


**A History of Popular Culture**  
More of Everything, Faster and Brighter

Second edition

**Raymond F. Betts with Lyz Bly**

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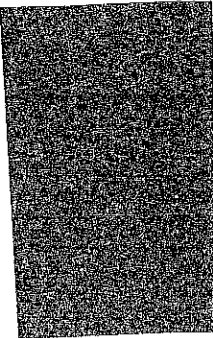
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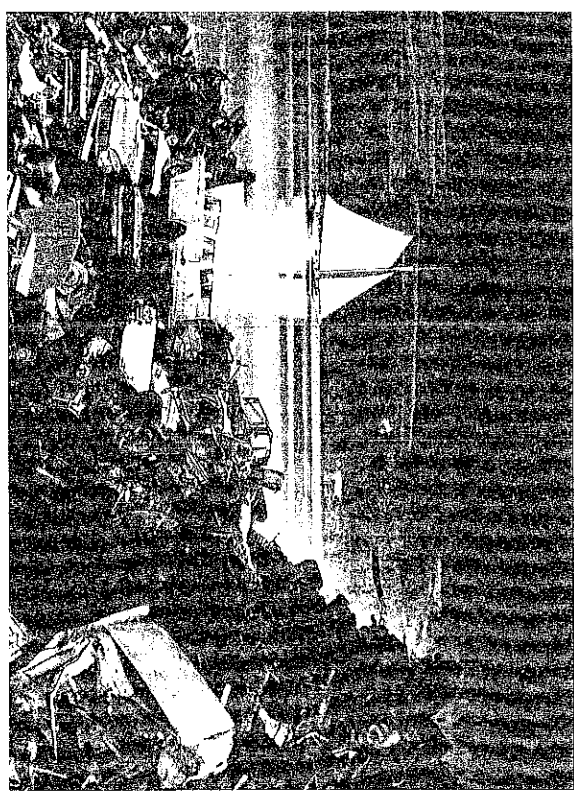
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To the Many Students We Have Taught and  
Who in Turn Have Taught Us



## 7 The unintended outcomes

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The world of waste: the sloop *Cleanwater*, built to promote the anti-pollution cause, sails down the Hudson River past a junkyard in Newburgh, New York State, on its way to attend an Earth Day event in 1970 (© Bettmann/CORBIS)

Some measure of the enormity of unintended outcomes of contemporary popular culture was the “10-mile-wide flotilla” of six million plastic bags found floating in the Pacific Ocean in 2002. Fallen from a container ship, the bags became a vast pollutant instead of packaging for purchases at fast-food restaurants in California (Hayden 2002: 58). Many of the institutions, instruments and practices that have defined contemporary popular culture have led to questionable, even disastrous effects, such as this one. Automobile accident and their resulting deaths are daily news in most countries. Air pollution and the profligate use of non-renewable resources have given rise to new agencies of protest, like the Green Party in Germany and the Sierra Club in the United States. In the “throw-away” economy, waste management has ironically become a new growth industry in most of the developed world. Critics have urged a shift to a sustainable economy or what Worldwatch has called a “reuse/recycle economy” (website “Worldwatch” 1998: 1).

The issue has become more acute in the last two decades with the emergence of IT (information technology) where the rapidity of advance quickly makes products obsolescent.

### E-waste

In 2003, a baseball fan of a losing team reportedly threw a cell phone at the right fielder of the rival and winning team. This act was an unusual example of a common problem, ineffective e-waste management. That was one of about 55 million handsets discarded or recycled in the United States in 2003, a statistic that has nearly doubled within a decade, as 100 million mobile devices were replaced in 2011 (website “Recycling Programs” 2012). Recognizing the enormous problem globally, the major manufacturers of cell phones met in Basel, Switzerland in January 2003 and established the Initiative for a Sustainable Partnership on Environmentally Sound Management of End-of-Life Mobile Phones. The title is long for a problem aggravated by the product’s short life. Currently, cell phones become obsolete in less than a year, outmoded by new models ever more appealing in their range of features.

In 1997, according to an American Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report, e-waste in general – television sets, computers and cell phones – amounted to 3.2 million tons annually. Similar statistics representing similar waste management problems for products ranging from toys to cars could be easily mustered. Few are the items like the 1975 Barbie doll and the well-kept 1935 Ford Phaeton that have gained new value as collectibles or antiques.

