical depletion of a resource.

Frank Stanton, president of Columbia Broadcasting System, argued that the public interest would actually be damaged by nationwide reservations for noncommercial educational use. Testifying before the FCC on 25 January 1951, Stanton (RG 40/62/5) maintained that a “rounded service for the majority of families” should take precedence over a “special television service for a minority of the community. . . . The first consideration must be a service which appeals to most of the people most of the time.” Stanton testified that widespread reservation of channels for education would jeopardize a competitive, general television service and its ability to attract a “mass audience.” Stanton’s testimony did not overtly disparage the concept of educational programming: “We are all agreed, I am sure, that television is a great medium and that education is a great force for good.” His strategy, rather, was twofold. First was to discount the ability of educators to develop successful stations:

There must also be weighed the fact that the history of educational use of AM certainly furnishes the basis for reasonable doubts as to whether, even with blanket reservation, there ever will be a significant number of noncommercial educational stations.

Second was to argue for a competitive, city-by-city review of noncommercial applications:
We are convinced that the recommended approach of a case-by-case method of deciding these problems . . . holds far greater promise of best serving the public interest than would an inflexible across-the-board formula which must necessarily ignore the variables in each community situation.

Seemingly, the prime objective of Stanton’s testimony was to persuade FCC commissioners that America’s public interest was equated with the market’s interest and that both were best served by a strong commercial television system and the programming it offered to a mainstream “mass audience.” To this end, he opposed action that would remove any portion of the spectrum from commercial access, splinter the developing U.S. television audience, or establish the structure for a new network. Unlike that of most educators, Stanton’s testimony did not address issues of resource protection. An “educational band” for television was viewed not as public domain preserved for public use but rather as a competitive incursion into a zone developed and controlled by commercial broadcasters for profit activity. If the educators’ arguments retraced old ground, so too did Stanton’s. Significantly, his efforts to protect the networks’ broad-based audience cohered with the FCC admonition in 1934 that the “mass medium performs most properly when it reaches the broadest, ‘most mass’ audience possible” (Brown 1989).

Perhaps most striking about the commercial response to the reformers’ hearing, however, was its lack of response. The broadcast reformers took the 1950-51 hearings seriously. Remembering the movement’s lack of planning, organization, and coherent argument in the allocation hearings of 1934, they determined to mount a credible campaign for television frequencies. As a result, the educators produced eleven days of testimony, which included seventy-six witnesses, 838 written statements, and sixty-four exhibits. In sharp contrast, the industry’s presentation was far less substantial (with five witnesses and six exhibits) and hastily prepared (Blakely 1979, 14). As Broadcasting, the leading trade journal, reported in January 1951,

Almost too late organized radio and TV will seek to balance the record on the demands of organized educators who would have Uncle Sam reserve at least 20 percent of available TV spectrum space for pure, unadorned education. Until quite recently there have been no comers from the commercial side of TV. (Blakely 1979, 20)

That the NAB (National Association of Broadcasters) and commercial networks did not deem it necessary to mount a full and compelling defense before the FCC suggests that industry leaders expected, from the outset, an allocation ruling favoring commercial interests.
A Hollow Victory for 11.7 Percent of the Spectrum

On 14 April 1952, the FCC announced 2,053 new TV assignments for the United States and its territories. Of these, 242 (233 in the continental United States and 9 for territories) were reserved for education. The long-awaited Sixth Order and Report allocated 162 UHF and 71 VHF noncommercial frequencies for the continental United States and decreed that noncommercial television would be strictly educational and noncommercial. In all, noncommercial broadcasters were awarded 11.7 percent of the spectrum (Paulu, RG 40/62/5, 6). The popular press was jubilant, but broadcast reformers rightly perceived the FCC allocation ruling as a hollow victory. Not only did the allotment fall significantly short of the movement’s goal of 20 percent, but most of the allocations for education were located in the still unavailable domain of UHF. Even more damaging, fully one-fourth of the country’s metropolitan centers were given no reservations at all (Paulu, RG 40/62/5, 6). In practical terms, this meant that most Americans would wait a decade or more before noncommercial stations developed in their communities.

Most problematic, however, was the narrow scope of noncommercial TV’s largely self-defined service and sphere of influence. The visual trope of “electronic blackboard” would stunt the growth of noncommercial broadcasting, as it came to define noncommercial television as a teaching tool. A static image that was woven into traditional pedagogy, the blackboard metaphor, positioned educational TV in the classroom—not the neighborhood—and privileged the speech of teachers instead of students. Speaking in 1949 at the Allerton House seminars, Paul Lazarsfeld (n.d.) had worried the myopia of educational broadcasters might prevent their seeing the public potential of television:

I am also afraid that it will not be quite so easy for you to realize what we are talking about—what we want from you—because there is a danger that you educators will have a hard time in detaching yourselves from the classroom situation.

