Scott McQuire

‘The Go-For-Broke Game of History’

The Camera, the Community and the Scene of Politics

Contemporary transformations in communication technologies — such as the digitalization of traditional photography, the proliferation of new delivery systems for television, the merging of camera, computer and telephone systems in fully ‘interactive’ media, Virtual Reality — have generated considerable debate. The fact that these debates now extend across what are often isolated discourses, linking technical manuals to corporate agendas and government policies, while granting cultural theory its place in the sun of the popular media, registers the extent to which these shifts are perceived to intervene at the fundamental levels of social life. If there is an advantage to be gained from living such a moment, beyond the blooming of heroic visions for those eager to annex the role of the first explorers of the new uncharted territories, it lies in the
possibility for defamiliarizing received wisdoms and displacing entrenched practices. New technologies provoke unsettling questions which have the potential to disturb the smooth contours of history, allowing previously hidden formations to come clearly into view, even — or perhaps especially — as their own time passes. In this sense, digitalization, satellite and cable delivery systems, interactive media and Virtual Reality experiences (transformations which should not be too hastily collapsed into a single heading) offer the possibility for rethinking our understanding of the history of the 'mass media', especially the place occupied by cinema and broadcast television in the distinct social and political architecture of modernity.

But the value of any such reappraisal also lies in the extent to which it can inform the present by restoring a sense of historical possibility, by situating current media constellations in relation to other trajectories that were marginalized or frustrated. Refusing the inevitability of the passage from past to present opens the space for a more critical evaluation of the current rash of claims to innovation without parentage inspired by multimedia, the Internet, cyberspace and the like. Clearly this is a delicate undertaking. The difference between narratives of historical continuity and those emphasizing discontinuity and rupture cannot be mastered by declaring a preference for one or the other. These two tendencies are inextricably related, and the fluctuating space in between remains subject to infinite negotiations, split by the desire to recognize historical specificity while nevertheless locating particular events within a general framework of collective understanding.

The determination of historical breaks is always a question of politics, if not a simple matter of political choice. In a recent article in Arena, Mark Poster discussed the extent to which new media technologies might be said to institute a paradigm shift, not only of media theory, but of social being and subjectivity. In what follows, I am concerned with similar questions. In attempting to situate some of the texts Poster draws on with reference to the social and political context of their production, my initial aim is to set them into play with different emphases. However, by reading these transformations of theory in relation to specific historical developments in the media, I also hope to broaden the frame of current debates. The desire to associate non-linear communication networks such as the Internet with a process of transnational democratization often seems naive: as Derrida noted long ago, one of the most compelling reasons


ARENA journal no. 4, 1994/05
for the decline of linearity as the dominant mode of social organization is that it begins to paralyse the techno-scientific economy it has long favoured. The ‘decentring of the subject’ that has become the *leitmotiv* of postmodernism is crossed by this political ambivalence. If it clears a space for rethinking personal and collective identity outside the determination of originary or essential subjectivities, this is also the deterritorialized space in which abstract identities are packaged and traded on global commodity circuits.

Like other participants in contemporary debates on the media, Poster draws on the work of the Frankfurt School and, more particularly, on Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis of the ‘culture industry’ as a point of departure. While he levels a variety of charges at their door, his principal criticism is that, when confronted with the media, their sophisticated social analysis gave way to ‘polemic and vituperation’, underwritten by a regressive bias towards high cultural forms at the expense of mass culture, which finally results in a reductive technological determinism. On this basis, Poster goes so far as to grant Adorno exemplary status, albeit in a negative light:

The type of individual which Adorno represents shies away from media culture and from technology in general in order to preserve the position of the autonomous subject.

While there is undoubtedly much to criticize, Adorno deserves better than this short shrift. Unfortunately, Poster seems to have adopted the tendency of much recent media theory to use Adorno and Horkheimer as convenient whipping posts: a quick reference to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* today suffices not only to dismiss it, but also to counterpoint the ‘advances’ of contemporary theory with its (enlightened) concern with popular culture and audience ethnography. While the contrast is justified to some extent, Adorno and Horkheimer are also suffering the vicissitudes of theoretical fashion; in other words, bad press.

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3. Poster, p. 52.
4. Poster, p. 56.
Take, for example, what Poster refers to as Adorno’s ‘revulsion’ for popular culture. 6 This plays a significant role in Poster’s general argument: to the extent that Adorno is motivated by a ‘disgust for the common,’ 7 he is unable to see any worth in the cultural products of the mass media, and is therefore condemned to read them as homogenizing and authoritarian, rather than as potentially democratic. Yet even in such a pessimistic text as Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer are less monolithic in their analysis than Poster suggests. While frequently scathing towards popular culture, they nevertheless grant the culture industry a positive role as the dialectical corrective of ‘serious art’. What stalls the dialectic is neither the mass nature nor the technological mediation of the culture industry, but its gentrification: ‘The culture industry is corrupt, not because it is a sinful Babylon, but because it is a cathedral dedicated to elevated pleasure’. 8 Rather than betraying a disgust for the common, they argue that:

The culture industry does retain a trace of something better in those features which bring it close to the circus, in the self-justifying and non-sensical skills of riders, acrobats and clowns, in the ‘defense and justification of physical as against intellectual art’. 9

But the bourgeois intellectualization of amusement means that ‘the nonsensical at the bottom disappears as utterly as the sense in the works of art at the top’. 10 One might well dispute their analysis, but this should not mean simply ignoring their attempt to relate these different domains, instead of declaring an absolute preference for one over the other.

However, more serious than any misreading of Dialectic of Enlightenment is Poster’s desire to make it representative of the Frankfurt School’s work on the media. 11 Putting aside for the moment his rather problematic attempt to recuperate Benjamin as the

7. Poster, p. 61.
8. T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. J. Cumming, London. Allen Lane, 1973, p. 143. This view was held in common with other Frankfurt School theorists and, as I will argue below, it is Poster’s failure to consider this dialectic which leads him to neglect both earlier Frankfurt School writings, as well as the question of what, beyond criticism, may have motivated Adorno and Horkheimer’s antagonism to the culture industry.
9. Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 143. The internal quote is from Frank Wedekind.
10. Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 143.

ARENAT 4, 1994/95
exception to this rule (here he directly follows Enzensberger), this
decision leads him to unnecessarily sacrifice the insights of a
complex body of work produced at a critical juncture in the
development of media culture. By ignoring both the variety of this
work and the historical context of its production, Poster is unable to
read it, in relation to the profound social and political
transformations it traversed. In this way, he cites, but completely
misses the significance of, 'the twin scourges of the twentieth
century': the culture industry and fascism. Or, to put it another way,
Hollywood and Hitler.

