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POPULAR CULTURE

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IN 1970 HOLLYWOOD GESTURED IN A DIRECTION THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN unthinkable ten years earlier. In Norman Jewison's *The Landlord*, a jarring film filled with confrontation and suppressed violence, the camera recorded scenes of passionate love-making between a white man and a black woman. However, what the movie seemed to embrace—the resolution of racial conflict through intermarriage—was not something that American audiences were prepared to accept. The film fell flat. This was perhaps something of an omen, for in the next decade popular culture expressed a keen awareness of the limitless varieties of conflict and discord in American society, not the resolution of social contradiction in love or politics. This emphasis upon social tension formed a major contour of popular culture in the seventies.

Three of the most popular television series of the early seventies, "Ironside," "Kojak," and "The Streets of San Francisco," indicate why this was so. Although they sometimes paid lip service to understanding the sociological or psychological origins of social disorder, these shows stripped law to naked power and order to the implicit threat of violence. By implication, society lacked moral and ethical cohesion. Underlying sources of tension were rarely uncovered and never resolved. The resulting picture was of a society without shared ideals or respected institutions.

Norman Lear's "All in the Family" expressed this same vision in comic form. Each week Archie Bunker denounced some minority or liberal cause. In each episode, he lost (temporarily) in a struggle of values with his instinctively liberal wife. Yet the following week he returned to test new prejudices. Like the enormously popular daytime soap operas, "All in the Family" exposed the deepest problems of society, but never hoped to ameliorate them.

Of course, police dramas almost always use force and firepower—and rarely sociology—to end the careers of criminals. Situation comedies and soap operas require stereotyped characters. These are the requisites of each genre. Nonetheless, the changes in popular culture over the last thirty years

suggest that these genres may have different meanings in different periods. In the seventies the prolonged attention to unresolved antagonisms in society has a special place in the popular culture of the era. As if to underscore this point about the inability of contemporary society to solve its problems, the three most popular television serials of the 1970s relied heavily upon nostalgia. In "All in the Family," Archie Bunker is a character out of place, belonging to a time when, as the show's theme song put it, men were men and girls were girls. Nostalgia shaped "Happy Days" and its spin-off, "Laverne and Shirley," even more explicitly. Both were set in the late fifties. Other very popular programs such as the "Waltons" and "M.A.S.H." were also placed back in time. These examples point to a central characteristic of popular culture in the seventies: its yearning for eras when recognizable moral systems prevailed. This is not to argue that popular culture of the seventies lacked any identifiable moral code. Yet it does suggest that beneath the new tolerance of heretofore disapproved behavior, audiences responded to an imaginary past of traditional values. They felt steadier in the roots of contemporary experience than in the confusion and conflict of the present. As the most popular song of 1972 put it, "Those Were the Days, My Friend."

The value structure in these nostalgic shows depended upon the belief that the 1950s in particular was a time when political, social, and family values formed a coherent moral order. The word "code" is particularly apt to describe this order because it suggests an element of social coercion that censored films, television programs, comic books, and political expression during that era. Since the 1950s popular culture has largely emerged from the lingering censorship of that decade, although the contemporary Moral Majority would like to reimpose it. Since the decline of explicit censorship, recognizable standards of behavior have become confused. Obvious symbols of community control, like the everpresent "voice of authority" in Hollywood feature films, have disappeared. Popular culture has increasingly depicted American subcultures (such as the world of juvenile delinquents, for example) without judging them. Archie Bunker's confusion in such a world is easily understandable.

The heroes and heroines (where there were any) of Hollywood films in the seventies showed a similar discomfort in the contradictory moral present, and they often lived above or beyond the law. Several of the Academy Awards for best picture of the year went to movies that set men against society, from *Patton* (1970) to *The Godfather*, parts one and two (1972, 1974), to *Rocky* (1976). In such films, society is little more than a backdrop and sometimes an obstacle. By necessity, ethical behavior is generated to fit each special situation. Heroes achieve success by struggle against social institutions, not through them. Thus society is either irrelevant or menacing, as in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975).