### Plastics

In the film that launched the remarkable career of Dustin Hoffman, *The Graduate* (1967), one of the older business types at the family graduation party offers quick professional advice to the young Princeton graduate whom Hoffman plays. "Plastics!" he whispers. Plastic products are basic in our throw-away society in which novelty, convenience and pleasure bear brand names printed on plastic bags and Styrofoam containers that are quickly and often randomly discarded. Plastic contains much of popular culture: it records its music and videos; it facilitates the serving of fast food, it rings in the proverbial six-pack; it forms much of the automobile body, it holds groceries and serves, almost ironically, as the material of garbage cans and their liners.

Used plastic containers form part of the worldwide litter scene, found in the aisles of American movie theaters, in barbed-wire residential fences in Kenya, among the hedgerows of England and France, and in street gutters just about everywhere. In the United States, the adopt-a-highway project has volunteers cleaning up the debris cast out of car windows. In a recent act intended to have dramatic effect, the Irish government has imposed a 13-cent use tax on each plastic shopping bag.

Such litter has debased the current coastal scene. On the beaches and in the water, ingested by sea life and found ensnaring the necks of porpoises and seagulls, it has replaced the traditional flotam of seaweed, driftwood, rope and cork that marked the passage of ships in the age of sail. The worst effects have been in the Caribbean and the Inside Passage of Alaska where cruise ships have caused major environmental problems, not surprising in view of the 200 or so cruises each month in the Caribbean and the estimate that each cruise passenger produces onboard between five and six times the waste that he or she produces when at home.

The MARPOL international convention of 1973, established "to eliminate the pollution of the sea" caused by the discharge of toxic materials, contained a clause that specified the North Sea and "the wider Caribbean" as "special areas" requiring more severe limitations on the discharge of ship-generated waste. Violations of the terms of this convention and ones established by the United States for its coastal waters led to 87 law suits against cruise lines between 1993 and 1998.

To this particular instance of water pollution, now being addressed by the cruise lines through refined onboard processing of waste material, may be added the pollution of streams, lakes and rivers as sites for waste discharge. In

the more developed nations, largely responsible for this problem, strict environmental laws have assured much clean-up (fishing is again now possible in the Great Lakes and the River Thames, for instance).

While much of this material, like parts of the cell phone and the plastic supermarket bag, is recyclable, the waste management problem is aggravated by the waste products not yet disposed of. Again, the EPA estimates that three-quarters of all the computers sold in the United States have simply been joined in garages, cellars and attics as new models have been purchased. Ten million meet this fate annually in the United States; even in Poland, where an automobile's on-the-road existence is ten to fifteen years long, some 500,000 automobiles are annually junked. The Germans are the most successful in recycling parts: 85 percent of parts from their junked automobiles are used again, as compared to 75 percent in the United States. Still, the remaining amount ends up in domestic landfills, a highly undesirable but growing landscape feature.

The major concern in all recycling efforts is what is called source reduction. The focus is not so much on disposal of waste but on reducing the quantity, by less wasteful use of materials, of which packaging is the most obvious. With the growth of air freight and the introduction of e-commerce, standardized and durable packaging has become the norm, making the tote and string bag of earlier days now just a relic. To reduce the one-time use of packaging materials, the current goal in the European Union is to reach 90 percent use of recycled materials. To this end an "eco-label" in the shape of a daisy – and resembling the star cluster that is the symbol of the European Union – was devised and introduced in 1992 (TED 2003: 1).

### Noise

A serious issue is the noise that has accompanied the intensification of means of communication, except text messaging, of course. Noise pollution is the outcome. It has become an urban problem in which unwanted and intense sound disrupts daily living, generating stress and fatigue. Jet aircraft taking off have generated the most widely recognized noise problem. The situation in the area of Heathrow Airport, on the edge of London, where 461,000 airplanes annually take off and land, has not only disturbed the sleep of residents but disrupted schooling and led to learning impairment (website "Local Authorities Aircraft Noise Council" 2012). A similar result has been found for the areas surrounding O'Hare Airport in Chicago, where one teacher claimed that children just stopped listening every time a plane took off, on average every three minutes.

Schools and houses near Heathrow and O'Hare – along with houses in the flight pattern of San Francisco International Airport – have been sound-proofed with two layers of glass. Consequently, reducing the noise hazard leads to the environmentally problematic need for air-conditioning.

