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# The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility

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## 12 (En)Visioning the Televisual Audience: Revisiting Questions of Power in the Age of Interactive Television

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In a recent television advertisement for Shaw Communications Inc.,<sup>1</sup> an unseen individual responds to a knock at the door. He/she finds a smiling, baseball-capped fellow from the local cable operator 'checking in' to ensure that the subscriber is enjoying the full benefits of his/her expanded digital television service. Our cheery cable representative – Digital Dave – is on the scene to remind our subscriber that digital television provides all customers with an expanded range of channel choices to the extent that he/she can watch virtually anything that fits her/his individual interests.

Let us briefly deconstruct this commercial moment. This is no anonymous cable television subscriber answering the door. Rather, through the positioning of the camera, we, as individual members of the cable television audience, are invited to see ourselves as the subjects of Digital Dave's exhortations. This particular subject positioning establishes a personalized relationship with 'Dave' – as opposed to an objectified business relationship between a telecommunications company and a subscriber – that promises to provide us with a veritable bounty of customized television offerings in which we, the viewers, will have control over our media repertoires. In effect, we are witnessing a transference of power. No longer are we slaves to the meager offerings of three or four network broadcasters. Instead, we as individuals – not preconstituted audience aggregates – are free to roam the digital cableways in search of programming that speaks to our own subjective desires. If we wish to add Shaw's Internet package to our digital cable

service we will further accelerate our advance into the driver's seat of televisual control. Or will we?

What is interesting about the Shaw advertisement is the extent to which it corresponds with the central themes underlying current academic debates about the consequences of media convergence in the age of digital communications: namely, the propensity to personalize, individualize, and customize forms of electronic communications technology that were once seen to be the pre-eminent domain of large corporate or government institutions. Beginning in the late 1980s, media convergence became a hot topic in mass communications research. Much of the dialogue heralded the coming era of integrated computer, fibre optic, telephonic, and broadcast technologies. With the introduction of the personal computer and increased accessibility to the Internet – and what would become the World Wide Web in the early 1990s – technology proponents painted a picture of an environment in which so-called ordinary viewers would be able to circumvent the controls of the broadcast industry and produce their own television schedules while operating every conceivable household appliance with their television remote controls. Much early prognosticating about a future world of 'interactive television' depicted a utopian vision of audience empowerment in a highly technologically deterministic manner (see Negroponte 1995). The assumption was that because these new technologies offered two-way communication, audiences would no longer be passive in their viewing, but active in creating new media content.

What such arguments overlooked were the economic, social, and political contexts in which convergence was taking place; in particular, the moves towards deregulating media ownership structures and weakening anti-trust laws under the Reagan administration. The consequences of deregulation were evidenced by the rush by telephone companies to buy into the cable industry and the conglomeration of media outlets into horizontally integrated companies with holdings in every aspect of entertainment and news production as well as online Internet services. Today, six to eight corporations (depending on the merger and acquisition plays at any given moment) own most of the world's media and all have a vested interest in how convergence unfolds.

As of a few years ago, we entered the first generation of media convergence with the public introduction of interactive television. We are now in a relatively better position to question some of the arguments concerning power in the new media age. In this chapter, I discuss the patterns that are evolving in how media companies are taking

<sup>1</sup> Shaw Communications is one of the two largest cable operators in Canada and dominates most of the western region of the country.

advantage of the potential of two-way communication. I argue against the type of technological determinism that marked early predictions about the future of televisual communications technologies. The first section contextualizes interactive television (ITV) and explains how it operates as a surveillance technology. This is followed by an analysis of the larger implications of this new media form with a particular emphasis on its potential as a socially fragmenting force. The central argument is that rather than witnessing a revolutionary new phenomenon of empowerment, which is often the description of interactive television, we are in fact seeing television – as a consumerist medium – fulfilling its industry logic as a marketing platform. In brief, this essay evokes a more dystopian view of the social implications of interactive television, accentuating its capacity to accomplish unprecedented levels of surveillance of the domestic sphere with the goal of rendering audiences visible to advertising interests in ways that were previously impossible.