His fears would seem justified, as Martin Maloney (1969, 15), writing eighteen years later, noted the central questions of educational television historically had been technical and pedagogical: “Can we teach by television, who learns best by television, and how do teachers feel about teaching by television?” These issues guided the work of Philip Lewis (1961, 31), who claimed educational TV’s best use was in “partially relieving the classroom teacher from routine preparation and delivery of expository material, thus leaving her free to concentrate on the individual needs of the student.” They also framed Wilbur Schramm’s (1962, 4) questions in 1961 about television’s potential in the classroom:
The spectrum of instructional uses of television is not completely known. It is clear that there are some teaching acts it can do superlatively well. It can let a large number of students look into a microscope at the same time, or watch surgical procedures from close at hand. It can let a class watch an activity that would be spoiled by direct observation.

Schramm’s vision of educational TV—the performance of “teaching acts”—is revealed here as one of spectators, not actors; it did not reflect the vision of a robust public participating in socially responsible discourse for the good of the community. The practical lessons of citizenship—wrapped around themes of diversity, social change, and democracy—did not extend into the realm of “teaching television.” This narrow definition of purpose developed partly as a response to the social and political moment in which noncommercial TV was introduced. The move to construct a child-centered, largely depoliticized public media service would seem a logical compromise for noncommercial broadcasting in the early 1950s, as broadcast reformers—working within the cultural constraints of homebound domesticity and the chilling political climate of McCarthyism—produced an “acceptable discourse” about public channels. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) wrote that public opinion—necessarily a “matter of speaking and of silence”—arises from an interaction of people with their social environments. Fearing social isolation, sanction, and outright punishment, individuals select and voice the viewpoints they perceive as dominant. The more this happens, as one opinion is heard more frequently and more confidently, secondary views are correspondingly voiced less and less. This interactive process of dominant and less-dominant dialogue sets in motion a spiraling process by which given attitudes prevail and establish public acceptance.

Taking their cues from the restricting postwar culture of the time and remembering spectrum losses of the past, noncommercial broadcasters made deliberate choices of speaker and topic that worked to narrow the debate over frequencies. The battle for radio channels in 1934, although largely disorganized, had nonetheless represented a range of constituency and experience, with significant contributions from labor, religion, the left, education, agriculture, and amateurs. A similarly rich resource base for noncommercial TV was demonstrated by the coalition of educators, parents, club women, extension specialists, and labor and religious leaders that started Alabama Educational Television in 1953 (“Twelve Groups” n.d.). Testimony at the FCC hearings on broadcast editorializing in February 1948 was also mixed. Groups as varied as the United Automobile Workers, Chicago Federation of Labor, American Jewish Congress, Cornell University, Revere Racing Association, Farmers Union of America, Institute for Education by Radio, Radio Writers Guild, Joint Religious Radio Committee, Iowa Association of Radio News Editors, and the
three commercial networks offered comments (“Order of Testimony,” RG 40/62/5).

Despite this broad-based interest in radio and television, the only voice heard in the frequency hearings was that of mainstream education. In producing a coherent argument for noncommercial frequencies, the JCET had erased the talk of difference so that in 1950-51—amid a national debate of “separate but equal”—there was no discussion in the FCC hearings of how noncommercial TV could usefully impact the lives of black children being schooled in lesser and segregated facilities. Although the Association of Negro Land-Grant Colleges had been active for decades, this organization was not called as a witness for the land-grant tradition. Furthermore, on 3 November 1950, a “TV Hearings” memo by NAEB president Richard Hull purged remaining voices from the margin:

Item 17: DO NOT USE DURR [an advocate of civil rights and free speech]. And probably not Patton either [of National Farmer’s Union].

Item 21: RE AUGUSTANA SYNOD—IF THIS GETS DIRTY ENUF WE CAN BRING IN RELIGIOUS GROUPS. AS OF NOW MY ADVICE IS NO.

Item 23: Regarding Baptist and Methodist Representatives—Depends on DIRTY and 21 above. (Hull, RG 40/62/5)

This memo—which excised representatives of religion, agriculture, and the left from the agenda—stands as striking evidence of noncommercial broadcasting’s move to delimit the rhetorical range of its argument. Not everyone was granted the floor, and as speakers were strategically silenced, so were the communities and viewpoints they represented. What remained was a claim for the status quo and the designation of noncommercial broadcasting as a tool for a traditional pedagogical style.

