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# The Integrated News Spectacle, Live 8, and the Annihilation of Time

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# The Integrated News Spectacle, Live 8, and the Annihilation of Time

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*Abstract:* In this article, the recent strategic turn by U.S.-based media corporations toward the use of broadband technologies, particularly online video, is assessed as a turning point in how news is being conceptualized, distributed, and consumed. Using the heuristic tool the integrated news spectacle, and its application to political, economic, and technological developments propelled forward by the 2005 Live 8 concerts, the authors analyze contemporary trajectories concerning the news and their more general implications regarding what Innisians refer to as the annihilation of time.

*Résumé :* Dans cet article, la stratégie récente destinée à diriger les corporations des médias américains vers les technologies "broadband", la vidéo sur Internet en particulier, est analysée comme un changement majeur en ce qui concerne la conceptualisation, la distribution et la consommation des nouvelles. Pour ce qui est de l'outil heuristique, le spectacle intégré des nouvelles, et de son application aux développements politiques, économiques, et technologiques avancés par les concerts "Live 8" de 2005, les auteurs analysent les trajectoires contemporaines vis-à-vis les nouvelles et les implications générales pour ce que les étudiants d'Innis appellent l'anéantissement du temps.

Keywords: News; Spectacle; Time; Live 8; Harold Innis

United States-based media corporations, using digital broadband technologies, have initiated something of a turning point in how news is conceptualized, distributed, and consumed. The ascendancy of a new kind of interactive, commodified news provider-audience relationship now lies before us. To take just one recent example, the transformation of American morning show host Katie Couric into the anchor of the CBS evening news comes amidst an ongoing but accelerated shift toward what has been called the integrated news spectacle (Compton, 2004). The term, as explained below, is a heuristic device useful in comprehending the constellations of social forces, new technologies, and institutional logics now converging into unique fields of social-economic interaction. One profound outcome is an

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intensification of Harold Innis' observations regarding the annihilation of time (Innis, 1952)—the pernicious trend, at least in capitalist liberal democracies, to structurally facilitate spatial expansion and control in ways that diminish cultural capacities concerning reflexive, communal, and historicist ways of thinking. Beyond its saliency for assessing the implications of the integrated news spectacle, we use an Innisian approach for another reason: in the tradition of Canadian communication thought (Babe, 2000), both the integrated news spectacle and Innis' time-space dialectic constitute critical holistic approaches to developments affecting Americans, Canadians, and, indeed, all humanity. As Innis recognized, the Canadian scholar's position at *both* the centre and margin of American commercial culture provides him/her with the opportunity—and, indeed, the responsibility—to assess U.S.-based developments in uniquely insightful ways.

The hiring of popular media personality Couric to replace retired journalist Dan Rather is yet another step toward personality-driven performances and spectacular media events—performances and events promulgated through capitalist dynamics generally and cultural processes specifically. Couric's ascendancy to the position of network anchor completed a generational shift at two of America's three traditional networks. Brian Williams was groomed to replace NBC's Tom Brokaw and, following the death of Peter Jennings, ABC executives chose Bob Woodruff and Elizabeth Vargas to co-anchor its nightly news, but cancelled their decision after Woodruff was seriously injured in Iraq and Vargas announced she was pregnant (Steinberg, 2006). These anchor-personalities are situated within developing systems of promotional integration that span multimedia delivery platforms. *The NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams*, for example, is "repurposed" on MSNBC.com, while Williams appears on podcasts, Web blogs and, most recently, cellphones. Couric, having assumed the anchor chair at CBS in September 2006, is featured in two video/audio podcasts: a one-on-one interview segment called "Eye to Eye with Katie Couric" and a monologue entitled "Katie's Notebook." CBS also launched "First Look with Katie Couric," a Web-based preview of the stories to be viewed on the main network newscast. These moves largely are designed to reach out to a younger technology-savvy audience, "connecting" with them emotionally through their chosen media platforms and, the hope is, funnelling them back to flagship broadcasts as well as a complex of network-related marketing and retailing activities. A turning point in this recent iteration of the integrated news spectacle, we argue, was the global multimedia event staged in the summer of 2005—the concerts/consciousness-raising/political-economic configuration called Live 8.

The integrated news spectacle—the core concept applied in what follows—does not circumscribe analyses through definition. Rather than narrowing the focus of our research in the name of "academic rigour," the integrated news spectacle impels us to address a broad range of questions concerning how and why contemporary power relations have become aestheticized in the context of high-volume production systems involving flexible forms of management, labour performance, and an acceleration of production-consumption turnover time (Castells, 2000; Harvey, 1989). Our methodological approach is straightforward: we constantly refer objects of study—e.g., the spectacular media event of the Live 8 concert—back to the broader social totality. As developed below, we argue that important insights regarding cultural production are attainable by focusing on cultural texts

(and other forms of cultural capital) vis-à-vis their *practical use* by activists, journalists, news organizations, political professionals, and audiences.

The concept of the integrated news spectacle utilizes Guy Debord's (1995) analysis of reification within consumer culture, i.e., how popular culture is increasingly subjected to objectification, rational organization, and control by impersonal market forces. From this perspective, media events are component parts of an *integrated* spectacular system of commodity production, distribution, and exchange. Particular attention is paid to action taken by various agents—activists, news organizations, journalists, and political professionals—to rationally organize and control popular forms of news and, crucially, to the promotional logic they deploy. Political performances and spectacular media events—such as the Lewinsky-Clinton sex scandal, the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and the Live 8 concerts—constitute revealing moments along the circuit of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. Social actors implicated in these spectacles are relatively autonomous: they act in relation to their own perceived interests but not under circumstances of their own choosing. Actors as disparate as Bob Geldof and the G-8 leaders—in their struggle against, or in the service of, dominant social relations—exercise agency, generally making use of the resources and promotional logic of the integrated news spectacle. In so doing, they tend to perpetuate or reproduce it.

Our article begins by elaborating the integrated news spectacle. It then details, through mostly U.S.-based examples, how varied social actors use it as a promotional fulcrum point to further their own interests. But the usefulness of the concept goes beyond its ability to theorize and explain. By articulating how the integrated news spectacle has emerged and what drives it forward, tensions and contradictions—both within the integrated news spectacle and in relation to the larger political economic order—are revealed. With this dynamic in mind, we use the concept to evaluate three interrelated concerns: 1) how the commodification of news and its integration with broader spectacles is directly connected to the strains of capital accumulation; 2) how political, economic, and technological factors came together in 2005 to make the Live 8 concerts a turning point in the history of the integrated news spectacle; and 3) how the spectacular emphasis on the here-and-now and ephemeral contributes to a substantive crisis of time—a crisis in which, from an Innisian perspective, a truly pluralistic culture is under assault by “a cacophony of noise and data available everywhere” (Watson, 2006, p. 427), and one in which ahistorical thought itself impels tensions and contradictions. As Innis recognized, “improvements in communication have made understanding [i.e., reflexivity] more difficult” (Innis, 1982, p. 31).

