

- Klingeman, H.D. and D. Fuchs (eds) (1995) *Citizens and the State: Beliefs in Government, Vol. 1*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kress, G. (1986) 'Language in the Media', *Media, Culture & Society* 8(4): 395-420.
- Livingstone, S. and P. Lunt (1994) *Talk on Television*. London: Routledge.
- Lunenburg, M. (1993) 'Politici en hun retorische mogelijkheden in een veranderende politieke cultuur' ('Politicians and their Rhetorical Possibilities in a Changing Political Culture'), paper voor de Politicodagendagen, Juni Soesterberg, Netherlands.
- MacGill-Hughes, H. (1940) *News and the Human Interest Story*. London: Transaction Books.
- MORI Data at <http://www.mori.com>
- Mulgan, G. (1994) *Politics in an Anti-Political Age*. London: Polity Press.
- NIPO Data at <http://www.nipo.nl>
- Peer, L. (forthcoming) 'Women in Talk Radio and the Public Sphere(s) in the United States', in A. Sreberny-Mohammadi and L. van Zoonen (eds) *Women's Politics and Communication*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Peters, J.D. (1993) 'Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere', *Media, Culture & Society* 15(4): 541-71.
- Rapping, E. (1998, forthcoming) 'Talkshows, Feminism and the Discourse of Addiction', in A. Sreberny-Mohammadi and L. van Zoonen (eds) *Women's Politics and Communication*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Sparks, C. (1992) 'Popular Journalism: Theories and Practice', pp. 24-44 in P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks (eds) *Journalism and Popular Culture*. London: Sage.
- van Zoonen, L. (1994) *Feminist Media Studies*. London: Sage.
- van Zoonen, L. (1998a) 'Finally, I Have my Mother Back! Politicians and Their Families in Popular Culture', *Press/Politics* 3(1): 48-64.
- van Zoonen, L. (1998b) 'An Unreliable, Professional, Heroic, Marionette, Stunt, Agency and Subjectivity in Contemporary Journalism(s)', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 1(1): 123-43.

Politics in the fine meshes: young citizens, power and media

Kevin G. Barnhurst

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

One of the 'shocking' revelations from the social sciences is that the 'public' is made up of dummies (see Whitney and Wartella, 1988). Survey research of public knowledge beginning at the mid-20th century portrayed a citizenry (and media audience) in possession of little by way of facts, yet more than willing to spout opinions on any subject no matter how ignorant they might be. This seemed to be something new -- a measurement that gave the lie to the assumption among politicians and news reporters of the 19th century that the citizenry was (or could become) enlightened, capable of sorting through the cornucopia of facts and events concerning public life that appeared in the newspapers of the day.

Discovering citizens so ill-prepared to govern themselves left a gap in the place of power: as Jefferson put it, 'I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of the society but the people themselves . . .' (quoted in Barber, 1984: xvii). Where power resides and how it operates in modern societies has been much debated. Ever since Hobbes and Locke supplied the pleasant metaphor of power as something emerging from the rational consent of the citizenry (see Hindess, 1996), the manifest contradictions to their ideal conception have been troublesome.

Lukes's (1974) succinct account of the three dimensions of power summarized the history of the debate swirling after the publication of *The Power Elite* (Mills, 1956): pluralists such as Dahl (1961) observed power in overt conflict, which led them to tabulate results and focus on winners and losers. Reformists such as Bachrach and Baratz (1970) also recognized power in the covert maneuvering that allows only some issues to be dealt with overtly. And radicals such as Lukes went further, discovering power in the tacit manipulating of desires, so that citizens' 'wants may themselves

be a product of a system which works against their interests' (Lukes, 1974: 34).

In his work on prisons and sexuality, Foucault proposed a definition of how or where power emerges, by examining the 'techniques of power present at every level of the social body' (1980: 141). His particular contribution was to expose the existence of mechanisms operating at the level of the individual life, so that the citizen participates in the process of regulation, following procedures that make the body a site where power gets produced (and contested). Foucault later elaborated his definition by focusing on government (and his position has been thoroughly critiqued, see, for example, Hindess, 1996; Haugaard, 1997), but his earlier emphasis already reversed the knowledge-power polarity. Power is knowledge to the degree that it inculcates techniques of discipline that lead citizens to modify themselves both in body and in personality.

New citizens, new news

By taking a measure of (or reducing to numbers) the attitudes, interests and opinions of the citizenry, surveys participate in the discipline of the public at the level of mind, helping create a new sense of the citizen and revising the public sphere (Herbst, 1993). In the case of the Western press, which has the historical charge to inform the citizenry, journalism responded to this re-ification of the public (and helped invent and reinforce it) by redefining itself over the course of the late 20th century. If people needed things explained to them, then coverage of politics had to become more explanatory.