There is, of course, much in this posture of exile and alienation that is traditional. Popular culture has long celebrated the individual pitted against

society, from Tarzan to the Electric Cowboy. Yet the outsiders of seventies' films were not traditional heroes. They were men (women rarely appeared in such roles) who stepped into the spotlight for a moment, not to be emulated, but merely to be exposed to public attention. Notoriety came from the fact of their exposure, not necessarily from their achievements. They were, like so many other public figures of the era, made important through their appearance in the media. As such they belonged to a celebrity elite including movie and television stars, politicians, and sports figures who participated in talk shows, celebrity sports events, quiz shows, and endless interviews or features in weekly magazines.

Even the ordinary citizen could enter this celebrity world through the inquisitive eye of the media. For those willing to endure the humiliation, the "Gong Show," a self-mocking and crudely satiric television show, offered an opportunity for momentary celebrity status. Another route was the invidious comparison to real achievement. This is most notable in the *Guinness Book of Records*, updated annually. In a section featuring "Human Achievements," genuine accomplishments in sports are listed next to endurance records for activities that intentionally have no other purpose than to establish a record.

It was also possible to purchase the trappings of celebrity life. For example, an advertisement hawking Puerto Rican rum often run in *Rolling Stone Magazine* in the 1970s began: "Liza [Minelli] introduced us to white rum and soda at an Andy Warhol Party. She was wonderful and sincere and became one of our best friends." Of course the drink was superb. The message was simple and old-fashioned: vicarious access to celebrity life was as easy as a sip of a swank drink. This sort of enticement is as old as the English Royalty's endorsement of tea biscuits, but the aggressive intimacy was new. Mention of Andy Warhol, the leading creator of instant celebrity, made it all believable.

Looked at another way, celebrity was a celebration of the individual ego identified by Tom Wolfe in his phrase, "the me decade." Attention to the self gave titles to magazines like *People* and *Self*; it also provoked sharp criticism from Christopher Lasch in his book the *Culture of Narcissism* (1979). The self and its neuroses held the center of popular attention in the seventies, from "liberation" movements to songs in Broadway musicals that proclaimed, "I am me," to the mirrored refractions of disco dancing. Such messages of personal witness came from the "new journalism" and the proclamations of born-again Christians. In one sense or another each of these defined personal experience as self-contained, intrinsically interesting, and almost inevitably hostile to the surrounding society.

The depth and extent of this self-absorption can be seen in the list of best-sellers from 1973 and 1975. In 1973, nonfiction best-sellers included: *The Living Bible*, *Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution*, *I'm OK, You're OK*, *The Joy of Sex*, *Weight Watchers Program Cookbook*, and *How to Be Your Own Best Friend*. Two years later, the list offered the same sort of variety of self-

improvement books: *Angels: God's Secret Agents*, *Winning Through Intimidation*, *TM: Discovering Energy and Overcoming Stress*, *Total Fitness in Thirty Minutes a Week*, and the *Save-Your-Life Diet*.

The lack of any overt censoring ideals upholding community standards of behavior, the easy achievement of celebrity status, the celebration of the self, and the liberation and public attention demanded by a great variety of subcultures underscored toleration during the seventies for behavior that had formerly existed at the edges of American popular culture. Elements of culture that seemed revolutionary in the sixties were absorbed, transformed, and legitimated. The disapproved behavior and language of the fifties became standard fare for the seventies.

There are several ways to understand how this ambiguous tolerance took hold of American culture during the seventies. I intend to pursue only one: by looking at the seventies as the third stage in the postwar development of American popular culture. Seen in historical perspective, the seventies were the result of the dialectic between earlier popular culture and the vast changes in the media and the audiences of the years after 1945.

* * *

Following World War II and up to about 1960, popular culture and the producers of films and television programs made self-conscious gestures toward supporting traditional institutions. The largest commercial producers of popular culture (Hollywood, television networks, comic book publishers, and record companies) paid attention to various official production codes drawn up by each industry. These codes were ostensibly designed to censor culture, to eliminate overt sexuality, obscenity, and perversion in order to create a saleable commodity for the entire family. They were also a response to pressure on the media from organized religious and civic interest groups who wished to uphold traditional values. Homogenized ethical virtues attached themselves to popular culture like antibodies to an invading organism. Studio blacklists in Hollywood and the unspoken assumption that popular culture should not express controversy formed another line of the informal censorship of culture. Thus shared opinion, backed by vigilante interest groups and formal production codes, helped shape a popular culture that risked little. Countless movies, television programs, and comic book characters adhered to the minimal values expressed by censoring agencies—at least in the final moments. Even in the most violent crime comics, the last two or three panels generally contained a warning that crime does not pay. In fifties' films, immoral behavior, adultery, or crime was almost always punished by society or some sort of natural retribution in which the offender was destroyed.

