



Contemporary **Sociology**

A JOURNAL OF REVIEWS

**A Symposium on Media:
From Telegraph
to Hypermedia Campaigns
Featuring essays by David Zaret,
Gaye Tuchman, David Croteau,
and Todd Gitlin**

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EDITORS' NOTE: FROM TELEGRAPH TO HYPERMEDIA CAMPAIGNS

The media has become a critical institution of American culture. It has become more pervasive, more intrusive in our everyday lives, and more relevant for many important societal outcomes. Think, for example, of its role in recent political campaigns, of its ability to turn scandals into public conversation pieces, and the ways in which it frames and amplifies popular culture. For this issue, we invited four distinguished sociologists (David Zaret, Gaye Tuchman, David Croteau, and Todd Gitlin) to contribute to our symposium on the role of the media in the U.S. They selected to discuss up to three recent sociological contributions that we identified: *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*, by Philip Howard; *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications*, by Paul Starr; and *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism and Television in a Neoliberal Age*, by Toby Miller. The result is a lively and contested set of discussions concerning the historical roots and development of the media in the U.S., its contemporary role in the U.S. public sphere, and its role in shaping contemporary politics.

The books under consideration highlight different processes and offer disparate perspectives on the media's influence. According to David Zaret, they "emphasize different aspects of politics—political choices and formal structures (Starr); political economy (Miller); political managers (Howard)—and offer divergent assessments of commercial media's impact on the public sphere: guardedly optimistic (Starr), guardedly alarmed (Howard), apocalyptic (Miller)." Croteau is especially impressed by Starr's book, which parallels his earlier classic work on American medicine in that it emphasizes agency in the context of technological, political, and social constraints. This, he argues, makes it decidedly sociological. While he praises the book, he wishes it didn't end with the U.S. entry into WWII; he wants to know what Starr has to say about more recent developments.

Gaye Tuchman emphasizes the extent to which media studies constitute an "interdisci-

plinary world." The two books she reviewed fit into one of two broad categories of contemporary research: those that claim that the media penetrates societies, institutions, and human rights (the other broad category involves theorists who propose new ways to challenge the media's power). She summarizes Miller's book, as "funny, outrageous, and insightful" and Howard's book as "one of the scariest books I have ever read." She quotes from Howard: "Political hypermedia create [a] second life for us, and it is not in our possession. It is a silhouette of our political selves, composed of raw data about how we think and act in our private worlds." She adds: "It is also a life that for-profit firms sell to political actors." In contrast, Gitlin takes issue with the Howard book's claim that the hypermedia political campaign has succeeded the traditional mass media political campaign: "Did any hypermedia event in 2004, or even the sum of them, have half the impact of the 'Swift Boat Veterans for Truth' advertising campaign, which pyramided a small ad buy into a free-media sensation that broadcast far and wide a fraudulent claim that, stamped with credibility, helped sink the hapless Kerry campaign?" Gitlin remains convinced that the problem is not so much Howard's "thin citizen," but the "all-embracing, omnipresent media torrent of nonstop and evanescent communications . . . that grabs the collective attention."

Also in this issue are review essays on two central sociological theorists: Pierre Bourdieu and Emile Durkheim. Rick Fantasia reviews Michael Grenfell's *Pierre Bourdieu: Agent Provocateur* and David Swartz and Vera Zolberg's *After Bourdieu: Influence, Critique, Elaboration*. Fantasia argues that Bourdieu offered a "toolkit of working concepts," and in effect, he was "the master craftsman with a finely honed set of working tools." Jennifer Lehmann, who reviews *The New Durkheim*, by Ivan Strenski and *Durkheim's Ghosts: Cultural Logics and Social Things*, by Charles Lemert, explains that while both emphasize that Durkheim deserves more attention, the

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former is about the past, within Durkheim's context, and the latter is about Durkheim's influence on contemporary theory.

We conclude the front section of this issue with two additions to our "Toolkit" section: Barry Wellman's review of Linton Freeman's *The Development of Social Network Analysis: A Study in the Sociology of Science* and Sara Curran's review of *Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies*, by William Axinn and Lisa Pearce. Our hope is that this new section in

Contemporary Sociology, and these two books in particular, will inspire provocative discussion about the tools sociologists use to do empirical research.

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A SYMPOSIUM ON MEDIA

American Media and the Public Sphere

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Current research on media highlights political factors in the development of organizations and technologies that facilitate or inhibit a vibrant public sphere. An independent, accessible public forum for communication has been a crucial counterweight to initiatives by governments to control information and limit criticism. The authors of all three books under review concur in a rejection of technological determinism for understanding the different intersections of organizational and technological forces that can enhance or impede critical, public political discourse.

Beyond these general themes, the three books differ greatly in content and methods. Read (as I review them) in chronological order, they survey the development of media from newspapers and the post office, to the telegraph, telephone, radio and television broadcasting, and, lastly, political hypermedia. The survey proceeds via comparative-historical analysis by a senior scholar (Paul Starr), a mid-career scholar's deployment of cultural studies (Toby Miller), and a young scholar's deft combination of ethnography, survey data, and network analysis (Philip Howard). They emphasize different aspects of politics—political choices and formal structures (Starr); political economy (Miller); political managers (Howard)—and offer divergent assessments of commercial media's impact on the public sphere: guardedly optimistic (Starr), guardedly alarmed (Howard), apocalyptic (Miller). The books also differ greatly with regard to originality and scholarship.

Colonial America to Radio Broadcasting

Paul Starr's book traverses roughly two centuries: developments in colonial America that eventuated in the media of cheap print (newspapers and books) and the postal system; the rise of electronic networks (telegraph and telephone); and, lastly, the movie industry and radio broadcasting up to 1941.

The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications, by **Paul Starr**. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004. 484pp. \$27.50 cloth. ISBN: 0465081932.

Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age, by **Toby Miller**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006. 238pp. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 1592135617.

New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen, by **Philip N. Howard**. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 288pp. \$23.99 paper. ISBN: 0521612276.

This grand synthesis uses a wide range of secondary sources, supplemented with primary data, from government reports, legal decisions, and private corporate documents. The result is a magisterial achievement that should be read by anyone with an interest in media technology, communications policy, and democracy.