Whether along the once quiet banks of the Seine in Paris or on the streets of Rome, the automobile has polluted the world's urban environment. Its increase seemingly never-ending, road traffic pollutants by sheer numbers as well as noxious fumes and noise. In the United States, the steady stream of automobile noise on major roadways on the edge of residential districts has led to the introduction of sound walls, usually conspicuous and unattractive reinforced-concrete structures, found in almost all large American cities. Ohio and New Jersey experimented with "vegetative walls," high mounds of dirt and mulch, or berms, surmounted by tightly clustered trees and perennial flowers.

Car stereo systems and "boom boxes" (portable radios) force noise on everyone around. Of lesser volume, but no less noticeable, is now the disrupting effect of the cell phone. Its intensive use in cars has prompted concern about road safety, both because of the motorist's hand being off the steering wheel to hold the phone and the possible distraction from attention to the road that use of the phone may cause. Texting exacerbates an already dangerous situation, and in 2010 AT&T initiated a documentary on the perils of driving while texting featuring interviews with first responders to teen car accidents and friends of young people killed in texting-while-driving incidents. Ireland, Great Britain and Israel have banned phone use from moving cars, as has the state of New York; ironically, however, many states and municipalities passed laws early on banning cell phone use while driving, which did not portend the pervasiveness of the texting, which is often more distracting than talking. Moreover, cell phones are used in almost every social environment, and they have frequently elevated monologue to a disturbing form of theatrics. The sudden sound of someone speaking to an unseen and unheard party has a jarring effect and the sound of impoliteness.

Thus intrusive use of the cell phone has been banned in certain places, like theaters and libraries, where it would be very distracting. *Wired News* reported in its online issue of February 5, 2003 that the actor Kevin Spacey interrupted a stage performance to holler at a member of the audience whose cell phone was ringing: "Tell them you're busy." The *Sacramento Bee*, a California newspaper, carried an article on the subject in its online edition of April 6, 2003, in which a moviegoer complained that a person arriving late at the theater phoned the friends he was to have met as he walked down the aisle in order to determine where they were sitting.

### Light

In the last decades of the twentieth century, light pollution was added to the list of environmental hazards. The glitz of urban sites aglow from London to Las Vegas and on to Seoul, as well as the huge light pods for night sports events contribute to the problem. In response, organizations like the International Dark-Sky Association have appeared with the intention of arousing public concern about light pollution.

Major causes of light pollution are poorly designed public light fixtures but also include all-night gasoline stations, fast-food shops, motels and billboards. Such recreational activities as night baseball and tennis add to the problem and to the 25 percent of all electricity now directed to lighting. Cities in the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia have passed ordinances controlling night lighting.

### Land use

In 1994 the Disney Corporation proposed to build a new park, strictly historical in theme, called DisneyAmerica, in the vicinity of the Manassas National Battlefield Park, commemorating the opening battle of the Civil War. A coalition of academic historians and preservationists vigorously protested. Disney backed away; the theme park was not built. Less than ten years later, a golf course flanked by residences was being constructed on the same land.

This rather new relationship between sport and community, sharing land, is most obvious in the spread of golf communities in the United States. They have often become retirement communities, particularly as the "baby boomers" are retiring and wish a more relaxing combination of residence and activity. As the online explanation of DC Ranch in Scottsdale, Arizona, put it, "this golf community is a connected community focussed on the neighborhood" (website "az-golfhomes" 2003, n.p.). Golf communities are found in Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Spain and Australia, some suggestion of the growing popularity of this residential form.

More dramatic has been the new shift on the ski slopes of Colorado. As the ski resort business has declined – because of several seasons with poor weather conditions and an aging population that skis less – the large corporate interests that control these resorts have made their major business into real-estate development. "In the process" wrote one critic, "the sport of skiing morphed from a more or less environmentally outdoor experience into a destructive, extractive industry" (Clifford 2003: 35). This means the cutting down of forest areas, the disruption of wildlife and the intensifying use of natural resources like water.