Nevertheless, much of this censorship was superficial and one can find elements contrary to the established picture of popular culture in the fifties

as benign and acceptable. A broad group of culture critics from Dwight Macdonald to Ernest Van den Haag argued that popular culture, despite its lip-service to traditional values, was, in fact, subverting such values. These critics of mass culture attacked the vulgarity and escapism of popular culture. In making this argument they were continuing an interpretation of Nazi propaganda developed during World War II. They theorized that violence celebrated in culture would debase culture, citing the history of Germany as their proof. Others, such as psychologist Fredric Wertham, relied upon psychology to make the same argument. Wertham's attacks on comic book violence rocked the entire juvenile publishing industry and led to the adoption of an industry code.

Critics such as Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, once associated with the Frankfurt School of German exiles located at Columbia University, identified mass culture with political conservatism and cultural lethargy. Popular culture, they declared, had become an opiate of the masses, destroying working-class culture and blunting the development of revolutionary politics.

Traditionalists also worried that mass culture had uprooted Americans. As they often had in the past, these critics blamed popular culture for the misbehavior of children. This accusation dominated the hearings held by the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency in the mid-fifties. First headed by Senator Robert Hendrickson of New Jersey and then by Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, the committee heard long, impassioned testimony that blamed films, radio shows, television, and comic books for the postwar rise in delinquency.

Sometimes popular culture itself reflected this criticism. Ray Bradbury's widely read *Fahrenheit 451* sketched a terrifying utopia where the debased values of mass culture guided all political and social regulations. The enforcers of order in this society were firemen, hired to burn books: "Those who don't build must burn. It's as old as history and juvenile delinquency," says one character. No books were allowed in this society, only radio, photographs, movies, and television. Indeed, television, with its "parlor families" (soap operas), is so pervasive that it absorbs and distorts real life. The result is a world of total cultural homogenization where "you can stay happy all the time."¹

The implicit elitism and conservatism of such critiques of mass culture are obvious, and defenders of popular culture emphasized this point.² Nonetheless, critics had raised an important and perhaps unanswerable problem: if popular media shaped society, shouldn't society exercise some control

¹Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Ballantine, 1953), 57, 61.

²Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, *Mass Culture Revisited* (New York: Van Nostrand, Reinhold, 1971).

over this shaping power? Because mass culture was believed to have a serious impact on society, this problem touched the relationship between moral, cultural, and economic assumptions of society. Should mass culture reflect accepted values or should it be limited only by economic considerations? Was mass culture merely a commodity?

As important as these considerations were in the debate over mass culture during the fifties, they were set aside by several important Supreme Court decisions that judged the First Amendment to be superior to the rights of a community to impose its values on culture. The Court gradually undercut censorship codes and brought the popular media under the protective umbrella of the First Amendment. This loosening of the power of local authorities encouraged the film industry itself to modify the production code. Gradually, important “don’ts” involving sexuality and drug use were removed from the Hollywood censorship code. This movement was speeded by the desire of the film industry to compete with television. Self-censorship codes in other media industries were also softened.³

The forces behind such transformations in popular culture during the fifties were also demographic and economic. The decline of family-oriented and community-approved popular culture came in part from the disruptions of World War II, in part from increased affluence among large segments of the population, and especially from the discovery and growing exploitation of the teenage market. Added to this were important technological developments: advances in television, long-playing records, and widespread ownership of automobiles by teenagers. The result was a fracturing of cultural unity and the emergence of a full-blown adolescent culture that reflected and caricatured adult culture.

The hasty reaction of many adult critics to this teenage culture was to brand it as delinquent. Rock and roll, new clothing styles, hot rods, and customized cars (which tampered with America’s most important symbol of success and mobility) were denounced because they did not coincide with middle-class norms. They derived, instead, from working-class sensuality, urban gangs, juvenile delinquency, and black culture. As Dwight Macdonald, one of the principal critics of mass culture, put it: rock and roll “is the teenagers’ link to the nihilism of our time.” Despite the stridency of such critics, this new adolescent culture possessed three important dynamics: it displayed enormous creativity, it challenged middle-class morality in popular culture, and it provided a new field for commercial exploitation.