For Starr, the impact of communications revolutions on the public sphere is not principally determined by technological change but by political choices under specific historical circumstances. Any new medium has divergent implications for public life. "The new technologies [. . .] could expand social connections, increasing the possibilities of association, exchange, and diffusion of information, but they also created new means of controlling communication that the state or private monopolists might use for their own purposes." These divergent possibilities "depended critically on political decisions" (p. 155).

With comparisons to Britain, France, Canada, and Germany, Starr develops nu-

anced accounts of key “constitutive choices” that put development of American media on a unique historical path. He does not simply juxtapose “free-enterprise” America to “statist” Europe. For example, development of the electrical telegraph in the U.S. as private enterprise derived from a specific conjunction of historical forces in the 1840s, relating to competition between Whig and Democratic parties and sectional conflict between Northern and Southern states.

For Starr, the most enduring constitutive choice occurred in the American Revolution, when a politically expedient alliance between printers and resisters to British rule eventuated in first amendment protections for print media. This, along with other commitments for expanding communication (e.g., postal system that subsidized newspapers), laid the groundwork for the first information revolution. An eleven-fold increase in the number of newspapers from 1790 to 1835 outpaced a nearly four-fold increase in the U.S. population. “Nowhere in Europe was there anything like this profusion of newspapers and newspaper reading” (p. 86). Political antecedents of this information revolution had no counterparts in England, France, or British North America. “Cheap print was public policy in America” (p. 125). Whereas the American Revolution paved the way for the first information revolution, in France the eruption of printed news and commentary in the early 1790s quickly gave way to repression, which persisted after the Revolution when Napoleon restored the centralized controls and monopolistic organization that regulated the press under the *ancien régime*.

Subsequent constitutive choices in the United States vested development of the telegraph, telephone, and radio networks in the private sector. Media monopolies were tolerated but limited. Monopolistic “legacy organizations” were not allowed to dominate new media. The Post Office did not control the telegraph (unlike Europe); the Western Union telegraph monopoly did not control the telephone (often a postal service operation in Europe); and the Bell companies did not control radio broadcasting (another state activity in Europe). None of these developments were inevitable. Radio broadcasting’s “constitutive moment” (p. 362) occurred in the 1920s, when conservative Republican leaders made decisions that paved the way

for the NBC and CBS oligopolies. (Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation that established the FCC virtually replicated earlier policies developed by Herbert Hoover.)

Starr dismisses the well-received view of the mass media as a force for homogenizing culture. He acknowledges that, compared to the medium of print, radio broadcasting was less accessible to diverse viewpoints. But if American radio initially provided less access than print culture, it provided far more than its European counterparts. Moreover, countervailing trends emerged. Concern over anti-democratic implications of oligopoly in radio broadcasting prompted the professional development of broadcast journalism and government initiatives with equal access regulations.

The principal lesson to be drawn from this history is that American media followed a unique path of development, initially charted by political decisions in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that facilitated the subsequent global preeminence of American communications in the twentieth century. Despite the earlier dates for new media initiatives in Europe, and its supremacy in science, American media grew more rapidly and afforded greater access and diversity because they were less impeded by legacy organizations and more reliant on private capital. This leads Starr to conclude that “markets in liberal societies enrich the public sphere far more than they impoverish it” (p. 401)—but only if political decisions set limits to monopoly and oligopoly and promote the expansion of communications networks.

Television News

The opposite conclusion is the point of departure for Toby Miller’s analysis of the impact of television on citizenship, which presumes that broadcast media are central to the construction of identity. At the core of this analysis are three case studies of television broadcasting: foreign affairs since 9/11, food issues, and weather. Television is crucial to this process “because that is where Yanquis learn about war, subsistence, and the environment” (p. 179). A unifying theme is Miller’s passionate denunciation of neoliberalism, especially with regard to deregulated broadcast media which cultivate passive consumers and not active citizens by instilling in viewers deep desires to buy commodities

and believe jingoistic, ethnocentric accounts of American foreign policy.

The book's conceptual framework broadly derives from cultural studies, which offers an "emergency exit" from "moribund disciplines adrift in the detritus of Cold War professionalism" (p. 3). This has alarming implications, which I discuss below, for the rhetoric and use of evidence in Miller's book, which is "designed to assist leftist politics via the reassertion of a democratic, internationalist state" (p. 23). Perceiving a diminution of Marxian elements in cultural studies, Miller advocates restoring political economy to a central position in order to combine a political-economic critique of neoliberalism and a cultural studies critique of consumerism.

Miller's choice of topics for his three case studies initially seems odd, but he succeeds in extracting a consistent conclusion from them. Television's failure to provide even minimally adequate coverage of important issues is systemic, a consequence of hegemonic corporate control of media. In his study of food on television, for example, we learn that "Yanquis persist with an animal-based diet" because this is promoted by "a clever food industry, a duplicitous state, and an enabling media," abetted by "interlocking directorates between media and food corporations" (pp. 116, 120). Obesity is not the outcome of "a conscious wise choice by consumers" (p. 120), but, rather, inadequate regulation of media and food industries. Evidence for these claims is largely anecdotal; and countervailing anecdotes or trends are dismissed. For example, media campaigns to promote sensible diet and exercise, and food industry initiatives with more healthy products, are "cynical" undertakings (p. 122).

Corporate interests make "media weather into a matter of consumption rather than citizenship" (p. 153) as television coverage uses sensationalism to hype ratings and largely ignores issues like global warming. I suspect more readers will agree with Miller's dislike for the "unnecessary hysteria" (p. 146) provoked by this sensationalism than his interpretation of underlying messages he intuitively finds in TV weather, which include "Get to work on time by allowing for nature, so that the sale of your labor power is not interrupted" (p. 147). *If* labor discipline were the big issue, buyers of labor power would abolish broadcast and hypermedia weather reports

and thereby eliminate a major workplace distraction to sellers of labor power.

The pivotal chapter on 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq recounts the depressing story of the U.S. media's initially uncritical coverage of these events. In Miller's one-dimensional account, "Yanqui media" thoroughly insulate viewers from harsh realities, including "bloodthirsty war crimes of the U.S. military," in order to cultivate passive acceptance of militaristic U.S. policy. "Any allegation of improper conduct by the state came to be regarded as treason" (p. 92).

