

INTRODUCTION

When we look nostalgically at the recent past, we often recognize it by the things we used to buy, or else by such modern "heroes" as movie stars and sports celebrities. The movies, music, fashions, sport and designs provide a vivid map of our past, because they all share ephemerality. They are all things of the moment, designed to have a brief life, to burn brightly for the instant and disappear, but are always replaced by other, even more gaily colored things of the hour.

An athletic record or popular song is replaced by another which is little different from it. These pass us in an endless parade with similar functions but different details. In the details of this parade is contained a history of our century. At one level it is a history of skirt lengths and Top Ten hits, a history of the ephemera in which we wrap our sentimental memories of lost loves and long-ago summers. But it is also a history of how modern society has created images of itself and expressed its fantasies, its fears, its ambitions.

This is also the history of the economic system by which the images are manufactured and distributed and sold. We talk of the entertainment *industry*, of show *business*, of the dream factory. Industrial societies turn the provision of leisure into a commercial activity, in which their citizens are sold entertainment, recreation, pleasure and appearance as commodities that differ from the goods at the drug store only in the way they are used. For 70 years, Hollywood, "The Metropolis of Make Believe", "the entertainment capital of the world", has manufactured and marketed a non-durable consumer commodity: the experience of "going to the movies" rather than any particular film. In going to the movies, people do not buy anything tangible. They merely consume *time* by renting seats in the cinema for an hour or two. What we are really buying is perhaps something different, something already our own. As a name for Hollywood, the Dream Factory has long been a cliché, but no-one has yet found a more evocative analogy for the experience of cinema-going than that of the dream. As spectators we sit, spellbound in darkness, sharing a public privacy with our fellow viewers, all of us engaged witnesses in a fantasy that is not under our control, but is nevertheless ours to make of what we will. The people who run what Italian critic Umberto Eco has called "the heavy industry of dreams" are in the business of selling us desires we already have. They steal our dreams, and then sell them back to us for entertainment.

The marketing of leisure

The buying and selling of time is the central activity of the leisure industry in a capitalist economy. This is what differentiates modern popular culture from the folk culture which preceded it, and from which it borrowed many of its forms. Football, for instance, developed in the 19th century into its various modern forms out of local, traditional games, but by 1900 had become a professional sport. The players earned their living by the game, and their spectators paid for the pleasure of watching. Throughout the present century, adults have berated their children for preferring to buy the products of popular culture rather than "make their own entertainment". This offers a clear distinction between folk culture and popular culture: folk culture is something you make; popular culture is something you buy.

Among the many fundamental social changes brought by the Industrial Revolution was the way in which leisure was systematized. The factory system regulated time in a new way, making time-at-work different from time-not-working. In a sense that had not been true in preindustrial culture, time-not-working became an empty period that needed to be occupied. For much of the 19th century leisure, which can be defined as the non-productive use of time, remained the prerogative of the propertied classes. But by the early 20th century the notion of leisure spread down through the social system in Europe and North America and new activities came into existence to occupy leisure time.

The city amusements of the late 19th century were prototypes for ephemeral consumption: saloons, dance halls, pool rooms and roller-skating rinks; dime novels and illustrated papers, circuses, amusement parks, burlesque shows and professional sports; melodrama and cheap seats in the theaters and concert halls. Most spectacular of all were the great exhibitions of the second half of the 19th century, beginning at London's Crystal Palace in 1851 and culminating in the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 and the Paris Exhibition of 1900. These architectural extravaganzas, thrown up for a summer to display the new wonders of the worlds of industry and commerce, were available to anyone who could pay.

This was not enough. By the turn of the century industrial production had developed to the point where the economy required consumption, as well as production, to be managed. 19th-century industrialists had regarded their labor-force as a necessity for production, but in the early 20th century it was recognized that capitalism must encourage the workers to be purchasers as well. Mass advertising developed out of a need to persuade people to buy. Manufacturers merely made products, but advertisers "manufactured consumers". Advertising involved a shift in cultural values away from a Victorian Protestant ethic which demanded that production, property, and personal behavior be controlled. It encouraged an ethic which permitted pleasure and even sensuality. Advertising came to concentrate not on describing the product it was selling, but on the emotional satisfactions that its consumption would afford its purchaser. It preached the new, "therapeutic" doctrine of 20th-century capitalism, that its citizens should seek self-realization through the intense experiences brought about through buying products for their leisure time. In 1899 the American economist Thorstein Veblen argued that "the conspicuous consumption of valuable goods" became the principal means by which members of the Leisure Class demonstrated their social standing to each other and to the rest of society. As he was describing the nature and implications of a consumer culture, American capitalism was spreading that culture, and the idea of leisure, to far larger sectors of the population. Several years later, a writer on fashion noted that as wealth or social status were the basic selling points of most clothes, "the styles should go as far as possible in proving that the owner does not have to work for a living". From the 1920s onward, the idea of stylistic obsolescence in which annual models introduce new season's fashions spread out from automobiles to other types of