From an Innisian perspective, the integrated news spectacle constitutes an important nodal point in our civilizational neglect of time. Through the largely unconscious elaboration of spatial biases, according to Innis, long-term cultural projects (i.e., Western civilization) fall into crisis as a result of their self-referring and ultimately stifling structuring of consciousness. In the context of the twentieth (and now twenty-first) century, according to biographer Alexander Watson, Innis recognized “the cumulative drift towards the tearing apart of the conception of time and towards the supreme compression of space in the consciousness of modern man” (Watson, 2006, p. 329). Indeed, in conceptualizing the emergence of technology-mediated efforts to control markets and profit from individual consumers

through, among other developments, engaging sensations, interactivity, and more individual choice (i.e., control over space), the integrated news spectacle itself constitutes a kind of medium—itsself reflecting and deepening a more general inability to think and act reflexively (i.e., the failure to critically assess historical-contemporary developments and, thus, control time).

Before we proceed, one last point should be made. The complex logic behind the integrated news spectacle and its use among disparate interests do not represent the spectacle in its entirety (Debord, 1995): spectacular media events are significant in the context of larger integrated promotional systems of commodity production in which the news—at least in the United States and other liberal democracies such as Canada—now constitutes a core, if not decisive, component. The latest iteration documented here, we suggest, must be viewed as part of the already established process of the “continental integration for cybercapitalism” (Mosco & Schiller, 2001)—a political economic dynamic that carries with it cross-border implications for shared institutional norms such as what some have called the “regime of objectivity” (Hackett & Zhao, 1998).

### **The integrated spectacle of news production**

The integrated news spectacle, of course, has a history—a history of the cultural, political, economic, and technological developments that have compelled or facilitated (and continue to compel or facilitate) changes in how corporate executives, news editors, social activists, and politicians conceptualize and utilize news as a commodity and promotional vehicle.

A core component of the integrated news spectacle for corporations is the “common sense” employment of public-policy myths related to “deregulation,” information and communication technology (ICT) investments, and, together, their implications in defining “the news.” For example, private-sector media conglomerations and technological convergence activities (both facilitated by neo-liberal state policies) have involved and continue to involve enormous upfront fixed costs. These costs, usually constituted as debt, must be paid down (eventually) through profits. Indirectly and sometimes directly as a result of these and related pressures, editorial content is altered—i.e., it is made more transposable and efficient, and produced to fit flexible production regimes (Harvey, 1989). Cable news channels CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News, to name just a few American outlets, depend on highly dramatized “never-ending stories” such as the war in Iraq, “Monicagate,” or this month’s missing (and preferably young and blonde) white woman to fuel their 24-hour production regimes (Compton, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, these stories take on the form rather than the ideals of “objectivity” and “truth” (itself a historically constructed, intersubjective norm). Converged news media organizations, while referencing these principles, have been changing what they consider the news to be and how it is covered. This has been taking place in a media universe that must work progressively harder to get and hold audiences long enough to deliver them to advertisers and, increasingly, toward preferred nodes of a company’s or group of companies’ proprietary network, be it print, broadcast, or online news provider, entertainment site, or retailer (Compton, 2004). “Big stories” and celebrity or shock-and-awe features have become delivery platforms funnelling audiences to more than just a newspaper’s or broadcast’s sponsors.

Examining the integrated news spectacle as a complex of relationships clarifies the roles played by a broad range of political interests. Successful actors learn to take advantage of changing representations of the news and, in doing so, they become agents of the news spectacle—agents formally working outside of the dynamics driving corporations to perpetuate it. Utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's "social fields" and "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1990, 1991, 2005), we conceptualize that all social actors occupy positions within larger fields of interaction involving various spheres of social life. These include the fields of art, economics, politics, and journalism. Social fields are structured spaces of position and, for the most part, the position of social actors is determined by the resources they possess specific to a given field. These resources (or capital, broadly defined) take different forms: economic, cultural, and symbolic. One's power to act and think strategically, therefore, is relational.

The ability of rock stars Bob Geldof and Bono to act in the field of politics is related to their symbolic capital as celebrities. Their power is dependent, in part, on the relation between the political field and their habitus—i.e., transposable dispositions that form the basis of one's perception and understanding of social experience. Individuals are socialized by their interaction within a range of institutional structures (the economy, class, race, gender, etc.). Through experience, in the context of the habitus, people generally internalize the possibilities and constraints of social life. It is at this level that Bono and other celebrities have a sense of how to act in a given social context or situation. Understood holistically, Bono's social location as a rock star provides him with the economic, cultural, and symbolic capital needed to produce a global media event—for him, a promotional vehicle serving his and others' political activism. Also crucial, of course, was the participation of the Live 8 audience, both as an example of performance/activism and as a moment in the production, distribution, and consumption of the audience commodity. Indeed, the relationship of the much sought after affluent youth demographic to digital and mobile technology—experienced at the level of the everyday—has significantly elaborated the integrated news spectacle.

It is important to emphasize that there is no direct causal relationship between a celebrity's status and his/her ability to marshal support. Habitus involves a dialectical approach to social agency. The symbolic power of actors—the ability to use symbolic forms to garner attention and support—is not simply given by the social and material context of the political field. Symbolic power is dependent upon the *relation* between the actor or group's habitus and the political field. Political success depends, in part, on their compatibility with each other (Bourdieu, 2005).

### **The integrated news spectacle and the strains of capital accumulation**

The past 25 years have seen competitive pressures rise for print and broadcast news media. In the United States, in particular, the easing of media ownership and content restrictions by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) coupled with the landmark 1996 Telecommunications Act facilitated the global trend toward a market-based regulation of broadcast news. According to Robert Horwitz, "[T]he interlinked forces of deregulation, growth of television outlets, and new forms of competition have transformed the traditional complexion of mass electronic media" (Horwitz, 2005, p. 33). During the 1980s, tensions escalated with the introduction of new technologies such as video recorders and the burgeoning cable industry.

With the VCR and remote control, time shifting and channel surfing increased advertising avoidance. In response, advertisers began demanding more “advertising-friendly” content (Andersen, 1995).

The growth of cable and the subsequent proliferation of satellite technology further intensified competition. Between the years 1979 and 2001, the number of television and radio stations in the United States rose significantly—television stations alone multiplied from 1,008 to 1,686. The growth of local cable companies was even more pronounced, almost tripling from 4,200 to 11,800 over the same time period (Horwitz, 2005). Local network affiliates could now broadcast video from around the world that formerly was only available through direct network feeds. Local news became a significant revenue earner, with expected pre-tax profit margins of 40% and, in some cases, up to 70% in major U.S. markets (Horwitz, 2005). Meanwhile, 24-hour all-news cable channels CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News contributed to a growing fragmentation of audiences, as did syndicated tabloid news shows such as *First Edition* and *A Current Affair*.

By the end of the 1980s, the major U.S. networks were in a bind. Fixed costs associated with news production remained high while audiences were fragmenting. In short, the rapid technological development and the re-regulated broadcast media environment of the decade had generated stark economic uncertainties. Network executives had to respond. In the late 1980s, they replaced entertainment programming with less expensive current-affairs shows such as *48 Hours*, *20/20*, *Dateline*, *Nightline*, and *Prime Time Live*. Newsmagazine broadcasts attracted smaller audiences than sitcoms and other standard prime-time programs, but due to their relatively low incremental costs, they generated *relatively* higher profits and allowed the networks to amortize the fixed costs of their news divisions more effectively. By the 1990s, network news executives turned to relatively flexible, less expensive, and more entertaining programming in order to reduce costs and increase audiences (Compton, 2004).

Today, most newspapers and network news broadcasts are profitable but face dissipating readerships and audiences due to the Internet and other developments. Although income level remains the best indicator of online access, Internet penetration rose from 58% to 70% for all adult Americans between 2002 and 2005 (Horrigan, 2006). In the United States, newspaper circulation declined roughly 12% between 1990 and 2004 (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006), and, while the audience share of individual network newscasts dwarfs even the most popular cable news programs, the combined audience of the big three nightly newscasts has declined by more than half from their peak in 1969.