This and other patently unbalanced claims illustrates why we should be wary about Miller's view, noted above, of cultural studies as an "emergency exit" from "moribund disciplines." The exit leaves behind fundamental, commonly understood norms of academic scholarship, such as the imperative to qualify arguments and avoid hyperbolic simplification. They also include civility. Throughout the book, Miller refers to the incumbent president as "Bush Minor," e.g., on 9/11 "Bush Minor was busy learning to read in Florida" (p. 79). Miller uses uncivil rhetoric to highlight disagreements with journalists (e.g., "the ever-simple Thomas Friedman") and disdain for colleagues who have not taken the emergency exit—a comment by Paul DiMaggio "derives from the cautious but slightly arch vocabulary of Ivy League sociology." (pp. 29, 98). This uncivil rhetoric is also fertile ground for sexual tropes. Major newspapers are "bastions of bourgeois comfort and onanism." News, drama and other programming in early broadcasting "had a comfortable and appropriate frottage" (pp. 6, 14).

More troubling are inaccurate representations of evidence adduced in citations. In asserting that corporate-inspired censorship distorts coverage of Iraq, Miller cites a 2004 *USA Today* report: "General Motors—the country's biggest advertiser—and other major corporations avowed that they 'would not advertise on a TV program about atrocities in Iraq'" (p. 90). Exactly the opposite is reported in the news article (http://www.usatoday.com/money/advertising/2004-05-17-upfront_x.htm). Despite nervousness over graphic images in news on Iraq, "so far advertisers haven't pulled back." Next comes the statement, quoted by Miller, from the GM spokeswoman: GM "would not advertise on a TV program (just) about atrocities in Iraq,"

says spokeswoman Ryndee Carney. However she says, "When you buy news media, you take what you can get. The news is the news." Other network advertising executives indicate that 9/11 and the Iraq war "have made marketers tougher about what they think audiences can handle." Miller's gloss on the article, and deletion of the reporter's parenthetical insertion "(only)" from the quotation, completely inverts the newspaper report.

Another inversion occurs in the analysis of how putatively credulous viewers respond to one-dimensional news on Iraq. Citing a December 2005 Harris Poll, Miller writes, "in 2005, 44 percent of Yanquis thought Iraqis had attacked their country on September 11, 2001." His conclusion: "The truth was only known to Yanquis who watched or listened to public broadcasting. Goodbye discourse and the active audience, hullo ideology and the passive recipient" (pp. 109–10). In the December poll cited by Miller (Harris Poll #95, 12/29/05), 24 (and not 44) percent agreed that Iraqis had attacked. The December poll reports that popular belief "declined sharply" in this and related claims as justification for invading Iraq, since February, when 44 percent affirmed that Iraqis had attacked. Hello discourse and active audience, goodbye passivity.

Readers may be amused by Miller's rhetoric and facility for eye-catching quotations, but, aside from the juxtaposition of reporting on food, weather, and foreign affairs, little originality inheres in the book. Miller traverses well-ploughed fields in advocating an admixture of cultural studies and Marxism, viewing passive consumption as a threat to citizenship, and advancing a Marxist critique of corporate media. Nor is he alone in his frustration and remorse over the American media's inability to slow down or deter the Bush administration's rush to war.

Political Hypermedia

Over the last decade, the development of hypermedia campaigns has accelerated and become a key political strategy for major political parties, grassroots activists, and corporate lobbyists. New media tools and resources for these campaigns were forged in the context of acute electoral competition by young professionals in an emergent e-politics community. Philip Howard provides a com-

PELLING analysis of these developments in this revision of his doctoral dissertation.

In addition to journalism and broadcasting, a universe of networked computers is increasingly the context in which "people transmit, interact with, and filter data" (p. 2). This holds at both ends of the political communication loop. *Consultants* devise narrowcast communication strategies, building vast relational databases by data mining commercial information banks and digital shadows created inadvertently by use of the internet. *Voters* not only receive narrowcast messages, but also increasingly use internet resources to obtain and sift through information that assists them in deciding who to support. "Political hypermedia are designed to move democratic conduct from the public sphere of rallies, town hall meetings, newspaper editorials, and coffee shop debates to the private sphere of screens, key strokes, and highly personalized news services" (p. 190).

The core of the book is built around his immersion in the e-politics community during the 2000 U.S. Presidential campaign. Howard worked as a volunteer on eighteen political hypermedia projects, interviewed consultants, and attended conferences of e-politics professions and national political conventions. A social network analysis guides his selection of hypermedia projects and consultants for this study.

Based on these observations, Howard develops a sharp contrast between the strategy of hypermedia campaigns—"decentralized and distributed; creative, collaborative, and competitive" (p. 182)—and communication strategies via traditional media. The latter standardize content; hypermedia campaigns promote particularization of content. Divergent messages in support of the same candidate (or issue) can be narrowly tailored to different sub-constituencies by use of data mining techniques that can assign known or inferred political inclinations to individuals or segments of the population.

Hypermedia campaigns manufacture public opinion in ways conducive to grassroots activism as well as astroturf manipulation by corporate lobbyists. When used by social activists to mobilize social movements, hypermedia campaigns can provide citizens with tools for activism. But lobbyists also use these campaigns to create phantom publics united by only the narrowest of issues, for

example, the outcome of an amendment to a bill pending in Congress. According to Howard, it is an open question whether “issue publics” created by hypermedia campaigns become communities whose members interact with each other or constitute only a list of individuals, isolated from each other, “founded and organized by professional lobbyists who consider the appearance of an aggravated public to be a useful tool in the service of a paying client” (p. 99).

For Howard, “one of the most important changes in democratic institutions is in the organizational behavior of the managers of our political culture: the way the political consultants, candidates, lobbyists, and activists manage information” (p. 72). This behavior is regulated by an emergent normative order in the e-politics community, “a set of shared norms about how technology should be used in political life” (p. 36). This entails affiance in the ideal of direct democracy, which trumps loyalty to employers, political parties, ideologies, and short-term political goals (pp. 41, 43, 46, 51). Other interesting attributes of this community are its demographic composition, mostly young college-educated men whose work environments “feel more like fraternity houses” (p. 47), and a neoliberal notion of voters as information consumers who operate under conditions of imperfect information that will be repaired by e-politics (pp. 92, 94, 103).