- St Louis World's Fair, 1904.





consumer goods as the way to maintain a constant demand, through what Charles Kettering of General Motors called "the organized creation of dissatisfaction". In 1929 Christine Frederick wrote, "Consumptionism is the name given to the new doctrine; and it is admitted today to be the greatest idea that America has to give to the world; the idea that workmen and masses be looked upon not simply as workers and producers, but as consumers... Pay them more, sell them more, prosper more is the equation."

This was the American Dream: an economic perpetual-motion machine which made everyone appear equally prosperous. It drew immigrants with the fantastic visions seen, as novelist Michael Gold described in 1930, "In the window of a store that sold Singer Sewing Machines in our (Romanian)

village. One picture had in it the tallest building I had ever seen. It was called a skyscraper. At the bottom of it walked the proud Americans. The men wore derby hats and had fine mustaches and gold watch chains. The women wore silks and satins, and had proud faces like queens. Not a single poor man or woman was there; everyone was rich."

America leads the world

The image of the Americans as the "people of plenty" is with us still, as alluring in a slum in Manila or Buenos Aires as ever it was in a Romanian village. What the history of our popular culture tells above all is how many of our fantasies have been sold to the rest of the world by Americans; how much people all over the world have all been influenced, in the details of



The stars celebrate Hollywood's export achievement.

In the 1960s media theorist Marshall McLuhan proclaimed that electronic communications had turned the world into a "Global Village", in which "our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us". McLuhan argued that the electronic media were more "organic" than mechanical forms such as print; thus the new media could become quite literally, "the extensions of Man." His writings enjoyed an enormous vogue at the time of their publication, and he contributed a collection of slogans by which the media would be discussed and categorized - "the medium is the message"; "Culture is our Business", "hot" media, such as film or radio, that concentrated attention on a single sense, against "cold" media like television that he claimed required more participation on the part of the consumer. But McLuhan's theories were only another version of the popular excitement which has accompanied every new development in communications technology in this century. In McLuhan's media fantasy, "We are certainly coming within conceivable range of a world automatically controlled to a point where we could say, 'We can program twenty more hours of TV in South Africa next week to cool down the tribal temperature raised by radio last week'." What was missing from this monstrous scenario was any suggestion about who might be doing the controlling. McLuhan's mythology ignored the historical forces that actually shaped the world's media institutions.

American popular culture has formed so many of our contemporary images of "civilization" in part because the United States has been the great economic power of the century, and in part because the characteristic forms of each new medium of popular culture have first been fixed in America, and then copied elsewhere. If popular culture in its modern form was invented in any one place, it was at the turn of the century in the great cities of the United States, and above all in New York. The forms by which a mass population would talk to itself, and what it would talk about, were tested and refined in the newspaper print rooms of Park Row, where Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst fought circulation battles for tabloid newspaper readers; in the primitive film studios in the Bronx where Edison, Vitagraph and Bioscope were learning how to mass-produce movies; in the piano rooms of Tin Pan Alley where songs for the city were being mass-produced; in the advertising offices of Madison Avenue, where the stylish agencies dreamed up ways to spend other people's money. All of them unconsciously modeled their mode of working on the tailoring sweatshops of the Lower East Side of New York.