Evolving in response to audience fragmentation—a development perpetuated as a result of the Internet’s popularity (Comor, 2000)—and the corollary drop in advertising revenue has been a comprehensive strategy. This has taken place through affiliations, acquisitions, and synergies. Through these, the holy grail of mass media capitalism, “walled gardens,” have emerged, constituting “a fully converged computer-television information-entertainment portal permitting exclusive access to consumer households” (Murray, 2005, p. 418). Successful (and unsuccessful) mergers and takeovers, directly involving ICT investments and applications, have sought to develop content or software as the means of attracting audiences to pay for digital distribution. Once the prospective “garden” is in place, the plan has



been to utilize these capabilities to expand demand for digital content and, with it, increase advertising and other sources of revenue. Importantly, the costs of developing both content and distribution typically go beyond the debts incurred as a result of acquiring needed properties. They also involve rising expenditures associated with creating and marketing ever more exciting, stimulating, and engaging media experiences: experiences needed, it is assumed, to bring consumers into a given corporation's fold. In other words, the business opportunities related to digital technologies—enabling previously incompatible text, visual, and audio commodities to be inexpensively reproduced, integrated, and distributed—has spurred on expensive mergers, acquisitions, and digital-friendly infrastructures. As Lincoln Dahlberg argues, “the route to the domination of online practice is the domination of online attention, achieved through control over key content, software, and bandwidth. Space,” says Dahlberg, “may be preserved for critical communication free of corporate interests; yet such communication may be largely marginalized in the competition for user attention” (Dahlberg, 2005, p. 162).

Through such capabilities, the primary payoff is the ability to “capture” audiences—to, in effect, minimize competition and create an engaging promotional space in which most of the consumer's information, communication, and entertainment needs will be met by one multifaceted corporation. Indeed, in these multi-billion-dollar fixed capital formations (now taking the primordial form of bargain-priced “bundling” packages, for example), we see the seeds being sewn to develop an elaborate form of brand loyalty. In the words of Simone Murray, “The upshot is that production of mainstream media remains extraordinarily concentrated. . . while the marketplace continues to be flooded with a specious plenty of branded media product” (Murray, 2005, p. 421). Predictably, the most visited sites for news are owned by the wealthiest media corporations: Yahoo! News (which aggregates mainstream media content), CNN, MSNBC, and AOL News (Dahlberg, 2005; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006).

This is the economic context in which the integrated news spectacle and events such as Live 8 (and their spillover implications for corporate interests) continue to unfold. Brands attract eyeballs while simultaneously helping in their redistribution (Compton, 2004). Creating and keeping brand loyalty over time involves both repetition on the part of the consumer and the reliability of the brand. The goal in integrated newsrooms is to use editorial content to steer audiences toward preferred nodes of a company's or group of companies' proprietary network. These nodes may be ad-supported online retail sites or media organizations with which promotional partnerships are struck. News organizations increasingly, therefore, have a direct interest in related retail transactions or the financial success of associated outlets. The potential for conflicts of interest to arise between the public-service commitments of news organizations and their particular commercial interests are very real, as is the possibility that the diversity of media content will decline as formerly competitive organizations share editorial content (Compton, 2004).

In this complex process, we see the integrated news spectacle in the context of Innis' more ambitious time-space dialectic. Commercial efforts concerning spatial control, as both the centring *and* de-centring uses of ICTs demonstrate, generate, through the perpetuation of institutionalized biases, an ongoing neglect of time. Rather than just assessing a given medium—such as the integrated news specta-



cle—as itself enabling or disabling some ways of thinking and acting relative to others, Innis more generally focused on media in the context of longer-term imbalances, tensions, and contradictions. As with the layers of an onion, the interrelated contexts in which the integrated news spectacle unfolds involve both the dynamics of capitalism and the spatial-temporal dialectics of civilizational biases.

### **Corporate concentration and the ascendancy of bandwidth**

Tensions surface in a media universe in which corporations, burdened by debt, struggle to forge complex brand loyalties. Beyond the spectacle-as-news as a means of attracting audiences and reducing costs, there is a general dilution of professional journalistic standards. For example, a study released in April 2006 by the Center for Media and Democracy documented the use of 36 video news releases (VNRs) over a period of 10 months. It found that 77 television stations broadcast the VNRs without disclosing their origin. In some cases publicists who appeared in the prepackaged reports were referred to as local station reporters (Farsetta & Price, 2006). Moreover, many of the corporate structures being constructed are tenuous. Even in the most buoyant economies, the road leading to these technology-inspired information-communication-entertainment “gardens” have been littered with sometimes fatal accidents. The near collapse of Vivendi and the tribulations of the AOL–Time Warner merger are the most notable. But in an economic downturn, let alone a period of sustained recession, when both advertising and retailing dollars are scarce (see, for example, Delaney & Vranika, 2006), many of the corporate entities seemingly well on their way to achieving their goals become extraordinarily vulnerable.

The logic of the integrated news spectacle—both stimulating and a component of larger capitalist processes—accelerates the trend toward concentration, national monopolies, and international oligopoly. In lengthy periods of flat or declining consumption (last experienced in the 1970s to 1980s), markets devalue most share prices, bond-rating agencies compel troubled corporations to pay higher interest rates, and, for most, debt increases. In such times, overstretched, debt-laden capitalists are compelled to sell assets or get swallowed by others. Those corporations that are relatively “liquid” and possess “deep pockets” tend to take advantage. The predictable result for news is the further dominance by fewer large-scale commercial interests and a general decline in the quality of their services as news becomes further integrated into synergistic commodification strategies. At least for the production and distribution of the news as a source of mass information and genuinely pluralistic perspectives on issues of mutual concern, we thus anticipate the following developments: more corporate news concentration; greater pressure to deliver audiences to advertisers and corporate affiliates; more editorial intervention as a means of not offending valuable sponsors and essential sources; more seductions crafted into the news in order to capture audiences; greater demands for increased efficiencies from labour, often found in the form of journalistic multi-tasking among reduced staff; and, as the logical outcome of these and other tendencies, a general intensification of news-as-spectacle.

The struggle by news organizations and their corporate parents to decrease the uncertainty of capital accumulation amidst the costly flux of technological development and audience/consumer fragmentation continues. Recently, with the introduction of digital recorders such as TiVo, and audio and video podcasts for play on

portable devices—from cellphones and laptops to Apple's video iPod—advertising avoidance has gone mobile.