This is not to argue that Hollywood was — or is — 'fascist'. This
kind of polemic merely feeds the complacency of an all too easy
division between democracy and fascism. On the other hand, it has
always seemed a serious mistake to assume that fascism was simply an
exception to the political culture and political rationality of
modernity. This error is greatly magnified when relating social
and political transformations to transformations in technologies of
representation and communication. What emerges in the first
decades of this century is a radically new political constituency in
which the media (particularly radio and cinema) assume a
dramatically heightened role in defining the collective space of the
nation-state, and in recruiting and integrating individual citizens
into its dispersed community. The Nazi state was certainly one of
the first to recognize the enormous potential of simultaneity as a
means of generating a distinctive sense of national unity: hence its
campaign to place 'a radio in every German house', and its innovative
use of the medium, such as the famous occasion when over a million
Party members gathered around loudspeakers all over the country to
hear Rudolph Hess take his oath of allegiance to Hitler and to recite
it in unison with him. Moreover, in 1935, at the same time that
Walter Benjamin was working on his seminal 'Artwork' essay,
Germany saw the release of Leni Riefenstahl's pathbreaking
'Triumph of the Will', as well as the beginning of public television

13. This has been argued recently by a number of writers. See, for example, M. Foucault, 'The
Subject and Power', Critical Inquiry, no. 8, Summer 1982, p. 775; J. Derrida, 'Like the Sound of
the Sea Deep Within A Shell. Paul De Man's War', trans. P. Kamuf, Critical Inquiry, no. 14,
Spring 1988, p. 645; P. Lacoste-Laharrie, Heidegger. Art and Politics: The Fiction of the
'the Jen', trans. A. Michel and M. Roberts, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990,
p. 44.
14. The quote is from W. Urlicchio, 'Rituals of Reception, Patterns of Neglect: Nazi
Television and its Postwar Representation', Wide Angle, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 49.
broadcasting.¹⁵ (The fact that Benjamin mentions neither of these events directly should perhaps alert us to the need to read his text rather more critically than Poster has).

I want to develop these points more fully below. What is important to grasp here is the extent to which similar transformations were occurring elsewhere more or less simultaneously, including both the United States and the Soviet Union — in other words, across what are usually posited as the great political divides of this period, if not this century. Six decades later, and more particularly in the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall and the "collapse of communism" (events which themselves became celebrated television events), it is perhaps easier to discern this trajectory. The experiences of time and space catalysed by modern vehicles of transport and communication have coalesced into economic, political and social relationships with little or no precedent — and yet which, paradoxically, often seem to touch something very old. In the turn to radio, cinema and television as privileged arteries of communication through which the social bond is both practically activated and symbolically displayed, habitual forms of presence give ground to the immediacy of that which is absent, distant, or deferred all along the line. If the mediatization of culture marks a decisive threshold in the scene of politics, it is also the point beyond which our sense of the political must be rethought in a world where the centres of existence — home, community, identity — have been utterly remade by the effects of rapid movement and the omnipresence of speed.

Instead of beginning from Dialectic of Enlightenment, as Poster does, it is instructive to consider some earlier Frankfurt School writings on mass culture and film theory, particularly the work of Siegfried Kracauer.¹⁶ Tracing the path from 1920s Germany to the early 1940s...

¹⁵ Public television broadcasting (as distinct from experimental broadcasts) began in Germany on March 22, 1935, preceding its advent in both Britain (1936, terminating in 1939 with the start of the war) and the United States (1939). Guided by Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry, the Nazis favoured public television halls seating between forty and four hundred at an ideal mechanism for relaying important events to a national audience.

¹⁶ Kracauer is probably best known for his postwar works written in English: From Caligari to Hitler (1947), Theory of Film (1960) and, to a lesser extent, the posthumously published History: The Last Things Before the Last (1965). However, his earlier work, written while editor of the arts and culture section of the prestigious Frankfurter Zeitung which regularly published essays by Benjamin, Adorno and Bloch, has been largely neglected outside of Germany. The recent translation of some of these early essays [collected in Germany as Das Ornament der Masse (1977), forthcoming in English as The Mass Ornament] may help to redress this situation. Thomas Elsaesser has suggested: "Das Ornament der Masse is a worthy companion to Bloch’s Erbuchaft dieser Zeit (Heritage of Our Time). Horkheimer and Adorno’s Dialectic of Enlightenment, and Benjamin’s Illuminations, and might have been as much a key text in the...
when Adorno and Horkheimer wrote their essay on the culture industry while exiled in the United States affords important insights into the despair evident in their text. A framing condition of this period was undoubtedly the immense and often exhilarating disjunction experienced as the industrial city increasingly concentrated a multitude of technological innovations within its bounds. Architectural structures built of concrete and steel, the first widespread uses of electrical power and electric lights (described by architectural historian Rayner Banham as 'the greatest environmental revolution in human history since the domestication of fire'), 17 and the rapid spread of new mechanical vehicles (cars, buses, trams and elevators) had vastly transformed the characteristic rhythms and patterns of city life. New modes of communication, from newspapers illustrated with photographic 'snapshots' to the growing network of radios and telephones to the uncanny living image of cinema, redefined the geography of urban spaces in which dense crowds of factory and office workers — the city's gathering of strangers — moved.

Kracauer's essays of the 1920s, shaped by the intellectual shocks of relativity theory, psychoanalysis and the modernist avant-garde, were written when neither the outcome of the Soviet experiment nor the full consequences of the failure of the German revolution were yet clear. Interweaving disparate social phenomena, from the architecture of cinema palaces, shopping arcades and hotel lobbies, to the spectacle of popular musical revues and sports events, to the impact of new media such as photography and film-making, his work constituted a pioneering attempt to map what he called 'the spatio-temporal passions' of this emergent environment. 18 What seems most remarkable in reading essays such as 'Cult of Distraction' (1926), 19 'Photography' (1927) 20 and 'The Mass Ornament' (1927) 21 today, is Kracauer's prescient awareness of the impact of industrialization and rediscovery of Critical Theory as these proved to be, had there been commentaries (and a translation) in English to do it justice. See his 'Cinema — The Irresponsible Signifier or 'The Gamble with History': Film Theory or Cinema Theory', New German Critique, no. 40, Winter 1987, p. 69.


18. If he was undoubtedly influenced in this bent by his teacher Georg Simmel, his strongest affinity was with Walter Benjamin, and one can trace the migration of crucial concepts such as distraction and the optical unconscious from Kracauer to Benjamin's 'Artwork' essay.


urbanization on all facets of social existence, transforming the experience of subjectivity and levying new demands on cultural production. Moreover, while he held the massive extension of the instrumental domination of nature under capitalism responsible for the traumatic uprooting of the subject, conditioning modern experiences of alienation, depersonalization, loss of identity and existential homelessness, Kracauer also believed this process carried its own possibilities for cultural renewal. Like Adorno, Kracauer asserted that 'Capitalism does not rationalize too much but too little', arguing that this limited rationality had become stuck in an obdurate abstractness which assumed the appearance of nature. It is from a dialectical perspective positing the need to redeem an abstracted nature that he makes his ambitious and provocative claim: 'The turn to photography is the go-for-broke game of history'.