A similar phenomenon might have been witnessed in Paris five years earlier, for the cinema, the mass-circulation daily newspaper, the press and advertising agencies and the fashion houses were already there. But popular culture needed not only the body heat of a metropolis and the blood of capitalism, but the oxygen of American democracy to bring it to life. Workers there could choose how to spend their leisure; American laborers campaigned for "eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for what we will". Leisure was a social leveler, and popular culture has always, on its surface, been an enemy of class distinction. In 1898 the *New York Tribune* explained why relatively poor garment workers spent all their money on fashionable clothes: "In the matter of dress, it is natural that the East Side should be strictly up to date, for does it not furnish clothes for the rest of the town."

their daily lives, by the United States; how, if the rest of the world has not been colonized by the United States in the 20th century, it has all, certainly, been Coca-Colonized: "If the United States abolished its diplomatic and consular services, kept its ships in harbor and its tourists at home, and retired from the worlds' markets, its citizens, its problems, its towns and countryside, its roads, motor cars, counting houses and saloons would still be familiar in the uttermost corners of the world... The film is to America what the flag was once to Britain. By its means Uncle Sam may hope some day, if he is not checked in time, to Americanize the world." What the *New York Morning Post* said of the movies in 1923 has become only more true since, as the instruments of Americanization have become more and more effective.

This was the great American cultural promise, a "democracy of surfaces" brought into being through the mass production and distribution of images. The realities of the distribution of economic and political power within the culture could thus be disguised, to the satisfaction of capitalist and worker alike. Mass fashion allowed everyone to appear upwardly mobile. In the "democracy of goods", the best things in life appeared available to all at reasonable prices. The American city was a world of strangers, where the individual needed to construct an impressive appearance and to disguise him- or herself: for the immigrant masses, an old culture was being discarded and a culture of novelty adopted. Immigrants were the first customers and the first proprietors of the nickelodeons. Their involvement in the new leisure industries came about in part because conventional business activities were seldom open to them, in part because the entertainment industries required little capital, and in part because, as new citizens of a New World, they were well placed to develop new forms of expression and commerce.

American popular culture has been so successful above all because it has been able to absorb and assimilate forms and material from anywhere, and yet reproduce them as specifically "American". One advertiser claimed in 1929 that his profession was bringing about "the growth of a national homogeneity in our people". He came close to describing what was at the same time the great boon and the great vice of American popular culture. By acting as the means through which the enormously varied cultural traditions that immigrants brought with them were assimilated into American life, it worked to level differences between ethnic groups and social classes. At the turn of the century American popular music began to borrow rhythms and dances from black and other ethnic groups. In doing so, it awarded these socially inferior musical forms a degree of legitimacy they had previously been denied, and in the process also provided one of the few means of genuine upward mobility for this group of the American poor. One of its other effects was to help spread what psychologist William James called "The Gospel of Relaxation" among the white American middle-class. Danced to ragtime rhythms, the "Bunny Hug" and "Grizzly Bear" brought a new sensuality to middle-class life, and eventually made it respectable. That process has continued ever since.

The "homogeneity" that advertisers sought, the cultural equivalent of the Melting Pot of different nationalities that America described itself as being, was a diluted version of each of its mixed ethnic origins. Many of its critics argued that it was not only homogeneous, and acceptable to everyone, but also homogenized, watered-down and blended until it had no taste, no life, no soul. In the 1940s young whites took up another black dance form, the jitterbug. But for all their increased abandon, they still looked inhibited to black writer Malcolm X: "The white people danced as though somebody had trained them, as though somebody had wound them up. But those Negroes - nobody in the world could have choreographed the way they did whatever they felt."

Popular culture and high art

The Industrial Revolution had taken work out of the home into the factory and office. The home became a place of male leisure, serviced by women, at the same time that many things that had once been made at home were now bought in stores. Offering objects for leisurely use in the home, advertising - the form of popular culture that is most concerned to sell the

satisfactions it promised - was primarily addressed to women.

The consumer was usually viewed by producers and critics alike as female. In part there was good reason for this: women were responsible for as much as 85 percent of consumer spending. Middle-class women constituted a new leisure class, spending their time at shops, theater matinees and hairdressers. The ethos of sensuality cooperated with the cosmetic industry to insist on the "natural right" of American woman to be beautiful. In the 1920s the "flapper" as a beautiful American woman was a ubiquitous advertising image. She was, as social historian Stuart Ewan put it, "Pure consumer, busy dancing through the world of modern goods. She was youth, marked by energy not judgement. Her clothes, her vehicles, her entire milieu was mass-produced - and she liked it."