This emerging online news provider–mobile audience relationship is made possible by a confluence of factors bolstering the commercialization of digital communications. By early 2005, broadband was being used by more than 56% of U.S. Internet customers. In the U.K., broadband use in homes has risen 6,700% in the past four years, accounting for 80,000 new connections each week in November 2005 (“News Analysis: Connecting with Broadband Users at ‘Tipping Point,’” 2006). Along with this mass penetration has been a mass interest in streaming video. Video-sharing sites YouTube.com and Google Video are two notable examples. YouTube says its users view close to 100 million videos every day. Google Video has responded by allowing its users to post and share video, while Microsoft has launched its own video-sharing site called Passport (Levy & Stone, 2006; Taylor, 2006; Delaney, 2006). MySpace.com, the social-networking site that allows users to post text, photos, audio, and video about themselves, boasts 65 million, mostly young, users. Predictably, the popularity of these interactive sites has sparked a rush among media corporations to acquire online “communities.”<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the core reason for these developments is the interest shown by advertisers. Although online advertising remains a relatively small portion of the overall ad business—in the U.S. accounting for only 3.7% of total spending in 2004—according to PricewaterhouseCoopers this mode of advertising surged in 2005 by 30%, while growth in the entire American ad market was 4.5%. One U.S.-based research firm, eMarketer, estimates that online video-related advertising will exceed \$2.3 billion by 2010 (current U.S. television ad revenues total approximately \$60 billion) (Siklos, 2006). This relative growth, in turn, has buoyed the price of online advertising at the four largest U.S.-based Internet portals—Google, Yahoo!, AOL, and MSN (Angwin & Delaney, 2005; Avery, 2006). Another motive behind the rush to own interactive websites and a reason for the importance of broadband in conjunction with the recent proliferation of online video is conveyed in a study conducted by Neilson/NetRatings in November 2004. Broadband users, it reports, account for 69% of online retail sales (El Akkad, 2005; Oser, 2005; Walker, 2005).

The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that broadband customers in the United States (accounting for 74 million as of December 2005) used the Internet intensely—frequently checking in to get news updates and other services throughout the day. One reason for this is that broadband users were taking advantage of the “always on” availability of their high-speed Internet connections to alter their online experiences at the more prosaic level of the everyday. For some, viewing news from one moment to the next was becoming routine. The study found the habit to be particularly pronounced among so-called high-powered broadband users—those who reported using the Internet to do “four or more things” on the day surveyed. According to the report, these users “comprise 40% of the entire population of home broadband users and 44% of *all* Internet users who get news on the typical day. They are better educated and have higher incomes than other Americans” (Horrigan, 2006). They are, for these reasons, the most sought after audience for many advertisers.

The new multi-platform media environment for video and audio has created

pressure to develop business models that focus on constructing sustainable connections with young, affluent, and mobile customers—now referred to by marketers as “millennials.” Surveys indicate that these under-30 consumers do not rely on one form of media for information and entertainment. “In this group,” says Anne Sweeney of Disney Corp., “40 percent go home at night after work and school and use between five and eight different technologies. Then you have 40 percent of boomers who go home at night and watch TV. That’s what’s directing so many of our efforts in technology and content, especially as we look at our brands going forward and how they’re going to be used. . .” (Klaassen, 2006a).

For many commercial broadcasters and marketers, the “eureka moment” came during the Live 8 concerts of 2005—a media event that matched the integrated promotion of online video with the “desires” of relatively well off millennials.

### **Live 8 as promotional fulcrum point**

It was billed as “the greatest show on earth.” On July 2, 2005, one million people watched and listened to musicians at ten venues on four continents. Millions more watched the Live 8 concerts on television and the Internet. According to pop star Bob Geldof, “These concerts are the start point for ‘The Long Walk to Justice,’ the one way we can all make our voices heard in unison” (Geldof, 2005). Geldof, the organizer of the Live Aid concerts 20 years earlier that raised U.S.\$100 million for Africa, was not making a plea for more donations. His goal was to bring the weight of transnational public opinion to bear on the Group of Eight (G-8) leaders’ meeting in Edinburgh later that week. The brand slogan for the concert/rally was “Make Poverty History.” Geldof and rock star activist Bono were two of the more high-profile performers using the musical spectacle to ask leaders of the world’s most powerful economies to double aid, forgive debt, and create fairer trade rules for struggling African nations. Former South African president Nelson Mandela told a crowd of 8,000 Live 8 spectators in Johannesburg that “[h]istory and the generations to come will judge our leaders by the decisions they make in the coming weeks” (“Live 8 Puts Pressure on G8 Leaders,” 2005).

The event was hailed by politicians and media pundits as a political and artistic success when the G-8 summit ended with an agreement billed as a U.S.\$50-billion increase in aid. British finance minister Gordon Brown said Live 8 demonstrated how “public opinion” could influence governments to do the right thing (“Live 8 Puts Pressure,” 2005). Others dismissed the spectacle as “revolution lite” (Griffiths, 2005) or, pointing to the contradictions of its associated claims, as a sensational sellout of Africa’s poor (Monbiot, 2005a).

Ritualized dramatic performances, such as Live 8, often lack a historical dimension. Although it may be true that extraordinary media events can foster a liminal social space for communal reflection (Cottle 2006; Dayan & Katz, 1992), we must not reify or idealize them. Instead, they should be referred back to the historical power-laden contexts in which they are produced, distributed, exchanged, consumed, and, of course, contested by disparate groups of social actors. When Madonna asked fans gathered in London if they were “ready to change history?” (Hilburn, 2005), we should respond by asking in what sense was Live 8 a break with history and, for that matter, in what way was it a continuation of historical trends, particularly in light of the integrated news spectacle and recent develop-

ments involving broadband technologies?

Live 8 can be characterized, following the work of Dayan and Katz (1992), as a moment of cultural reflexivity in which liberal values concerning universal justice were held up to public scrutiny and found wanting. The liminal stage—a concept borrowed from the work of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1984)—is the in-between stage of ritual, when the structure of society is temporarily suspended. It is a moment in which the rules shaping social reality are no longer taken for granted. Instead, new possibilities arise; what could or should be becomes debatable.

Apart from its progressive intentions and at least momentary success, the Live 8 spectacle was a prime example of how popular culture is constitutive of the journalistic, political, and economic fields. Geldof and Bono are socially located political activists operating in historically constructed fields of social interaction that involve their own political economic dynamics. While social activism, pop fandom, state diplomacy, and the necessities of capital accumulation were linked through the media event, Live 8 served corporate news interests as a promotional fulcrum point.

In the political and journalistic fields, certain narratives are favoured over others. Melodramatic stories with strong central characters, including unequivocal victims representing the forces of good and evil, are preferred over stories involving more complicated shades of grey. The appeal of these black-and-white stories crosses multiple demographic categories. The plight of starving African children and the words of their charismatic rock star champions meet the promotional and immediate organizational needs of integrated news media organizations for easily understood, transposable stories—stories that can be re-purposed across an array of media formats and platforms. Thus there exists an enormous incentive to provide news media with such stories. To have a voice in the commercially mediated and cluttered sphere of political discourse, the good, the bad, and the sensational are routinely packaged, preferably together.

The political nature of the “Make Poverty History” event was potentially alienating to marketers, some of whom worried that the event would be anti-capitalist. Geldof, Bono, and others redressed these trepidations. “We met with concert organizers,” said Jim Bankoff, AOL’s vice-president of Programming and Products. “They’re taking great pains to make sure it’s not partisan or ideological” (Klaassen, 2005). Live 8 was, in effect, a “mass marketing approach to social advocacy” (Griffiths, 2005) or, as we prefer to describe it, an example of the spectacularization of the globalization-from-below movement—the movement to expand, capture, and contain an interested (but not necessarily knowledgeable or politically sustainable) civil society. Although the large amount of media attention directed toward Live 8 was due, in part, to the newsworthiness of the story and the draw of celebrity appeal, the event also was uniquely situated to take advantage of the shifting dynamics of capital accumulation centring around the convergence of broadcasting and online media.

