Introduction: Mobile Citizens, Media States

D. N. RODOWICK

MOBILE CITIZENS, MEDIA STATES. THE TITLE OF THIS special-topic issue, also used for our panel at the 2000 MLA convention, is meant to raise more questions than it resolves. The nature of our mobility as citizens (economic, geographic, cultural) is no less complex and variegate than the media environments we now occupy, as Caren Kaplan explains in her contribution. Moreover, even if the concentration of media ownership in fewer and fewer transnational corporations is resulting in a multinational entertainment state, as the *Nation* suggested some years back, this does not mean that media use and audience identity are becoming more homogeneous. Global media are less unified, and unifying, than they appear at first glance; media consumers are more heterogeneous and their responses more complex than ever.

In these respects, our special topic continues the debate launched by Giles Gunn in the *PMLA* special topic devoted to globalizing literary studies. Our specific interests lie elsewhere, however. What unifies the otherwise divergent perspectives of the contributions here is the authors' understanding that global electronic media are evolving in contradictory ways and, in so doing, are potentializing new powers of citizenship. In the context of globalization, then, what does it mean today to be a "subject" in the political sense, and what are the subjective affects deriving from the political and cultural impact of global media?

Globalization's economic forces promote flows of commodities and finance capital, as well as enhancing the control over media networks by a few multinational corporations. But the same forces also produce increasingly deterritorialized transnational communities. The consolidation and expansion of the media state as a virtual information "territory" in conjunction with the actual transnational movements of people is producing

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what might be called a cosmopolitan public sphere.[1] This is a contradictory and heterogeneous transnational space with two fundamental dimensions, both of which are eroding the traditional functions of the state. One dimension is characterized by the increasing importance of human rights as a transnational concept whose locus of articulation is international nongovernmental organizations. If the state can no longer guarantee rights, citizenship becomes more participatory. Because states are slow to act, citizenship acquires an ethical dimension that insists that individuals and groups participate more directly and cooperate on issues that are increasingly global and local at the same time.

The other dimension is defined by the global reach of electronic communication and entertainment networks, or the media state, if you will. Progressive critics are often wont to treat "global media" as a homogeneous and hegemonic force. And, indeed, the increasing concentration of world media ownership poses worrying problems of control over content and over the flow of information.[2] Undoubtedly, the entertainment-communication multinationals are dislodging one of the functions of the liberal state, which was to guarantee equal access to information as well as to a multiplicity of points of view. Nonetheless, the same technologies that enable global distribution of media (satellite, cellular, Internet, and so on) are also increasingly available to media activists. (Thomas Foster's account of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's theory and practice of media activism in this issue is a wonderful case in point.) Moreover, global media forms are not monolithic. They are heterogeneous and contradictory with respect to source (print, film, television, video, radio, and the varieties of computer-mediated communication) and to modes of reception. One necessary way of envisioning a contestatory cosmopolitan public sphere, then, is to account for the proliferation of alternative media that use the same technological resources as corporate media, as well as for the alternative circuits in which communications technologies are distributed and recontextualized in *immigré* and activist communities.

Each of the essays presented here also addresses a distinct shift in the concept of citizenship, to a version that one might call, with some hesitation, postmodern. The relation of citizenship to modernity is top down. Closely linked to concepts of nationhood and powers deriving from the state, in the modern framework citizenship is conferred by birth, thus identifying what Etienne Balibar has called the "citizen subject" with the assumed self-identity of the nation and its corresponding territorial claims. Here the state assures rights through national legal and juridical systems and, in return for the guarantee of rights, asks the citizen to assume certain responsibilities: to vote, to obey the law, to serve in the military, and so forth. Alternatively, the postmodern forces of globalization have shifted or, more precisely, multiplied and complicated centers of power so as to diminish the forms of self-identity conveyed by nationality. Acceleration in transportation and communication means geography is less constraining for most people. The primary function of the state is no longer the permanent preparation for war and control of territory, national or colonial. The state's role in adjudicating the identities and rights of citizens is also becoming more troubled. As a result, participatory citizenship has shifted the ratio between rights and responsibilities. This is a bottom-up notion of citizenship that demands a more loosely defined, though more directly committed, notion of democratic participation, which may not necessarily recognize the authority of nations. States have lost the will or the ability to be the sole grantors of rights, nor can they alone be the guarantors of universal rights. Therefore, a more direct, participatory democracy is called for as the state becomes less able to assure individuals social and environmental security. Similarly, the positive side of the new media ecology may be an enhanced awareness of the web of global political and cultural relations that surround and bind us. This ecology also enables new

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ways of forging political consensus and inventing strategies of action as communication networks connect local and transnational organizations. This leads to a renewed focus on building transnational political consensus, whose foundations often turn to questions of ethics.