What critics wrongly identified as a delinquent subculture during the fifties, they later began to recognize during the sixties as a major force affecting not just youth, but all of American culture and much of the popular culture of the world. This sudden turnaround of interpretation occurred as

³Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), passim.

adolescent culture pushed to the center of American popular culture. In the new, more liberal political climate of the sixties, the creativity of the fifties exploded as a new force expressing not just teenage alienation and self-concern, but a positive vision. With the proliferation of musical forms and social experimentation and the gradual politicization of leading sectors of popular culture, youth culture proposed a different vision of life. It assumed a moral imperative distinct from what had prevailed during the fifties. It affirmed a self-conscious desire to change society. This tendency can be seen particularly toward the end of the decade in the music of Phil Ochs, the Jefferson Airplane, and Bob Dylan, or more generally, in the vast underground press that grew up in the late sixties.

In response, many cultural commentators stopped criticizing and started explaining. Most of the older arguments about mass culture disappeared, and discussion now focused on "popular culture." This change in terminology symbolized the important shift in attitudes. The growing legitimization of popular culture occurred for several reasons. Perhaps the greatest was commercial success, pushed by a demographic crest. As the largest age group in society after 1962, young people asserted the hegemony of their own youth-oriented culture. The advice not to "trust anyone over thirty" was as much the arrogance of superior numbers as it was a political slogan. Another push, however, came from political liberalism, which attached itself to popular culture in this decade. This complicated development came in part because of the growing recognition of the legitimacy of the black experience in America and its contributions to culture and politics. Indeed, certain aspects of popular culture (particularly music), because they were identified with black liberation struggles or the antiwar movement, claimed to be the only authentic voice of the American masses.

Intellectuals, critics, and academics also changed their opinions about its meaning. Marshall McLuhan's several startling books at the beginning of the sixties proclaimed the revolutionary character of modern communications technology. The predominant culture of the day, he declared, was the sort of popular culture that enthralled American youth, not the linear, literary culture preached by their elders.

Two short-lived movements in art and criticism validated popular culture in another way. The first of these, "Pop Art," affirmed that everyday symbols of American commercial life, from Campbell's Soup cans to photographs of Marilyn Monroe, had intrinsic artistic value. This brief reign of "camp" reversed the scorn critics of the 1950s had poured upon the popular commercial arts and "Kitsch" culture. The aesthetics of camp declared that objects and symbols in popular use had important and refreshing meanings. By reconsidering older forms of popular culture—old movies, songs, and so on—camp rescued and validated the history of popular culture and helped establish a financial value to collections of the artifacts of past mass art.

Camp also had its commercial successes. The most obvious among these

were paintings by Andy Warhol, whose studio, "The Factory," reproduced hundreds of commercial images from Brillo soap pads to images of celebrities like Elvis Presley and Jacqueline Kennedy. Another successful camp production was the television series "Batman" (1966–68), derived from the old comic book series and purposely exaggerated to call attention to its origins in popular culture. Indeed, the show depended for its success upon audience familiarity with the history of recent popular culture.

The founding of the *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1967 signalled the professionalization of the study of popular culture. Thus the fifties' argument about the vulgarity or "totalitarian" overtones of mass culture was transformed: academic studies now interpreted popular culture as symbolic or coded language that could help reveal the mind of the masses. These studies emphasized the origins of popular music, art, sports, movies, and television, and tried to propose reasons for the success of some of the most important examples. By the end of the sixties, structuralism elaborated the tools available for serious study of popular culture.⁴ Bolstered by the anti-elitism of the era, a great many serious studies moved away from emphasizing literary sources to a more energetic and creative use of popular culture.

Despite the fact that much of the mass culture of the sixties continued to be packaged inside traditional values, or, as in the case of television's innumerable broken family dramas, tried to explore what had gone wrong with traditional values, the leading edge of popular culture became charged with politics. In part, this came about because of an intolerable paradox of the age: a liberal society betrayed by an illiberal war. The contrast between two declared "wars," one against poverty in America and one against Vietnamese revolutionaries, intensified the politicization of American youth culture.