It was because "mass culture" was addressed particularly to women that it was a matter of anxiety. The "masses" were taken to have exclusively "feminine" characteristics: they were irrational, capricious, passive, and conformist. Like women, the masses would respond only to emotional appeals and "raw sensation". The cultural objects designed for them could not, in the eyes of elite male critics such as Dwight Macdonald or the poet T.S. Eliot, qualify as art. Macdonald was disturbed by what he called Gresham's Law in Culture, by which "bad stuff drives out the good by mimicking and debasing the forms of High Art". His colleague Clement Greenberg, writing in 1946, argued in similar terms, that "Mass Culture pre-digests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a shortcut to the pleasures of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art". Although in some respects this argument echoed the position of blacks who claimed that "whitening-up" their music had deprived it of its essence, it was more forcefully a defense of cultural elitism against the contamination from the hands of a larger and more "vulgar" audience.

The debates over "mass culture" arose from the occupation, by commercial enterprises such as the cinema, of territory previously reserved for elite culture by its designation as art. The description of mass culture as feminine depended on the actual exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions. Thus mass culture could be declared trivial and dangerous at the same time, symptomatic of and responsible for all the social ills of life under capitalism. Veblen had described how "expensive vices" were reserved for the rich and forbidden to others.

What was at stake in this debate, as in the recurrent concerns of critics over the censorship of what their social inferiors consumed, was the question of where cultural power was situated in Western democracies. The "democracy of images" protected the political and economic elite from social criticism, but it equally endangered their role as protectors of "culture". So they constantly disparaged the effects of "mass culture" as morally corrupting. That argument was applied equally to dime novels and to skirt lengths or movies, but it was always couched in terms of a discussion of the effects on the mentally and morally deficient - children and "morons" - of objects that were not fully under the control of the cultural elite. At its root was a middle-class fear that there was no control over the behavior and values of the lower orders. Against this denunciation of "nickel madness", there arose a counter-argument, couched in terms of the definition of "entertainment" as "harmless". In 1916 the Supreme Court adjudged that movies were not to be permitted the free speech protections of the First Amendment, because they were "a business pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit...not to be regarded as part of the press of the country or as organs of public opinion. They are

mere representations of events, of ideas, and sentiments published or known, vivid, useful, and entertaining, no doubt, but...capable of evil, having power for it, the greater because of their attractiveness and manner of exhibition."

The activity of regulating entertainment, whether through censorship, mechanisms such as the Motion Picture Production Code, or less official devices, constituted an attempt to render the potentially harmful object harmless, but throughout, this was a debate conducted among the cultural elite about what might be permitted to the lower classes, whose opinions were seldom directly requested.

As capitalist producers, the major companies and the financial forces behind them had strong vested interests in having their product regarded as merely a harmless form of entertainment too inconsequential to merit state interference or regulation. As advertising had to argue that it influenced consumer choice but did not otherwise affect people's lives, the movies had to bluff their way through the contradictory arguments that while they provided their audiences with immediate pleasurable experiences, they did not cause people to behave differently in any important way. Such an argument was even more convincing if movie content appeared superficial, "escapist" and irrelevant to the world outside the movie theater.

Art and escapism

Any distinction between art and entertainment is far from precise, because entertainment lacks a firm definition. It is usually defined through negatives: that which fails to be art or socially significant is entertainment. We may not know what entertainment or popular culture is, but we know it when we see it. Its connotations are triviality, ephemerality, and an absence of seriousness. Unlike Art, entertainment is not "about" anything outside itself, but is self-enclosed. Play, whether it is called "sport" or "entertainment", has been made into an area of activity sealed off from our engagements with power, ideology and politics. It is therefore usually escapist.

Mark O'Dea, a leading New York advertising executive, wrote that the key to successful advertising copy was the ability to "release people from the limitations of their own lives". Helen Woodward suggested that fashion had a similar role. But it was from the movies, above all, that writers and critics came to see the consumer audience as trapped in a humdrum existence, secretly desiring the illusion of romance.

Like such other fictional forms as radio soap opera or pulp fiction magazines, "the world of entertainment" the movies presented was one of heightened experience, in which the complexity of their audience's daily lives was replaced by an intensity of focus on particular dramatic events. In their films dark Gable, Gary Cooper or Bette Davis seldom endured the minor irritants of ordinary life. Life in the movies was not so much simpler than elsewhere as less cluttered. Most moviegoers recognized Hollywood's perfectible world, where problems were cured by a dose of romantic love at the end of the plot, as escapist, but it might be better described as **Utopian**, an attempt to project, as one critic has suggested, "what Utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized".