The existence of a globalized cosmopolitan public sphere also suggests that our current notions associating the concept of the subject with citizenship must be revised. An earlier notion of the cosmopolitan as expatriate intellectual is now broadened and problematized by the new cosmopolitans—economic immigrants, members of diaspora communities, political refugees, and displaced persons—whose mobility is by no means qualitatively positive. The vexed character of this mobility and what it means for the frontiers of Europe are the subject of Etienne Balibar's fascinating lecture that appears in the Criticism in Translation section. The territorializing forces of colonialism and neocolonialism are now counterbalanced with the reverse flows of deterritorialized populations—a mobility of immigration driven by political or economic necessity. The new cosmopolitans are dis-located in multiple ways, and in this sense, they are the darker, reverse side of Enlightenment optimism for a rational and universal consensus on political issues. The world is full of these *sans-papiers*, people without papers, undocumented in the historical or governmental sense. As Iain Chambers notes in this issue, they form a collectivity "that exists beyond art, subjectivity, and political and cultural representation. [. . .] Such peoples are exiled in many ways; they are not only, and most obviously, dislocated physically and materially but also excluded economically, politically, and culturally from the agenda that dictates global development and progress."

But this situation also opens possibilities for contestation and critique. The mobility of deterritorialized transnationals must be characterized across several levels: not only their movements but also the inventive mixing of languages in bilingual and polyglot communities, the increasing hybridization or creolization of cultures, and finally the transformation of identity as a set of complex cultural and political allegiances that unite as well as divide local communities subnationally, nationally, and transnationally. In this manner, the mobility of identity or of cultural identification must be opposed to the fixity of an identity politics. In the wake of Enlightenment philosophy, the cosmopolitan subject was defined by a discourse of self-determination and the emancipation of the self. But now the velocity of communication and of transnational movements, not to mention economic migration, is producing culturally and ethnically hybrid spaces where the self is always multiply located. This is one of the central contradictions of cosmopolitanism today, since modern constitutionalism was never designed to deal with the problem of cultural diversity. This also means that, as Pieterse Nederveen has pointed out, the new cosmopolitans adapt unpredictably to the global flows of culture and media: "on one end an assimilationist hybridity that leans over toward the center, adopts the canon and mimics hegemony, and, at the other end, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the center" (64). The extraterritorial flows of immigrant and expatriate communities form complex vortices and countercurrents in relation to the centripetal forces of transnational media, on one hand, and of residual nationalism, on the other, whether that of the home country or that of the adopted land. But, as in the 1996 film *Salut cousin!*—where the *maghrebin* cousin is astonished to discover that his Parisian relatives watch nothing but Algerian TV via satellite because in Algeria they watch only French TV—the center is always elsewhere. The social anchor of national identity is loosened as economic migration becomes more intense and complex. Thus, cosmopolitan citizenship is a postnational form motored by the "enhanced interconnectivity of cultures" (Delanty 53). It offers new possibilities for rights and participation at levels above and below those of national identification. At the

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same time, as cultural identity becomes fluid and multidimensional, cultures and ethnicities mix locally and relocate or redefine themselves through the consumption of culture(s) transmitted by global media networks.

As a result, the new cosmopolitanism originates in ambivalence. Globalization cannot simply be thought of as a runaway free-market capitalism proliferating without the constraints of national regulation and promoted officially by international regulatory mechanisms. It is also helping to establish a cosmopolitan public sphere. To be sure, part of this public sphere rests in the domain and control of global media conglomerates. But the compression of space and time effected by the new global media ecology also releases new possibilities for communication and resistance—parallel information networks and alternative strategies of reception and use. These are networks of solidarity and contestation wherein the local becomes transnational and global. As Gerard Delanty has noted, "Cosmopolitan public spheres come into existence when transnational, national, or local public spheres come into contact with [one] another and undergo change as a result. This is quite distinct from the question of civil society as a legal and political form of transnational governance, for it is a *matter of cultural transformation in the values and norms of social and civic relations*" (5; emphasis added). As geography becomes less and less a barrier to communication and movement, cultures become more exposed to one another. This produces an intricate field of tensions, creolizing not only identity but also communities, whose active reception and use of global media become novel and unpredictable.