The Internet broadcast of Live 8 was a strategic success for the troubled America Online franchise. Two years after the 2000 AOL–Time Warner merger, the media behemoth’s stock price had plummeted 80% and subscription revenue for its dial-up Internet service was in decline. This prompted Time Warner to split the AOL moniker from its corporate logo and, by the end of 2004, America Online

announced a major strategic shift. In the context of an effort to move away from a subscriber-based revenue model, AOL spent an undisclosed amount on the exclusive rights to Live 8. It then licensed the rights to television and radio broadcasters in the United States. The company's new business model focuses on free access to music and video content, supported by online advertising and search engine marketing (Bandler, 2004; Boucher & Gaither, 2005; Oser, 2004). Indeed, AOL's involvement with Live 8 was part of industry-wide developments—blossoming only after the event's success—placing broadband video at the centre of efforts to attract and re-aggregate audiences. According to AOL, five million “unique” viewers visited its video service on the day of the concert. At its peak, 175,000 streams activated at the same time—the most-watched streamed event ever on AOL.

Unlike television coverage, critics praised the breadth and flexibility of America Online's broadcast. More people tuned in to ABC's taped-highlights show (16.2 million overall) and MTV's broadcasts (13.3 million overall) (Lasswell, 2005), but television reviewers generally scorned the MTV broadcast for its frequent cutaways and narrow focus. Making available specific shows in their entirety, the Internet gave users the ability to view shows when they wanted to see them (Bauder, 2005; Hilburn, 2005). Concert highlights were archived at AOL.com for later replay. The company also provided exclusive content to bolster its online music channel, AOL Radio. “It was a tipping point,” said AOL vice-president Bankoff. “It's the biggest step so far and a pretty big leap forward” (Boucher & Gaither, 2005).

Live 8 also was viewed as a promotional opportunity for news organizations. Reuters news service struck a co-promotional partnership with AOL that directed traffic between Reuters.com and AOLmusic.com. Links to Reuters news stories were placed on the Live 8 site, part of the British company's attempt to increase its American readership (Klaassen, 2005). But it was Time Warner that seized the moment to synergize its news and entertainment divisions, using the G-8 summit to promote its HBO movie *The Girl in the Café*—a film about a woman who shames world leaders attending a fictional G-8 meeting and subsequently taking action to end world poverty. CNN broadcast a one-hour special the day of the Live 8 concerts that included 25 minutes of clips from the movie. Following the film, CNN aired an exclusive interview with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the subject of global poverty. Blair was given an advance screening of the film. Jonathan Klein, president of CNN's domestic operations, stated that “[t]he movie is a phenomenal way of making the central issue of the G-8 summit accessible to Americans.” The co-sponsor of the film's Washington premiere was the Council on Foreign Relations. Following the screening, CNN commentator Jeff Greenfield led a panel discussion with an editor from Newsweek International and a foreign relations expert. The interview was one of three discussions scheduled to air on PBS following the broadcast of so-called provocative Home Box Office films. The deal is an example of editorial-sharing agreements among rival networks—a strategy crafted to provide a hedge against the vagaries of capital accumulation. PBS gets access to widely promoted dramatic programming and Time Warner is able to market HBO and CNN to PBS's relatively affluent audience. It is in this sense that Live 8 was a promotional fulcrum point, serving a complex of political, economic, and cultural interests (HBO, 2005; Miller, 2005).

In the weeks following the Live 8 broadcast, the Web portal Yahoo! struck deals with CNN and ABC. These broadcasters agreed to provide video feeds to the Yahoo! news site. Both CNN and CBS News announced they would revamp their online portals, featuring free on-demand video streams in order to attract younger audiences and, with them, a more diverse group of advertisers (Steinberg & Lawton, 2005). Weeks earlier, Associated Press announced its plans to offer enhanced on-demand streaming video. And the deals continued. By year's end, the once maligned America Online found itself pursued by a number of wealthy suitors (Yahoo!, Microsoft, and Google), each hoping to strike an advertising-sharing partnership. An agreement was finally made with Google, which purchased a 5% stake in the company (Angwin, Delaney, & Guth, 2005). As part of the deal, Google consented to give ads promoting AOL prominence in its online searches (Hansell & Siklos, 2005). By April 2006, America Online officially changed its name to "AOL" as part of its transitional re-branding from a proprietary Internet service provider to an international news and entertainment portal (Carvajal, 2006).

Another experiment in merging broadcasting's mass audience with the Internet came in March 2006, with CBS's successful streaming of the "March Madness" basketball tournament. CBS underestimated the popularity of the event and, after capping the potential number of simultaneous streams at 260,000, was forced to turn away viewers (Oser & Klaassen, 2006). CBS Digital Media called the "March Madness on Demand programming its Live 8 event" (Klaassen, 2006b). According to Sarah Kim Baehr, an executive with Avenue A/Razorfish (a media buyer and interactive media company), "AOL's Live 8 was the big breakthrough event that kind of jumpstarted this whole love affair we've engaged in with digital in a sight, sound and motion kind of way" (quoted in Oser & Klaassen, 2006).

### **Journalism, common sense, and Live 8: Implications**

The need to increase the surplus value of the news as a commodity, and the drive to use news as a means of attracting audiences and advertisers, structures (but does not itself determine) how the news is being defined, developed, and put to use. As argued above, Live 8 constituted something of a turning point in this process. More specifically, streaming video, through the Internet and, increasingly, on portable devices, is becoming the core promotional vehicle through which the news is delivered, audiences are garnered, and, most importantly, the advertising, marketing, and cross-promotional ambitions of corporations are being elaborated. These developments have an impact on more than just the news; they have deepened cultural trends observable over what Fernand Braudel called the *longue durée* (Braudel, 1980) and Innis referred to as the history of contemporary Western civilization (Innis, 1982). The integrated news spectacle is particularly useful in the context of Innis' analysis in that it enables us to specify some of the mechanisms shaping our present-day annihilation of time. Through the application of digital, interactive, and personalized technologies, the consumer is seduced and serviced anytime, anywhere. The traditionally social, shared, and historically contextualized news story is being individualized within an increasingly commodified immediate gratification-focused and sensational framework.

The role news plays in the quest to develop digitized news and entertainment environments and their "walled garden" implications can be viewed as a much more



complex elaboration of the role U.S. news broadcasts once played for their respective networks. For CBS, NBC, and ABC, the profitability of the nightly news was secondary in relation to its spillover effects for the network brand *writ large*. Reliability, accuracy, and the quality of its investigative reporting, in a television world before cable competition and the remote control, brought audiences back to one of the three networks night after night, funnelling viewers into the profitable programming that followed. Today, in the context of more competition and the intensified search for revenue, not only are these news broadcasts expected to make money, they are becoming platforms from which consumers are directed to a plethora of commodities, sponsors, and related corporate interests.

Even today, at least in liberal democracies, the institution of the news still “promises” to communicate accurate, “balanced” reports on what editors (variously influenced by advertisers and targeted consumers) deem to be important. Despite a status quo interest in stifling dissent and ignoring uncomfortable facts, the commercial news service that consistently fails to provide its audience with institutionalized norms of “good journalism” is unlikely to survive. Of course, the commercial imperative to capture and deliver an audience still involves the expectation that the news being reported is accurate. But rather than the result of timeless principles held by the professional journalist, it is, in fact, commercial imperatives integrated with journalism’s (long-established but changing) institutionalized norms that facilitate this ongoing dedication to the “truth.” Particularly in times of crisis—as experienced in the United States beginning in the late 1960s—this commercial-professional dialectic impels journalists to re-frame the boundaries of what is true. In the not too distant past, the American news media generally operated under the institutional auspices of reporting only what could be substantiated by reliable sources; most often this meant government and military contacts. Trust in the accuracy and, in the context of the culture, the “balanced” presentation of facts constituted shared norms of both news providers and audiences. Under such conditions, the response by editors and reporters to audience demand for more inclusive anti-Vietnam War perspectives took place in the context of these institutional norms.