Implications of these developments for democratic citizenship are mixed. Howard rightly worries about widespread violations

of privacy via data mining of digital shadows and information banks, and calls for controls on political use of information technology, e.g., requiring politicians and lobbyists to disclose hypermedia technologies as well as financial records. On the issue of unequal access to hypermedia, he offers contrary assessments; it’s a vanishing (p. 24) and persisting problem (p. 183).

A more intractable problem may be “thin citizenship.” Hypermedia relieves citizens of the heavier interpretive work required for distilling opinions from written texts and broadcast journalism. Political content in hypermedia presents recipients with pre-digested materials organized by knowledge of the recipient’s explicitly—or implicitly—expressed preferences. “Thin citizens do not need to expend much interpretive labor in their political lives, because they use information technologies to demark political content they want in their diet” (p. 185). Thin citizens are less likely to obtain information “through random encounters with newspaper headlines and other opinions” (p. 197). However, this situation resembles Lazarsfeld’s account of how traditional media influences voting decisions via self-selection of sources and influential others.

These quibbles aside, I recommend this thoughtful, important book, which received the 2006 Best Book award from the ASA’s Communication and Information Technologies Section, to anyone interested in the unfolding impact of epochal change in media on democracy in America.

Commodifying Politics

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I have been asked to engage in an audacious activity, reviewing two books that require me to stick my toe in other people's disciplines—in this case, media and communication studies. The daring is not mine alone. According to his University of California, Riverside web biography, where he is "Professor of English, Sociology and Women's Studies, and Director of the Program in Media & Cultural Studies," Toby Miller has the intention of "sustaining and developing a dynamic interdisciplinary research environment in media and culture." Miller clearly aims to do so in his book *Cultural Citizenship. New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*. After reading it, I had been certain that its author, Philip N. Howard, was a political scientist, but I was wrong. Howard teaches in the University of Washington's Department of Communication and he received his doctorate from Northwestern's Sociology Department.

The brave new world of media studies and communications is an interdisciplinary world, where the scholar must be prepared to stub her toe as she ventures into unread ground. As has been true for almost twenty years, current research concentrates on the implications of technological change (new media), its content, its impact and (more recently) its regulation, and how audiences use both technologies and content to forge both individual and group identities, world views, and institutions. But there is also much that is new. Scholars, including some sociologists, political scientists, and social psychologists, draw on contemporary social theory to explore questions about the cultural dimensions of political economy; how media contribute to the subjectification of self; how theories of citizenship affect the rights of under-represented "minority groups"; how by contributing to information excess, media feed the attempts of nation-states to control both their own and other populations, and even the structural implications of changing regimes of regulation in democratic societies. For the new media and communications

Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age, by **Toby Miller**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006. 248pp. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 1592135617.

New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen, by **Philip N. Howard**. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 288pp. \$23.99 paper. ISBN: 0521612276.

studies is trying to explicate and theorize how media are implicated in the new world order—not simply the "world order" dominated by American hegemony, but the one being fashioned as political power (states), economic power (multinational corporations), and military power joined with symbolic power (media) to shape the conditions of contemporary life both here and around the world (Couldry and Curran 2003).

Quite simply, media studies are "all over the place." It is almost as difficult to keep track of the new journals about media, the old journals that now accept articles about media, and the questions that media and communications scholars ask, as it is to prevent spam from accumulating in my office e-mail inbox.

There is some irony to this knowledge explosion. Just as some media-theorists propose new ways for individuals and groups to challenge the media's symbolic power, other theorists and researchers announce how the media are implicated in new incursions on societies, institutions, and human rights. The two books under review fit into this second category. Both ask about the meaning of citizenship in advanced capitalist societies, especially the United States. But they do so in very different ways. Toby Miller ruminates on media culture.¹ Philip Howard offers that rare

¹ Miller apparently conducted extensive interviews, but he does not use these data.

beast, an ethnography of the internet. (It uses ethnographic data on four pseudonymous dot-coms, interviews, survey data, and network analysis.) Toby Miller's book is by turns funny, outrageous, and insightful. Philip Howard has written one of the scariest books I have ever read.

Toby Miller seeks to theorize "cultural citizenship." Elsewhere, he explains, "Cultural citizenship concerns the maintenance and development of cultural lineage via education, custom, language, and religion and the positive acknowledgement of difference in and by the mainstream" and "is a developing discourse in response to the great waves of cross-class migration of the past fifty years and an increasingly mobile middle-class culture-industry workforce generated by the new international division of cultural labor" (Miller 2002: 231). Thus, Miller emphasizes how cultural citizenship involves the interpenetration of the political, economic, and cultural spheres.

Philip Howard warns that the hypermedia are creating "managed citizens": Political managers are using digital media not merely to collect public opinion, but also to create it. They are even creating social movements. Howard explains, "[W]e now have the power to have our interests represented without behaving as a traditional citizenry. Data profiles, some of which we generate knowingly and some of which is collected without our informed consent, are our true representatives and in fact what are truly represented" (p. 187). He adds: "Political hypermedia create [a] second life for us, and it is not in our possession. It is a silhouette of our political selves, composed of raw data about how we think and act in our private worlds." It is also a life that for-profit firms sell to political actors. Although Howard does not explicitly discuss the interpenetration of the political, economic, and cultural spheres, he provides illustrations of that process.

One may read Howard's book as a study of commercialization gone wild, for he documents the incorporation of emerging marketing techniques into the political sphere. Joseph Turow's *Niche Envy* (2006) was published too late for Howard to use. Turow (personal communication) describes his book as a study of hyperlinks that documents a significant transformation in the marketplace. Howard calls his book a study of hy-

permedia. Turow explains that once customers had chosen the products they wished to buy—now marketers, media executives, and retailers choose their customers. (Turow's term "niche envy" simultaneously refers to business "competitors, who may envy the quality of other competitors' customers" and "consumers who may envy what they believe to be their friends' better profiles, which may get them better treatment from media companies, from stores, and even from manufacturers" [p. 3]). In a variety of ways, people engaged in one or another aspect of sales screen for the appropriateness of their customers, track customers' marketing and media activities, mine data about customers, tailor their messages of customers in specific niches (engage in narrow-casting), and try to establish a bond with "desirable" customers while shedding undesirable ones. Not all firms engage in all of these activities, for some are quite expensive. But Turow reminds us, the price of technologies is decreasing and the "new industrial logic" of marketers and media executives "leads them to work toward a world in which data bases rule . . . and price discounts are customized instantly on the basis of a customer's history and niche identification" and the process of making the last sale is added "to the data set so that the next encounter will be more profitable" (pp. 181, 182).