Similar concern has been expressed worldwide over the appearance of shopping centers and "big boxes," the sort of structure found in supermarkets such as the mega-corporation Wal-Mart. In the United States, such development has caused a dramatic shift in commerce from city centers to the suburbs, or to major highway junctions where land is available at cheaper rates. Elsewhere, there is growing concern that the American pattern will be replicated, particularly in Eastern Europe. There, the shift from a state-controlled economy to a market one has made visible not only the consumer goods hitherto denied but also something of the consumer attitude prevalent in the United States. In 2003 Viktor Trebicky of the Institute for Environmental Policy in Prague, Czech Republic said, "We are making the mistakes

the West made 20 years ago." His colleague Eva Krutzikova said that the new availability of consumer goods has made any discussion of a sustainable economy difficult (Maher 2003: 2). While Wal-Mart has not yet made a foray into the Czech Republic, as of 2012 4,068 of the company's big box stores can be found across the globe in 14 countries including Mexico (1,479 stores), China (284 stores), Guatemala (164 stores), and most recently, India, which has one retail outlet.

There is, however, a choice irony in recent shopping mall development. It is the disillusionment with the idea of its founding genius Viktor Grünbaum, a Viennese who immigrated to the United States in the Nazi era and there changed his name to Victor Gruen. It was Gruen (see p. 125) who developed the first mall in Southdale Center, Minnesota in 1956. What he wished to do was provide the myriad suburbs appearing in the United States with a new core, a sort of encased downtown that would replicate the best features of that earlier urban form but with the convenience of proximity. Although the mall has become something of a surrogate gathering place that would encourage community, it remains primarily a shopping and entertainment place without the civic spirit Gruen had hoped to see flourish there. In a telling statement, he later remarked "I refuse to pay alimony for those bastard developments" (Uferth 2002: 3).

One wonders what Gruen would think of the newest iteration of shopping "communities" that are springing up throughout the US, with names like "Legacy Village" and "Crocker Park" in the Cleveland, Ohio Metropolitan Area and "Mountain Brook Village" and "Cahaba Village" near Birmingham, Alabama. These environments meld everyday living with conspicuous consumption as, particularly in the case of Cleveland's Crocker Park, people can live amid high-end chain stores such as Abercrombie and Fitch, Banana Republic, Barnes & Noble, and Urban Outfitters. Indeed, residents' lives become centered on consumption, as ordinary activities such as walking the dog puts them into the center of marketing and commerce – they leave their private spaces and enter into a fully commercialized space, manufactured as "neighborhood." Devoid of blemishes and authentic character, these sites epitomize what Jean Baudrillard described as "hyperreal," a space that is a map without a history, a "desert of the real itself" (website, "The Procession of the Simulacra" 2012).

Moreover Gruen would have found unpalatable the many food courts now located in the malls, bringing together many of the fast-food shops that once stood separately. Fast food, certainly one of the most prevalent and criticized popular cultural developments of the second half of the twentieth century, has become the center of a new global concern: obesity.

### Nutrition and obesity

In their quest to reach new or different demographics, marketing researchers have encouraged a new "prepubescent Pop" music for the 6–11 age group and are

also working on age-targeted food products. Appealing to the young, H. J. Heinz, the food company in Pittsburgh, gave ketchup a couple of new splashes of color a year ago by turning the tomato-red substance into purple and green. The young approved and so this year the company is trying to add color to french fries by introducing a Kool Blue variety. "We asked the kids what would make them want to eat more french fries," a company executive stated when Kool Blue and other french-fry varieties were announced (Spangler 2007: c2).

As the above remark suggests, American consumption of french fries dropped in 2001, the first time in over a decade. Analysts believe this is in part the result of consumer concern over fatty foods. Concern with obesity – with an estimated 17 percent of the young overweight – may be having some effect in the United States, but on the world scene obesity has become the ironic complement of starvation, in the major problem of malnutrition. A Worldwatch News Release stated in 2000: "For the first time in human history, the number of overweight people rivals the number of underweight people ... " (website "Worldwatch" 2002: 1). The World Health Organization, declaring that "obesity is one of "today's most blatantly visible yet most neglected public health problems," coined the word "globesity" to describe the condition (WHO 2003). In the US one in three people is obese and the increase in the use of corn syrup (an expensive sweetener made from corn, the biggest crop of US farms) has contributed to an epidemic of type-2 diabetes; as of 2011 26 million children and adults were living with the disease (website "New Diabetes Statistics Highlight Need for Prevention" 2012).