From this experience, the integrated news spectacle appears to be unsustainable. This is because the actors and structured relationships driving it forward seem destined to outpace journalism’s relatively conservative (i.e., slow to change) institutional norms. This tension has become more visible in recent years through a series of ethical scandals, ranging from hearsay reports during “Monicagate” to the outright fabrication of events by journalists such as former *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair. More recently, CBS News anchor Dan Rather left his position under a cloud after critics challenged the authenticity of documents cited in a report he did that questioned whether President George W. Bush had fulfilled his service obligations in the Texas National Guard in the early 1970s. “Memogate” soon thereafter was inserted into discourses concerning common sense views related to the supposedly left-leaning “liberal media” (Kurtz, 2005) and, as such, constituted something of a disciplinary warning to other news outlets on behalf of American neo-conservatives (Herman, 1999).

This disjuncture, between lived experience and its representation in the news, arguably is more transparent today as a result of the integrated news spectacle and its compulsion to exploit the black-and-white and sensational while ignoring the

complexities of everyday life. With its emphasis on celebrity, social mythology, and the like, juxtapositions involving one's material conditions and how these conditions are represented (or not represented) point to a potential crisis of legitimacy both for news organizations and, potentially, the contemporary neo-liberal status quo. In conditions of sustained crisis—prospectively triggered by massive U.S. trade deficits, rising interest rates, reduced consumer spending, and, perhaps most viscerally, ongoing military and domestic security activities related to the “war against terror”—such world (dis)order developments may soon test the capacity of the news-as-spectacle to reframe itself in the face of commercially mediated public demands.

It is in this contemporary context that recent developments involving new technologies and the integrated news spectacle constitute something more important than the restructuring of corporate news operations. These changes, to repeat, reflect a deepening Innisian crisis involving time. Indeed, the cultural implications of these developments can be more fully assessed through both the neo-Gramscian term “common sense” and Innis’ time-space dialectic.

Common sense, of course, is not some kind of objective compass upon which “rational” decisions are made. Instead, the common sense of any particular time and place is historically constructed; it is inter-subjective, enabling people to “understand” what they are experiencing despite inconsistencies. Because of its axiomatic and seemingly universal characteristics, common sense is difficult to promulgate or disrupt (indeed, its apparent timelessness is in part what defines it as common sense). All-encompassing references to the rights of the individual, the vagaries of Big Government, or the good of the nation, for example, do not have to be explained—they’re just “the way it is.” Common sense thus helps the individual make sense of his/her sometimes conflicting or incoherent experiences. This same common sense, through its elaboration from day-to-day, also may internalize the individual’s subordination. Rather than the absence of opposition to the status quo (which remains part of daily life and, of course, continues to be fodder for the working journalist), common sense ways of thinking are rooted in the general absence of feasible, realistic, or imaginable alternatives—alternatives that are rarely communicated in news-as-spectacle. For the most part, and in keeping with contemporary neo-liberalism, common sense—its unexplained contradictions and its use in closing off reflexive debate before it begins—neuters the saliency of critical thinking itself, particularly critical thinking projected toward the construction of a radically different future. The world’s destiny is out of our hands—*plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*.

To repeat, most liberal democracies have experienced, and continue to experience, an ongoing spectacularization of news and, as a result of mostly political economic dynamics, a more general reformation of the news as a promotional fulcrum point for capital. Live 8, we should remember, entailed assurances that the “Make Poverty History” campaign would not be anti-capitalist. The common sense reproduced and exploited through the integrated news spectacle in this event, as well as the daily practices of working journalists, is largely an outcome of structural pressures on the latter to report on events that stimulate an affect rather than promote sustained, collective deliberations. Feasible, realistic, and imaginable alternatives are, at best, marginalized because, for editors and journalists (to borrow from Margaret Thatcher), “there is no alternative.”

Let us elaborate through the example of Live 8. At first blush it appears as if the spectacle shattered (or at least dented) the status quo. The core message of the event, repeated as a mantra, was that a different world is possible. People living in Africa do not have to die. The means to end poverty are at hand. All that is lacking is the political will to make it so. And it can be argued that Live 8 pressured G-8 leaders to at least be seen to be acting to end world poverty. Much was made by event organizers that more than 26 million people worldwide sent text messages supporting the campaign's objectives. Following the announcement that G-8 leaders had promised \$50 billion in aid, Bob Geldof declared the summit a triumph. "On aid, 10 out of 10; on debt, eight out of 10. . . . Mission accomplished, frankly" (Monbiot, 2005a). Apparently, Live 8, in stark contrast to the concerns expressed by Innis, demonstrated that history not only could be redressed, in this instance *it was* (or so it seemed).

And yet what kind of break with history was achieved? What kind of understanding of the past and concern for a sustainable future did the media event actually produce? Soon after the Edinburgh summit, critics detailed the hollowness of the G-8 promises. Instead of initiating a substantive new direction, the G-8 leaders' proclamations were a continuation of the so-called Washington Consensus—a set of neo-liberal policies aimed at promoting economic growth, including enforced trade liberalization and privatization. Despite claims to the contrary, aid would remain tied to the neo-liberal status quo involving the privatization of domestic economies. In addition, the aid increase would include money already put aside for debt relief (Curtis, 2005). In fact, "[t]he extra money [G-8 leaders] had promised for aid and the extra money they had promised for debt relief were in fact one and the same" (Monbiot, 2005a). According to Monbiot, Live 8 turned the political campaign of the global justice movement into an exercise in philanthropy. Geldof and Bono criticized rich Western nations for not giving more aid but they remained silent on the role played by those same countries "in Africa's accumulation of debt, or accumulation of weapons, or loss of resources, or collapse in public services, or concentration of wealth and power by unaccountable leaders" (Monbiot, 2005b).

As the integrated news spectacle itself is institutionalized and deepened through new technological applications, editors and reporters are more (not less) likely to respond to crises by, at best, modifying the parameters of neo-liberal common sense. In the era of news-as-spectacle, obligations to journalism's professional code of conduct are breaking down. Given the choice of responding to public demands by either "getting serious" about their institutional obligations *or* by "explaining" foreign threats, economic collapse, and political dissent through modified references to the culture's common sense, the logic of the integrated news spectacle likely will compel editors and journalists to pursue the latter.

Arguably and ultimately, the Live 8 spectacle obscured debates about how neo-liberal trade and development policies have harmed not just poor African nations but also many others around the world. In this context, what news organizations have been doing as they structure news-as-spectacle into their daily practices is not necessarily an abandonment of the news as truth—the news, that is, as some kind of reflection or explanation of the audience's experiences. Instead, what Live 8 and subsequent strategies focusing on sensation, personalization, and interactivity reflect and perpetuate is *the co-existence of fundamentally contradictory interpre-*

*tations of the truth.*<sup>3</sup> In its occluded and liminal response to crises such as African poverty, or the brutality of war, or the unethical behaviour of corporate executives and politicians, the logic of the integrated news spectacle expands with little serious opposition.<sup>4</sup> Rather than anticipating that the juxtaposition of a material crisis with endless stories of missing White women will one day implode in a sustained burst of collective consciousness, the integrated news spectacle more probably is contributing to the ongoing and simultaneous saliency of conflicting versions of common sense. In terms of the “Make Poverty History” movement or just the everyday of Katie Couric anchoring broadband reports structured to suit multi-platformed marketing strategies, we are reminded of Innis’ recognition that efforts to control space tend to undermine capabilities related to time—that in the corporate quest for markets and consumers, collective, historical, and reflexive thinking generally is neglected.