The reason that Philip Howard's book is so scary is that it documents the application of these techniques to politics, especially the formation of social movements and the conduct of political campaigns. Astute observers have known about narrowcasting for some time, though now political parties purchase data sets assembled from computer-cookies and credit-card records to send different messages to people who visit their websites. A New England Republican might be informed about activities promoting fiscal responsibility; a Southern religious fundamentalist visiting the same website might learn about opposition to abortion. But it gets worse. Howard describes one firm's strategy for narrowcasting political content:

The first [aspect] is humanizing the candidate or issue, which involves making candidates seem like you or making issues relevant to you by repeating known information about your own life in the

portrait of the candidate or description of the issue. The second is simplifying the message through four or five key themes chosen for you, themes they know will distract you from contrarian information. The third is emotionalization, whereby key words that sensitize you and trigger visceral reactions are deliberately chosen from what is known to trigger visceral reactions from people with your demographics and attitudes. The fourth aspect of narrowcasting is actually the appeal to celebrity, whereby you are promised special status in an exciting group effort. (P. 82)

This firm estimates that it has some data on one out of every four adults in the United States.

Narrowcasting is apparently an old technique. Howard explains how firms use data sets to lobby by appearing to set up a social movement. "Members may be profiled but not actually contacted or in contact with one another, and are not always aware that they are being represented" (p. 99). Furthermore, "[m]embers may not be aware that an industry lobby group sponsors their social movement, that a professional IT staff manages their movement, and that the movement might be suddenly shut down if managers decide that the tactical advantage of organized public opinion has passed" (p. 99). But these activities are not really about data, Howard explains. They are about programming, the manipulation of data to produce opportunities for what Howard calls "thin citizenship":

Thin citizens do not need to expend much interpretive labor in their political lives, because they use information technologies to demark political content they want in their diet. They choose which editors and which issues take priority and minimize their exposure to random or challenging information. . . . The thin citizen participates in five-minute protests through the computer, by signing electronic petitions forwarded by friends and family, for example. Political hypermedia have been designed to permit, and promote, thinner citizenship roles. (P. 185)

Howard also discusses shadow citizenship, privatized citizenship, and the managed citi-

zen. All are related to commodification, for all are being created or activated by private business. All are related to political rationalization. All are related to political redlining, for just as the marketers whom Turow discusses may decide that they are not interested in selling to specific populations, so too political redlining may restrict the flow of information to some ("desirable") groups, but not other ("undesirable") ones. As in marketing, "the elderly, poor, and racial minorities are most likely to be victims of imposed political redlining" (p. 132). They are being cast out of the social contract.

Frequently citing social and political theorists, Howard clearly cares about the implications of his work for contemporary democracies. As one institution after another becomes rationalized, corporatized, and commodified, the new political actors whom Howard studied create "managed citizens." The production of political content for "private consumption" decreases what citizens have in common; as encouraged by the hypermedia, "individuals act more out of private discontent on select issues than out of public duty for collective welfare" (p. 190). Like Turow, Howard believes, "We must act now" (p. 201).

Howard's world is one of Republicans and Democrats, political managers who have more in common than not and who are exporting their skills around the world in the off-years when the United States does not have significant elections. Howard presents himself as neutral, the participant observer immersing himself in a new situation to figure out its structure and implications. But beneath his seeming neutrality, one senses Howard's own dismay at the new political regime.

Toby Miller's *Cultural Citizenship* makes no claims to either objectivity or neutrality. Miller sets his book in a neoliberal world. Most Americans don't use the term "neoliberalism," which refers to a "state apparatus whose fundamental mission [is] to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation," to limit the scope of government, and by achieving these ends, to guarantee individual freedom and dignity (Harvey 2005:7). But many theorists in the rest of the world do use the term "neoliberalism" to characterize the political and socio-economic conditions that have dominated the United States,

Britain, and other nations since the Reagan days. Miller uses the term to announce his critical intent to debunk by identifying the ironies of political life in these nations and explaining how they are tied to media, ideas of citizenship, and the state apparatus. Sometimes his debunking is right-on and pithy, as when he suggests that neoliberals believe “[p]eople are sovereign when they purchase, but magically transmogrify into ‘special interests’ when they lobby” (p. 11). Sometimes he is so intent on debunking that he fails to notice the discrepancy between people’s ideas and his version of their ideas, as occurs when he confuses neoliberalism with the liberal concern for both the freedom and dignity of the individual and meaningful group cohesion, as expressed, for instance, in Durkheim.

Here is Miller’s argument: the idea of “cultural citizenship” arose because of the movement of populations around the globe, especially to North America. North American theorists, in particular the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, treated cultural citizenship as the demand of “disadvantaged subjects” for full citizenship despite their cultural difference from “mainstream society” (Ong 1996). Other theorists adopted the term. Some, such as Will Kymlicka (1995), stressed both the rights of indigenous populations, such as the First Nations of Canada, and the rights of newer immigrants, including people of color. Others, Miller tells us, invoked the term in the context of using education to insure free and equal participation of citizens in civic life. All of these people, Miller suggests, are arguing about an “empty term,” a concept that has no referent. So, Miller supplies that referent. Citizenship is indeed associated with culture, Miller says—the culture of consumerism. Television in general and news in particular—even the seemingly harmless weather and food channels aired throughout North America—are part of the “global commodity chain” organized into “open markets” which do not permit national governments” to “guarantee the economic well-being of their citizens” (p. 45). Miller believes that American reporters are “the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power (p. 82),² that television turned its coverage of 9/11 into an infomercial; and that the food channel

and the weather channel are infomercials. The cooking shows of both the food network and public television are geared toward consumerism and obfuscate “the global processes of the eating-industries” (p. 137). They do not “contextualize food through history, politics, economics and culture, [and so] transfer [. . .] a consumer’s address to a citizen’s one” (p. 139). They do not consider the importance of land reform and water policies to the production of food. Similarly, weather television engages in reification as it entertains. As Miller puts it, “Weather television. . . [is] a place where the sublime and the beautiful meet at the popular” (p. 155), while “Yanquis” eschew any real concern with environmentalism and global warming. The cultural of citizenship is, then, a mass-mediated consumerism. It claims to be concerned with the rights of individuals and groups, but is actually concerned with the rights of capital as captured, exemplified, and created by television.