Content analyses of news in newspapers (Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997) and on national television networks (Steele and Barnhurst, 1996) show that American journalism in general — and political news in particular — has become less focused on events and facts, and more concentrated on analysis and interpretation. The consequence of this shift, of course, is the increasing emphasis on the journalists themselves. The star turn of American journalism, which spread into Europe and into any zone worldwide in which news operates primarily within a competitive market, slowly eroded the sense of news as a cooperative endeavor serving citizenship.

Instead, news converted into a platform for entertainers and showmanship. Studies of the newspaper as well as television news show a turn toward the visual extravaganza. Newspaper designs have become post-modern jumbles of fancy type, chart junk and factoids (Nerone and Barnhurst, 1995; Barnhurst, 1994). On newscasts, the high-tech sets, latest graphic algorithms and breathless pacing have upstaged content as well (Barnhurst and Steele, 1997). In short, news 'professionals' made up for the

growing and inevitable dreariness of journalism filled with their own opinions and interpretations by disguising and dressing up news in visual excess.

These measurements of media content and public opinion hint at fundamental change in the political atmosphere: citizens attenuated into measurable audiences and consumers; politics commodified into beauty pageant cum talent show; journalists transmogrified into masters of ceremony, celebrity judges and measurers of the public will. The prospect might be frightening indeed if these measurements could be taken seriously.

The measure of political life

However, content analyses and surveys measure the phenomenon from the outside, from a comfortable distance. Their 'subjects' — the citizens who live out their lives under various elected governments and media environments — exist at a far remove, like artifacts under a glass. The meaning of politics — how politics operates for individual citizens and what it means to be political — is at the heart of cultural studies. If a change has indeed occurred, then the new meanings will emerge in the lives of citizens, in the stories they tell about themselves and their interactions with the political media.

Young citizens — the generation now in their early 20s who have only recently come of voting age — live out any new definition of politics in their daily lives. Understanding the change in the political can at least start with that age group. In earlier studies, market research provided the first early signs that young adults were moving away from news (Bogart, 1989). The fact that with each passing year fewer of them were becoming regular newspaper readers alarmed the American newspaper industry, which, like the tobacco companies, must attract more young consumers to sustain a market and stay in business.

An interpretive analysis of young adults confirmed that they are disaffected from newspapers, based on their own stories of experience with the medium (Barnhurst and Wartella, 1991). Young American citizens remember learning that newspapers were supposed to be an important avenue for political information, but their own encounters with the medium taught them that the products of institutional journalism are largely irrelevant to their lives. This disillusionment is profound in the USA, where the processes of redefining political journalism are developed to perhaps the most extreme extent.

Similar signs are appearing elsewhere. In Spain, the techniques of American journalism began entering after the death of Franco and accelerated in 1980 with the founding of *El Mundo* by an editor who

interned at the *Washington Post*. Young adults now stand back from opinionated news and disdain the showiness that comes with it, especially on television (Barnhurst, 1997). Despite the much ballyhooed shift in the USA to television as the most widely consulted source of political news, young Americans do not substitute television for newspapers (Barnhurst and Wartella, forthcoming). While their numbers expand the ratings of news programs, they hardly take the programs seriously. They consider news just another programme in the flow — a reality-based variety show. Nor do they say they pay much heed to talk radio, the Internet or any of the other 'informational' media. All of these come tainted, the young people say, by corporate stratagems to make a sale.

So what do they do? What media do they use (and how do they use them) in their political thinking and decision making? How do they define their political lives, or their lives as political, if not in the traditional ways (such as informing themselves by reading the press, and then voting)? To find out, I asked college students predominantly from the USA but also from Spain — the young adults most likely to vote and become future political leaders in their countries — to tell me their life histories.

Rather than requesting that they tell stories about politics, which might have narrowed their thinking to metanarratives about voting and government, I suggested they choose an issue or concern — ambiguous terms that gave them plenty of latitude to ponder their experiences. Because I wanted to understand how they informed themselves as citizens, I invited them to include their experiences with the media, once again leaving it to them to choose.

This method emerged out of autobiography as a way to understand social life early in the 20th century, when Blumer (1933) asked young people to write about their experiences with movies. After an initial flurry of use, life history disappeared from social studies until recently, when it was rediscovered. Denzin (1990) calls Blumer's work the first example of cultural studies. Unlike research that focuses on objective measurements, life histories concentrate on subjective experience, employing the most important mode for producing meaning in Western cultures.

Tales of political identity

One of the principal tasks of the young in Western societies is to define their identities as adults, making commitments to some while rejecting other ways of being in the world. In their small decisions, young people reveal the workings of 'the fine meshes of the web of power', in Foucault's phrase (1980: 116). He goes on to point out how in concrete daily struggles, power becomes visible, very often in activities that have hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis.