Thus, we can imagine the new cosmopolitanism as a contested space where questions of language, culture, representation, and identity must be articulated together in complex ways. In like manner, the critical and theoretical study of modern languages, literatures, and media—the constituent elements of this global public sphere—becomes ever more important. This raises the crucial question of the place and function of teachers and intellectuals with respect to the emergence of a cosmopolitan form of citizenship—the focus of our 2000 MLA convention panel, featuring Bruce Robbins, Mark Poster, Thomas Keenan, and N. Katherine Hayles. All the authors in this special-topic issue ask in different ways what it now means to be a subject or, more precisely, a potential witness or actor in a public sphere that is increasingly transnational and cosmopolitan. What new qualities and powers characterize cosmopolitan citizenship, and what new possibilities of action, but also inaction and blockage, confront these qualities and powers?

In his essay "The Sweatshop Sublime," Bruce Robbins introduces an idea of the literary critic and literature teacher as citizen. As a cosmopolitan citizen, the progressive intellectual is bound by the same contradictions as every consumer of global culture. On one hand, the globality of the media state—the transnational sale and circulation of images and information—transcends and unifies otherwise heterogeneous cultures and communities. On the other, this sale and circulation, despite their overwhelming reach and volume, disconnect us cognitively from what is conventionally called globalization: a multinational economy uncontrolled by any one state and whose single acknowledged border is that between First World consumers and Third World producers. This disjunction between global information and multinational economies (often serving the same corporate masters) discourages a notion of citizenship distinguishable from consumption by striving to block any communication promoting solidarity between the localities where the surplus value of labor is extracted and the developed nations where it is consumed. Thus, globalization produces two disjunctive versions of cosmopolitanism: an abstract and universal consumerism where all local differences are effaced and an ethical recognition of economic and human rights and cultural differences.

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Where is literature, much less the aesthetic, in all this? This is the value of Robbins's concept of the "sweatshop sublime"—a numbing disjunction between the two global spheres of economic exploitation and its possible representations or misrepresentations, which is often experienced as an aesthesis or sensation yielding particular avenues of action or, more commonly, inaction. Striving to contemplate the sublime of globalization, to reconnect our local consumption to a representation of the myriad and interdependent hands and minds that produced its objects, often in exploitative circumstances, the individual's powers of cognition come up short. The sweatshop sublime connects the local and singular individual to a global and collective situation, but, as Robbins points out, this knowledge of the global scale is not commensurate with the individual's powers of action. It thus translates into feelings of powerlessness and inertia. Like the early modern sublime, the sweatshop sublime is an aesthetic sensation connected to a kind of political awareness that has literary precedents. And even if this sensation is uncertain and ambivalent, it has a progressive role to play. As Robbins writes, "[T]his limited moment of ethically inspired consumer consciousness is just the sort of raw or semiprocessed phenomenological material in which private and public, domestic and international are fused, and it is out of such material that an internationalist antiglobalization politics on a mass scale will have to emerge, if indeed it ever emerges."

In the concept of the sweatshop sublime, Robbins not only presents an interesting way of reconnecting the aesthetic to the political; this articulation of the global and the local may also be understood as the emerging outline of a new concept of nation. Here Robbins appeals to Antonio Gramsci's notion of the "national-popular"—"an imperfect and historically determined version of common sense [. . .] that links the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people to the fate of others in a larger collectivity. [. . .] The gradually increasing reservoir of everyday tropes and images that connect our sense of ourselves and our fate with the fates of those who are not our fellow citizens can thus be thought of, I propose, as the international-popular." N. Katherine Hayles points out in her response in the conference section that, instead of blocking understanding and action, the sweatshop sublime pushes us to recognize and confront the complex set of cultural and political interdependencies that have always marked everyday life under capitalism. It also promotes an idea of citizenship that is linked up in a transnational notion of collectivity, and in the face of the complexities of globalization, it asks us to accept and to redefine a more limited sense of what social action means, especially for intellectuals.