In all his writings, Kracauer gave the camera a crucial role in bringing the secular disenchantedment of the natural world to a new pitch: 'For the first time in history, photography brings to the fore the entire natural shell; for the first time the inert world presents itself in its independence from human beings'. If Kracauer understands photography in phenomenological rather than semiotic terms, what he proposes is not a traditional theory of mimesis, but a bold attempt to insert the new technology into the historical process. What is important is not the 'mere surface coherence' of the photographic image that supports the referential illusion, but the potential for the photographic process to destroy the familiar coordinates of recognition:

Just as consciousness finds itself confronting the unabashedly displayed mechanics of industrial society, it also faces, thanks to photographic technology, the reflection of the reality that has slipped away from it. This warehousing of nature promotes the confrontation of consciousness with nature. To have provoked the decisive confrontation in every field — this is precisely the go-for-broke game of the historical process. The images of the stock of nature disintegrated into its elements are offered up to consciousness to deal with as it pleases. Their original order is lost; they no longer cling to the spatial context that linked them with an original ...

25. Kracauer, 'Photography', p. 456. This text prefaced by nearly a decade the publication of Benjamin's better known analysis of the liquidation of the aura/quality of art by technical reproducibility.

ARENA Journal no. 4, 1994/95
It is precisely the disintegration of natural appearances promoted by
the camera, and the consequent exposure of the contingent quality of
every arrangement, that creates new political possibilities: 'It is
therefore incumbent on consciousness to establish the provisional
status of all given configurations and perhaps even to awake an
inkling of the right order of the inventory of nature.' For
Kracauer, the crucial political question was therefore the extent to
which the new media — especially cinema — would be able to
display the alienating disorder of modernity. Or would its
powerful effects of immediacy and presence be harnessed towards
producing illusions of coherence that simply 'drilled' the subject in
the manner of its depersonalized everyday existence.

This situates the historical stakes bound up in the development of
classical narrative cinema, a transition that is itself inseparable from
the emergence of Hollywood as the undisputed center of world film
production. Like Kracauer, many early writers on cinema
(including Benjamin, André Breton and Dziga Vertov) were struck
by film's unprecedented ability to dethrone the primacy of human
perception, estranging the subject from its habitual repose. The
gradual emergence of interlocking conventions of narrative, shot
matching and spatio-temporal continuity designed to enhance a sense
of spectatorial omniscience while sustaining a predominantly
voyeuristic relation to the screen, proved vital in recuperating this
rupture and converging cinema into an acceptable form of mass
entertainment. Moreover, if cinematic language retained a
significant degree of fluidity into the 1920s, the consolidation of
the Hollywood studio system, and the introduction of synchronized
sound around 1927 served to consecrate classical narrative cinema as
the dominant mode of film production and consumption from the
1930s until (at least) the 1960s.

27 By 1919, some eighty per cent of the world's film production was taking place in
28 Film historian Tom Gunning argues that 'the period 1907-1913 represents the true
narrativization of the cinema, culminating in the appearance of feature films'. See his 'The
W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation (1915) consolidated the new paradigm of the narrative
feature film which works by 'placing' the spectator within a psychologically coherent weave of
filmic space and time. For an analysis of this process see for example, S Heath, 'Narrative
29 Synchronized sound not only increased production and exhibition costs, further
concentrating control of the film industry in the capital rich United States, but effectively
split the international market into a series of language-based domestic markets. Hollywood,
which operated in the largest domestic market, assumed a dominance it is still far from
surrendering. Synchronized sound also directly affected narrative technique; the need to
Despite its increasing appropriation as a mechanism of bourgeois entertainment, Kracauer never wholly abandoned his vision of cinema’s radical potential. Even in *Theory of Film*, cinema retains the historical role of ‘redeeming’ an alienated physical reality. (This is undoubtedly a major reason for its lack of favour since the 1970s, when the turn to semiotics and psychoanalysis in film theory relocated the redemptive possibilities of cinema in the self-reflexive practice epitomized by Godard). But in many other respects his analysis changed greatly. In an informative reading of the genesis of *Theory of Film*, Miriam Hansen describes Kracauer’s metamorphosis from ‘a radical Weimar critic into a cold-war liberal humanist’. Although the text was not completed until 1954, Kracauer first began writing it in Marseille in 1940, during a tense and anguished time while awaiting either deportation to Germany or escape and exile in the United States. (It was also in this period that Walter Benjamin, who the Kracauers saw almost every day, suicided following his failed border crossing into Spain). By comparing earlier and later versions of the work, Hansen traces Kracauer’s gradual repression of the more radical impulses of his unique materialism (which nevertheless remain in fragments in the final work). She comments:

Whether this process was triggered by any specific pressures (a number of Kracauer’s friends were either victims of McCarthyist persecution, like Jay Leyda, or feared they would be, like Adorno); whether Kracauer’s back was broken by his enforced exile and renunciation of his native language, as Adorno asserts; or whether it was perhaps the reinforcement of a life-long tendency to collaborate with the status quo, as Adorno insinuates, is an open question.

Rather than pursue these particular arguments here, I want to suggest that the transformation can also be understood in terms of a reassessment of the political possibilities of mass culture. What could be read in the 1920s as the ambivalent and marginal spaces of capitalism, had, by the 1940s, become symptomatic of the rise of fascism in Europe and the gentrification of cinema under the leadership of Hollywood. What, in the 1920s, could be valued

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ARENA journal no. 4, 1994/95
purely from the point of view of its capacity to dislocate tradition, had, by the 1940s, coalesced into the formations of a new normative culture in which the cult of the film star and the politics of dictatorship had converged to a disturbing degree.

Before extending this line of thought, it is worth noting that Adorno and Horkheimer were not the only ones to despair at this trajectory. Brecht, who Enzensberger cites approvingly for his early comments on radio, changed his position on cinema markedly in the 1930s. More to the point, Walter Benjamin, who remains the touchstone for most left analyses of the radical potential of the media, was perhaps more ambivalent towards 'technological reproducibility' than Poster recognizes. Poster's suggestion that, for Benjamin, 'the potential democratizing advances of the media are all reversible according to their manner of realization', tends to collapse the dialectic between culture and technology into political voluntarism. If Benjamin did this himself at times, this was not his only standpoint. In a compelling reading of the 'Artwork' essay, Miriam Hansen situates it in relation to Benjamin's other writings, revealing a series of tensions surrounding its rather programmatic address. In particular, Hansen argues that Benjamin's blunt advocacy of the destruction of aura in the 'Artwork' essay was made 'under the impact of deepening political crisis', and in fact runs counter to the more dialectical 'theory of experience' he elaborated in both earlier and later texts. By surrendering his theory of experience with its crucial emphasis on disjunctive temporality, she suggests that Benjamin is forced to simply oppose 'masses' to 'aura' at critical points in the essay. As a result:

he also makes the discontinuities of memory and history congeal into the linear presence of polytechnical education, popular expertise and a pseudo-scientific notion of 'testing' which cannot be dissociated from its industrial-capitalist origin.