### Terrorism

Car bombing, aircraft hijacking, hostage-taking have become all too familiar news items. Their horrendous proportions were brought home to people in the United States on April 19, 1995 when the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was destroyed. The detonation of a bomb placed in a truck parked in front of the building killed 168 people. The explosion occurred at about 9:03 a.m. Ten minutes and several years later on the morning of September 11, 2001, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City; a fiery explosion of 12 tons of jet fuel. Less than a half-hour earlier American Airlines Flight 11 had struck the North Tower.

The destruction of the Murrah Federal Building was an act of domestic terrorism. The destruction of the two World Trade Center (WTC) towers was an act of international terrorism. Moreover, the terrorist organization held responsible for the New York tragedy (as well as a comparable act that heavily damaged the Pentagon in Washington on the same morning) is one with a loose network of cells in over 40 countries, an indication of frightening potential. The "terrorist spectacular," of which the destruction of the WTC complex is the most stunning example, is designed by its perpetrators to be a media spectacle.

The dramatic horror the terrorist inflicts can be quickly and vividly displayed on television screens because of the ubiquity and portability of television equipment. Accordingly, tens, even hundreds of millions of viewers become eyewitnesses to the tragedy, even though they are elsewhere in reality. Even more than eyewitnesses, they are repeat viewers of the act as it is projected over and over again. The crash of United Airlines Flight 175 into the South Tower vividly recorded on videotape, was shown repeatedly on every American television network as well as around the world on that fateful day.

Acts of terrorism are that: crude, cruel acts of the theater of the horrendous, Grand Guignol expressed at its worst. They become most spectacular when they are most horrendous. The day-long television coverage of the destruction of the twin WTC towers is the dreadful proof of the compelling force of the dreadful relationship. "For hijackers, hijacking television is usually part of their plan" wrote the senior news commentator Daniel Shorr (Shorr 2001: 11, section 1). Television assures a multiplier effect, an extension and a prolonging of the act, a deepening of its impact on the viewing public. In a not dissimilar way, the creator of the crime may move from elusive figure on the scene to celebrity on the screen (Gabler 1998: 181). Seen by few in life, Mohammed Atta, believed to be the key figure in the September 11 bombings, now joins Osama Bin Laden, Timothy McVeigh, and others before him whose images fascinate as their crimes repel. Notoriety is just the dark side of celebrity.

Yet terrorism thrives more often on personal anonymity. For the perpetrator, the cause, not the person is important. The shrouded or unseen attacker is as anonymous as is his or her victim. "It wasn't a personal vendetta," commented a Palestinian terrorist who had wounded an American in Israel. "It was public relations. It was like telling the media to pay attention to us," he said in conversation with an American journalist (Blumenthal 2002: 38).

Almost twelve thousand terrorist acts were recorded between 1981 and 2002. Among them were 182 airplane hijackings in 50 countries, in which many of the passengers were tourists. Since the 9/11 attacks, numerous acts of terror varying in range of casualties, method, and purpose have been committed. Some of the more horrific include the October 26, 2002 hostage taking and attempted rescue in a theater in Moscow, Russia, which resulted in 170 deaths (including the 41 terrorists), and, more recently, the March 11, 2004 bombing of four trains in Madrid, Spain, where 191 people were killed, the October 28, 2009 bombing at a marketplace in Pakistan, which took 118 lives, and the October 2, 2006 school shooting at the Amish-run West Nickel Mines School in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where 10 girls aged 6 to 12 were tied up and shot by Charles Carl Roberts, who then shot himself (five girls were murdered). The latter case reveals the complexities involved in defining terrorism; some scholars assert that the Roberts case is one of misogyny as terrorism (website "Global Terrorism" 2012).

There is not even an approximate figure for the muggings and thefts of tourists, so commonplace have they become and so unlikely of solution that many are not even reported, much less defined as terrorism. Tourists have been hijacked, kidnapped and killed for personal gain and for political retaliation. One of the most dreadful incidents reported by Reuters as occurring between 1992 and 1997 took place in Egypt. The terrorist organization al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya on November 17, 1997 carried out a devastating act in which 59 tourists and 4 Egyptian guides were killed by 6 gunmen who also soon lost their lives at Karnak. The radical group which perpetrated the crime was opposed to the Egyptian government and wanted to destabilize it by destroying its tourist trade, the major source of the country's foreign currency.

Other terrorist attacks have been made frequently against the presence, home and abroad, of the corporations and business practices that define the American consumer economy. Abroad, the most prevalent have been the bombings and other destructive attacks against McDonald's restaurants. Since the early 1990s, McDonald's restaurants have been blown up or otherwise destroyed in Brazil, France, China, Chile, Greece, Belgium, Bosnia, Russia and South Africa.