In this respect, interactive television can be seen as a component of the larger technological apparatus that Oscar Gandy calls the panoptic sort, to the extent that it 'involves the collection, processing, and sharing of information about individuals and groups that is generated through their daily lives ... and is used to coordinate and control their access to the goods and services that define life in the modern capitalist economy' (Gandy 1993: 15). This paper attempts to explicate how the companies behind interactive television seek to exploit their access to such information about the private sphere with the hope of encouraging members of the household to become complicit in their own disciplinary subjectification as units of consumption. It is important to note here that, contrary to utopian depictions of the possibility of a new electronic public sphere, corporate ambitions regarding ITV contribute to processes of exclusion and fragmentation as the goal is to invite only select individuals to participate fully in the world of the new and improved medium. These are people who already occupy positions of economic, social, and cultural privilege – the preferred targets of manufacturers and their advertising interests. Herein, ITV epitomizes the ways in which Gandy's panoptic sort operates as the ultimate *difference machine* (15).

### The Brave New World of ITV

What could sound crazier than someone saying 'I think my TV is observing me?' What could sound crazier than someone saying 'I think my TV is sending messages only meant for me?' (Burke 2000: 115)

At the most rudimentary level, interactive television is the integration of broadcasting and computer Internet capability through two-way communications via a set-top box connected by modem, cable, or satellite systems. At full capacity, ITV allows viewers to use e-mail, participate in Internet chat groups, play online video games, and/or shop while they watch television. One of its most significant features is that it allows audiences to personalize their television practices. Through the use of an electronic programming guide, viewers can set their systems to search and retrieve favourite shows or conduct searches for programs by certain directors or starring certain actors. All of this content can then be organized into a schedule customized for each individual to watch at his or her convenience rather than at the scheduled airing determined by a broadcast network.

The first step into the interactive field was the digital video recorder, now more commonly referred to as the personal video recorder (PVR), of which the two leading brands are TiVo and Replay. PVRs are set-top boxes that allow viewers to digitally record up to sixty hours of television programming. Sonic Blue, the company that developed Replay, recently increased its machine's capacity to 320 hours. Regardless of differences in storage capacity, both machines sell themselves on enabling viewers to create television 'wish lists' that allow them to create personalized television schedules, sometimes referred to as customized television 'channels.' Each machine is able to go one step further and actually anticipate viewers' preferences, based on their submitted profiles, and send back recordings of programs it 'thinks' the viewer would like. However, one of the dominant selling points of these PVRs has been the feature that allows viewers to skip past television commercials or avoid recording them altogether. Not surprisingly, these features have met with fury from the television industry as personalized schedules impede a television network's ability to offer a predicted audience to an advertiser at a set time. This is to say nothing of the commercial deletion feature, which makes the advertisement an uncertain venture regardless of when it is aired.

The apparent ability to circumvent the constraints of broadcast schedules and commercial appeals led to marketing discourse that paralleled that of the early work of researchers mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Namely, that media convergence, in the form of ITV, had ushered in a new era of viewer empowerment in which individuals would be able to navigate the airwaves free from broadcasters' attempts to direct their attention to specific media content or product promotions. The promotion of an intangible bounty of social goods to

be garnered from these new technologies is epitomized in a recent book by satellite and Internet marketer Phillip Swann (2000: 11): 'Companies are spending billions of dollars to develop new digital set-top boxes that will scratch your every itch and satisfy your every desire. These new boxes will make your life more convenient, more fun, and, in many ways, more enriching. They will take you on adventures of the mind, bring you closer to friends and loved ones, perhaps even give you a greater sense of control and self-esteem. They will change your life in ways you can barely imagine.'<sup>2</sup> Here, again, we are told of the ethereal wonders wrought by technological progress, but we are not given any indication of how such technologies are becoming structured according to the economic logic of capital. Indeed, if people were to follow Swann's polemic they could not be criticized for believing that the industries involved in ITV were actually charitable technocrats working to establish a liberatory electronic public sphere. However, a different story unfolds when we examine the current industry battles to control the structural environment of PVRs and ITV.