### **The integrated news spectacle and the annihilation of time**

A historical contradiction related to the logic of the integrated news spectacle involves the ascendancy of both reactionary status quo policies *and* similarly reactionary or ahistorical public responses. News, of course, is a core mediator of more than just what information some believe to be important (or not important); it also plays a significant role in shaping how we conceptualize what is feasible and even imaginable in our individual and collective lives. Although the history of capitalism has always involved efforts to control space and time, the structural conditions articulated by the integrated news spectacle signal capital’s ongoing success in this struggle. As the news becomes more reified, more in tune with fashion than political economic context, more aligned with individual consumption than sustained communal possibilities, capitalism (as opposed to fractions of capital or specific companies) faces fewer barriers to dominating the course of history. Capital, writes David Harvey, “continues to dominate, and it does so in part through superior command over space and time” (Harvey, 1989, p. 238).

All human relationships are mediated. As such, media (broadly defined to include institutions such as the news) are fundamental components in the process through which common sense realities are conceptualized and experienced. In other words, media, such as the news as an institution (or Live 8 as a spectacular event), affect *the process through which* reality is constructed or challenged. In the context of life under capitalism, those who possess extraordinary amounts of wealth or capital (understood broadly as financial, symbolic, and cultural) directly or indirectly exercise extraordinary powers in shaping this reality.

As we have argued above, the historical structuring of the news-as-spectacle has taken shape in the context of capital accumulation. Capital always strives to speed up production and accelerate turnover time, and this is pursued through long-term investments—the mobilization of fixed capital including “human capital” and the institutionalization of cultural norms (such as the wage labour contract, mechanical time, and, more generally, common sense axioms regarding “the way things are”). Of course, this dynamic involving fixed investments itself generates contradictions. Particularly in times of crisis, such relatively fixed structures in conjunction with rapidly changing conditions of life generate political uncertainty. Fixed capital formations also (and, in the context of capitalism, ironically) tend to impede

innovations and complex political economic re-structuring efforts. Today, for example, the time-horizon of transnational commodity markets simply “cannot accommodate to the temporalities of social and ecological reproduction. . . in a responsive way” (Harvey, 2000, p. 59). Specifically in terms of the integrated news spectacle, the primary agents of this drive to annihilate the time (and thus reduce the costs) involved in producing and distributing information, “capture” consumers, and monetize “eyeballs” through increasingly elaborate methods are corporate executives. But sometimes standing in the way of their structured ambitions are editors, journalists, and audiences socialized by institutionalized norms and expectations. These various agents act in various contexts—from competitive machinations to pressures related to mounting debts to (for consumers) the practical desire and psychological quest to access relevant, trustworthy news.

In our reading of one dimension of Innis’ *Bias of Communication* (1982), media (including the news) constitute institutional nodal points in the hegemonic process of prospectively facilitating rule through consent. For Innis, periods of explicit uncertainty or crisis are moments in which the ability of dominant interests to directly shape reality—to control how time and space are organized and conceptualized—is potentially challenged. Indeed, in the context of capitalism, Innis recognized that various media (which, for him, included a broad range of technologies, organizations, and institutions) hasten capital’s systemic drive for spatial expansion in conjunction with its related neglect of time. The news-as-spectacle mediates this very process. As the news becomes an experientially immediate and interactive commodity, and new technologies enable consumers to choose the news they want and its format (any place, any time), ahistorical, self-oriented ways of acting and thinking become routine. Seemingly, there is no explicit authority; individual choice “rules.”

The integrated news spectacle and its post-Live 8 incarnations reflect and deepen these tendencies—what Innis referred to as our civilizational bias toward spatial conquest and its concomitant neglect of the past, the long-term, or, from a classical sociology perspective, reflexive thought itself. We observe these in the narcissistic (Lasch, 1979; Sennett, 1974) instant gratification of seeing your name added to a global and decidedly impermanent Live 8 online electronic petition; the event’s seamless divorce of world poverty from history; and, of course, the mythological status of agency as some kind of “heroic” consumer “participating” online or by watching TV (thus effecting immediate change).

Following Live 8, some notable strategic developments are afoot. CBS is establishing its own broadband platform (Becker, 2006a). One streaming-video promo found at CBSNews.com contains the slogan “CBS News, See it now, Anytime, Anywhere.” Moreover, CBS’s online “First Look” at upcoming stories is filmed with a shaky hand-held camera conveying a kind of verisimilitude. NBC News is now going to market itself using the slogan “NBC News: Wherever you go, there we are,” meaning, in the words of one executive, that their news services will be available “on-air, on cable, online, on your telephone” (quoted in Becker, 2006b). As with broadcasters, newspapers are trying to get readers online as a means of attracting younger consumers and, more importantly, “getting more participation from audiences” (E & P Staff & the Associated Press, 2006). By “participation,” news providers and marketers forecast more than just consumers selecting what

video they want to see and the text they want to read at the time and location of their choosing. Executives also anticipate the news becoming an *experiential activity* involving polls, interactive maps, timeline charts, multiple video downloads, and other interactive mechanisms (Atkinson, 2006). “Whenever I hear the word ‘broadcast,’ I try to dump it,” says advertising executive David Rolfe. “It’s a grotesque anachronism that implies the model where we’re just feeding viewers whatever we want them to have” (Klaassen, 2006a).

Substantively, however, the logic at hand has little to do with truly liberating audiences, enabling them to realize some kind of neo-liberal “consumer sovereignty” ideal. Instead, news corporations and their complex corporate interests are seeking to create one-on-one *relationships* with (preferably younger and relatively affluent) customers—consumers of the news as well as a broad range of interconnected revenue-generating activities. While a strong editorial hand and the supremacy of professional standards have been in decline for many years, structurally, the logic of the integrated news spectacle, in light of “personal” and increasingly mobile technologies, has intensified and accelerated this dynamic. Marketing practitioners now talk about establishing “more. . . meaningful relationships with their customers. By encouraging consumers to express their ideas and concepts, they build strong brand loyalty” (Allan Kennedy quoted in “Web Ads Can Lure You In,” 2006). And in the words of another: “The best use of the web. . . is [its use as] an engagement platform. . . the best advertising. . . encourages dialogue” (Donna Alteen quoted in “Web Ads Can Lure You In,” 2006). Rather than a bold move toward individual freedom, the pressing question is who will capture and maintain an increasingly commodified and commodifiable relationship with the consumer?

Innis, writing in 1946 on the development of modern democracy and the newspaper, believed these to have generally facilitated force-based and, ultimately, contradictory “solutions” to political, economic, and cultural crises. He thought such media—both shaped by advertising’s emphasis on sensual engagement and immediate gratification—constitute dangers to sustainable, peaceful relations; they are dangers, more precisely, to reflexive thinking and its role in maintaining order (control over time) as opposed to the mobilization of mass support through serial manipulations of public opinion (control over space). Innis argued that the news had become a kind of addictive drug, contributing to the long-term decline of critical faculties (Watson, 2006). Through its concern “with reaching large numbers of readers,” the newspaper “rendered obsolete the machinery for maintaining peace. . . .” In sum, writes Innis, “Guizot wrote of the great evil of democracy, ‘It readily sacrifices the past and the future to what is supposed to be the interest of the present,’ and that evil was accentuated by the reign of the newspaper and its obsession with the immediate” (1946, p. 95).