33. Poster, p. 62.
36. Hansen, 'Benjamin and Cinema', p. 203. This resembles the criticism that Adorno once made: Benjamin did not elaborate on how deeply some of the categories he postulated for film — exhibition, text — are imbricated with the commodity character his theory opposes. Adorno
To my mind, Hansen’s carefully layered reading which stresses the belatedly utopian quality of some of Benjamin’s pronouncements situates his otherwise puzzlingly inadequate comments on mass cultural phenomena such as bicycle races, letters to the editor, and Soviet film more convincingly than Poster is able to. 37 It also raises vital questions concerning the transition from sacred to secular societies, and the trajectory Benjamin identified as lifting the work of art out of the realm of mystification and into the domain of politics: in siding so enthusiastically with the destruction of aura and conferring on this process a sense of historical destiny, to what extent did Benjamin in particular, and the left in general, abandon whole realms of experience — aesthetic, mythic, spiritual — to be exploited by others, including the Nazis?

Nowhere was this capacity to aestheticize the political by deploying the new technical apparatus with the aim of restoring mythical dimensions of experience more dramatically realized than in Triumph of the Will (1935), Leni Riefenstahl’s monumental film of the 1934 Nazi Party Convention at Nuremberg. But if the film undoubtedly constitutes a pivotal moment in the modern reconstruction of the scene of politics, appreciating the extent and depth of this transformation demands something more than the conventional paradigm of propaganda. The fact that Triumph of the Will is the most commonly cited example of film propaganda, while, at the same time, it is the film most widely chosen by critics to provide images that show the ‘real’ nature of Nazi Germany, illustrates something of this difficulty. 38 More importantly, unlike most other examples of propaganda from the time, Triumph of the Will retains an intense fascination for contemporary audiences. To explain this with reference to Riefenstahl’s ‘genius’ (as Barnouw attempts), or by appealing to the difference between the film’s formal techniques and its political or ideological affiliations (as

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37. Poster clearly notices the same problem, observing that Benjamin ‘contrasts, perhaps wrongly, the Soviet films of Eisenstein with those of Hollywood’ but does not draw any deeper consequences from this supposed error. Poster, p. 62.
many film critics do) is inadequate. Here, of all places, separating politics from art proves untenable.

In fact, in conventional terms, Riefenstahl’s defence of her role is quite convincing. As she points out, before the war Triumph of the Will won prizes and acclaim internationally, including the Gold Medal at the Venice Film Festival (then Europe’s most prestigious film prize). Riefenstahl herself was feted in Hollywood as Walt Disney’s guest in 1939. After the war her reputation as ‘Hitler’s favourite film maker’ meant she was twice tried (although not convicted) as a war criminal. If her bewilderment at these events is at times disingenuous, her memory deliberately vague concerning the closeness of her ties to Hitler, and her account of a bitter feud with Goebbels more a self-serving attempt to demonstrate her artistic autonomy, her essential point remains to be answered. Whereas other film-makers closely aligned with the regime, such as Veit Harlan who directed the notorious Jew Suss (1940), were later rehabilitated, Riefenstahl was subject to lingering boycotts and protests. Why has she remained such an awkward figure for the post-war era to come to terms with?

The answer, I suggest, lies less in exonerating Riefenstahl from responsibility than in broadening the terms for analysing the conditions in which a political formation such as National Socialism could emerge. Of particular importance is the extent to which its radically heightened emphasis on ‘aesthetics’ as the means of defining the unified space of a modern national polity depended on the strategic possibilities entailed by radio and cinema at that particular historical juncture. While the mass assemblies and grand spectacles promoted by the Nazis could provide active participation in public life for thousands, and even hundreds of thousands, the ecstatic fusion with the Leader that ultimately steered political events beyond the control of the traditional Right and onto such a desperate and extreme course, demanded something more. By extending the intensely narcissistic experience of identification derived from narrative cinema — the spectator’s sense of being singled out by events and characters on the screen — towards the fusion of personal and national destiny that Hitler proclaimed as his and Germany’s own, Triumph of the Will constituted — as Hitler put

39. Characteristic is John Taylor’s observation that ‘even such committedly left-wing, dedicating anti-Nazi writers such as Paul Rotha have had to admit… that the film, whatever one’s attitude towards its content, does transcend that content’, in R. Roud (ed.), Cinema: A Critical Dictionary. New York, Viking Press, p. 869.
40. Here I am drawing on the extensive interview she gave for Ray Müller’s film The Wonderful. Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl (1993). (Its German title, Der Macho Der Bilder would be more directly, if less markedly, translated as The Power of the Image.)
it — a ‘totally unique and incomparable glorification of the power and beauty of our Movement’. 41

While the precise genesis of the film remains obscure (it seems that Hitler personally asked Riefenstahl to undertake the project), the general circumstances of its production are well-known. It has been widely acknowledged, for example, that Triumph of the Will was not so much the document of a political event as its cinematic hybrid. Riefenstahl’s book about the making of the film 42 describes planning and supervising the construction of elaborate bridges, towers, pits and dolly tracks for the camera, as well as the logistical problems of coordinating the thirty cameras and 120 crew she had at her disposal. Kracauer cites her statement that: ‘The preparations for the Party Convention were made in concert with the preparation for the camera-work.’ 43 This perspective informed the truncated post-war versions of the film released by the Allies, which were sternly prefaced with warnings that all the events were ‘staged’, and that the rallies were themselves akin to ‘film productions’.