In an effort to regain control over the commercial television arena, the major motion picture studios and broadcast networks have brought their grievances against PVRs to the courtroom. Sonic Blue has been named the defendant in a number of lawsuits alleging the company violates copyright laws by allowing viewers to create personalized, time-shifted television menus. The plaintiffs further argue that people who watch television without commercials are in fact stealing. In the words of Jamie Kellner, chairman and CEO of Turner Broadcasting: 'It's theft. Your contract with the network when you get the show is you're going to watch the [commercial] spots' (Vikman 2002). The other major PVR player, TiVo, has sought to avoid these problems by not activating the commercial-deletion option in its machine and, moreover, by developing what it calls 'advertainment' – ten-minute spots

2 Swann's book is a rather interesting piece of promotional literature for the ITV industry. Of the ten chapters and 126 pages extolling the wonders of interactive television, only three pages address the negative aspects of the surveillance potential of new media technologies. Here Swann admits that 'the television networks and ITV companies will know nearly everything about you' (123) and quotes a WebTV executive who acknowledges that the company has a 'department that does nothing but look at the information' (124). Swann implies, nonetheless, that these problems will be minimal as it will be in the companies' best interests to assure their customers of privacy protection. The argument corresponds closely with economic perspectives that assert that the market will always correct itself to achieve profits efficiently.

that promote movies (through trailers and actor interviews) and other products offered to targeted viewers (Smallman 2002). This is the point where we see the initial incursions into surveillance practices. Because of the two-way capabilities of the technology, these companies are able to monitor every move an individual makes with a remote control – what was selected, replayed, fast-forwarded, paused, and/or deleted. That information, in addition to records of audience wish lists, allows for profiling and research that can then be sold to advertising interests. In fact, this is exactly what TiVo did during the 2001 Superbowl. The company documented which plays were most frequently rewound and which commercials received the most viewing time and were replayed the most often. Pepsi Co. must have been happy to find that its Britney Spears commercials received more instant replays than the game itself, as TiVo discovered through monitoring a sample of 10,000 of its viewers. In fact, all of the results of this surveillance activity were sold to interested businesses through TiVo's marketing department ('Britney Rules' 2002). It is access to this type of audience information that makes Hollywood's claims against Sonic Blue of copyright infringement and commercial theft appear particularly disingenuous. Firstly, the standard videocassette recorder (VCR) allows for time-shifted viewing and fast forwarding through any television commercial, albeit not at the speed or automated level provided by PVRs. Second, the plaintiffs against Sonic Blue are asking (as a form of reward against damages) that the type of subscriber information sold by TiVo's manufacturers also be made available from Replay's owners (Willey 2002). Sonic Blue's steadfast refusal to violate the privacy of its subscribers underlines that corporate policy – not innate technological capabilities – will, in the end, determine where power lies in the age of media convergence.

PVRs are, however, merely the first foray into the new media domain because they lack the Internet and computer interfaces that are a vital component of interactive television. ITV is truly where it all comes together – the ability, as mentioned earlier, to surf the Web while customizing your own television schedule, electronically chatting with friends and fan groups while simultaneously shopping or banking online, makes ITV participants completely transparent to those who want to sell them products and services. This ability to visualize or 'know' the audience has always been a paramount concern of television broadcasters and advertisers. The history of the relationship between audience measurement companies, such as A.C. Nielsen, and the broadcast networks is a series of attempts to know what types of people are

watching which types of programming and when. These attempts began with early research methods such as phoning a sample of (preferred) households after specific shows were aired to ask people if they had watched the broadcast and retained any memories of content and corresponding advertisements. The limited information garnered through this episodic tracking was superseded by efforts to measure longitudinal viewing habits through the use of media diaries, whereby people were asked to track and record their weekly television viewing over the course of a month or two. The diary system proved particularly problematic as research companies determined that people lied about their viewing habits for fear of stigmatization. For example, rather than admitting to being an avid soap opera fan, an individual was likely to skew diary entries towards public broadcasting programs or news and educational shows. Consequently, concerted efforts were invested in developing audience surveillance technologies that could be placed, as unobtrusively as possible, in people's living rooms. An early example is Nielsen's 'people metre,' a device in which every member of a household would 'press-in' his/her identifying information when watching television. Measurement problems arose here as people would often forget, or neglect, to log in after turning on their television or they would leave the room without turning off their set, thus measuring the viewing patterns of an empty room. As a result, infrared and heat-seeking machines were developed to register when an actual body was sitting in front of the television. As anecdotal evidence has it, Nielsen measured the viewing repertoires of many household pets through this device.<sup>3</sup> In recent years Nielsen and other companies such as Arbitron have provided select households with packages that allow them to scan their groceries' barcodes and record television activities in the hopes of gleaning that most desired portrait: the link between the types of programs watched and actual consumption patterns.