I didn’t enjoy reading *Cultural Citizenship*. Though I am not a fan of the current president, I found the repeated references to “Bush Minor” and “Yanquis” to be irritating—much as Miller must have intended. However, Miller makes many valid points. To wit: “My concern is that the cultural Left got what we wanted,” he writes, “culture at the center of politics and socio-political analysis. But it wasn’t Queer Nation and Stuart Hall. It was fundamentalist Christianity and Samuel Huntington” (p. 179).

At the same time, I wish that Miller had more passion about how the process of racialization is associated with cultural citizenship. Miller mentions the Canadian First Nations, poor immigrants in South America, the Muslims in France, and the middle-class immigrants in the leisure industries. When he discusses them, his ideas are politically correct, but his prose is flat compared to his zippy writing about television. Miller cites Aihwa Ong’s (1999) book on neoliberalism and flexible citizenship, but not her article on cultural citizenship (1996), which highlights how both race and social class interact with American practices to “whiten” some immigrant groups and “blacken” others.³ Understanding how media contribute to racializa-

² Miller is actually quoting Karen Young of the *Washington Post*.

³ For the contradictions introduced by gender, see Okin (1999).

tion is vital to any analysis of television, consumerism, and cultural citizenship, as both Purkayastha (2005) and Entman and Rojecki (2000) reveal.

These new books in media and communications studies have appeared at a time when sociologists and media-scholars have just gotten a handle on the structure of “old” media, including television. Eric Klinenberg’s *Fighting for Air* (2007) has traced the implications of the three c’s—corporatization, consolidation, and convergence—on the electronic and news media. Robert McChesney’s *The Problem of the Media* (2004) not only provides a cogent analysis of commercialization and the failures of the Federal Communications Commission, but also actively organizes for reform, including the maintenance of net neutrality. Jay Rosen, author of *What are Journalists For?* (2001) is working to invent new forms of citizens journalism, including *PressThink*, a weblog about journalism, and *NewAssignment.Net*, a “pro-am” site for “open-source” reporting projects. Scholars identified with a range of racialized ethnicities are working to grasp how groups may use the media to interact with dominant cultures and to try to take charge of their own group and individual identity.

Not since the early 1970s have I read about so many people successfully organizing to take hold of social change. It is also a

long while since I have read such well-done descriptions of intensifying commodification and political control.

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Media Nation

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Sociology has failed to fully grapple with the social significance of media, often treating the subject as some minor sub-specialty rather than embracing it as part of the discipline’s core. There is no media section of the ASA. (The culture section is a very different animal.) Many departments still do not offer courses on the sociology of media, ceding that ground to media studies or journalism departments.

That’s too bad. Our understanding of media can benefit greatly from a distinctly sociological approach to the topic. And our broader understanding of society can be enhanced by closer attention to the role of media. Paul Starr accomplishes both of these in

The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications, by **Paul Starr**. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004. 484 pp. \$27.50 cloth. ISBN: 0465081932.

Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age, by **Toby Miller**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006. 238 pp. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 1592135617.

his exceptional book, *The Creation of the Media*. Toby Miller’s book, *Cultural Citizenship*, is also of note for its attempt to put media in

a broader social context. Both works explore in their own way the relationship between media and U.S. society, highlighting how media are a distinctive and integral part of the nation.

The Creation of the Media is a sweeping social history of media in the United States from the colonial period up to the mid-twentieth century. Starr's focus is on how critical political choices made in various eras set the framework for the future of media development. These choices were not inevitable and they often had unforeseen consequences.

In this sense, the book parallels Starr's classic Pulitzer Prize-winning work, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. As he notes in the preface here, "Powerful tendencies have been built into the institutions [of medicine and the media], but the lesson of the past, it seems to me, is that we can still make new choices about them—and politics has been, and continues to be, the primary means of making those choices" (p. xii). This insistence on agency, while simultaneously acknowledging a variety of constraining technological, political, and social forces, helps make Starr's account distinctly sociological and results in a fascinating and convincing analysis.

Starr argues that the communications path the United States followed is a unique one that emerged, in part, from the challenges involved in creating a nation that eventually expanded across a continent. He highlights three key periods of institution-building that have special importance in U.S. communications history. The first is the revolutionary transformation of British colonies into a new nation, which included the creation of a new system of government, the founding of the Post Office, the establishment of common schools, the enactment of copyright laws, and the emergence of the early press. All of these were fundamental developments that both reflected the unique character of the U.S. system and set the stage for its further refinement. These developments also had key features that distinguished them from media systems elsewhere. For example, unlike England, the colonies had no publishing tax on printers and the British attempt to impose one was a factor contributing to the Revolution.

The second period Starr examines involved the rise of new communications tech-

nologies in the nineteenth century and the creation of the political and regulatory environment in which they would operate. The third period overlaps chronologically with the second, but involves the rise of "mass" media in the form of large circulation papers and, later, motion pictures. Here, Starr considers debates about cultural values, diversity, and moral propriety. Each period allows Starr to highlight a social force—politics, technology, and culture—while showing their interactions.

Starr's account is always attentive to nuances, complexities, contradictions, and unintended consequences. For instance, he dispenses with the simplistic idea that what distinguishes the U.S. media model from its European counterparts is a rejection of government intervention and a reliance on market forces. Instead, he shows how, from the very beginning, U.S. laws and policies have been used to influence communications. For example, the country's one nationalized industry, the postal service, along with the subsidization of postal rates for periodicals were both essential for the early diffusion of political news. Government support for public education also helped produce an educated citizenry with a higher percentage of readers than that found in Europe. Thus, a strong civil society was able to emerge precisely because of government policies that directly or indirectly assisted in its development.

Starr also tellingly shows how monopolistic private ownership of an early media technology proved to be disastrous. The telegraph was practical only because of government support given to Samuel Morse to test his invention and because of ongoing subsidies—provided in a variety of ways—that enabled the construction of the necessary infrastructure for a telegraph network. But the promoters of private ownership for the telegraph won the political debate in the mid-nineteenth century and the U.S. industry diverged dramatically from the European model of state ownership. The result was the Western Union telegraph monopoly, which perpetuated high rates and which, in turn, facilitated a journalistic monopoly—the Associated Press struck an exclusive deal with Western Union. Meanwhile, in England, the telegraph was part of the postal service, providing cheaper services and an open platform for many competing wire news services.