Escapism is far too simple a description of the complex relationship between our mundane realities and the heightened realms of experience made available to us by Hollywood or television. A stenographer in the 1930s going to a screwball comedy set in the art deco world of the very rich might seem to be indulging in an "escape" from her drab daily life. But what is she doing, the next week, when she goes to her local department store and buys a copy of the dress worn by the star in

that same movie? Escapism usually suggests to us that we must be escaping from somewhere where we ought to be, the daily world of work and responsibility, and escaping to somewhere make-believe, a Shangri-La, a **Utopian** fantasy-land over the rainbow. But that does not explain why the stenographer buys the dress. Sportswriter Hugh McDvanney came closer to the mark when he wrote, "Sport has no validity, no worth whatsoever, if it is not governed by **Utopian** ethics, by a code of morality infinitely superior to anything likely to be found in everyday life".

But sport *is* part of everyday life; like the movies and the songs about perfect love and the party dresses we wear for special occasions, sport is the **Utopian** part of our daily existence, the part in which we dream we are at our best. Science tells us, as individuals, that we need to dream when we sleep, that we suffer if we are not allowed to. Our culture tells us, every day in myriad ways, that we need to dream, to let our secret, holiday selves escape. And escapism that is not an escape from or to anywhere, but an escape of our **Utopian** selves, has always been present in the idea of Carnival, where the inhibitions which bind us to conventional roles are loosened. It is our Carnival selves that we take on holiday, and the holiday resort - from Atlantic City to Blackpool to Pattaya - has always been a place of loosened inhibitions. If it is the crime of popular culture that it has taken our dreams and packaged them and sold them back to us, it is also the achievement of popular culture that it has brought us more and more varied dreams than we could otherwise ever have known.

The interplay between our public and private worlds which popular culture invokes by the moment suggests that the artefacts of popular culture should be seen as a form of public fantasy. Frank Sinatra crooned "I'll be seeing you" to a million "you's", and his sentiment was put to personal use by each viewer. The world of private imaginings is a shared commodity that everyone can purchase, and it takes place in public spaces like picture palaces, around communal property, such as the images of movie stars. Marilyn Monroe, for example, served as the public fantasy of American sexuality in the 1950s and early 1960s. In some senses, popular culture and entertainment involve the escape of those elements of ourselves and our culture that are normally kept under restraint - what Freud termed "the return of the repressed".

Popular culture and social change

Because popular culture charts social change exactly and swiftly, it is commonly held responsible for the changes it reflects, and denounced as the harbinger of social dislocation. In the early years of the century, jazz and the movies were held responsible for juvenile delinquency, as television continues to be today. Cultural conservationists blame the spread of popular culture for their discomfort, believing that if only it could be kept under proper control, then the stability of the old ways of life might return. But this is to punish the messenger for the news he delivers. The media of popular culture are not themselves the origin of social change, although they encourage its novelties by making them appear desirable. In one important respect popular culture is itself conservative, since, to be popular, it must speak a language that is already common to its consumers. To sell the people what they want to sell, the producers of popular culture must say what they think people most want to hear. In this sense popular culture is a form of dialog which a society has with itself.

The debates over censorship reflected a widespread belief that popular culture was an instrument of informal education and influence, and that as a result care needed to be taken over



its content. Non-capitalist countries supervised their information and entertainment media at least as closely as they supervised their state education systems. In the United States, by contrast, the industries of leisure accepted "escapism" as a definition of their activities, since it has provided them with an easy means of avoiding responsibility for what they represent.

Entertainment, industry and politics

Throughout the 20th century the industries of leisure have expanded to constitute an ever greater part of the economies of industrialized nations. From the Korean factory worker producing television sets to the part-time saleswoman in Stockholm who sells them, ever-increasing numbers of people are employed in the production and servicing of leisure activities.

All these activities are couched in the idioms of advertising and entertainment: they all respond to real needs, but as they do so, they define what constitute the legitimate needs of the people of their society. As critic Richard Dyer has expressed it, "The ideals of entertainment imply wants that capitalism itself promises to meet...entertainment provides alternatives to capitalism which will be provided by capitalism." Yet such ideals and alternatives, dismissed as merely entertainment, are held to be unworthy of serious consideration. As a result, we are alienated from our own dreams and Utopian desires, persuaded instead that they can be fulfilled, or just disposed of, by two hours at the movies or a new dress and in the process

• The hula-hoop craze of the mid-1950s.