These forms of audience measurement, and the entire television ratings system, are largely defensive mechanisms on the part of network executives to produce and schedule programs that they can sell to advertisers based upon serving up a *construction* of the audience for their products. In brief, it is a type of risk management that transforms

3 See Ang (1996) for an examination of some of these audience measurement techniques and for an excellent analysis of the problem with 'constructing' and 'measuring' audiences in general.

'the audience' into a commodity. Today, ITV solves many of the problems of audience measurement and goes beyond market researchers' wildest dreams to the extent that they can surreptitiously enter people's homes and watch them through the electronic hearth. Here is how it works. With the convergence of the Internet, personal computing, and broadcasting, software and hardware companies are developing desktop configurations for our television screens that invite us to 'log on' every time we choose to watch television. The enticement to do so is based on the ability to personalize our viewing through the use of the aforementioned electronic program guide (EPG). Once the individual is verified, his/her own EPG will process and provide him/her with the preferred content based on actual and anticipated wish lists. This single feature is paramount as the personalization of content opens the door to the advertiser's most desired strategy: one-to-one targeted marketing.

Logging on also allows the ITV subscriber to use e-mail and instant messaging to chat with other people watching the same program – all of which is observable to the service provider. Such electronic conversations provide instantaneous feedback about responses, or lack thereof, to any television program or advertisement. Moreover, just as the cookie system in web surfing is used to track the sites an individual visits on the Internet, such clickstream monitoring of ITV activity (and particularly that which involves online purchasing) provides the service provider with a composite profile of television surfing and consumption. The potential audience surveillance is seen as so promising that software developers have joined forces with market researchers and advertisers to develop both the systems and content that will allow for the embedding of the sales pitch in any television segment. Some of the largest companies, such as Synergy and Claritas, are developing both tele-surveys that develop psychographic audience profiles as well as online video games that construct scenarios in such a manner that an individual's personality and motivations – it is hoped – will be revealed with every manoeuvre made in the game (Burke 2000). Interactive advertising is also being market tested whereby icons appear during programs that allow viewers to click on an image and 'learn' more about a product. An example of this is Dove Cove, brought to us by the soap manufacturer Unilever, in which the viewer enters a virtual world designed to resemble a health spa or 'sanctuary' and then moves through rooms that, as one marketer explains, 'encapsulates them in the brand' (Burke 2000: 23). Throughout these 'visits,' viewers leave an electronic trail that links them identifiably with their subscriber information.

According to Josh Bernoff, an analyst with Forrester Research, the effectiveness of such interactive advertising far exceeds the current commercial-break model: 'With an interactive ad, when people respond to it, you have a name and an address and a lead that is 100 times more valuable than an impression to a marketer' (Cooper 2000). By way of example, Bernoff points to the success of a recent venture by a San Francisco company that aired an interactive Domino's Pizza commercial during a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* marathon. Of the estimated 1,000 ITV subscribers who saw the commercial, 220 'clicked' for further information and 140 homes ordered a pizza (Cooper 2000).

These, however, are early stages in the development of ITV. Industry members are currently working to exploit the possibilities of customized television to bring every individual their own personalized advertising and program content. The vision here is such that people living on the same street, and even in the same house, will be sent different advertisements, customized news broadcasts and, perhaps, even different endings to their favourite shows based on the psychographic and demographic data they have either intentionally or unknowingly sent to their service provider. The future scenario predicted by people working on ITV is one in which we will all be able to 'click' on the shift of our favourite television character and have it immediately sent to our homes as the service will already have our credit card numbers and addresses stored on the central network (Roman 2002). Development of the technology proceeds apace as artificial intelligence and neural network software are also being incorporated so that our televisions will soon adapt to our lifestyles over time. Here, our options to use 'commercial-deletion' options will be circumvented as our consoles will enable personalized advertisements to follow us from one channel to another until we can no longer avoid them (Burke 2000). These interactive features are marketed to the public as ones of convenience and, somewhat misleadingly, as empowerment and content control. Little, however, is mentioned about how personal information is gathered or how it is used. Even less is told to the public about how we are encouraged to become complicit in our own transformation into all-consuming individuals. On the other hand, these processes are discussed at great length within the interactive marketing industries: 'In direct marketing, you make a spear, hunt down the consumer you want, and impale him. In brand advertising, you make a really, really sharp spear, chuck it into a crowd of consumers and hope it impales as many as possible. With online marketing you make a spear and invite the consumer to come