When writing a life history, young adults engage in a latent sort of personal genealogy, which resembles the larger genealogy Foucault defines as 'a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges ...' (1980: 117). The life histories begin, of course, at the beginning: in earliest childhood. It should not be surprising that they relate stories of entertainment media (not political news), but their descriptions of ordinary events reveal their earliest understanding of power in their society:

The first program that became a permanent part of me was *Happy Days*. I clearly remember riding my small green tricycle in my driveway. It would be lunch time and my mother would call to me from the kitchen. She would call my name a few times and I wouldn't respond. I wanted to respond because I was really hungry, but my mother knew exactly how to get me in that house, and I wouldn't go a second before she gave me the recognition I wanted. 'Fonzie, it's lunch time!' There it was, that was all I needed. Running through the front door and into the kitchen. I would greet my mother with my thumbs outstretched and with my most enthusiastic 'Heech'. And that would be the end of it. My kitchen didn't have to be Al's Diner, my little brother didn't have to be Richie Cunningham, and I was no longer The Fonz. All I needed was those few moments of recognition.

The story begins not in what adults might consider part of the political world but in an interaction where the child uses a (*faux*) rebellious (and absolutely powerful) character from fiction television to enact his own mild resistance to his mother and find a separate identity in the home and family.

This genealogy is like many others, where young adults remember asserted status and usurped recognition by employing the resources available to them: accessible fictions, usually viewed on television. The manifest content ranges through Michael Jackson in his glove and zippered jacket, movie and soap opera characters, and heroes from sport.

These texts can be read as personal identification but also as moments within a political system. Looking back at the boy of the Fonzie story, the young man writes, 'Although I didn't realize it at the time, by playing this little game with my mother I learned that if I pushed, I could be whoever I wanted to be.' This right, 'the "right" to rediscover what one is and all that one can be', Foucault (1990: 139) calls the political response to the new system that administers at the level of the life.

The media work to discipline the individual life not through coercion but through pleasure. A common story involves several members of a family, and sometimes friends, relaxing in complete comfort and watching some particular program.

Every Thursday night like clockwork — snuggle-time. Our vee-shaped beige leather couch looked more like a blanket exhibit than a family room sofa. My dad lay on one side, my mom on the other, and my sister and I lay on the ground in a make-shift bed of blankets and pillows.

Another pair of sisters, who bonded while watching cartoons, struggle to recapture that unity in later life. A boy finds rooting for the Cleveland Browns football team so linked him to his father that even after the two are separated, the game induces them to call and gives them a common ground for talk. Of course, these ties impose the discipline of fandom, with the accompanying host of practices and ideals, but they do so through pleasure. In another context, Foucault described the process: 'What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (1980: 119).

Citizenship as a form of belonging begins in personal interaction, within small jurisdictions at home and school. The Citizenship with a capital C may provide 'the public structure within which other, more personal and private relationships can flourish' (Barber, 1984: 217), but the smaller citizenship is lived the other way round, from the personal into the public. The first step is the bond to friends outside the family. It may be a simple obsession with the New Kids on the Block that connects a girl to her best friend, in opposition to their families, or a boy's determination to win a computer version of strip poker that binds him in secrecy with a friend. In the microscopic polis of such interactions the substance and form of citizenship take root.

Identifying with the state

The life histories describe a growing out from these tiny domains into larger political regions, which exist in imagination even in the young. Upon learning her father is being transferred to Texas, a girl living outside San Francisco confronts her television sense of the state: John Wayne and the Lone Ranger.

I had even seen an episode of *Sesame Street* where the children, all dressed in jeans with bandannas around their necks, visited a ranch, and they all took turns riding a small pony around a square fence. This, to me, was Texas.

What the political entity means once she moves there, she finds she discovers on TV, not from politics but in a commercial with Mean Joe Green in his cowboy hat and also in Hank Williams, Jr, singing 'Don't you Mess with Texas' in an anti-littering campaign. When she moves away as a young adult, she finds people call her 'Tex', expect her to 'shoot the guns' with them, and define her by what they saw on *Dallas*. 'I never used to think that I would be proud to call myself a Texan', she writes, but now she is. Instead of a California girl from the Bay Area, she's someone else

— a product of discipline: a friendly and outgoing Texan, who remembers not to litter.

This 'power to foster life' is a positive expression, but it does not exist independent of the state's power to disallow life, Foucault insists (1990: 138). Through the media, young people also first confront that negative power: they learn to imagine war. The after-school cartoons provide the cliché example, which young adults say produces an obvious and predictable result:

The types of images I was exposed to with *G.I. Joe* and *Transformers* affected the way I used to play games, with toys, or outdoors. For instance, when it snowed, my friends and I would build huge snow and ice walls on opposite sides of our yard to act as a fortress for a snowball fight. . . . Games like hide-and-seek evolved into 'manhunt', a much more intense game where opposing teams acted like platoons, the battlefield expanded, and [there were] stricter rules and penalties. In essence, because of what we had been exposed to, war was cool.

Through media and games, the young play-act their way not only into the web of power relations that constitute personal identity but also into the disciplines and values of larger entities.