Recognizing that the rally was conceived as a set in which the camera-eye was given right of way over all others, and that spoilt footage of loyalty pledges to Hitler was reshot weeks later in a studio (with a set designed by Albert Speer) is important, if only to contradict Riefenstahl’s later assertions that: ‘Not a single scene is staged. Everything is genuine. And there is no tendentious commentary for the simple reason that there is no commentary at all. It is history — pure history’. 44 (Equally telling in this regard is the fact that Riefenstahl shot — or attempted to shoot — a film of the Party convention in 1933, a year prior to the production of Triumph of the Will. Surviving fragments of the earlier film Sieg Des Glaubens (Victory of Faith), included, to Riefenstahl’s obvious displeasure in Ray Muller’s The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl (1993), reveal a far less sophisticated marriage of camera and event, and demonstrate that, Riefenstahl, as much as Hitler and the Nazis, used the occasion as a dress-rehearsal. 45

42. Hitler der Kultur der Reichsparteitag-Films, Munich, 1935.
44. Riefenstahl interviewed by Cahiers du Cinema, September 1965, quoted by Sontag. Under the Sign of Saturn, p. 82. In the same interview, Riefenstahl claimed that she had not written a word of Hitler der Kultur der Reichsparteitag-Films, despite the fact that it appeared under her name.
45. When Muller questions Riefenstahl about Victory of Faith, it is one of the few occasions on which she becomes agitated, at first vehemently denying the film’s existence, then downplaying

ARENA journal no. 4, 1994/95
But recognition that *Triumph of the Will* was staged still needs to be taken further. Clearly, every attempt to film an event such as a political rally is partial, selective and discriminatory. Despite its aura of transparency, the camera inevitably conceals as much as it reveals, and decisions concerning what to film and how to edit it exert a decisive influence on subsequent perceptions as to what took place. In this regard, the originality of *Triumph of the Will* lay not in manipulating reality — how could it do otherwise? — but in the *unreserved* manner in which it borrowed techniques of narrative film making in order to extend the degree of control available to 'fiction' films onto the arena of 'real events'. Hayden White's suggestion that the historical fantasy is that 'real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherence of a story' situates the stakes at play in this move. The seductive power of a film that meticulously shaped appearances while enabling them to apparently speak for themselves was undoubtedly the reason Hitler chose an 'artistic' film-maker rather than an established documentalist for the project. As the text credited to Riefenstahl acknowledged:

> That the Führer has raised film making to a position of such pre-eminence testifies to his prophetic awareness of the unrealized suggestive power of this art form. One is familiar with documentaries. Governments have ordered them and political parties have used them to their ends. But the belief that a true and genuinely powerful national experience can be kindled through the medium of film, this belief originated in Germany.

Putting aside the vexed question of absolute origins, it seems more important today to recognize that awareness of the suggestive power of this approach to film-making has not remained confined to Germany. Perhaps the use of films as tools of public education and

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its significance by dismissing it as 'just a few shots', and at all times insisting that Muller not talk about it in relation to her 'technique'.
48. Barnouw reports that Walter Ruttmann, who directed the influential documentary *Berlin, Symphony of a City* (1929) was keen to undertake the film, but Hitler insisted on the young and inexperienced Riefenstahl. Another moored candidate was Fritz Lang, whose *Metropolis* (1927) had so impressed Goebbels that he wanted the director to meet Hitler. However, Lang was less than impressed with the Nazi, and left Germany for Hollywood upon their seizure of power.

ARENA journal no. 4. 1994/95
propaganda under John Grierson (who coined the term 'documentary') at the British Empire Marketing Board from around 1930 lacked the resources — and the epic nature — of Riefenstahl's work. But the immediate success of Time Incorporated's *The March of Time* newsreel (begun in March, 1935) which combined 'actuality footage' with free-wheeling dramatizations confirmed the arrival of a new paradigm that embraced Roosevelt and Churchill, as well as Hitler and Stalin. One reason that all these political leaders of the 1930s remain 'larger than life' is that politics divides at this point: they were the first to use the audio-visual media to project 'personalized' images in a manner which has since become second nature.

All this is to suggest that the primary reason *Triumph of the Will* remains so contentious even today, and its seduction so impervious to conventional categories of political analysis, is that its setting remains so contemporary. The enigmatic logic of designing public events from the point of view of their media re-presentation not only defines the political landscape in which we live; under the accelerated optics of television, this process has saturated the interstices of daily life. If the sporting arena constructed as a space of total surveillance constitutes the most extreme example of this trajectory (again Riefenstahl was an innovator: in her film of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, 'we turned the stadium into a film studio'),

51 it also forms the dominant ideological paradigm for a social existence in which democracy is equated with the immediate availability of all sites and situations to the ubiquity of the sight machine. While the full implications of the constitution 'of the world' as a global television studio are still making themselves felt, a few observations can perhaps be made.

In retrospect, the most radical break that cinema made with previous modes of representation was not simply that it produced moving images. Of equal significance was the capacity to generate mobile fields of perception, creating dynamic texts in which discontinuous sites and heterogeneous objects could be made 'continuous' by virtue of montage. The extreme plasticity of the

50. Detailing Roosevelt's close ties to Henry Luce (controller of Time Inc.), Robert Hertzstein suggests *The March of Time* 'became a virtual mouthpiece for Roosevelt's interventionist policy', *Roosevelt and Hitler: Prelude to War*, New York, Paragon House, 1989, p. 344. In discussing Hitler and Stalin, Paul Virilio goes further: 'Perhaps it has not been properly understood that these miracle working dictators no longer ruled but were themselves directors', *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. P Camiller, London, Verso, 1989, p. 53. Churchill’s wartime radio broadcasts certainly deserve a place in this scene.

51. The comment was made by one of Riefenstahl’s camera operators, re-united with her at the Berlin Olympic Stadium for Muliër’s film.

ARENA journal no. 4, 1994/95
The Go-For-Broke Game of History

cinematic frame opened new possibilities for representing aspects of the modern world that could no longer be properly represented by traditional means. Extending Kracauer's analysis of the mass ornament, Walter Benjamin noted cinema's affinity for the scope and sweep of emergent social phenomena such as mass events:

Mass reproduction is particularly congenial to the reproduction of people as mass. In the large festivals, the monster congresses, the mass-sembles, at sporting events or in war, which are all occasions directly brought before the photographic or radio apparatus, the masses can look themselves in the face.  

It is not unreasonable to imagine that Benjamin had the narcissistic crowd scenes in Triumph of the Will in mind in this passage, although it could equally have been the Hollywood musicals of Busby Berkeley which took the camera's capacity to translate group choreography into abstract kaleidoscopic patterns to new and immensely popular heights in the 1930s. But as much as the ability to encompass the crowd was operative in Riefenstahl's work, it also depended on the capacity to isolate and magnify the individual. At the other end of Benjamin's scale, Ingmar Bergman has declared: 'The possibility of drawing near to the human face is the primary originality and distinctive quality of the cinema.' 33 In this context, however, it seems most productive to define cinema not by its use of the close-up, the longshot, or the wide angle, but by its fluid movement and rhythmic transitions between these options. In this sense, it can be argued that the capacity to exploit the dynamic potential of the cinematic frame by interlacing different shots — that is by integrating them in a single scene while maintaining a sense of spatial and psychological continuity — has not only provided a flexible and enduring narrative matrix, but it also constitutes a key political technology in an era in which the principal social dynamic has repeatedly been framed between the poles of individual and society.