The most blatant domestic acts have been committed by environmental activists who practice "monkey wrench ecotage." This term, describing assaults on property and equipment of corporations exploiting the land, but with no intention of direct personal harm, is derived from Edward Abbey's novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), in which an odd gang of four protest what they see as wanton destruction of the natural environment for the sake of profits. "A planetary industrialism ... growing like a cancer. Growth for the sake of growth." Such are the words spoken by Dr. S. K. Sarvis, the unlikely leader of the gang and expressing the sentiments of activists who later turned fiction into fact.

Trees in forests intended to serve as lumber have been spiked to render them useless. New homes in a formerly pristine tract of land on Long Island were burned. The most dramatic and costly example of "monkey wrench ecotage" was the destruction by arson of the newly built and not yet opened Blue Sky Basin building complex, a ski resort in Colorado. This act of violence resulted in \$12 million of property damage. A highly secretive and cell-based organization with the acronym ELF (Earth Liberation Front) laid claim to this assault.

### Language and culture

Above these changes the United States still looms. Its large population, its dominant economy and its privileged position in software production (operating systems for computers, blockbuster movies and exported television programs) assure its continuation as the heartland of popular culture. Add to this combination the primacy of English as the language of international

communication, and the formidable position of the United States is undeniable, as are the reasons for concern. The unintended threat to other cultures is palpable. Currently, most books published in the Netherlands and a large number in Germany are published in English in order to reach a wider audience. The Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) has bluntly complained about this sort of development as a continuation of the colonial mentality imposed by the European conquerors.

Yet the preponderance of English in contemporary scientific and business discourse, to say nothing of the popular culture of music and film, makes faculty in it something of a cultural imperative. Rigorous study of the language is now mandated in almost every European country. Tourist guides around the world now learn English to further their trade not only because Americans are the largest single national group of tourists but also because other tourists frequently use English to negotiate abroad when they are not home, say, in Denmark, or Italy, or Brazil.

Faced with international support of open markets and the deleterious effect of the importation of cultural products, such as movie films and television programs, the French argued for the "cultural exception" in trade negotiations. UNESCO sponsored a conference on the matter in Stockholm in 1998. The topic was: "Culture: a form of merchandise like no other?" The conclusion was that culture was indeed a distinctive product. In an article she wrote for the prestigious Parisian newspaper *Le Monde*, the French Minister of Culture and Communications, Catherine Trautman, spoke forcefully on the subject: "Cultural assets are not merchandise like others." Referring to several film makers, such as Alain Resnais and Martin Scorsese, she asks: "Where does the power of their films come from, if not from their exploration of their own world anchored in their own culture and irreducible to formulas?" She supported her argument with telling statistics: nearly 75 percent of the films shown in European movie theaters and on European television are American, but only 3 percent of films shown in the United States come from Europe (website "Europe Strives to Catch Up with Digital Hollywood" 2012).

An argument that Mme Trautman did not address, but one that concerns others is "convergence," an industry term for the merger or acquisition of media corporations to form conglomerates that direct the production, distribution and exhibition or sales of the major media: publishing, movies, television and the internet. Today there are six such giants that control vast empires broader in reach and deeper in influence than that of the British Empire, upon which, it was said in the late nineteenth century, the sun never set. A resident in one part of what was then that empire, Rupert Murdoch, born in Australia but now an American citizen, remarked of his News Corporation in his 1999 annual report, "Virtually every moment of the day, in every time zone in the planet, people are watching, reading and interacting with our product" (Murdoch 1999: 13).

In 2012 these giants were AOL Time Warner, the Walt Disney Company, Bertelsmann AG, Viacom, News Corporation and Vivendi Universal. Three