It is at the level of the nation that citizenship becomes most closely linked to death (see Foucault, 1990). Young adults from Spain share several powerful experiences in which death links them to national identity: the death of Franco very early in their childhood that returned the nation to democracy, or the coup d'état in 1981 that threatened the new government. Here is an extended example of the collective memory about the latter:

The image was the congress completely empty (later I learned that it was not empty, people were hidden under the seats) and a man in a military uniform was holding a gun and shooting. I saw my mom running to the telephone to call my dad who was working. I did not pay a lot of attention but I felt something weird was going on. That night I stayed up late; in normal days the nightly newscast was a sign of going to bed. That night the newscast was replaced by what we called in Spain a 'constitutional speech' addressed by our king, Juan Carlos I, who was dressed in a military uniform talking to the nation for something like an hour. I remember my parents getting calls from all our relatives and hearing unpronounceable words (for me) about politics. I think I never knew what happened that night and my only memories were images from the TV set and the figure of the king.

That this is collective memory, forged through shared remembrance and repetition, is evidenced in the subsequent recourse and interpretation ('later I learned') and by the admission in the coda to the story that the raw experience meant nothing to him at the time (the words were 'unpronounceable'). All of the telephoning around marked the beginning of a hermeneutic circle that supplied meaning. The local activity was direct experience with 'the nation'.

Because it transpires through the media, this is the sort of event that Inglis defines as 'parade', a mode of imaginative response in which 'citizens who have largely lost the means of vigorous participation in public life watch glowing rituals whose distance from feasible action permits inconsequentially strong feeling' (1988: 105). The most important of these to the current generation of young Americans is the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*.

28 January 1986. Blackout. My eyes welled up with tears while watching the screen in my fourth grade classroom. I felt my heart pound and chest tremble. The solid rocket boosters split up, forming a distinctive vee in the blue Florida sky. The space shuttle blew up that day. The rest of my world was shattered. That lone ninety seconds of footage changed my dream of becoming a spaceman!

Up until that day, space travel on TV had an air of beauty and innocence. Now it was dangerous and feared. I no longer rented videos [of space documentaries] on the weekend. I would wake up in the night thinking that pieces of the shuttle were falling around my bed. I couldn't bear it. . . .

While TV had once taught me to dream, it had now given me nightmares.

In the explosion of the shuttle, young Americans encountered the brute power of government to place a citizen's (or rather, the greatest authority in the jurisdiction where these young people lived: a teacher's) life on the line and lose it. In their memories, the *Challenger* marks the end of one thread in their history of making sense of the world — in the case of this young man, the event closes a technological dream of escape and freedom from the limits of the terrestrial globe.

Foucault argues that 'In feudal societies power functioned essentially through signs . . . of loyalty to the feudal lords, rituals, ceremonies and so forth' (1980: 125). In the present era of 'parades', Inglis argues, 'These become splendid tableaux existing in social memory as disjointed moments with blank, black space around their glittering visibility and no history of circumstance to give them continuity and consequence for the spectators' (1988: 105). The *Challenger* — so prominent in the life narratives of the young generation — provides such a moment. Despite the non-stop chatter of television journalists interpreting the event as it happened, the various programs at schools to psychologize the incident, and the conversation that ensued at home, young adults hardly make any sense of it. (But that does not mean that the experience will not reverberate throughout their political lives, in the outlooks and decisions this generation takes on issues of public policy concerning technology, space and government projects; see Barnhurst, 1997.)

By contrast, young Spaniards describe themselves living through a historical metanarrative: their country's transition to democracy. When the Basque separatist group ETA kidnapped a young politician in July 1997, people protested in the streets of major cities and television networks

canceled their programming, made the airwaves an open forum and replaced their corporate marks with a blue ribbon, symbol of the demand that ETA release its prisoners.

Sometimes there were periods of 30-45 minutes when the networks showed only a picture of the kidnapped politician. This silence was not only present on the TV set but in my house, in the street, in the entire country. I watched demonstrations in every single city. During that weekend the whole country was united, and I think it was possible thanks to television. This has been one of the few times, I should say the only time, that I was moved not only by the event itself but also by the media coverage. The main goal was not economic; television networks were trying really to communicate what was happening without concern for their own interests.

The reactions throughout Spain signaled democracy, dramatizing that particular sort of nationhood in which citizens may in deference express their sovereign will and corporate entities may suspend buying and selling. These rituals did not prevent the death of the hostage, any more than a similar show of national solidarity and corporate non-commercialism on American television could change the death of President Kennedy. Both were symbolic expressions of belonging, reaffirmations in the face of a death.

Whether or not these different historical moments belong in Inglis's parade category, they all act out death in public. As Foucault argued, it is not the case, as commonly believed, that 'death is so carefully evaded' because of 'a new anxiety which makes death unbearable for our societies', but quite the contrary: 'that the procedures of power have not ceased to turn away from death' (1990: 138). In confronting death, the young discover the basis of national community, not in the cooperative notion of citizenship but in the ultimate power to end life. Each of the events became cast as a threat to nation because the deaths resulted from things ostensibly beyond state control (but also perhaps the inevitable consequence flowing out of its sovereign power over life): terror, *golpe de estado*, crime, accident or the like.