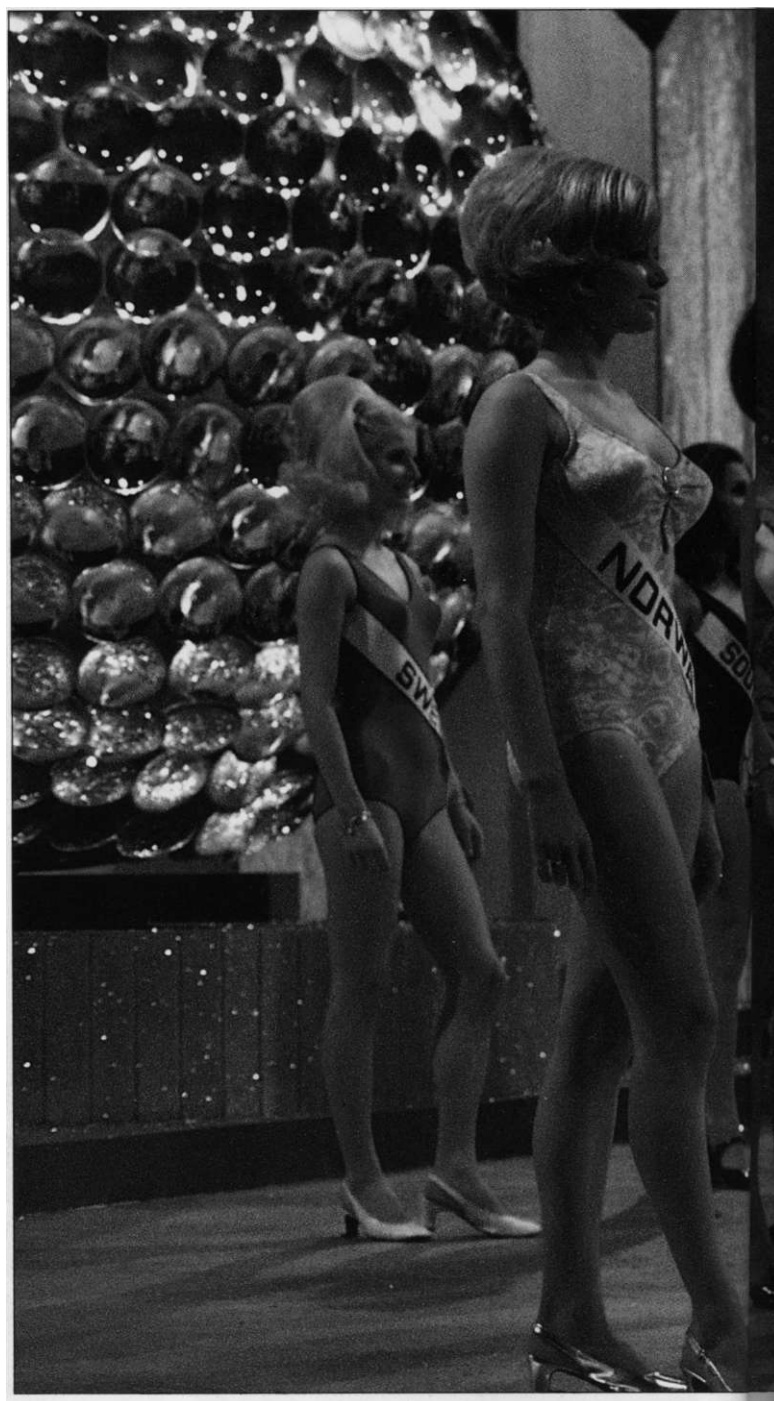
reassured that, like the commodities that have replaced them, the dreams were never "about" anything important in the first place.

Broadcasting has been one of the most predictably profitable commercial enterprises of the century. Within 15 years of its appearance, television became an integral part of American culture: not simply recording or reflecting in distorted form, but its dominant medium of social expression. To watch was an act of citizenship, participation in the national culture. On a typical autumn evening in the late 1970s, over 100 million people, in 60 percent of American homes, chose between the programming output of the three national television networks. The particular genius of the medium came not from its intensity but from its sheer volume, its pervasiveness, and its extraordinary capacity to integrate everything - news, entertainment, talk, sport, comedy, commercials, action - into a single entity. To an even greater extent than movies, sport or radio, television filled its consumers' lives with drama, so that, as the British literary critic Raymond Williams wrote in 1972, "More drama is watched in a week or a weekend, by the majority of viewers, than would have been watched in a year or in some cases a lifetime in any previous historical period."