and impale himself' (Rishad Tobaccowalla of Giant Step – interactive marketing in Burke 2000: 71).

Tobaccowalla's comments illustrate the marketing world's changing conceptualizations of the relationship between consumers and product promotion in the age of digital, interactive media forms. As McAllister and Turow (2002) underline, this contemporary emphasis on *synergistic marketing communication* – 'the use of multiple media channels and publicity methods to sell products, services, and ideas' – combined with digital media, should be examined within the 'overarching hallmark of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the commercialization of society' (507 and 508). Indeed, current strategies to accelerate ITV's capacity as a synergistic marketing medium, sine qua non support of McAllister and Turow's assertions about the reach and intensification of consumer culture into all facets of social life. Here, an examination of the central players in ITV provides us with an initial glimpse as to how this potential can be realized.

It will probably come as no surprise that America Online (AOL) and Microsoft Corp. are the major ITV actors in North America, with AOLTV and MSNtv (formerly WebTV and Ultimate TV, respectively). Media mogul Rupert Murdoch is the central ITV force in Europe and much of Asia with his Sky TV and Star TV satellite services. AOLTV appears to have the current advantage in the North American market because of its existing Internet subscriber base and its takeover of Time Warner – a move that provides the company with one of the world's largest libraries of programming. In their efforts to capitalize on the commercial marketing potential of ITV, both AOLTV and MSNtv have been frustrated by the public's slow adoption rate of ITV. This fact has largely been attributed to the high cost of the requisite hardware in combination with subscription rates. MSNtv, for example, has found it difficult to pass the one million subscription mark and, according to interactive marketers, advertisers will not come fully on board until they can be guaranteed a threshold of two million viewers (Ford 2000). Consequently, North America's largest ITV companies have lobbied ardently to advance the switchover date of the industry standard from analogue to digital, which is scheduled for 2006 in the United States, 2008 in Canada, and anywhere between 2006 and 2010 in Britain (Roman 2002; Howe 2001). It is believed that once the necessary digital foundation is firmly established, people will become rapidly accustomed to the increased capacity of 'new' television and, from there, move comfortably into complete interactivity.

These lobby efforts have initiated an outcry on the part of privacy interest groups, including EPIC and the Center for Digital Democracy, which have called for immediate legislation of the new technologies in light of early practices by ITV companies. For example, every night MSNtv downloads the viewing practices of its subscribers for analysis and it is conceivable that the company is using this data as a pilot study for the future development of ITV and streamlined marketing strategies. According to the company's own public relations material, these new technologies 'enable faster and better decision-making through an innovative data warehouse that aggregates and stores information on all user activity [and provides] rich personalization and targeting of content and ads to consumers based on their television viewing and Web surfing histories and preferences' (EPIC 2001).

ITV companies have countered their critics and defended their practices by stating that they are in compliance with industry privacy regulations stipulated under the 1984 *Cable Communications Policy Act*, whereby cable operators must receive informed written consent from subscribers before they are able to collect or use any data that could identify any individual personally (Benner 2001). Herein, MSNtv and AOLTV emphasize that their subscribers must knowingly 'opt in' and agree to have their personal data used. This adherence to existing legislation that governs the cable industry – and not specifically satellite or other ITV modes of delivery – provides a measure of defence against those who would argue that broader policies must be developed to expand privacy protection beyond cable companies alone. In this regard, MSNtv and AOLTV are not, in fact, bound in any way by the *Cable Communications Policy Act*. And, despite their claims to respect privacy, these companies have sought to circumvent the issue through their assertion that they are only studying data provided by 'anonymous' individuals and general profile information provided by the subscribers who use the personalized features of their ITV service.