Opinion as politics

What is the role of citizens in the face of such arbitrary power over the body? When young adults from both countries describe their experiences with what is manifestly political — political movements, elections, government policies and the like — they work from an implicit definition of that realm. The essence of political life for them is the expression of opinions and preferences. This view seems closest to what Foucault called 'the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, in the sphere of political techniques' (1990: 141-2).

Consider, for example, this life history about famine. To create his narrative about world hunger, a young American tells five stories (the anatomy of narratives used here comes from Labov via Riessman, 1993). He first encounters famine at the age of eight:

I was sitting in our living room playing while my parents watched the news, when I happened to glance at the television. I saw hundreds of children with their stomachs enlarged way more than I had ever seen. At first, I thought that they had eaten a lot and gotten fat, but my dad said that they were starving.

In the complicating action of this simple story, the very idea of famine is remote. The child's first interpretation is of plenty, of children who have gorged themselves. This feeling, not hunger, is the most familiar. Foucault considers famine a second dramatic example, along with epidemic, of biological pressure on the historical, both of which receded in the 18th century. It is clear from this story that famine cannot be conceived as acting directly on the young man.

Foucault suggests that in the space opened up when death ceased to torment life so directly, knowledge entered in, becoming 'an agent of transformation of human life' (1990: 143). This theme continues in the second story from the narrative.

'We are the World. We are the Children' ... it was when I was twelve that this popular video first aired on MTV. It was referring to Ethiopia and other parts of Africa, where starvation was very prominent. I again saw these vivid pictures of starving adults and youths, but now I could, in my sixth grade wisdom, put a place to where these people were. I knew that they were relatively close to us, not on another planet but only a short plane ride from my comfortable home. Many of the musicians whom I adored at the time were showing that they cared for these people; so I did as well.

In this story of transformation, knowledge is once again the active agent. Here the knowledge is geographical, conceiving of the world as one place. It is also social, as the child takes cues from figures he admires. Of course, he leaves ambiguous whether he joined his idols in 'showing that they cared' by taking action or simply by sharing their feelings, but the context within the narrative implies no action. The pop stars urged him to care, and so that is what he felt.

The theme of taking one's cues from authority runs throughout the narrative but especially in the third and fourth stories. One occurs in eighth grade, when the young man sees 'those public service announcements with that lady who tries to convince you to donate money to the good cause of helping these starving people'. An influential school teacher 'conveyed to us — accidentally or purposely, I don't know — that somehow they brought it upon themselves and were too lazy to get food'. So he says at 14 he felt no pity for the children stars like Sally Struthers promoted on television, and he blocked out the idea of famine.

The fourth story takes place three years later, after many talks with parents, when there

... came all the news about starvation in Somalia and the Michael Jackson music video for 'Man in the Mirror'. At this time, I once again believed that I had the 'correct' view of life. I thought that even though it is not our fault that these people are starving, it is almost our responsibility to help them.

Someone pointed out to him at the time how much food Americans waste and how 'just sending some money or canned foods to these people would make a huge difference in their lives', but these ideas never led him to act. The plot moves forward not on political action but on 'correct' political thinking. Granted, the issue is one of finding and acknowledging responsibility, and in the final story the narrator, now a college student, arrives there. The complicating action of this story is watching documentary films and listening to lectures in a college class. These reveal how the US government uses its military and economic clout to prevent Third World efforts to raise wages and improve work conditions, all of which contribute to malnutrition. He writes:

This idea, however, is not publicized much in the major media like TV news or newspapers — only in small, low-budget films such as the ones we viewed and the small number of similar classes around the country. This made me think even more that we are responsible to help these people and urge the government to stop this oppression ...

The evaluation at the end of this last story makes it clear that the media bear some responsibility for the problem and even mentions a course of action. It remains unclear just how to help those starving people, but one can at least apply pressure on government (in some unspecified way). The narrative is not, even in the end, about action. In a concluding coda, the life history returns to the shifting sands of opinion:

... as I have gotten older, my views have changed a great deal ... so I would not be surprised if they would change again. They have been changed and molded by the media ...

It might be tempting to accuse the narrator of reducing famine to a matter of opinion, but in his daily experience, there is little more he can do. Each new authority and each new medium that enters his life urges him toward another point of view. The issue, like so much of what gets covered in the media, is in fact far removed from his direct experience. Only through an elaborate process can he finally trace any responsibility to his homeland (and none to himself). Even then, the government remains a distant abstraction. It seems too much to ask that he be as alive to famine as are Americans his age to entertainment or the Spaniards to the political protests in their country.