In "Citizenship, Language, and Modernity," Iain Chambers reflects on tensions in the age of globalization between belonging (that is, being a citizen) and being mobile. Like Robbins, he acknowledges that citizenship, with its claims to civic freedom and justice, means little in the fields and sweatshops of the rural and urban poor. In most parts of the developing world, physical survival is at stake, not citizenship. At the same time, in the midst of our First World metropolises, a so-called Fourth World congregates—the world of the displaced, the exiles, immigrants, asylum seekers, and other mobile noncitizens. In Guillermo Gómez-Peña's terms, the Fourth World is a counterspace that challenges the privilege and identity of citizens, those who have a home.[3] And if citizenship is meant to be more than just a legal term, then language and shared memory become central. Similar to Robbins proposing the international-popular, Chambers emphasizes the importance and complexity of the interdependency of citizenship and the new global media in a way that underlines questions of language:

> For language—as representation, configuration, and communication, as a potential ethics and aesthetics—secures and propagates such a relation. And the media—as photograph, film, printed archive, daily newspaper,

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> and computerized recall—have become the collectors and custodians of individual and collective memory for those able to access them. If citizenship depends on individual and collective recollection to be articulated, then the media, in becoming memory, are central to the performance of an imagined collectivity, whether it is local, ethnic, or national.

Seen in this way, citizenship is a cultural construct shaped to a large extent by modern media as the repositories of individual and collective memory.

In this situation, Chambers proposes that an enlarged concept of translation is crucial for understanding the new possibilities, and limits, of belonging and citizenship. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's seminal essay "The Task of the Translator," he argues that translating a foreign language or culture does not leave one's own language and culture unaffected. As we try to "translate" and understand unheard-of practices and events, transmitted to us by the media from all over the world, we are daily confronted with, and humbled by, images and actions that cannot easily be integrated into our horizon of understanding. They interrupt and disturb our dominant narratives, thereby exposing our unquestioned provinciality. To open ourselves to these other narratives is, according to Chambers, an invitation to render "the universal story many of us think we are living more localized, particular." The desired goal, then, would be not to feel at home, as Theodor Adorno once put it. Chambers's reflections negotiate between "roots and routes," between location and mobility, but he clearly privileges language over land because place can no longer claim proprietorship over the language(s) that appear(s) and speak(s) there: "Land and locality—one's roots, as it were—are [. . .] reworked in the translating medium of language." Language thus becomes a historically situated medium that actively transforms and sets the parameters for new forms of worldly transit and transition. In this existential sense, the question of citizenship and the media asks us to reconfigure the language we use and to "shift an understanding of the power and reach of the media from the producers into a more ambiguous and contested zone of interpretation." Mobile citizens, he would claim, have a home in language (in its widest meaning), a language, however, that is mobile, transitory, and open to self-questioning.

Where cultures confront one another in this contested space of media interpretation and recontextualization, new opportunities arise for what Chambers calls, following Rey Chow, "reciprocal translation." And this hybrid space shifts not only our normative conception of language but also what it means to be a subject acting and identifying itself in relation to language and culture. For Chambers, the transformative powers of this process of cultural translation put us all "[i]n the mix," as it were, and the same might be said of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance work and media activism, in Thomas Foster's account. Gómez-Peña adds a Fourth World to the old colonial hierarchy of First World–Third World. For Gómez-Peña, the "border" is no longer a frontier in the sense of a rigid frame or territory but rather a mobile segment in continual displacement. The Fourth World is a meeting place of undocumented people in Edward Said's understanding, which includes not only deterritorialized migrant populations but also indigenous peoples displaced from their ancient claims of nation and land. In Foster's explanation, "Gómez-Peña redefines the meaning of *indigenous* so that both migrant and native groups can be understood as occupying a 'conceptual' rather than a material space, and the main characteristic of conceptual space is that it is not defined by clear boundaries between insides and outsides; Gómez-Peña's Fourth World occupies 'portions of all the previous worlds.'" This conceptual augmentation of the territorial definition of the three-worlds theory is further expanded in reference to a virtual media space that Gómez-Peña calls the Fifth World. In this way, Gómez-Peña seeks a mobile space of reciprocal translation where concepts of border and identity can be contested and reconfigured. In

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contrast to the bounded, Euclidian notions of territory suggested by the three-worlds theory,

> the Fourth and Fifth Worlds embody a concept of spatial relations defined in terms of motion, flux, and relationality, qualities more typically associated in Western philosophical modernity with temporal experience. The opposition between the bounded spaces of the first three worlds and the more complex spatiality of the fourth and fifth therefore also causes the boundary between the Fourth and Fifth Worlds to remain open. In this way, Gómez-Peña poses the question of the relation between the virtual spaces of computer and media networks and the new forms of ethnicity that are emerging from what Arjun Appadurai calls transnational "ethnoscapes" or flows of displaced peoples and workforces across national boundaries.

