

AFTERWORD

The new world makeover

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EXTREME MAKEOVER APPLICATION

Deadline – Saturday, March 31, 2006

MAKING AN EXTREME VIDEO

1. Have Fun! If you are not having fun making the video, we are not having fun watching it.
 2. Make sure whoever is filming you is someone you are comfortable with. Do not read from cards or over rehearse what you want to say. Just talk to us like a friend.
 3. Making the video:
 - a. Get creative and grab our attention immediately! Introduce yourself and tell us a bit about you. We get tons of applications, so try to stand out and think outside the box. Why do you deserve the *Extreme Makeover*? How will it change your life? Do you have any events coming up in the next few months that make this the perfect time?
 - b. Go from head to toe explaining what you would like changed. You do not need to know the exact procedure, just tell us what you don't like about your current features.
 - c. Get good close ups, about 30 seconds, of your face, profile and body. Also include close ups of any areas of concern that may be hard to see like teeth, complexion, scars etc. For your teeth, please get a good 10 seconds smiling from the front with teeth showing, bite closed. Then another 10 seconds in the same position from the side.
 4. Please watch the video after to make sure the lighting is good and we can accurately see your problem areas. The light should be shining on your face and not behind you where it may cause shadows. Also check for the sound quality.
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These were instructions for people who wanted to appear on *Extreme Makeover*, a programme that ran on the US network ABC from 2002 to 2007. The application performed dual tasks. At one level, it was what it said it was – a recruitment device. As such, it was unreliable and rapidly becoming outmoded. In its second, covert, role – surveillance – it was a neatly targeted way of securing data about viewers that could be sold to advertisers. This intelligence was obtained gratis, under the demotic sign of outreach and public participation (via, for instance, plastic surgery for a soldier or fast-food manager who want to advance their job prospects) (Heyes 2007, 25).

That economic subtext runs right through the genre. For makeover television is part of the wider reality-television phenomenon, a strange hybrid of cost-cutting devices, game shows taken into the community, *cinéma-vérité* conceits, scripts written in post-production, and *ethoi* of Social Darwinism, surveillance, and gossip – bizarre blends of reportage, documentary, and fun. Makeover programmes take economically underprivileged people and offer them a style they cannot afford to

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from the steppes; Roman colonization; invading Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians, and Normans; attacking Scandinavians; trading Indians, Chinese, Irish, Lombards and Hansa; and refugee Europeans and Africans.

The number of refugees and asylum-seekers at the start of the twenty-first century was 21.5 million – three times the Figure 20 years earlier. The International Organization for Migration estimates that global migration increased from 75 million to 150 million people between 1965 and 2000, and the United Nations states that 2% of all people spent 2001 outside their country of birth, more than at any other moment in history. Migration has doubled since the 1970s, and the European Union has seen arrivals from beyond its borders grow by 75% in the last quarter-century. Five key zones of immigration configure today's world – North America, Europe, the Western Pacific, the Southern Cone and the Persian Gulf – along with five key categories: international refugees, internally displaced people, voluntary migrants, the enslaved and the smuggled.

No major recipient of migrants has ratified the United Nations' International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, even though they benefit economically and culturally from these arrivals. Opinion polling suggests sizeable majorities across the globe believe their national ways of life are threatened by global flows of people and things. In other words, their collective cultures are under threat. At the same time, they feel unable to control their individual destinies. In other words, their neo-liberal capacities are under threat. Majorities around the world oppose immigration.

Immigrants and their cultures have long been *the* limit-case for loyalty, as per Ruth the Moabite in the Jewish Bible/Old Testament. Such figures are both perilous for the sovereign-state (where does their fealty lie?) and symbolically essential (as the only citizens who make a deliberate decision to swear allegiance to an otherwise mythic social contract). Hence the regressive nationalism that greets them, in such forms as the belligerence of the United States, the anti-immigrant stance of Western Europe, or the crackdown on minorities in Eastern Europe, Asia and the Arab world. The populist corollary is often violent – race riots in 30 British cities in the 1980s; pogroms against Roma and migrant workers in Germany in the 1990s and Spain in 2000; migrant-worker and youth struggles in France in 1990 and 2005 – on it goes. The two most important sites of migration from the Third World to the First – Turkey and Mexico – see state and vigilante violence alongside corporate embrace in host countries, and donor nations increasingly recognizing the hybrid experience of daily life. This grand collective project of cultural adaptation, however accidental, voluntary, coercive, planned or casual, has made cultural recombination a fact of everyday life for both host and donor nations. But there is an alternative story contending with this narrative and its solid numbers – a fantastical account of personhood called neo-liberalism that does not have a research paradigm because it brings facts into being through the application of its theories rather than dealing with the world as it finds it.