'Outside the Western world, famine exists, on a greater scale than ever', writes Foucault, but when societies reach what he calls the 'threshold of modernity', the tables are turned and 'the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies' (1990: 143). The student's famine narrative illustrates what Foucault then calls 'the growing importance assumed by the action of the norm' (1990: 144). The central question of citizenship has become 'What opinion should I hold?' because citizens, with the immediate threats to life and health removed, are left this primary political activity: responding to public opinion surveys. In this way, young Americans (and, increasingly, Europeans) define their roles as citizens, and democracy gets built on the same epistemology, in which polls (drawing on the metaphor of voting) provide the structure behind authoritative knowledge.

Media reality as truth

Living their political lives in the media surround, young adults may seem the antithesis of citizens, the embodiment of what Nietzsche's Zarathustra calls the Ultimate Man, whose absorption in the present devours his future. 'We have discovered happiness,' say the Ultimate Men and blink. They have left the places where living was hard: for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs oneself against him: for one needs warmth' (Nietzsche, 1969: 46).

Young adults describe their use of the media as an addiction. One can't go a day without taping *General Hospital*, and watching each episode bonds her to her friends. The same occurs at the level of the nation. Another describes becoming habituated to violent and sensational news. For the Ultimate Person, 'A little poison now and then: that produces pleasant dreams' (Nietzsche, 1969: 46). The media provide a retreat from life. When her parents were about to divorce, writes yet another, 'I was watching *The Cosby Show*, and I had to keep turning up the volume to drown out the yelling from upstairs.'

However, young adults also rebel. The narratives especially by 'others' — women and minorities — tell stories of escaping from media control. After watching the news with her father and sister, a woman recounts, she would join in debates: 'My sister and I would work as a team and tear my father's arguments to shreds', she writes. She describes the 'sense of accomplishment' she felt after she 'successfully stood up to a man who, like the men on TV', has power. Such stories contrast with the Ultimate Woman, who would say, 'Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both are too much of a burden' (Nietzsche, 1969: 46).

The site of struggle is often the body, as Foucault observed. A woman confronts anorexia after two friends, planning a beach holiday, paste their

heads from snapshots onto the bodies from a Victoria's Secret catalog and hang the image on their refrigerators. An African-American is angered by commercials glorifying the Barbie doll's long, flowing blond hair. In their families, the young adults confront stereotypes in the media: the Latina whose home with her single mother is nothing like the big Latino families in ads for Goya brand foods; an only child who despises the 'typical' family portrayed in the sit-com *Growing Pains*.

In larger arenas, beyond the personal and local, young citizens cannot easily escape the media surround, although they try to test the truth of ideas against primary experience. In a narrative about understanding the Holocaust, a young Jewish woman tells five stories. She begins by describing her earliest memory, 'the picture of the nameless boy standing with his hands in the air behind a barbed wire fence'. The indeterminacy of this image, and the sadness it invokes in her, provide the opening abstract for the narrative. Her first story takes place in the fourth grade, when a Holocaust survivor came to visit her class.

Mrs Godin showed us her uniform, a blue and gray striped gown, and the identification numbers permanently branded on her arm. I knew I didn't completely understand everything she was telling us, but I understood enough to know that some people were very mean and unfair to her.

The survivor told of her own primary experience, and the fidgety child caught what she could — things like being separated from her mother she'd gone through in small ways herself. Her evaluation of the moment also focuses on what she knew of people being mean and unfair. Yet the experience is still not her own. In the second story, she describes going to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.

I walked through the museum alone, leaving my mother and sister somewhere out of sight; this was something I needed to experience on my own. I looked at all the pictures and watched every movie they offered. I read only some of the news clippings on the walls, thinking that they were subjectively written and the pictures, whether moving or still, told the real stories.

The complicating action here springs from the need for having the 'experience on my own'. As she chooses what to view, she again seeks out media that seem primary to her, evidence of a budding skepticism. Later in the story, after describing a cattle car that still held the odor of the people it had carried packed in much too tightly, she recalls feeling doubtful. Nevertheless, she counts her encounters as real and she is moved: 'as we left we were all silent, no one knew what to say, no comment seemed appropriate'.

The third story describes watching *Schindler's List*. She describes the film as true — she had read the book — but the experience 'was more frightening than any horror movie I have ever seen. The movie was so

realistic, filmed in the actual locations where these travesties occurred, it was as if we were watching an old newsreel'. The truth-value of the film derives from two sources, one being the physical settings of the original events and the other being realism. The standard for realism is set by another medium, period newsreels.

Rather than listening and watching, in the fourth story she says she 'embarked on the trip that would change my life forever': a study tour of Second World War sites.

I remember walking in the gas chamber at Auschwitz, and being able to walk out again. . . . I remember three children no older than I, sitting on a wall in Krakow throwing berries at us while shouting, 'Go home Jews!' as we walked by. I remember finding my name engraved on a wall of remembrance in the Warsaw Ghetto. I remember seeing my grandmother's home town on a list of those annihilated during World War II.