Foster traces the various stages of this self-described border artist, whose books include *The New World Border* (1996) and *Dangerous Border Crossers: The Artist Talks Back* (2000). As the latter title intimates, Gómez-Peña sees strong interventionist potential for cyberspace, stating that his goal is to "infect," "spanglicize," and "brownify" virtual space. Following Gómez-Peña, Foster argues that these technologies are part of a move to co-opt and commodify transnational border culture, even as they open up new opportunites for resistance and intervention. Yet, as Foster points out, Gómez-Peña argues strongly for the contestatory possibilities of "barrios of resistance," whose practices could include producing

> self-published "laser-xerox magazines," "experimental home videos on police brutality," and "pirate radio interventions." In contrast to the sectarian movements as Gómez-Peña presents them, the barrios of resistance define themselves as locally situated, one for each city block, and as capable of transcending the local through the expropriation of globalizing media technologies—publishing, video, and radio. These community centers resist the official culture's imperatives to localize and globalize by restaging both processes in a more critical modality.

In this way, Gómez-Peña's performance work responds to Arif Dirlik's call for a "critical localism" that is constantly aware of how local or regional problems intersect with transnational forces and are able to exploit them (qtd. by Foster).

In "Digital Networks and Citizenship," Mark Poster also turns to the new media in asking to what extent the communicative structure of the Internet suggests a model for global citizenship. The rapid commercial exploitation of the Internet has been assured, no doubt, only by the possibilities of commodifying it. Yet, Poster asserts, "new media offer possibilities for the construction of planetary political subjects, netizens who will be multiple, dispersed, and virtual, nodes of a network of collective intelligence." Poster's desire to discover new forms of association and power through computer-mediated communication echoes Robbins's desire to identify the idea of nation with a virtual force, not only constituencies of conscience based on transnational solidarity but also a collectivity rooted in the ethics of communication potentialized by the geographically distributed nature of packet-switched networks that link otherwise dispersed individuals in a "collective intelligence."[4]

The idea of the netizen, then, suggests the emergence of a new form of participatory citizenship. Poster contrasts what Etienne Balibar has called the "citizen subject" of modernity with the netizen, whose fluctuating existence in computer networks promotes new forms of agency and symbolization. The earlier Cartesian notion of citizen subject is being called into doubt for several reasons, according to Poster. First, it is a Western concept associated with the philosophy and political theory of the bourgeois and republican revolutions of the late eighteenth century, a concept whose abstract universality is being challenged by multiple assertions of a right to difference. In addition, the natural is being remodeled by the technological. Communicative structures are increasingly machinic—the forms of agency and collective symbolization to which they give rise are remapping the relation between

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human being and machine with new possibilities for both reification and freedom.

As electronic media become more and more cosmopolitan, as it were, do they give rise to a new cosmopolitian subject? Or as Poster asks, "Can the new media promote the construction of new political forms not tied to historical territorial powers?" As a concept linked to an emergent modernity, the citizen subject was understood as a rational and self-identical being separate from the world of material objects and whose forms of self-identity were equivalent to that of the nation. Globalization, as an economic and communicative force, is eroding the territoriality and sovereignty of the nation, however. And at the same time, new electronic and digital media are creating virtual territories that link the singular and the collective, the local and the global in previously unforeseen ways. As Hayles explains in "The Complexities of Seriation," this virtual and transnational collective mediated by computer networks augurs a transformation in our usual ideas of the subject:

> The netizen [. . .] implies a new kind of junction between human and machine that shifts the basis of humanness. [. . . A]n impressive body of work [. . .] seeks to redefine the human as part of a distributed cognitive system rather than as an autonomous unit. [. . .] Together with deterritorialization, this vision makes the human less an unchanging entity that can ground notions of human rights and human dignity than an evolving, historically contingent, and technologically enabled creature whose distinctive characteristic is continually and aggressively to enroll objects in its extended cognitive system. [. . . T]he netizen has power defined in terms of technological extensions of cognition, distributed global systems, and increasing connectivities.