Politics and show business became increasingly entangled; it became ever harder to disentangle "the media" from political or social history. Subjected to increasingly sophisticated advertising pressure, viewers have been constantly presented with politics as a drama of personalities in which the object of the game has been to pick the winner. Certainly television obliged politicians to become performers in a way radio never had, and the "image" they presented was scrutinized as intensely as their policies. The coverage of elections by television has grown to concentrate increasingly on campaign strategies and the techniques of voter manipulation, and less on the substantive political issues at stake. One consequence has been an increasing apathy towards the political process, a lower regard for the ethics and integrity of politicians and a greater volatility in voting behavior. The extent of media influence is reflected in the observation that when an industrially developed country is occupied or liberated today, whenever there is a coup d'état or a revolution, the new regime will take over the radio and television stations, the telephone and telex exchanges, and the printing presses. But the most striking way in which the media, and television in particular, have come to set the political agenda in the last quarter of the century can be seen in the extent to which the politics of personality and image have come to predominate in American and European politics. Whether in the election in 1980 of Ronald Reagan, whom novelist Gore Vidal called "the Acting President", whose most effective skills have been in communications rather than administration, or in the increasing employment of advertising agencies by political parties of all persuasions in the West, issues of style and image have come to dominate issues of political substance. The impact of Mikhail Gorbachev's more acceptable face of communism is evidence that such notions are not limited to the West.

Hollywood and cultural imperialism

The United States has remained the dominant influence on world culture throughout the century, and this position has hardly been challenged. It has been by far the largest exporter of cultural commodities - larger than the rest of the world combined. Every national cinema has defined itself in relation to Hollywood, even when that self-definition has been a conscious rejection of American commercial practice, for the United States has exported not only the products of its popular



culture, but its forms, too. Japanese movies in the 1930s were composed and edited in accordance with Hollywood conventions; Brazilian or Nigerian advertisements, soap operas and game shows have been written to the formats of American practice, with which their audiences were already familiar. The content might take on a local coloring, but the shape of the media package changed far less from country to country, and the overwhelming source for the model has been the United States. In large part the dominance of American popular culture throughout the world is simply a manifestation of raw economic power. But it also reflects decisions made within the importing countries.

Few governments have regarded culture as an economic commodity. By comparison with trade in raw materials or manufactured goods, the global trade in cultural commodities is not especially large, although satellite and computer



technology have produced dramatic increases in its volume in the 1980s. Its relatively small economic importance is one reason why few Third World countries have made a priority of controlling American imports, or developing national culture industries based on models other than imitations of American practice. But, as the American film industry has argued almost from its infancy, cultural products play a crucial role in opening export markets for other goods and the way of life they promote. On the other hand the very existence of American-dominated popular culture has been responsible for the development of national styles in fashion or media, as governments try to resist the encroachment of a homogenized "world" culture, whether it emanates from New York, Hollywood, Paris or Tokyo.

In Europe, popular culture has been derided not only as "feminine" and as the inferior cultural goods of the working

class, but also as "American". The word has implied an excessively democratic society where classes do not know their proper place in a hierarchy of social order. European experience has made clear that the crucial difference between high culture art and popular culture is that high culture is sold to a small elite audience. European film and television reflect specifically middle-class values and are directed much more firmly toward an elite audience than the products of Hollywood and the networks. The middle classes, used to paying higher prices for their cultural commodities, have always seen their purchases as qualitatively superior to those available to the masses. This is ultimately not an argument about esthetic quality, but a demonstration of real cultural, social, and finally economic power. Since the cultural elite in European societies has

A Miss World contestants In 1965.



corresponded closely to the economic and political elite, it has been able to dictate the terms of the debate. This has, for example, been a powerful influence on British broadcasting, whose patrons insist, against all evidence except cultural prejudice, that it provides the "least worst television in the world". The adaptations and documentaries which give British television its envied reputation for "quality" reproduce the "worthiest" remnants of British culture. As in Germany, television has absorbed writing and directorial talent which might have contributed to a cinematic renaissance. Innovation has been contained within the hierarchies of television. Elsewhere in Europe the formal experimentation of the avant-garde and international Art Cinema has been rendered harmless by being kept within a cultural ghetto of small metropolitan theaters for a middle-class elite, where its power to disrupt or subvert has been reduced to an untroublesome minimum.