They are also continuously looking for incentives to encourage customers to opt in and assent to the collection of personal information. The most coercive practice in this regard is that of negative billing on the part of Rupert Murdoch's SKY TV, wherein subscribers are charged £248 if they refuse to activate the interactive features of their satellite service (Burke 2000).

MSNtv and AOLTV have taken an alternative route and chosen to entice viewers by pitching the features requiring surveillance as so attractive that viewers would be silly not to want to participate. The

customized electronic programming guide is a case in point. Another means to opening the door to surveilling the private sphere is to target the group which is both one of the most desirable demographic groups as well as one of the most willing to surrender personal information: children and teenagers. Marketers are well aware that young people feel little compunction about divulging household details, particularly in exchange for coupons for toy discounts or free promotional offers (Burke 2000). If the price benefits exceed the costs of information exchange, parents will be more amenable to filling out surveys and thereby providing the requisite permission needed for children under the age of thirteen to participate in the data-mining process.

Microsoft, in particular, has shown a heightened awareness of the consumer power of children, especially in their ability to pressure their parents to purchase almost any conceivable product, and has engaged in broader marketing strategies to ensure that young people continue to be socialized in the world of television and interactive technologies. In 1997, the computer software giant introduced its ActiMate line of toys: dolls, based on characters from popular children's television programs, that are equipped with computer chips that allow them to interact with children while they watch the series on television. Interactive Barney, PBS's purple dinosaur and guru of love and kindness, launched the ActiMate line and was called the 'breakout hit' of the year by Consumer Reports (Behrens 1998). At its functional level, Interactive Barney is pitched as an educational toy and viewing buddy that will 'say' approximately seventeen phrases without its interactive software but increase its vocal and entertainment capacity substantially when the purchaser adds a television adapter pack (sold separately, of course). The adapter activates the embedded chip that allows Barney to interact with his television program and sing, play games, and say such things as: 'I like watching television with you.' However, Barney only remains interactive as long as the child remains within a specified radius of the television set. To exit the televisual realm is to lose what one person has intimated is a 'magical' relationship with the stuffed animal (Cassels in Behrens 1998).

In critical theories of consumer culture, goods have long been said to act as magical totems for a host of human bonds, from group belonging to love itself. In the case of the ActiMates, we see yet another corporate attempt to fetishize a product to the extent that children view not only Interactive Barney but also television as a friend. Thus, at the social level, Microsoft's ActiMates are a means to ensure that children not

only grow up encircled by interactive media but do so in such a way that they are comfortably domesticated within a televisual apparatus that seduces them with the discourses of consumer happiness. If interactive television increases, exponentially, your 'power' to choose among a bounty of offerings from your televisual friend, why would you need to look elsewhere for personal fulfillment? While this is a heavy-handed statement, it is intended to provoke us to muse about the larger social and cultural implications of interactive television. ITV is a unique surveillance technology in that it enters into the heart of the private sphere: the home. As with all forms of surveillance, privacy is an issue of concern in the new media age. However, the emphasis on privacy issues, in both popular and policy discourses, detracts our attention from the broader societal and economic dimensions of ITV's potential impact; in particular, ITV's propensity to contribute to far greater social fragmentation along class, gender, and ethnic lines combined with the desire of its makers to intensify the use of personal information to solidify the foundations of consumer society. It is to these concerns that the concluding section turns.

### Questions of Power in the Age of Interactive Television?

The boob tube is dead; the future is all about smart, personalized television ... The point is: This is an industry that's always been changed and impacted by new technologies that have consistently made it better for viewers and a more powerful economic engine for business.

Stacy Joina, Chief Programming Officer, TiVo (in O'Leary 2000).