Neo-liberalism

If the world of immigration and its multicultural legacy are at the core of cultural studies, then neo-liberalism is at the core of creative industries. The grand paradox of neo-liberalism is its passion for intervention in the name of non-intervention – pleading for investments in human capital at the same time as deriding social engineering; calling for the generation of more and more markets by the state while insisting on fewer and fewer democratic controls; and hailing freedom as a natural basis for life that can only function with the heavy hand of policing by government to administer property relations. Its lust for

market conduct extends beyond such matters to a passion for comprehending and opining on everything, from birth rates to divorce, from suicide to abortion, from performance-enhancing drugs to altruism. Nothing can be left outside the market, and nothing left to the chance that market relations may falter without massive policing (Foucault 2008).

From this flows an entire host of methodologically critical matters in the growing distinction between cultural studies and creative industries: a focus on collective struggle over meaning versus the rush to the discourse of creativity and the subordination of politics; the refusal of neo-liberalism versus its embrace; and the methods of political economy (studying material conflicts) versus narcissography (watching TV or playing games with one's children and friends).

Albert and Michael's collection paves the way for us to consider anew what neo-liberalism was in the light of the cultural *frottage* caused by immigration. I use the past tense to describe neo-liberalism because the world's descent into the disasters of deregulation and offshoring has forced neo-liberalism's prelates, from Beijing to the Bourse, to rethink their dismissal of alternative norms (hint: Keynesianism). Dominant in world thought for three decades, neo-liberalism was nothing less arrogant than 'a whole way of being and thinking', an attempt to create 'an enterprise society' through the pretence that the latter is a natural (but never achieved) state of affairs, even as competition was imposed as a framework of regulating everyday life in the most subtly comprehensive statism imaginable (Foucault 2008, 218, 147, 145).

Neo-liberalism understood people exclusively through the precepts of selfishness. It exercised power on people by governing them through market imperatives, so that they could be made ratiocinative liberal actors with their inner creativity unlocked in an endless mutual adaptation with the environment. The market became a privileged 'interface of government and the individual' (Foucault 2008, 253). At the same time, the notion of consumption was turned on its head. Everyone was creative, no one was simply a spectator, and we are all manufacturing pleasure when we witness activities we have paid to watch. Internally divided – but happily so – each person was 'a consumer on the one hand, but ... also a producer' (Foucault 2008, 226). This is perhaps best exemplified in the media, a key aspect of Albert and Michael's collection.

Media

A television survey by *The Economist* in 1994 remarked that cultural politics is always so localized in its first and last instances that the 'electronic bonds' of exported drama are 'threadbare'.² Part of the talent of the cultural commodity is that it leads a lengthy career and can be retrained to suit new circumstances. To quote Liberace: 'If I play Tchaikovsky I play his melodies and skip his spiritual struggles ... I have to know just how many notes my audience will stand for' (Hall and Whannel 1965, 70). Culture is simultaneously the key to international textual trade and one of its limiting factors. Ethics, affect, custom and other forms of knowledge both enable and restrict commodification. In the 1960s, Disney television in Australia consisted of rebroadcast US programs; by the 1990s, it went through a superficial localization, via young Australian presenters. And General Motors, which owned Australia's General Motors Holden, translated its 'hot dogs, baseball, apple pie, and Chevrolet' jingle into 'meat pies, football, kangaroos, and Holden cars' for the Australian market. Hollywood recently won over a key segment of the Indian market with a localized *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* This can be read as an indication of the paradigmatic nature of the national in an era of global companies, or as the requirement to reference the local in a form that is obliged to do something with cultural-economic

meeting-grounds. In the end, the sale is always local. Of course, producers are the most powerful cultural adaptors: Hollywood got away with using the music, set and title of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* in *Slumdog Millionaire* without paying a cent, because of a rights-exploitation clause in the initial format sale. That is the reality of recombinant media culture.