Finally, the perspectives and future service of educational broadcasting were narrowed by the discourse it produced and the audience it constructed—through that discourse—at the FCC hearings. Noncommercial broadcasters—offering up claims for a white middle-class educational TV service—delivered an argument that they considered properly persuasive for their audience of FCC commissioners. By inferring an audience that privileged the status quo, they constructed one (Black 1970, 110). This resulted in an even more powerful ideology of educational broadcasting, defining and (re)defining assumptions about the terms and obligations of noncommercial TV. The impact of the hearing discourse was the creation of a dominant public opinion that would overshadow all other arguments about the course of noncommercial television. Day (1995, 23-25) writes that the noncommercial broadcasting community of the 1950s was not of one mind about the educational definitions of public media, noting that some “envisioned a broader mission.” Even so, a view of
“public as educational” would emerge as the dominant public opinion. Through a spiral of silence that saw continued articulation of a pedagogic vision—at the expense of arguments for a public mission—public media came to be defined “naturally” as educational. The campaign that broadcast reformers waged for a presence on the spectrum, working within their own needs for success and worries about formal and informal sanction, initiated a spiraling of silence about publicness and television. As these broadcasters consciously selected some rhetorical stances and speakers over others, they cultivated a persuasive environment that allowed the educational mission to dominate the conversation, to gain allegiance from a range of groups, and finally to become entrenched as the public’s opinion.

The process by which alternative definitions of public media were silenced is further illustrated in the following example—dialogue from a Senate Interstate Commerce Committee hearing on 18 July 1951 (U.S. Senate, RG 40/62/5)—as FCC commissioner Wayne Coy called up, as his own concepts, those arguments presented by the educators seven months earlier:

   Senator O’Connor: What is considered an educational program?
   Commissioner Coy: An educational program today is one that is put on by an
   educational institution and has to do with the improvement of cultural back-
   ground and understanding. An example of such a program is . . .
   Senator Benton: University of Chicago Round Table!
   Senator Capehart: American Forum of the Air!
   Commissioner Coy: No. An example of an educational program is a program put
   on by the University of Michigan over a television station in Detroit having to
   do with various subjects in the curriculum of the University of Michigan.

Even as Benton and Capehart sought to push educational programming into the public arena, Coy confined it to the classroom, reiterating the dominant opinion promulgated by reformers that noncommercial TV had an in-school mission. This is not to suggest that the FCC was not initially inclined toward a view of noncommercial TV as a safe and sanitized teaching tool. Very likely, broadcast reformers were accurate in assessing the commissioners as more sympathetic to the frame of “educational” than “public.” Even so, their decision to exploit this line of reasoning as a means of achieving space on the spectrum would prove a shortsighted move, as it institutionalized a limited conception of noncommercial television in the minds of reformers, educators, and the general public. Through construction of the most defensible argument, reformers forfeited an opportunity to drive the discussion into a larger, more contested rhetorical terrain. Such discourse could have enabled a bold public initiative in the 1950s; it would most certainly have sustained what broadcast reformer Dick Hull called “this dream, this social dream” for future generations.
Conclusion

Ultimately, the case for frequencies in 1950-51 was a strategic compromise of vision that has cost public broadcasting not only its institutional identity but also a worldview. The compromises made almost fifty years ago—as noncommercial broadcasters sought a concept they could sell to a latently hostile FCC—curtailed the system’s public mission. Today, without a seminal self-definition and decades-long history of publicness, public television lacks the creative energy and self-confidence to move meaningfully in the daily lives of many American people.

In 1949, Allerton House participants discussed what the fledgling noncommercial television service should be called. Rockefeller Foundation’s John Marshall (“Letter,” n.d.) wrote Schramm,

I still wonder if it is wise to set this work up under the head of “educational broadcasting.” The people in the non-commercial stations as I see it are simply trying to do something else which, to be sure, turns out to be educational, serious, and I believe considerably more satisfying to the very large group of people in this country who now simply don’t listen. What we should all like to see tried, I believe, is ways in which broadcasting can do some of the things that it is not now doing. . . . For example, is the traditional phrase, public service broadcasting, out of the question?

From the outset, U.S. noncommercial broadcasters have faced many adversities, including a laissez-faire broadcasting system; lack of funding and spectrum resources; and powerful industry, regulatory, and political opposition. In the 1950s, broadcast reformers could have conceivably employed educational broadcasting as a sensible strategy for countering those adversities. The social currency of educational television could have made it an important “wedge” for noncommercial broadcasters in efforts to gain ground for broader applications of public service broadcasting. Unfortunately, such a project required foundational resources absent in nonprofit broadcasting’s organizational culture. Lacking deep commitments to an active, multidimensional, and responsive public sphere, noncommercial broadcasters could not expand beyond the classroom.

In the end, the name—and the limitations—of educational broadcasting stuck.

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