By exploiting the techniques developed in narrative cinema — for example, by building a camera platform at the precise spot where the ranks of marching soldiers give Hitler an 'eyes right' salute — Riefenstahl brought Hitler 'face to face' with his thronging supporters, both in the film's narrative space, and in the audience's


ARENA Journal no. 4, 1994/95
viewing space. This highlights the heterogeneity of subject positions available to the cine-spectator. *Triumph of the Will* undoubtedly works by encouraging the idealization of Hitler, a process exemplified by the famous opening sequence in which Hitler's plane descends on Nuremberg from the clouds. It also enables the viewer to identify with individuals in the crowd, with the crowd as a collective subject (resembling the audience in the cinema), and, beyond this, with the omnipotence of the camera that offers itself as a metaphor for Hitler. Cinematic reversibility — the leader seen everywhere, but also shown as seeing everywhere — lays the basis for the profound convergence between the leader principle and the star principle which dominates the contemporary mediascape.

No one recognized this trajectory more clearly than Walter Benjamin. In a remarkable footnote to his 'Artwork' essay, he argued:

> The present crisis of the bourgeois democracies comprises a crisis of the conditions which determine the public presentation of the rulers. Democracies exhibit a member of the government directly and personally before the nation's representatives. Parliament is his public. Since the innovations of camera and recording equipment make it possible for the orator to become audible and visible to an unlimited number of persons, the presentation of the man of politics before camera and recording equipment has become paramount. Parliaments, as much as theatres, are deserted. Radio and film not only affect the function of the professional actor but likewise the function of those who also exhibit themselves before this mechanical equipment, those who govern. Though their tasks may be different, the change affects equally the actor and the ruler. The trend is towards establishing controllable and transferable skills under certain social conditions. This results in a new selection, a selection before the equipment from which the star and the dictator emerge victorious.4

Benjamin's analogy between 'dictator' and 'star' suggests the need to situate the political impact of the star system on public life. Historically, the development of the star system can be directly related to structural transformations in the film industry. As the initial thrill of watching motion pictures waned, the need to attract new audiences by augmenting spectacle and improving narrative techniques led to higher production costs. Increased investment was

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ARENA journal no 4, 1994/95
The Go-For-Broke Game of History

secured by replacing the anonymity of the early players with a cinema marketed by its familiar names and faces. The story of 'the Biograph girl', Florence Lawrence, is offered by some as the origin of the movie star, while others point to the fame of Asta Nielsen in Europe around 1910. However, it was the emergence of Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford in Hollywood between 1910 and 1913 that completely redefined the notion of stardom, with repercussions that would be felt around the world. (Is it irrelevant to remark here that one can scarcely think of Chaplin's moustache without thinking of Hitler's appropriation of it? Chaplin's revenge in The Great Dictator (1940) may not have been plotted while rehearsing in front of Triumph of the Will, as Attenborough's recent bio-pic suggested, but it remains intriguing that two of the most recognizable images of this century are, in a direct sense, joined at the cinema.)

The cult of cinema stardom bore little resemblance to any previous manifestation of fame or notoriety. It enacted a new public ritual of excessive intensity in which the line between 'image' and 'reality' was deliberately blurred to heighten the power of identification. The star was his or her screen image (for a time at least). Of course, the star system has undergone substantial modifications since its peak in the 1930s, when major movie stars could expect to receive thousands of letters each week, and studio publicity machines maintained military control over their charges. Today it is often observed, usually with some regret, that we no longer have real stars. They have become too real, or rather, they have been brought too close: the distance sheltering the mystery essential to the star as god or goddess has been compromised. This would seem to represent less the end of the star-system than the dispersal of its effects across the space-time of television. This general overexposure of the private lives of public figures which today threatens to cause a political crisis in the United States due to the difficulty of finding 'clean' candidates for public office, is everywhere counterpointed by the desire of 'ordinary people' to expose their private lives on talk shows such as Oprah and Donahue. Rather than stars, today we have celebrities, depending more on the intimacy of personality than the authority of archetype. Where Royalty demanded divine birth, celebrity can accrue to anyone; it is simply a matter of being well-known, or rather, well-distributed across a multiplicity of circuits. This phenomenon testifies to the emergence of a cultural milieu in

55. Here one might recall Benjamin's definition of 'aura' in his 1931 photograpy essay as 'the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be', a formulation he later quotes in the 'Artwork' essay.
which the demarcation of media roles has become increasingly problematic.

Ronald Reagan's spectacular ascent to the United States Presidency reconfirmed a number of the key elements of Benjamin's hypothesis. His metamorphosis from actor-politician (as President of the Screen Actors Guild Reagan was one of the 'friendly' witnesses for the McCarthy inquiry into Hollywood) to politician-actor underlined the continuity of skills (photogeny, performance, script) needed to succeed in each domain. Technical effects also converged: the specially designed lecterns, complete with auto-cues borrowed from television, enabled Reagan to give the impression that he was not only on top of his lines, but on first name terms with the entire press corps. (Less seamless in this regard were his notorious homilies in which he would narrate 'personal experience' later revealed to be drawn from an old film role: as Michael Rogin commented, President Reagan is a man 'whose most spontaneous moments are not only preserved and projected on film, but also turn out to be lines from old movies').

In Reagan's aftermath, it seems that everyone knows that politics is performed for the media, especially television. But focusing on Reagan as if he is an exceptional case may be a way of resisting the full implications of this knowledge. When the general calculation of public appearances on the basis of 'photo-opportunities', and of public pronouncements on the basis of 'sound-bites' confirms the dominance of mise-en-scène in political as much as cinematic productions, rather than isolating individual examples, we need to reposition this shift at the heart of the political field itself.

In the cold-war period, when each nation-state was dominated by one, or, at most, a handful of national broadcasting networks, television assumed an unprecedented primacy in defining the public sphere, transforming its characteristic dimensions and rhythms. The extent of this process can be seen today in the concerted attempts to integrate traditional legal, educational, religious and political institutions with telecommunications. From the Lindy Chamberlain verdict to the O. J. Simpson trial, from debates in the Russian Chamber of Deputies to Kerry Packer's appearance before an

57. Consider Bob Hawke's appearance on A Country Practice in 1984, playing himself as Australian Prime Minister. This performance segued in effortlessly with his parliamentary performances, which themselves seem to have been merely the preparation for his later role as occasional roving reporter for Sixty Minutes. The point is that similar figures can be found almost everywhere.

ARENA journal no. 4, 1994/95
Australian Senate committee, contemporary public proceedings need to be televised, not simply to show 'democracy in action', but to shore up the legitimacy of its institutions; to reassure us that parliament, for instance, still has primary importance in a political process dominated by executive government and extra-parliamentary forces.