Yet parts of cultural and media studies, especially the church of creativity, hew to a fetish of the individual – narcissography under the heavy sign of neo-liberalism. Irresistibly enchanted by a seeming grassroots cornucopia, struck by the digital sublime, many First World cybertarian technophiles attribute magical properties to today's communications and cultural technologies, which are said to obliterate geography, sovereignty and hierarchy in an alchemy of truth and beauty. A deregulated, individuated media world supposedly makes consumers into producers, frees the disabled from confinement, encourages new subjectivities, rewards intellect and competitiveness, links people across cultures, and allows billions of flowers to bloom in a post-political parthenon. In this Marxist/Godardian wet dream, people fish, film, fuck and finance from morning to midnight. The mass scale of the culture industries is overrun by consumer-led production, and wounds caused by the division of labour from the industrial age are bathed in the balm of Internet love. 'Everyone is a publisher' thanks to the Internet and its emblematic incarnation in social networks (Jenkins and Hartley 2008). These fantasies are fuelled and sometimes created by multinational marketers only too keen to stoke the fires of aesthetic and adaptive desire, as when Apple advertises 'Do-It-Yourself Parts for iBook' (apple.com/se/support/ibook/diy). *Time* exemplified this sovereignty of consumption in choosing its 2006 'Person of the Year'. The magazine famously announced the winner as: 'You. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world' (Grossman 2006).

This apparent transformation is actually one more moment in an oscillation we have experienced routinely over the past century. During that period, each media innovation has offered people more of what they never knew they needed commercially, at the same time as it has promised new possibilities democratically. Today's touching cybertarian faith that individuals can control their destinies through the Internet, and folksy 'prosumers' can overpower big media thanks to their home-grown videos, is the latest version.

Academic cybertarians maintain that the new media provide a populist apparatus that subverts patriarchy, capitalism and other forms of oppression. All this is supposedly evident to scholars and pundits from their perusal of social media, conventions, web pages and discussion groups, or by watching their children in front of computers. Virginia Postrel wrote a 1999 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed in which she welcomed this Pollyannaish tendency within cultural and media studies as 'deeply threatening to traditional leftist views of commerce ... lending support to the corporate enemy and even training graduate students who wind up doing market research'. At such moments, we can say that what Terry Eagleton (1982) sardonically named The Reader's Liberation Movement is in the house. It can hardly be a surprise, then, to find Bob McChesney (2007) lamenting that contemporary media studies is 'regarded by the pooh-bahs in history, political science, and sociology as having roughly the same intellectual merit as ... driver education'. Or that the *Village Voice* dubs us 'the ultimate capitulation to the MTV mind' (Vincent 2000). Even Stuart Hall recently avowed: 'I really cannot read another cultural studies analysis of Madonna or *The Sopranos*' (MacCabe 2008, 14).

So let's be a wee bit more grounded here. Between 1980 and 1998, annual world exchange of electronic culture grew from US\$95 billion to US\$388 billion. In 2003, these areas accounted for 2.3% of Gross Domestic Product across Europe, to the tune of €654

billion – more than real estate or food and drink, and equal to chemicals, plastics and rubber. The Intellectual Property Association estimates that copyright and patents are worth US\$360 billion a year to the United States, putting them ahead of aerospace, automobiles and agriculture in monetary value. Global information technology's yearly revenue is US\$1.3 trillion. PricewaterhouseCoopers predicts 10% annual growth. And the cultural/copyright sector employs 12% of the US workforce, up from 5% a century ago (Miller 2009; Collins 2008). This is the underlying reality behind adaptive culture – its placement in, and impact on, the core of the world economy.