But Starr also recognizes the limits of state ownership, showing how European government ownership of the telephone industry held back its development. Meanwhile, in the United States, early private ownership resulted in competing phone companies, including local rural cooperatives, which successfully wired the national network. Eventually, regulated private monopolies produced a highly successful U.S. telephone system.

In telling the story of U.S. media, Starr returns time and again to other models of media from other parts of the world, including England, France, and the Soviet Union. In this comparative approach, he illuminates the uniqueness—both good and bad—of the U.S. system. Starr's balanced assessments are a useful reminder of the positive features of the U.S. media system that are worth fighting to preserve.

For sociologists from any specialty, Starr's work is also a fine illustration of how structure and agency coexist in social institutions. The book is also a lesson in how reality is socially constructed and then taken for granted as inevitable. Starr reveals how media structures that now appear natural and inevitable were, in fact, the result of intense debate and political maneuvering, producing results that precluded other options.

Starr's historical breadth, inevitably, is achieved at the price of depth. More detailed studies exist of the battle over radio regulation, the rise of the phone industry, and a number of other topics considered here. But Starr's approach is always fresh and his unique contribution is to place a multiplicity of occurrences spanning centuries into in a single broader context, showing the continuity between what might seem to be disparate developments.

Despite its substantial 400-plus page length, readers may be disappointed that the book ends, rather abruptly, too soon. Starr chose to finish with the U.S. entry into World War II and the rising dominance of broadcasting by a few national networks. But the themes raised, the questions posed, and the approaches pursued in Starr's analysis are completely relevant to today's developments regarding the Internet, telecommunications, and emerging media. Starr's history even informs our understanding of the recent battle over increased postal rates for periodicals—an issue that goes back well over 200 years.

By highlighting the dynamics that underlie a broad social history, Starr's analysis is both timeless and timely.

In contrast, Toby Miller's book, *Cultural Citizenship*, is firmly rooted in the contemporary. A scathing indictment of media, Miller makes the case that the lack of an engaged U.S. citizenry in an era of oppression and crisis is, in large measure, the result of a vacuous media environment—especially television. As a result, Miller notes, we are a nation of consumers more than one of citizens. His is a vision of hegemonic power infiltrating even the most seemingly mundane of venues.

The three free-wheeling case studies that comprise the heart of the book are of news coverage in the wake of 9/11, food networks, and weather reporting. First, Miller shows how the news cultivates a sense of national unity by focusing on an external enemy. In doing so, it downplays domestic divisions, including class and race inequalities. Second, food networks promote incessant consumerism and boutique lifestyles. What they ignore includes the treatment of food animals, the devastating impact of fast-food chains, and the labor abuses involved in food production. Third, weather reporting uses its technological wizardry to hype disaster and, like religion, explain happenings that seem out of control of mere mortals, all the while encouraging a disciplined labor force to adjust to the weather to ensure they get to work on time. What it doesn't talk about is politics of climate change, the coming battle over water, or the global inequality involvement in environmental degradation. The arguments may not be entirely new, but Miller delivers clever observations that will strike a familiar chord with even casual viewers of these genres.

As the book's title suggests, Miller locates his cases within a discussion of an informed and engaged citizenry. Drawing from a variety of fields, Miller begins by reviewing, and ultimately rejecting, seven different frameworks for cultural citizenship, but declines to pose an alternative. Instead, he affirms that citizenship needs to be conceptualized (somehow) to include the cultural ("the right to know and speak") as well as the political ("the right to reside and vote") and the economic ("the right to work and prosper"). In this sense, he argues for the importance of

reconnecting culture to political economy. That's where media come in because they are simultaneously purveyors of culture and economic institutions that can either encourage or retard political participation. After this introduction, he moves on to his case studies and only returns directly to cultural citizenship in a brief, underdeveloped, three-page conclusion.

Part cultural studies, part political economy, part sociology, Miller's analysis is eclectic, drawing upon the popular press and media activists, as well as more traditional scholarship. It's an approach, which he acknowledges, that moves "rapidly and repeatedly between theory and fact, speculation and setting" (p. 25) and, consequently, pro-

duces uneven results. But it does attempt to place cultural criticism in a larger theoretical context informed by theorizing about the public sphere.

In his critique, Miller points out that what is absent from contemporary media can help undermine healthy citizenship. In his account, Starr points out that what is present in our media system is not inevitable but, instead, the product of social and political processes that can ultimately be changed. Both books illustrate how our understanding is enhanced when media are placed in a broader social context. Both also show how studying media can enhance our understanding of society. It's something sociologists should be doing more often.

Thick Communications and Thin Citizenship

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More revolutions have taken place in the United States of America than in all the rest of the world since the beginning of recorded time—if the legions of paid and unpaid heralds of the staggeringly new are to be believed. New technologies, new concepts, new products, new styles, new professions, new spatial arrangements, new theories of economics and education and influence and culture, and many more novelties of many varieties tout themselves as nothing short of revolutions. This is partly to promote themselves, of course, in a culture that relishes an idea of itself as progressive, even eschatological, in the arc of its development. But the rhetoric of revolution is more than self-promotional. It is often enough assigned and brandished by a journalism that revels in the claims of the brand-new, borrowing the aura of sweeping novelty for its own purposes, taking pains to establish that it "gets it," whatever the "it" of the moment may be.

In *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*, Philip N. Howard, an assistant professor of communication at the University of Washington, argues that American politics are being radically transformed by "the *hypermedia campaign*, an agile political organization defined by its capacity for innovatively adopting digital technologies for express political purposes and its capacity for innov-

New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen, by **Philip N. Howard**. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 288pp. \$23.99 paper. ISBN: 0521612276.

actively adapting its organization structure to conform to new communicative practices" (p. 2). The hypermedia campaign, in his view, "has succeeded the mass media campaign" (p. 3). Websites, electronic databases, e-mail lists, blogs, and other combinations of hardware and software have become vessels for mobilization and tactical, even strategic planning. But if electronic networks have become instruments for mobilization, other technological gadgetry has become highly useful for dampening mobilization. Florida in 2000 is the most notorious place and time where electronic data collection served the purpose of removing thousands of voters from the rolls, charging that they were felons, and, in the process, arguably commandeering the outcome for George W. Bush. Electronic voting has also become routine, toward no apparent democratic end—but it is lush with antidemocratic potential.