Joina's statement is telling in two respects. First it echoes the more utopian depictions of media convergence by those working on issues of new communications technologies: a win-win situation for audiences who will cast aside the shackles of the network (and, for that matter, neo-network) age. Second, it is somewhat contradictory as it points to simultaneous revolution and continuity in television; namely, that television has long been a powerful engine for business. The two need not be mutually exclusive but they are not easily reconcilable either. Business concerns, through ownership structures and advertising pressures, have consistently operated as constraints on the creative process of storytelling in the private television sector. Issues of social representation through the construction and depiction of race, class, gender, and sexuality in both news and entertainment programming have always

been bound by the bottom line: the perceived need to play to imagined 'middle-of-the-road' audiences in ways that would not offend their prevailing sensibilities and particularly not those of advertisers.

Indeed, private television has long been referred to as the 'sponsor's medium,' a term harking back to the days when the new medium transplanted the structure of the radio series/serials in which product companies owned the programs aired. With almost unlimited script control, these organizations used programs as showcases for their goods with the hope that the content would correspond with the rhythms of emergent middle-class, suburban domestic life and consumption patterns. The soap opera is, of course, the ultimate example. The symbiotic relationship between corporate America and the television industry did not change drastically after the quiz show scandals of the 1950s forced the FCC to investigate standard operating procedures in the Big Three networks: ABC, NBC, CBS.<sup>4</sup>

The abolishment of the single-sponsor production system and the subsequent move to licensed network programming and the thirty-second commercial did not substantially alter the perception that television programs should still be produced with the advertisement in mind. Programs that promoted idealized portrayals that supported the ideological narratives of modernity still dominated prime time schedules in order to provide preferred audiences with images of the good life to which they were encouraged to aspire. Today, we only have to watch an episode of *Friends* to see the process at work. Where else but on television would we find a group of young, beautiful, white people who, despite being chronically under- or unemployed, lived in spacious New York City apartments and set the standard of fashion for dress and hairstyles in North America for over a decade? Indeed, programs that spoke to the experiences of those living in the margins of economic,

4 In the 1950s, quiz shows such as *Twenty-One* and *The \$64,000 Question* were among the most popular programs on network television. Sponsors, such as Revlon cosmetics, saw the potential to link their products in idealized ways to preferred winning contestants – notably, people who they wanted their customers to aspire to emulate. Consequently, the sponsors pressured producers to rig the shows so that the select contestants would continue to win as long as they were seen as beneficial to product sales. Not surprisingly, contestants who failed to measure up as idealized representatives for the sponsor's products (attractiveness, class, and ethnicity all playing roles herein) were set up to lose. When the FCC began investigations into the 'quiz show scandals,' it was not because of concerns over representational issues. Rather, there was a concern that television was too central to public dialogue and political participation to be seen as a dishonest medium.

political, and cultural power were rarely popular with network executives seeking to sell airtime to advertisers who wanted to promote a 'happy, buying, mood' among targeted audiences who were already incorporated, to some extent, into those spheres of power. This is the synoptic phase of television – where the many watch the few – and the broadcast industry, in concert with marketing interests, has long desired to move towards the panoptic where they, the few, can watch us, the many. ITV brings the synoptic and the panoptic together in ways that may not operate in our best interests as citizens as opposed to consumers, which is how these industries would like to position us.

As Turov (1997) underlines, it is important to distinguish between 'society-making media' and 'segment-making media,' because form contributes to the structure of content and the degree to which any medium can attempt to create a public rather than a market. ITV is a segment-making media as its panoptic capabilities change the primary mode of address to audiences whereby we become an aggregate of individuals as opposed to a public of citizens. This is a fundamental change in television: even in the days of traditional commercial programming, when audiences were segmented in the minds of marketers, they still experienced the televisual address of a public. Drawing on the work of John Dewey and his statement that society exists through a communication, many media scholars examined television through a 'ritual' perspective where the medium was regarded as an electronic public sphere (albeit imperfect and marked by relations of power) or virtual space where viewers would encounter issues and people that they might otherwise never come to know (e.g., Carey 1989). Television began to lose much of its ritualistic capacity during the neo-network era, when the proliferation of cable and pay channels expanded the number of channels and executives and advertisers initiated narrow-casting strategies. However, the potential for any form of televisual public space vanishes completely in the age of interactive television where all programs and commercials can be customized to our individual interests and desires. It is the ultimate difference machine, if we again invoke Gandy's words, because it only speaks to those who serve its interests and excludes others who are already socially marginalized or deemed demographically undesirable. Moreover, by personalizing our televisual worlds, ITV ensures that we need never come into contact with those who differ from us. We never have to see images that diverge from our view of society. By isolating us, political and commer-

cial interests can tell each individual what she or he wants to hear and collective debate and action could very well become the casualties of media convergence.