In her evaluation of these actions, she expresses for the first time the wish that everyone could share the experience. The media left out too much, she says, but now she 'knew and understood all that was possible without actually living the event'.

Of course, the fifth story takes her beyond what she thought was closure. She next traveled to Israel for several weeks, finally reaching the Holocaust remembrance museum.

I expected that after being in Poland, I would be able to walk through the museum quickly with no problem; however, I was very wrong. It was harder than I could have imagined, more real than ever, because I had been all the places on display. When we walked in, the first picture I saw was the one of the little boy that has been with me all my life, only this time I saw it differently.

This story presents the moment of change, when all her experiences come to fruition. In the picture, she recognizes how the faces resemble people she knows, and she notices details that went unnoted before. Her narrative shifts to the present tense: 'I am scared and sad. I see pictures of places I was standing in one month before.' Direct experience has changed her, and now a museum seems 'more real'.

In the summation to her narrative, she characterizes how understanding the Holocaust demands more than what the media can offer: 'we must turn to alternative sources'. These include face-to-face encounters with living witnesses as well as visits to museums. Although she now knows her understanding is incomplete, she will continue to study and 'teach others — from what I have learned and experienced'.

In one sense, this narrative is an exemplar. It describes a journey whose end is truth — 'the meaning of the earth' that is found in the self (Nietzsche, 1969: 42). Young adults make sense of human experience, their

own but also another's, as an act of the will, what Nietzsche calls the will to power.

Yet there remains a troubling residue: the 'primary' experiences that most moved and changed the young woman were mediated. Through media the new 'politics of truth' emerge (Foucault, 1980: 131). The visit of the Holocaust survivor, a primary encounter, sets her on her journey, but after that she travels encased in media. Not only the film but also the sites she visits, as well as the museums, have been constructed following a poetics that gives meaning to places and to artifacts (Lidchi, 1997). Her emotional responses to these, felt along with her family, make them primary, but beyond these there is only one unmediated experience she relates. The crucial moment occurs when Krakow children throw berries at her and shout an anti-Semitic slogan. Although that experience goes unremarked, it does provide a clue to the larger politics of knowledge of the Holocaust. The elaborate mechanisms of remembering, as well as the procedures the young woman followed, culminating in her will to 'teach others', stand against the prevailing 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980: 131) that works to ignore, drive into hiding or pretend to forget not just the Holocaust in history but also anti-Semitic hate and prejudice in the present.

The theme of experiencing on one's own flows through the essays by young adults. They have at last reached the age of majority, embarked on at least semi-independent lives, and seeking primary experience is a central motivation for them. Nevertheless, they cannot escape the media, the embodiment of power/knowledge. Faced with media as reality and political issues as occasions for polling, they have invented (without any help from Nietzsche or Foucault) their own political lives. Citizenship as conceived in political theory may elude them, but with their different sense of how power operates, they continue to struggle to find primary experiences with the issues that matter.

Where the Foucault are we?

The stories young adults tell are intensely personal and local. They respond to media content in the context of a television set at home with parents, or at the bar with friends. They discuss their emerging selves, in reference to the media, with peers. They find more sources and expose themselves more widely to alternative media because of teachers. They are what can be described as active citizens in the interstices of power/knowledge, even if not in the modes and regions prescribed by democratic theory.

Much of what passes for political news on television and in the papers — because it sin't y doesn't h'r — meaning within the localities where they

live — never reaches these young citizens. The news floats past them, unanchored. The reports might just as well be circulating in another dimension. The news stories that do catch their attention make the connection by including people their age or figures (such as teachers and parents) they encounter locally. That is why news is but one of many genres (especially entertainment media) they use to make sense of the political world. Understanding an issue comes scattershot, as in the case of the famine essay, from pop songs, TV commercials, documentary films and — most importantly — personal discussions more than from journalists.

Young people, just starting out as citizens, participate in power by first defining their own identities within immediate groups. The rise of identity politics, far from being a plot imposed by intellectual elites (as commentators on the right tend to characterize it), is a core political activity of these young people. They use commercials and magazine ads, fictional TV shows and films, and sports or gaming to give form to their dreams, personal and collective, and then they act as bricoleurs, gathering the detritus of fad and fashion to create their own styles and express themselves as political beings (just as Hebdige, 1979, and others have suggested).

These young people, far from being dummies, are deeply committed to finding the truth about the political worlds they inhabit. The sorts of civic-lesson 'facts' that form the basis of surveys suggesting the lack of public knowledge can of course be critiqued on their own merits, but in the case of young adults, that sort of knowledge forms part of an interpretive horizon they for the most part ignore (see Haugaard, 1997). Besides being local, their understanding of political life seems primarily discursive, existing in the ideas that emerge from local interactions in the presence of the media. Their practical knowledge is rooted in media savvy rather than in the traditional modes of political action (see Giddens, 1984).