American young people who had been in the forefront of the struggle against racial segregation were, after 1966, called upon to fight a war in southeast Asia that they neither supported nor understood. This sudden shift in social priorities deeply affected youth culture, and pushed college students in particular to assert their separation from adult society and to proclaim the revolutionary implications of their music, drugs, and mystic religions. Their vision of a regenerate community existing inside a corrupt society exaggerated the sense of confrontation. Thus the pleasure principle of the counter culture purposely flouted the traditional stringencies of the work ethic. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this was the widespread movement to "drop out"—to abandon the world of getting and spending.

Politicization of youth culture also proceeded from the decline of censorship and a proliferation of opportunities in the culture business. The explosion of rock music coincided with a rapid growth in small record companies. Enforced separation of AM and FM programming on the airwaves after 1966

⁴Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968); and *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

helped (temporarily) to diversify radio broadcasting, segment audiences, and increase attention to the rich varieties of popular music. Beginning in 1964 with the *Berkeley Barb* and spreading to most major university campuses and large cities, a new underground journalism preached a culture revolution based upon opposition to the war in Vietnam, while celebrating rock music, drugs, and lifestyle radicalism. This short flirtation with agitprop, particularly in the late sixties, affected both popular youth culture and middle-class culture (which met in the 1967–68 musical production “Hair”). Even American comic books, most of them notoriously conservative and even racist, began to respond to the new political orientation of young readers. Yet the result was not a revolutionary popular culture, only an apocalyptic one that anticipated a radical transformation of consciousness, much as Charles Reich predicted in the *Greening of America* (1970).

If the fifties was an era of transition from a family-oriented mass culture of middle-class ideals and the sixties was a decade when a small but significant element of popular culture reflected political and moral radicalism, then the seventies represented a time when the collapse of radicalism left benign tolerance in its wake. Rapidly changing and always creative, popular culture in the seventies nonetheless reflected overtones of retrenchment, tinged by nostalgia, sometimes haunted by alienation, and often unconcerned with solving problems. Unlike that of the fifties and sixties, popular culture of the seventies often expressed hesitations about the future, something that was rendered all the more ironic because of the enormous technological progress and growth of free expression in the decade. At the same time, the mass media became more pervasive and central in American life. The decline of large urban newspapers and Hollywood films was more than made up by the increasing importance of television. As the Watergate scandal proved, even the American presidency was a poor match in a serious confrontation with an irrepressible and curious mass media. The power of the president could not squelch the drama that the media created as it gradually destroyed the credibility of the leading elected officer of the nation.

By the mid-seventies, benign tolerance characterized the moral content of popular media. Yet as the influence of the political and moral liberalism of the sixties declined, other factors shaped the content of popular culture: economic changes, growing ethnic and class self-consciousness, demographic changes, and the long-range, cumulative effects of the media revolution that followed World War II.

From the end of the sixties through 1980, the American economy grew by fits and starts in a pattern distorted by recession, inflation, and intense international competition. Limitations in the success of the economy meant that adjustment of social inequities could not be accomplished merely by increasing the available goods of society. Instead, limitation intensified competition between special interest groups clamoring for compensatory treatment and a fair share of the whole. White ethnic groups, religious sects,

women, blacks, and gays all demanded attention. Each group succeeded in turning the spotlight of the media on its special needs, but none could dominate or shape national politics. This stalemate often found its way into popular culture.

Technological advances, particularly in television, allowed a great deal more individual choice in programming during the seventies. Cable television began in earnest around 1972, and video cassettes became available in the same year: both loosened the hold of networks over programming. This gave each individual consumer more freedom, without, however, fundamentally changing the nature of choice, since many of the new sources of broadcast featured reruns or copies of standard network fare. In addition, producers of popular culture were increasingly absorbed into conglomerate ownership. Integrated ownership and production speeded the disintegration of boundaries between various media until many movies, novelized films, record releases, and television programs were planned and produced in the same offices—and by the same committees—creating a culture of common denominators and interchangeable parts.