The neo-liberal dream of marketplace relations dominating society occludes the cultural limitations of its constituent ways of thinking. By “freeing” or enabling the consumer, the “walled garden,” paradoxically, really is *walled*. Culturally, the integrated news spectacle constitutes a dynamic force for the proliferation of information and, simultaneously, the strangulation of truly pluralistic thought. The pernicious neglect of time, Innis would have underlined, has become so pervasive and, indeed, institutionalized, that the quantity, immediacy, and mobility of individualized sensations are suffocating even marginal ways of conceptualizing reality.



Politically, the present mindedness of the integrated news spectacle, in the long term, disables the reflexive capacities of both the status quo and its opponents.

### **Conclusion**

What the integrated news spectacle reflects and structurally feeds into is a significant political economic and, indeed, cultural disjuncture: a disjuncture in how the status quo and its opponents organize and conceptualize time and space. As a means of spatial control, news has become a strategic medium challenging and influencing, among other things, a critical, progressive, and communal sense of time. Meanwhile, the structuring of a complex of commercial priorities related to the news and its common sense elaboration of the need for “less government,” regulatory “freedom,” and the right to privately own just about anything that can be commodified, all emphasize the biases that prompted Innis’ signature essay, “A Plea for Time” (1982, pp. 61-91). Indeed, our analysis of the integrated news spectacle and its time-space implications has consciously sought to apply a Canadian critical, holistic, and dialectical approach (Acland & Buxton, 1999; Babe, 2000) in contrast to biases found in most U.S.-based critiques of globally influential U.S.-based developments.

Television news and even the news presented by the “quality” press have changed, from our contemporary perspective at least, from largely stoic informational services to increasingly image-based, dramatic experiences. The contradiction at play here can be summarized as follows: responses to the many symptoms of our contemporary neglect of time—such as the emboldened use of the American military or the reified status of neo-liberal globalization—tend to make use of what is sensational, fashionable, and immediate vis-à-vis the habitus that is associated with the integrated news spectacle. Through all of this, reactionary tendencies mount, exacerbating existing problems, making crises less rather than more correctable.

In the case of Live 8, its rallying cry of “Make Poverty History” has limited value if it is not sustained beyond the duration of the 24-hour news cycle. Although the spectacle of Live 8 galvanized the attention of millions and focused it on the tragedy of African poverty, to make a substantive break with history, in order to confront the injustice of systemic poverty, social movements must also break away from the instrumental logic of commodity production, distribution, and exchange—a logic that is deeply implicated in some of the more trenchant social problems facing Africa and, indeed, the global South. Removing the structural conditions that arguably constitute the basis of African poverty will require, for example, a sustained effort by a combination of global and national actors; it will require a sustained social consciousness that moves beyond the shared liminal moments of a media spectacle that explicitly accommodates the sometimes disparate ambitions of corporate and political actors.

But Live 8 was more than just a liminal moment; its short-term aftermath constitutes, for corporations engaged in the integrated news spectacle, a period of remarkable clarity. Corporate ambitions and their strategic uses of broadband technologies have been crystallized, at least temporarily(!), while their cultural implications related to the Innisian annihilation of time march on. As David Harvey argues in his critique of what he calls the condition of postmodernity (Harvey, 1989), this emphasis on spatial, marketplace, and territorial control (as with the corporate quest

to construct “walled gardens”) is being pursued to the detriment of at least two building blocks of most sustainable political movements: community memory and an inherent concern with long-term structural reforms. In their absence, resistance to capital is not automatically and voluntaristically progressive. Indeed, in recent years, resistance has been fragmented and temporally limited. As the terrorist attacks perpetrated by both Islamic radicals and, before 9/11, by mostly White male “homegrown” terrorists indicate, resistance itself may be becoming more reactionary (as opposed to creative or progressive), reflecting the individualistic and immediate-gratification common sense perpetuated by contemporary news outlets.

In this article, we have framed the integrated news spectacle as a key nodal point in the *longue durée* of what Innis referred to as our civilization’s annihilation of time. The news spectacle is a dramatic representation of social relations that go well beyond everyday experience, offering common sense explanations, criticisms, and reassurances in the face of extraordinary problems (Edelman, 1988). Such cultural texts can be used to strengthen relationships through storytelling, to imagine shared communities, and, of course, to mobilize collective action (Alexander & Jacobs, 1998; Carey, 1992; Chaney, 1993; Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Dayan & Katz, 1992). But having said this, the news-as-spectacle is significant, more essentially, because it constitutes a promotional fulcrum point for an array of mostly status quo vested interests—from pop star activists to journalistic organizations, from corporate media conglomerates to G-8 leaders. As Guy Debord underlines, “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1995, p. 12). In other words, to assess the performance of power we must grasp the political economy of performance; we must understand how the promotional logic of the spectacle both mediates power and manifests itself within power relations as an objective social force—a social force now mediating capitalism’s systemic drive entailing a neglect of time and, with it, our collective distancing from the sustained structural and conceptual reforms needed to genuinely redirect history.

## Notes

1. During the summer 2005, the story of the disappearance of Alabama teenager Natalee Holloway while on vacation in Aruba received blanket coverage on Fox News. Fox’s fascination with the story has continued up to the time of this writing.
2. News Corporation purchased MySpace.com for U.S.\$580 million; NBC Universal bought the women’s oriented site iVillage.com for U.S.\$600 million; and iFilm.com, a site that allows people to post video and track film industry news and gossip, was sold to Viacom for an estimated U.S.\$50 million (Robertson, 2006). Yahoo! bought Vancouver-based start-up Flickr.com, a site that allows people to post and share photos for free. And finally, Google bought the 19-month-old YouTube for U.S.\$1.65 billion in stock (Delaney, 2006).
3. This ambiguity was captured on the front page of the *Toronto Star*, whose July 3, 2005, headline read “Live 8: Will It Help Her?” Below this question was a photo, taken in famine-scarred Niger, of a young girl working a field with a hoe. Inside this special edition, a range of stories was published that, when read collectively, simultaneously celebrated and questioned the political impact of the celebrity spectacle.

4. Further to this point, research by Daniel Hallin (1986) on media coverage of the Vietnam conflict provides empirical support for W. Lance Bennett's (1990) indexing thesis which argues that news coverage tends to defer to official elite opinions. Hallin found that media operate within the boundaries of a "sphere of consensus." Challenges and controversy begin to appear in news media *within* a sphere of legitimate controversy when elite opinion fractures. Bono and Geldolf, as members of the global cultural and economic elite, represent a fracture within elite opinion at the current historical conjunction typified, as it is, by the institutional norms of the integrated news spectacle. Criticism takes place, but within accepted boundaries. Their political activism is structured by the rules of the game specific to the mediated political sphere—a social field in which their status as pop stars and entrepreneurs affords them the cultural, symbolic, and economic capital to act within the political field. The feel for the political game, which enables politicians to predict the stances of other politicians, or celebrities, is also what makes them predictable for other politicians (Bourdieu, 1991).

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