Take YouTube, putatively the acme of consumer-led cultural adaptation. But consider the thousands of contracts the firm has signed with mainstream media, and the introduction of Video Identification, a surveillance device for blocking copyrighted materials by tracking each uploaded frame. It spies on users and discloses their Internet protocols, aliases and tastes to corporations and permits these companies to block or allow reuse depending on their marketing and surveillance needs of the moment. The software was developed with those great alternatives to mainstream media dominance, Disney and Time Warner. Hundreds of companies have signed up in its first year. Sales of *Monty Python* DVDs on Amazon.com increased by 1000% since they became part of the system ('YouTube rolls out filtering tools 2007; Kiss 2008; for fine overviews of surveillance and social networks, see Andrejevic 2007; Cohen 2008). This is a cybertarian dream of individuals combining cultures willy-nilly? No, this is YouTube becoming Hollywood's valued ally, from tracking intellectual property to realizing the culture industries' dream: permitting corporations to engage in product placement each time their own copyright is infringed online, and learning more and more about their audiences. Such social networks are culture companies that rely on unpaid labour for their textuality and seek, at the core of their business models, to obfuscate distinctions in viewers' minds between commercials and programs via participatory video ads (Keen 2007).

It is often alleged that political economists of the media have not accounted for the creativity of audiences/consumers. But they are well aware of this capacity. In the 1950s, Dallas Smythe (1954) wrote that 'audience members act on the program content. They take it and mold it in the image of their individual needs and values.' He saw no necessary contradiction between this perspective and his other principal intellectual innovation, namely that audience attention – presumed or measured – was the commodity being sold in the commercial TV industry, by stations to advertisers. Similarly, in his classic 1960s text *Mass Communications and American Empire* (1992), Herb Schiller stressed the need to build on the creativity of audiences by offering them entertaining and informative media. And at the height of his work in revolutionary societies, from Latin America to Africa, Armand Mattelart (1980) recognized the relative autonomy of audiences and their capacity and desire to generate cultural meanings.

Media texts and institutions are not just signs to be read; they are not just coefficients of political and economic power; and they are not just innovations. Rather, they are all these things. Culture is indeed adaptive. It is a hybrid monster, coevally subject to text, power and science – all at once, but in contingent ways (Latour 1993). I therefore favour a tripartite approach to analysing it: a reconstruction of 'the diversity of older readings from their sparse and multiple traces' (157); a focus on 'the text itself, the object that conveys it, and the act that grasps it' (161–63); and an identification of 'the strategies by which authors and publishers tried to impose an orthodoxy or a prescribed reading on the text' (Chartier 1989, 166). Amongst the pieces I was sent for this collection, the essays by Anthony May, Bill Grantham, Albert Moran, and Anthony Fung and Mickey Lee stand out in this respect.

This materialist history must be evaluated inside consideration of the wider political economy. As Jacques Attali (2008) explains, lengthy historical cycles see political-economic power shift between cores. A new 'mercantile order forms wherever a creative class masters a key innovation from navigation to accounting or, in our own time, where services are most efficiently mass produced, thus generating enormous wealth'. Manuel Castells (2007) has coined the term 'mass self-communication' to capture this development, which sees affective investments by social movements and individuals matched by financial and policing investments by corporations and states. Papers here by John Sinclair and Rowan Wilken, and David Rowe and Callum Gilmour, undertake such work.

New eras in communication also index homologies and exchanges between militarism, colonialism and class control. The networked-computing era has solidified a unipolar world of almost absolute US dominance, with a share taken by other parts of the world economic triad in Japan and Western Europe. None of that has changed or been even mildly imperilled by cultural recombination or anything else. China and India provide many leading software engineers, but they lack domestic venture capitalists, military underpinnings to computing innovation and successful histories of global textual power at the mainstream level as per Sony, the BBC, Hollywood or the Pacific Northwest.

There *are* alternatives to the hypocrisy of neo-liberalism. Bruno Latour thinks that global interdependence generated by life in a risk society may be shifting us 'from a time of succession to a time of co-existence', where historicity and commonality prevail (Latour with Kastrissianakis 2007). That is where our recombinations will inevitably take form: in the complex sociality of collective experience and struggle.

Notes

1. The numbers on immigration invoked here can be found in Miller (2007).
2. The material in this section draws on Miller et al. (2005).

Notes on contributor

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