Howard's emphasis is on the thinking and structure of the "e-politics community," a sort of profession-in-the-making. To understand

it, he resorted to ethnography and, on the quantitative front, surveys and network analysis. He did research on both the supply side (a data-mining company and a political action committee) and the demand side (software developers who help activists to lobby and help citizens to find candidates whose views comport with their own).

Howard came to find out that the “e-politics community” consists largely of men under thirty with political science degrees. They think of themselves as avatars of “revolution, direct democracy, and the marketplace” (p. 51). They believe, in the words of one of them, that “we can use these technologies to return powers that for the last couple of centuries, the public delegated to experts” (p. 52). In practice, they are for hire.

They are master collectors and sorters of data, and because they can process data that were hitherto inaccessible, they are superseding the old class of consultants and pollsters who dominated political campaigns for decades. The old “oligopoly” of information control is broken. “Today,” Howard writes, “candidates’ campaign teams, lobbyists, and individuals with a political agenda have access to many of the same data sources that the mass media campaign managers once sequestered as the basis of their expertise” (p. 92).

Meanwhile, software developers “saw business opportunities in developing hypermedia” (p. 117). Through their ministrations, political messages could be customized far more precisely than before. Commercial information could be mobilized, too, for political purposes. In particular, it was reported by Thomas B. Edsall in the *Washington Post*, among other reporters, that the Republican apparatus under Karl Rove in 2004 was adept at the sort of “microtargeting” that used data on consumer preferences to focus on prime lodes—categories of consumers that the party ought to invest in mobilizing.

So the sharpshooter of messages has replaced the shotgunner. Data mining grows more sophisticated. To shift metaphors, microtargeting campaign managers “build hypermedia not just to segment, but also to factionalize the public.” The result is what Howard calls “political redlining.” Here he partway follows Cass Sunstein (2007) who, in *Republic.com*, updated in 2007, argued that internet opinions cluster into relatively her-

metic capsules—and moreover that they tend toward extreme views.

It is interesting, up to a point, to have a sense of who the new informational entrepreneurs are and how they think. The larger question, though, is whether Howard’s research demonstrates, or even suggests, that new media have made successful end runs around the traditional media. About this, Howard leaves this reader in doubt. If “hypermedia are used to manage and control political culture” (p. 170), how effectively do they do so? Did any hypermedia event in 2004, or even the sum of them, have half the impact of the “Swift Boat Veterans for Truth” advertising campaign, which pyramided a small ad buy into a free-media sensation that broadcast far and wide a fraudulent claim that, stamped with credibility, helped sink the hapless Kerry campaign? Howard does not hazard the case. Oddly, the Swift Boat campaign does not feature in his analysis as a possible instance of the efficacy of the old-fashioned smear.

On the upside, political information technologies, Howard writes, “bring transparency to politics by providing information about policies and policy alternatives, candidate histories, and records of financial contributions” (p. 179). But such advances “also lead campaign designers to make a series of design decisions that change the character of democratic deliberation for the worse” (p. 180). Privacy goes by the boards and, in effect, the players in the industry collude in sustaining each others’ ability to violate privacy by turning private data into marketable commodities.

The result, Howard argues convincingly, is fuel for what he nicely and aptly calls “thin citizenship,” “a role that does not require individuals to have their own active, engaged political memory because they can quickly respond to poll questions that present simplified policy options. The thin citizen can respond quickly to political urges and need not spend significant amounts of time contemplating political matters” (p. 185). The “data shadows” that we project, and that dog us whether we know them or not, become, in a sense, the formidable political actors of our time.

If they are formidable, it is because, in Howard’s words, “in rationalizing political communication through hypermedia tech-

nologies, we diminish our exposure to random political content, and it becomes increasingly difficult to disengage from the public sphere" (p. 196). I would say that it becomes increasingly *easy* to disengage from the public sphere—except in the trivial sense of the sum of all symbolic expressions that diffuse beyond immediate face-to-face relations. Some disengagement takes the form of a withdrawal of interest from politics altogether—the standard recourse in a fun culture. Another species of disengagement from the largest political questions takes the form of clustering around specialized issues and into specialized subgroups.

In other words, the setting for thin citizenship is the collective immersion in what is, for most people most of the time, a domain of experience that is vastly more absorbing than politics: the all-embracing, omnipresent media torrent of nonstop and evanescent communications, affording its many occasions for private satisfaction, for disposable emotions and sensations. It is the ensemble of these communications that today grabs the collective attention (Gitlin 2002). It shapes the style of political communications. It is the noise as well as the signals. This reader wishes that Howard had grappled with the viscous immensity that goes by the name of culture today.

Howard's analysis is limited, then. It is also disconcertingly bloodless and airless. The larger political environment goes largely unnoticed—the state of the parties, the role of campaign funding and big-media corporations, the withering of the unions. And where in the larger analysis that Howard aims for are the so-called netroots, including (on the right) the bloggers who worked to bring

down Dan Rather in 2004 and (on the left) to deprive Joseph Lieberman of the Democratic Senatorial nomination in 2006? These critics, ranters, analysts, fundraisers, and (one suspects, in the years to come) actual online reporters are players in our politics now and for the foreseeable future. Whatever one thinks might be the consequences of these developments, they deserve a prominent place in any analysis of our political-electronic condition.

If the hype artists of so-called hypermedia were to be taken at face value, America ought to be growing democratic by leaps and bounds. On its face, the claim is outlandish. Despite his interest in the mobilization of new technology by quasi-movement lobbies, Howard hints at this larger, darker conclusion, and is properly skeptical of the hype, but his conclusion seems muffled because the larger setting is largely missing. He would agree, I suspect, that whether one looks at the impact of lying and secrecy, the fundamentalist Right and the attendant Republican Party apparatus, plutocratic money, a Supreme Court committed to discouraging the vote, and big-audience propaganda, the prime direction of change overall has been thunderously antidemocratic. On the evidence so far available, the ability to "distribute political content" to more people, more efficiently (for the distributors), is nothing to write home about, even by BlackBerry.

References

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