are American-based, one is German, another French and the last Australian (Murdoch's News Corporation still has its headquarters in Australia). To list the business assets of any one of these would require counting on all fingers and toes of a family of five – at least. Magazines, publishing houses, newspapers, theme parks, radio and television stations, movie theaters and sports teams are all part of the various empires. Media companies' annual revenues are staggering; Bertelsmann's 2011 earnings were €15.3 billion and Viacom earned \$14.91 billion. Given the size and influence of these corporations, the term "cultural imperialism" has been used by opponents of the corporate convergences that override national interests and divergent culture areas. Even today, a half century since it was first aired, the *I Love Lucy* situation comedy series is seen in over forty countries. It has been said that in its high moments of success, the drama series *Dallas* was viewed by both British and Spanish royal families, some measure of the show's widespread appeal, on a vertical as well as a horizontal basis. The cost of such a production is prohibitive for most nations, an obvious reason for the success of American exports. Moreover, the situation of most sitcoms and dramas is nearly universal in its effect, more commonplace than unusual among the urbanized populations of today. Dubbing or use of subtitles allows such shows to segue into other cultural environments with little difficulty. The question remains, however, whether this is good or bad, a means to further entertainment and extended appreciation of the human comedy or to greater profits and deeper penetration of Western culture, American in particular. As Madam Trautman argued, cultural products are unlike other forms of merchandise.

#### Language diversity and popular culture

In an interestingly titled paper on the continuing disappearance of languages, "Endangered languages: the crumbling of the linguistic ecosystem," Professor Osahito Miyaoka remarked that the effort to save the famous Japanese crane or ibis from extinction was widely reported in Japanese newspapers but the disappearance of the Sakhalin dialect of the Ainu language in 1994 went unnoticed (Miyaoka 2003: 1). Quoting from another source, he indicates that, of the roughly 6,000 languages in the world today, fewer than half will survive the twenty-first century. As is obvious, the development of modern media and their combined boundlessness and intrusiveness mean that once sheltered and self-sufficient linguistic communities of small scale have become an anomaly.

Moreover, the global trend in book publishing is toward consolidation in multimedia conglomerates, so that smaller national publishers in countries like Scotland and the Netherlands face extinction, absorption or the dreadful expense of publishing books for a very small readership. Few large publishers, for instance, negotiate to publishing rights in Dutch as most citizens of the Netherlands read English. Two other current indications of this linguistic



state of affairs are, first, the instruction booklet for any electronic device in which English, French, Spanish and Japanese are the usual languages provided; and, second, the displacement of French by English as the day-to-day language of bureaucrats in the European Union.

#### American dominance

Today, according to a United Nations report, 85-90 percent of the films shown worldwide are American. Wal-Mart is today the number one corporation in terms of both sales and profit in the world. Cyberenglish is the most significant form of communication in that medium. And in 1951 the International Commercial Aviation Institute accepted English as the language for all international flights. In facts such as these are rooted both the admiration and resentment found worldwide of American economic dominance in the communications industries. In his book *America*, Jean Baudrillard wrote that the United States was "the original version of modernity." Europe he called "the dubbed or subtitled version" (Baudrillard 1988: 76). That remains the condition and the problem.

## Conclusion

### Reconditioning the human condition

On a grander scale – on the level of the human condition – critics are expressing concern over the changing perception and organization of reality. Landscape, it has been said, is an act of human mediation with nature. It is the outward look and the presence of the viewer that determine perspective; one's angle on what is outside, beyond us. Previously, we reached into and organized what was at arm's length or at the distance of a stride. We determined our place from within our home, our shelter. From its windows, through its doors, we entered the natural world. The French philosopher Paul Bachelard phrased it nicely in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1958) with his chapter title, "The house and the universe."

Today this condition has been altered. The shelter has given way to the screen. Automobile windshield (windscreen in British terminology), movie screen, television screen, computer screen and even the small screen on the cell phone – the screen is the current mediating agent, the unopenable window on the world. (A segment of an American CBS nightly news program is called "Eye on America.")

The historical development of this condition, the one by which we are now screened from reality, reaches back to the nineteenth century. As mentioned in the introduction of this book, the railroad coach first encased the individuals who watched a passing panorama in which they participated only visually. What was seen depended not at all on any physical exertion, any move physically into the environment. The automobile continued to refine this new relationship, particularly when completely enclosed sedans replaced the open cars of the first automobile age. Then followed the movie screen: the pseudo-reality of two dimensions given imaginary depth by the bright light projected and then reflected. Railroad coach, automobile and movie theater were all "away," external to the shelter of the home.

With the electronic revolution in the second half of the twentieth century, screened reality was domesticated. The individual no longer went out into the world; the world came in. It was reduced to small dimensions and conventionally seen in living room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen on the television screen. The experience was and is essentially passive, not dissimilar to the movies, other than the viewer's ability to change from one program to