Despite the rising costs and consolidation in television, film, recording, and publishing, popular culture during the seventies still had crevices through which unanticipated successes could slip. Independent film productions such as *Star Wars* are a case in point. Moreover, amateurism flourished particularly in documentary filmmaking. In general, however, high costs, centralization, and the shrinking audience for youth culture diminished some of the energy of the sixties. The high costs of live music production, for example, helped stimulate the rise of disco; the central musical events that occurred outdoors as rock concerts during the sixties moved inside and onto the dance floor with recorded music in the seventies.

The makeup of American audiences for popular culture also shaped the direction of the seventies. The baby boom cohort during this ten-year span aged accordingly; this graying of the popular culture audience, followed by a much smaller and less self-conscious young generation gradually refocused attention on more conservative lifestyles, yet not before restructured images of families and sexual habits had been thoroughly explored by the media. American films and television shows of the seventies often rejected marriage as the central event of adolescent and adult life and broadened the list of appropriate living arrangements. Numerous examples of this can be found in television soap operas in which every form of human and social problem—and living arrangement—appeared with regularity.

Producers of popular culture during the seventies became increasingly conscious of the segmented audience to which they offered their products. Whether they were joggers, liberated women, housewives, apartment dwellers, gourmets, or ethnic or religious groups, these audiences were earmarked by interest, purchasing power, and taste. Magazines in particular were eager to exploit this self-consciousness. General interest periodicals such as *Look*,

Life, and the *Saturday Evening Post* (although *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post* were begun again) all disappeared by the seventies to be replaced by special interest journals devoted to apartment living, diet, single sports, etc. Using the *New York Times* as a platform, magazines described the profile of the readers they could deliver to a prospective client in full-page advertisements. Thus even the audience could be transformed into a commodity.

Race and ethnicity were particularly sensitive areas of audience interest. The highly charged, self-conscious atmosphere of the sixties became less acrimonious in the seventies, but still electric with racial, sexual, and social tension. Three of the most widely watched television events of the decade exploited this tension and the interest in the racial and social origins of American society. Three historical dramas, "Roots" (1977), "Holocaust" (1978), and the serial showing of the film, "Gone with the Wind" (1976), attracted immense audiences. Each one of these ethnic or regional pageants portrayed what might be called founding myths of contemporary social groups. Each authenticated and legitimated a form of special historical experience that had a profound impact on contemporary society. Each group—American blacks, Jews, and southerners—achieved certain claims upon the present because of the transformation of their unique history into contemporary popular culture.

In other television series and films, the same attention to diversity occurred as ethnic groups, women, and other interest groups made public claims to attention. While almost none of these dramatized confrontations resolved themselves in social action, the repeated stress upon self-consciousness and toleration underscored the diversity of the American population and popular culture.

In part, this agreement to disagree evolved from the political confrontations of the sixties. What began as counter culture was absorbed back into the mainstream of popular culture. The enormous success of "Saturday Night Live" illustrates this point. Beginning in 1975, this television show built its audience on four foundations: political satire, the exploitation of in-jokes about the drug culture of its audience, an acute sense of the direction of popular music, and an acid wit directed against television itself. Woven together with immense skill and played with refreshing enthusiasm, the show gradually sank into sentimentalism, eventually parodying itself. Before the original show folded, however, it had constructed a broad bridge for the counter culture to move into the mainstream.

Other elements of the underground political culture of the sixties either died out, which was the fate of most underground newspapers (the *Berkeley Barb* ran from 1964 to 1980), or were born again in new movements stressing consumerism, natural life styles, or evangelical religion. Certainly most young people did not turn from politics to religion, but the Jesus movement of the early seventies and the conversion of a few significant youth leaders like Rennie Davis linked ex-radicals to a rising tide of religious fundamen-

talism. Conversely, the growing movement of fundamental Protestantism absorbed some of the energy and concerns of the counter culture, including its confrontation tactics and its emphasis upon personal witness. It also reflected the energy and self-righteousness that had characterized sixties' radicalism.

Radical feminism, too, helped shape popular culture in the seventies. The woman's movement of the early seventies had enormous success in altering the styles, subject matter, and language of popular culture, although at a price. Manners, language, and images of women in the media changed to accommodate women's liberation. Even "Charlie's Angels," one of the most exploitative shows ever to appear on television, used independence and women's new lifestyles as dramatic pegs upon which to hang traditional portrayals of women as sex objects. In effect a version of women's liberation that reduced freedom to libertarian sex, this show was only the most extreme in a group of programs that attempted to merge old and newer visions of female roles into a saleable commodity.