These, I argue, are the imperative issues to consider in examining ITV and they are the ones that most often become subsumed by the emphasis on privacy as currently conceptualized in many examinations of surveillant technologies. Privacy is, indeed, important. It is not difficult to imagine our interactive practices of television viewing and websurfing being placed under scrutiny to determine whether we are international security risks or credit or health risks and, thus, need to be monitored accordingly. However, on a quotidian level, ITV is evolving into an integrated marketing technology concerned not with who we are as embodied individuals, but rather with establishing classificatory categories that can be profiled for the purposes of selling products. MSNtv is not interested in Mary or Bob as people who hold abstract hopes and dreams about philosophical concerns but, rather, as Individual A and Individual B whose hopes and dreams can be translated and exploited for sale. In this regard, my thoughts on ITV correspond with Lyon's (2001: 17) depiction of the disappearing body within surveillant practices and technologies: 'The fiction that the inside of a home is a haven from outside demands and pressures is subverted by the ways in which electronic devices take data into and out of the house, sometimes without our knowledge. Even our bodies, often thought in modern times to be our "own," and thus private, become a source of surveillance data. Paradoxically, the embodied person is still not in view. Only the image or the trace counts. The disappearing body makes an exclusive focus on privacy less salient to surveillance.' It is for these reasons that the larger social implications of ITV become paramount when we examine the medium's surveillance components in relation to the marketing discourses that hail a revolutionary new technology.

As I argued at the outset of this chapter, ITV is best described as television that has fulfilled its logic as a medium of consumption rather than as a rupture in the fabric of the industry. As Kim (2001) astutely explains, every technology is subject to an organizing ideology that governs the way in which its industry leaders will guide its development, and interactive television, structurally, differs little from traditional television beyond increased program choice and the technology's capacity to monitor its audiences. This stands in stark relief to the arguments of a revolutionary moment for newly empowered audiences

and brings into question the conceptualization of power itself. If we follow Foucault's reasoning that power and resistance are mutually constitutive, we can see that the resistance of the ITV viewer is pragmatically located within the realm of 'choice' (increased channel capacity and personalized viewing options), while the power to establish the parameters of decision making remains on the side of industries who produce the content and monitor the choices made for instrumental purposes: 'The proliferation of new technologies ... and the ever greater range of specialized audiences is creating an image world which seems to suggest that 'there is something for everyone's taste' - a delirium of consumer sovereignty and unlimited choice ... The discourse of choice is a core element of that legitimization. Seen this way, the figure of the "active audience" has nothing to do with "resistance," but everything to do with incorporation: the imperative of choice *interpellates* the audience as "active" (Aug 1996: 12). Choice of not unlimited options, indeed, is not synonymous with the control of the means and modes of production; and to the extent that ITV viewers remain receivers of programs, rather than producers of content, the celebration of a newly empowered audience in the making appears premature. Rather, power, when defined as the power of representation or the power of information gathering, remains in the hands of industry. We agree to become transparent in exchange for the appearance of choice. In other words, ITV - in its present configuration - remains business as usual only more so.

Is this, however, what people truly want? Have we seen the end of watercooler television shows or debates about the political bias in news programming? Would we be happier to dwell in our own private, customized televisual worlds of consumption? It is too soon to predict the future of ITV but it is important to initiate the dialogue on the role it will play in the social sphere. Early studies show that many people are reluctant to integrate their televisions with their PCs as the first is associated with entertainment and relaxation while the latter defines the world of work (Stipp 1998; Stewart 1999). However, members of the ITV industries have time on their side and can afford to be patient. The next generation that will drive the market is one which is increasingly comfortable with multi-tasking their technologies and can move fluidly between the information and entertainment aspects of the digital world. Interactivity is something they have grown to expect and following shortly behind will be their younger sisters and brothers who, perhaps, were 'friends' with Interactive Barney.

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