On occasion, as in the *Cinema Novo* movement in the 1960s in Brazil, cultural resistance has been linked to opposition to the political and economic dominance of the United States as well as to its cultural influence. *Cinema Novo* used the history, mythology and imagery of traditional Brazilian culture as the basis on which to revive a national culture free of North American domination. Much Third-World cinema has derived its impetus from an opposition to the cultural colonialism of Western countries, which has often dominated distribution and thus hindered or prevented the emergence of an indigenous film industry.

The most enduring forms of cultural nationalism have been those able to integrate imitations of American media forms with a culturally specific, preferably traditional content: the martial arts films of Hong Kong; Japanese "home dramas"; or, largest and perhaps most spectacularly successful of all, the Indian cinema.



Elvis lookalikes in 1980s Japan.

only in scale, from the complaints against Hollywood's influence in the 1920s. As the mass audience for the electronic media began to decline and fragment in the West, broadcasting became increasingly internationalized through coproduction arrangements, seeking its audience in many countries simply to pay the bills. The media have been important forces in maintaining Western influence and interests in Third World countries after independence from colonial rule: into the 1980s the majority of journalistic and technical staff continued to be trained by American or European agencies, and, partly as a result, to adopt Western values in regard to media content. Equipment and programs have enabled broadcasting services to be established, but have inhibited local production because of its high cost by comparison to American programming of much more ostentatious production qualities.

The revolutions in information technology in the 1980s have made the media more immediate - when American marines in Beirut were killed by a bomb in 1983, a CBS producer proudly exclaimed, "this week we have brought grief into American homes - fast." The escalating cost of satellites and other hardware has concentrated ownership of the means of media distribution in fewer and fewer hands.

This phenomenon is not limited to single media or separate countries: we all now live in the "Global Village" which McLuhan predicted in 1964. It is not like a real village: we can see and enjoy the carnival colors of our different cultures, but only a very few can speak, and the rest must merely listen. The power of the media - political, economic, cultural - now belongs to a handful of multinational corporations, who colonize the rest of the world, sometimes benignly, sometimes not. Throughout the century, Western popular culture has caused intense social disruption in the Third World, inculcating new patterns of behavior, new desires and new dissatisfactions. The pervasiveness of the electronic media increases the efficiency of this process.

Many analysts argue that only the pursuit of international mass audiences can sustain the investment in both equipment and programming, and envisage with dread a diet of Least Objectionable Programming, sport, music videos, news and reruns. What is undoubtedly clear is that a central feature of the Third Age of Broadcasting will be that, however increased the range of choice available to consumers may be, fewer organizations will own the means of distribution and determine what is offered to consumers.

For most people in the industrialized countries, the consumption of media has come to occupy more time than any other activity except sleeping and working - on average six hours per day in the United States, four hours in Europe. Home video recording, video games, remote-control television, cable and home computers have increased the amount of media available for consumption in the 1980s exponentially. But, contrary to the claim of a cable television company to provide "over 70 hours a day" of programming, the proliferation of media sources did not increase viewing times significantly. Time spent in front of a home computer screen tends to be at the expense of television time - saturation was reached in the mid-1970s. So far the fantasies of futurologists who predicted the electronic home, where people would shop, bank and work through interactive video, or the paperless office where all data would be computerized, have remained fantasies, like earlier overenthusiastic predictions of the changes new communications technologies would bring. As one television executive put it, "I have seen the future. And it's still in the future."

Curiously, the American film industry is required to be most sensitive to the demands of audiences outside its own cultural boundaries, since it is dependent on foreign sales for more than half its income. This heavy dependence on foreign markets is one explanation for the continuing ability of American popular cultural forms to absorb and assimilate almost anything. Polish filmmaker Andrej Wajda caught the other basic ingredient of their success: "The paradox is that because the American cinema is so commercial, because the pressure of money is so strong, everything in a film has to be the very best. That means the most expensive, but it also means the most authentic, the most honest. No half measures, everything on the edge of excess.... The amount the Americans are prepared to spend on making their films is in a way a sign of respect for the audience."

Essentially the argument has changed little in substance,