With the decline of censorship and a rise in tolerance, other sexual subcultures became a more explicit part of popular culture. The most important of these, gay life, deeply influenced the fashions, dance, and music of the seventies. Pornography, although never really a part of sexual liberation—and perhaps its opposite—also emerged as part of acceptable popular culture. The most successful venture of this sort was "Deep Throat," a low budget, slightly satiric hard-core pornographic film produced in 1973 which played in scores of legitimate theaters across the country. Its popularity and acceptance were indirectly affirmed by the name "Deep Throat," given by *Washington Post* reporters to their secret source in uncovering the Watergate conspiracy.

If any single factor helps explain the tolerant frankness of the seventies, it is the tendency of the media to focus attention upon and absorb the novelties for which it is constantly searching. With the decline of any explicit, external censoring standards for popular culture, this power of the media to transform all aspects of American behavior into popular culture became stronger. Thus even revival religion, the electronic ministry, which purported to oppose much of the new toleration, adopted the variety show format and talk show styles of television. Politics also came to depend upon the media's ability to create celebrities who increasingly have replaced older, professional politicians. These developments illustrate what Kenneth Tynan once called the layered effects of modern mass media, which have created a generation whose sense of place and time belongs not to lived experience, but to film and television history. Perhaps this is one reason why Americans chose a hero out of its media past for president in 1980.

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During the eighties popular culture will follow the same structural contours as in previous decades, depending upon the demography and prosperity of the consuming public, upon the desultory struggle of social groups to control the media, and upon technological advances in communications. Demography, of course, is predictable just as prosperity is not. Thus it is likely that the continued aging of the population will exercise a stronger influence upon the media, as the popularity of *On Golden Pond* demonstrates. Problems of economic growth which sharpened class, ethnic, and sexual tensions during the seventies have continued to intensify during the eighties. How they will be translated into popular culture is still uncertain, although positive attitudes toward social equality seem to have diminished.

It is also uncertain which, if any, of the contending special interest groups will be able most to influence the media. Already, the threat of a Moral Majority boycott has cut into the sexual explicitness and perhaps the political frankness of network television, forcing commercial television to rely more and more on violence to attract audiences. Yet this censoring influence still remains marginal and depends a great deal for its success upon what happens in the American economy and in American politics.

This connection between culture and politics should not be underestimated, if only because politics has become so intertwined with the media. The electronic media assault on politics is already an accomplished revolution. Politics is now defined in terms of new categories: image-making, polling, and fund-raising—all heavily computerized and placed in the hands of experts.

Just as politics now relies increasingly upon communications technology, advances in media technology have continued to effect popular culture. The affordability of private media systems—home computers, video equipment, and the like—will continue to undercut the old public mass media, particularly movies and network television. If the workplace and employment follow new information instruments into the home, this will accelerate an already apparent trend toward the contraction of the sociability of American cultural life. It will increase the segmentation and privatization of audiences.

In effect, popular culture can follow two basic routes. At this writing, it appears that segmentation and privatization might prevail. Political culture under the first two years of the Reagan Administration has been particularly divisive. The attack on “big government” is one manifestation of a decline in a sense of community. So is the banal dispute over the virtues of rock and roll versus disco music versus the imported nihilism of punk. In another sense, this assault upon shared values has accounted for the success of two nighttime

soap operas, "Falconcrest" and "Dallas." In both of these serials, the central character is a single-minded, perversely narrow and self-interested capitalist whose only duty is to self. Each is willing to destroy family members and even unravel the fabric of society to achieve power and private ends. Neither has the remotest interest in community. Yet it is not clear that audiences view such characters with much empathy. Other popular television soap operas like "Hill Street Blues" express much the opposite sentiments. In the terrible social disintegration that the police teams encounter, their commitment to comradeship is strengthened.

This then, is probably the question that will concern much of the popular culture of the eighties: will it express the disintegration of community or its reestablishment? The answer, of course, can only be found in the larger choices that society makes in the next few years.