The rise of tele-evangelists, the spread of tele-education and open university programmes, the increased tele-visibility of court proceedings, all confirm the critical role that television plays as a key institution of social integration. There is a powerful convergence between the ideal image of democracy — the accessibility of the representatives, the visibility of decision making, the transparency of the political process — and the desire for transparency, directness and immediacy in representation which has today found its home in television.

In many respects, it is this politically ambivalent public sphere that is today in question. On the one hand, the convergence of 1980s ideologies of deregulation with new delivery systems is pushing most state-controlled broadcasting systems towards new levels of corporatization and privatization. German film-maker and theorist Alexander Kluge argues that this represents a profound transformation of political space: 'when this public sphere threatens to disappear, its loss would be as grave today as the loss of the common land was for the farmers in the Middle Ages'. 58 While Kluge recognizes the contradictions embedded in the classical concept of the public sphere, which believed itself universal but always worked by strategic exclusion, he argues against surrendering the term. Instead, he advocates contesting its 'naturalization':

What we understand by 'naturalized' is evidenced by the ambivalence — in almost every case unrecognized — of the most important concepts associated with the key phrase public sphere: public opinion, public authority, freedom of information, the production of publicity, mass media, etc. 59

This ambivalence resonates in the concurrent rise of new communication practices — narrowcasters, computer linked networks, faxes, mobile phones — which carry the potential to elude some of the homogenizing influences of the existing public sphere.

It is from this perspective that Poster argues that 'the Internet seems to encourage the proliferation of stories, local narratives without any totalizing gestures, and it places senders and addressees in symmetrical relations'.\textsuperscript{60} To better appreciate the possibilities and the limits of these networks, it is helpful to pose their emergence against the existing tele-distribution of the community.

Over half a century separates \textit{Triumph of the Will} from \textit{Australia Live: The Celebration of a Nation}, an ambitious four hour telecast aired on January 1, 1988.\textsuperscript{61} Like \textit{Triumph of the Will}, \textit{Australia Live} self-consciously attempted to reconstruct an experience of 'community' capable of linking a dispersed national population in a predominantly urban-industrial setting. To this end, it drew on a familiar terrain, eulogizing national heroes and deploying the common colonial narrative of pioneering struggle in a harsh environment. Where it departed from earlier nationalist discourses, including the popular literary culture it otherwise reproduced, was in the manner in which it translated these themes into \textit{scenes}. The bulk of the programme consisted of live crosses between some seventy locations around the country and the three hosts (Ray Martin, Jana Wendt and Clive James) in the central studio. Each new location, ranging from capital cities to geographical extremities, national icons and tourist sites was presented by a different celebrity, usually fronting a group of revellers gathered for the happy occasion. Taking off from the camera’s powerful ability to constitute a multiplicity of observers as eyewitnesses infinitely dispersed in space (or deferred in time), \textit{Australia Live} used television to \textit{map} the social fractions and spatial dimensions of Australia into a coherent textual structure. By positing direct links between territory and 'the people', it constituted a powerful mechanism for turning the Nation — over and above whatever linguistic, cultural and racial differences it admitted — into One.

But what is the nature of this unity? No longer centred around locality or neighbourhood, yet also displacing axes of group identification such as race, gender, religion, age and class, \textit{Australia Live} offered the unity of a collectivity which defines itself in the act

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\textsuperscript{60} Poster, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{61} This anniversary of two hundred years of colonization of New South Wales was the date chosen for Australia’s Bicentenary. \textit{Australia Live} was the brainchild of Peter Faiman, long time director of \textit{The Don Lane Show} and later of \textit{Crocodile Dundee}. It was telecast simultaneously by Channel Nine, the ABC and the SBS, with the assurance of OTC and Telecom. Involving over 1000 technicians and presenters, it remains the largest live telecast undertaken in Australia.

\textit{ARENA} journal no. 4, 1994/95
of watching. Synchronous viewing and the shared experience of the unfolding of events on television, aware that others are watching simultaneously but elsewhere, now constitutes a primary ritual of national celebration and an integral mechanism in the formation of national identity. (Recalling Lacoue-Labarthe’s analysis of Nazism at this point is instructive. Firstly, following the example of Syberberg’s radicalization of Benjamin’s thesis, he notes ‘the political is instituted and constituted (and regularly grounds itself) in and as work of art’ — a ‘representation’ whose paradigm would be cinema. But he also speaks of an ‘immanentism’ in which the entire community produces itself as a collective artwork: ‘That is why the process finds its truth in a “fusion of the community” (be festival or war) or in the ecstatic identification with a Leader’. Here the paradigm would be television and the tele-event.)

Contrasting Australia Live with Triumph of the Will situates an important shift in the manner in which the contemporary nation-state is imagined (to use Benedict Anderson’s popular term). And, if the space and time of the national text is increasingly televisual, this turns decisively on the question of relative speed. The spread of television following the Second World War rapidly stripped cinema of its journalistic pretensions, confirming it instead as the privileged domain of spectacle and fiction. The fact that television constituted a privatized scene of watching — a cellular network of domestic viewing sites rather than the collective public space of cinema — went hand in hand with the post-war dispersion of the urban populace into suburban dormitories. Both the open lattice of viewing sites, and the immediacy of broadcast technology (which lent itself to a mode of direct address inherited from radio), promoted new narrative forms. Instead of cinema’s enclosed and darkened auditorium which favoured discrete texts and a predominantly voyeuristic viewing experience, television’s immersion within the everyday world oriented it towards more open narrative forms: the series, the serial, the twenty-four hour flow of programming. In addition, the disavowal of the spectator and the invisibility of the means of production that dominated classical

62. H. J. Syberberg’s Hitler: A Film From Germany (1979), which stresses that critiques of Nazi Germany cannot afford to simply repeat the spectacle of that history, but must critically engage the politics of spectatorship with which it is encroached, is an essential point of reference here.
64. This can be read in the demise of the major United States newsreels: The March of Time and This Is America ceased in 1951, Parke News in 1956, Paramount News in 1957, Fox Movietone News in 1963, while MGM News of the Day and Universal News lasted until 1961.

ARENA journal no. 4, 1994/95
narrative cinema gave way to a constant soliciting of the viewer and a continual fascination with the apparatus. 

Australia Live was in the mould of what Umberto Eco has called ‘Neo-television’: a discourse less concerned with the ‘outside world’ than with sustaining an ‘interactive’ relation with its viewers. At one point, a host proudly announced: ‘a show that’s prepared to go to any lengths to unite our nation and Australians around the world ... You’re all in this. If you’re in the audience, you’re in the show’. But being ‘in’ the show assumes novel dimensions when one tries to situate its event. Unlike Triumph of the Will, which crossed a certain threshold in the politicization of cinema and the cinematization of politics, Australia Live no longer refers to an event determinable ‘as such’. There was no single mass gathering, no epic performance or great procession even one designed to be filmed and subsequently re-assembled. To suggest the obvious — that the event was the sum of all its individual parts — risks missing the implications of this shift. The tele-event is radically homeless, which is to say, fissured at inception. Where ‘Triumph of the Will’ still belonged to a politics based on the control of territory and the populating of space, Australia Live reveals the extent to which television has directed the desire for community and commonality onto the axis of time. What Kracauer described as the camera’s game with history (photography as the spatialization of temporal relations) has become television’s all-out gamble with time itself.