The narratives by young adults present an occasion for interpretation, but they themselves perform the first interpretations of the new political world. Like any storyteller, the young adult not only relates a stream of remembered events but also implies and explains what they mean. When it comes to understanding the workings of power, 'life histories deepen the critique of existing knowledge' (McCall and Wittner, 1990: 46).

Young citizens' sense of how power operates does not draw from democratic theory, in which they participate as citizens in a state that invests power in the structures of legislative bodies and chief executives. Instead they adopt a definition much closer to Foucault's — without, of course, citing him — in which power is exercised at the level of the life, rather than at the level of law. They develop intense relationships with media contents and icons, using them to design their own bodies as outposts, politically sovereign but interdependent.

References

- Bachrach, Peter and Morton S. Baratz (1970) *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barber, Benjamin R. (1984) *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barnhurst, Kevin G. (1994) *Seeing the Newspaper*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Barnhurst, Kevin G. and Diana Mutz (1997) 'American Journalism and the Decline of Event-Centered News', *Journal of Communication* 47(4): 27–53.
- Barnhurst, Kevin G. (1997) *Media Democracy: How Young Citizens Experience the News in the United States & Spain*. Published doctoral dissertation, University of Amsterdam.
- Barnhurst, Kevin G. and Catherine A. Steele (1997) 'Image Bite News: The Visual Coverage of Elections on US Television, 1968–1992', *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 2(1): 40–58.
- Barnhurst, Kevin G. and Ellen Wartella (1991) 'Young Citizens, American TV Newscasts, and the Collective Memory', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8: 195–209.
- Barnhurst, Kevin G. and Ellen Wartella (forthcoming) 'Newscasts and Memory: Young Americans' Subjective Experiences of Television News', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*.
- Blumer, Herbert (1933) *Movies and Conduct*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bogart, Leo (1989) *Press and Public*, 2nd edn. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dahl, Robert A. (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Denzin, Norman K. (1990) 'The Spaces of Post-Modernism: Plummer on Blumer', *Symbolic Interaction* 13(2): 145–54.
- Foucault, Michel (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, Michel (1990) *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction*. New York: Vintage.
- Giddens, Anthony (1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Haugaard, Mark (1997) *The Constitution of Power: A Theoretical Analysis of Power, Knowledge, and Structure*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hebdige, Dick (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.
- Herbst, Susan (1993) *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hindess, Barry (1996) *Discourses of Power, from Hobbes to Foucault*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Inglis, Fred (1988) *Popular Culture and Political Power*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Lidell, Henrietta (1997) 'The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures', pp. 151–222 in Stuart Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.
- McCall, Michal M. and Judith Wittner (1990) 'The Good News about Life History', pp. 46–89 in H. Samuel Becker and Michal M. McCall (eds) *Symbolic Interaction & Cultural Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mills, C. Wright (1956) *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1969) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin.

- Nerone, John C. and Kevin G. Barnhurst (1995) 'Visual Mapping and Cultural Authority: Design Change in US Newspapers, 1920-1940', *Journal of Communication* 45(2): 9-43.
- Riessman, Catherine Kohler (1993) *Narrative Analysis: Qualitative Research Methods* 30. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Steele, Catherine A. and Kevin G. Barnhurst (1996) 'The Journalism of Opinion: Network Coverage in US Presidential Campaigns, 1968-1988', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13(3): 187-209.
- Whitney, D. Charles and Ellen Wartella (1988) 'The Public as Dummies', *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization* 10(2): 99-110.

From the margins to mainstream: the political power of hip-hop

Katina R. Stapleton

DUKE UNIVERSITY

'They didn't know what they were playing with, look what they got', spoke Jungle Brothers rapper Mike G from the floor of a conference on the state of hip-hop in the late 1990s. In the 20-plus years since it emerged in inner-city New York as an alternative to violence and a way to escape harsh urban realities, hip-hop has become a worldwide musical and cultural force. But the widespread popularity of rap music and hip-hop culture among youth has caught many outside the hip-hop community by surprise. Once considered 'black noise', hip-hop has claimed for itself the role of cultural and political voice of an entire generation of youth.

When hip-hop emerged in New York City in the 1970s, its primary sphere of influence was the youth in the neighborhoods where it evolved. In areas like the Bronx, breakdancers, graffiti artists, MCs (rappers), DJs and fans formed the hip-hop community. Hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose argues that 'alternative local identities were forged in fashions and language, street names, and most important, in establishing neighborhood crews or posses' (Rose, 1994: 34). Crews provided an opportunity for youth to form family-like bonds similar to, but not based on, gang affiliation. Instead of always fighting with fists, hip-hop gave youth the option of fighting with words, art, dance or the ability to produce good beats (Fernando, 1994).

Hip-hop emerged at a time of crisis for youth in urban communities. The situation was no less than a 'deindustrialized meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect' (Rose, 1994: 21). Hip-hop enabled youth to create their own cultural space within the city that countered the poverty and alienation that surrounded them on a day-to-