The profound consequences of the historical intersection between television and a certain desire for presence are now becoming increasingly apparent. Investment in televisural speed and ubiquity — the immediacy of response to current events and the multiplicity of points of recording, broadcasting and receiving — is critical in sustaining the aura of instant availability that defines ‘the world’ today. In the equalization of location and place through the screen interface, in the decreasing importance of traditional architectural and geographical borders (redefining access to the home as much as the security of the nation-state), in the fundamental de-realization of Cartesian space in favour of intermittent, disjunctive and inherently ambiguous topologies, we are witnessing what Virilio terms the

65. In this sense, television constitutes a return to what Tom Gunning (borrowing from Sergei Eisenstein) has designated the ‘cinema of attractions’: that early exhibitive cinema more concerned with its power to display than its ability to narrate. See his ‘The Cinema of Attractions’, Wide Angle, vol. 8, no. 3/4, 1986.

66. This orientation was exemplified by Hitler’s ambitious plans for a series of great assembly halls and studios, from the Berlin Dome seating 130,000 to Zeppelinfield for 400,000.

ARENA journal no 4, 1994/95
displacement of geo-politics by chrono-politics. The decline of traditional urban reference points (the post office, the city square, the public monument), as much as the emptying of the traditional sites of politics (the public meeting, the town hall, the parliament) reveals the extent to which territorial control has been overtaken by a government of time: the co-ordination of complex schedules that issue forth from advanced technologies, adjustment to the accelerated social rhythms of a viewing day that has dawned beyond all seasons.

How do the new wave of media technologies affect this trajectory, the drive toward a culture of speed of which Marinetti could only dream at the turn of the century? Given the multi-billion dollar investments needed to establish its infrastructure, it is not difficult to imagine the uses that will be privileged, at least initially, on the 'information superhighway': Pay-TV, on-line video, electronic mail services, with video phones looming as the biggest potential profit maker. Any alternative uses will have to be built in the shadow of the integrated, home-based information-entertainment circuit on which massive advertising budgets are currently being lavished to encourage us to think of it as essential.

Given the general acceptance that this superhighway will be a direct toll system rather than the collectively funded public thoroughfares that we (in Australia at least) have been used to, there are clearly important questions of access to consider. In his most pessimistic moment, Poster suggests: 'Participation in the information superhighway and virtual reality will most likely be accessible to and culturally consonant with white wealthy males'. But if everyone was somehow to be included there remain other important questions to be raised. Poster's principal example of an emergent practice capable of challenging existing media constellations is the Internet:

Connected to one's home computer, one will experience an audio-visual world generated from a node somewhere in the Internet, and this will include other participants in the same way that one can participate today on bulletin boards in videotext. If such experiences become commonplace, in the way that viewing television is today, then surely reality will have been multiplied.

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68 Poster, p. 89.
69 Poster, p. 88.
Putting aside the intriguing question as to how one might have ‘more’ reality, it seems to me that this movement toward the interlinking of individuated domestic cells of production and consumption is precisely the dominant trajectory of a contemporary capitalism predicated on the total mobility of national populations, and the consequent fragmentation of family and kinship networks based on the populating of space. From this perspective, it should be acknowledged that, as much as sophisticated communication technologies such as the Internet put us ‘in touch’ with diverse others, they also facilitate a mode of social organization and an architecture of urban living in which the individual becomes a primary social unit. In this regard, it is significant that the most popular metaphors for the Internet — as web, or the arteries of a living organism — not only refer back to older forms of community that are re-imagined on a global scale, but parallel the manner in which broadcast technologies such as radio and television have always cathedged older dreams of oneness with the universe.

Clearly, these are complex issues that offer more than one heading. Here I have merely sought to sketch some elements of the transformation of the social relations of time and space across this century against which current developments can be measured. On this scale, it might be argued that the age of television marks the final disappearance of the time and space of God. The perpetual overexposure and accelerated rhythms of television are fundamentally antagonistic to the existence of the sacred. But there is not turning back, even if this were desirable.

What is of greater importance today is a reconsideration of the manner in which a particular conception of time and space has been an integral marker of cultural and racial difference throughout this century. In closing, Poster rightly raises the issue of multiculturalism in relation to new communication technologies.

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70. The peak of this trajectory is currently found in the United States where, between 1960 and 1981, the number of people living alone doubled to be one in four. See J. Meyerowitz. _No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour_. New York, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 148.

71. This position underlies Heidegger’s important analysis of the spatio-temporal ‘ground plan’ of the modern age in his essay ‘The Age of the World Picture’, _The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays_, trans. W. Lovitt, New York, Harper and Row, 1977, p. 115. It is equally important to grasp this analysis in the context of its production: the lecture was first delivered on 9 June 1938, in a Nazi Germany radically configured by new technologies of representation. In the wake of his deeply problematic ‘commitment’ to the Party, Heidegger later (1945) argued that this text developed his critique of the headlong rush of science to ‘technicism’. ‘What is essential is that we are caught up in the consummation of Nihilism, that “God is Dead” and every time-space for the Godhead covered up’, _The Reckoner 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts_, trans. K. Harries. _Review of Metaphysics_ vol. 38, no. 3, issue 151, March 1985, p. 498.

ARENA journal no. 4, 1994/95
The Go-For-Broke Game of History 227

Treating the question simply as one of encompassing a diversity of voices within the space-time of existing computer or television networks, however, is problematic. Insofar as modernity has been conditioned by the spread of linear time, this horizon has consistently been used to designate entire peoples as 'backward', 'primitive' and 'undeveloped', at least partly on the basis of a different time sense. From the perspective of this history, cultural renewal cannot simply be a function of the manner in which the nodal connections of the Internet elude existing patterns of sending and receiving to 'emancipate' information flows on a transnational basis. It also demands new media practices strategically designed to contest the existing social relations of time and space based on the homogenization of territory and the imposition of immediacy. Instead of the possibility of losing our 'social baggage' such as gender, age and ethnicity which Poster stresses, it seems more important to develop site and subject specific discourses, including those which question the privileges of being permanently on line.72 Forging different means of experiencing and representing time and space has today become critical to the emergence of new social and political relationships: to land, to memory, to future development.

72. Poster, p. 84.