Poster follows Walter J. Ong, Marshall McLuhan, and others in suggesting that new technologies should be viewed primarily as new forms of social symbolization that, in their reorganizations of collective time and space, imply new possibilities of thought and agency: "The Internet may introduce postnational political forms because of its internal architecture; its new register of time and space; its new relation of human being to machine, of body to mind; its new imaginary; and its new articulation between culture and reality." For Poster, then, even if we accept that the Internet is a technology of globalization in all the negative senses of the term, it is equally important to recognize how it unleashes contervailing forces with the potential to contest and resist the control of information content and flow by global capitalism.

In "Transporting the Subject," Caren Kaplan is, like Hayles, more suspicious of new claims for technological mobility. Her focus—"the imbrication of location in the discourse of travel"—leads her to theorize the status of the material body in the disembodied and disembodying technologies of contemporary communication. Kaplan questions the ideology of unencumbered mobility, limitless space, and rapid transfers of bodies and information. Is embodied existence simply dissolved by the creation of new identities on the Internet? Can new communities be built in cyberspace? Once the self is released from the fixed location of the body and the nation, can we then speak of ultimately "mobile citizens," detached from real bodies, in a media-generated and media-controlled state? Kaplan is skeptical, arguing "the self is always somewhere, always located in some sense in some place, and cannot be totally unhoused." Even the most radical technologies of disembodiment are embedded in material relations and produced by machinery assembled in factories that are far from virtual. Labor involves bodies and real space. Like Robbins, Kaplan is aware of the amount of unacknowledged hard labor necessary for mobility, speed, and expansion. She argues against romanticizing mobility and in favor of recognizing the "material suffering" behind the celebration of mobile citizenship. Undermining the binary construction of mobility and location, Kaplan emphasizes race, class, and

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gender (and one might still add nationality). Transnational citizens are never only mobile citizens but are, Kaplan argues, "produced through location as well as mobility." Moreover, as Hayles also insists, the question of how these technological transformations can promote concretely a progressive politics beyond the virtual territories of new media remains open.

Thomas Keenan's "Publicity and Indifference" bridges the other essays on media. Keenan envisions global media as interpellating the television viewer as citizen in a media-dominated field of humanitarian action. Conversely, the "lesson of Bosnia" is that the electronic media's ubiquitous presentation of genocidal conflict led only to a failed expectation of responsive action. Why do the increasing volume and directness of global information not lead to a humanitarian response in kind? Why do the global media not function more directly as a cosmopolitan public sphere but produce instead feelings of inertia, humanitarian fatigue, or what Robbins terms the sweatshop sublime?

Keenan argues that the electronic media have displaced the nation-state in global reach and in the assumed power of forming public opinion. In this respect, electronic communication has become the primary mediation between, in Michael Ignatieff's words, "the suffering of strangers and the consciences of those in the world's few remaining zones of safety. [. . .] It has become not merely the means through which we see each other, but the means by which we shoulder each other's fate" (qtd. by Keenan). Indeed, as Keenan points out, the contemporary concept of humanitarianism as transborder relief is concomitant with the instantaneous and global transmission of information.

But this recognition opens onto a yet more complex question. The television camera, with its live link to an instantaneous and global transmission of information, is an ever-present witness to global conflicts. Is it also a privileged figure of ethical consciousness that measures equally our willingness or unwillingness to act or to respond? If there is something like a global or cosmopolitan citizen, perhaps its *conscience de soi* has emerged in the ethical conflict wherein the camera as witness repeatedly confronts us with the world's injustices, calling us either to respond or to blind ourselves knowingly to our irresponsiveness. Both are reactions of shame. In this manner, the electronic image conditions a new concept of the ethical. Live and direct, its field of reference is neither national interest nor defense of the state but a call to respond to the suffering of actual individuals. This is why it solicits an ethical rather than a political response. But the affective nature of this call is as contradictory as it is powerful: according to Keenan, "Such action threatens not simply to hide inaction or offer alibis for not doing other things but more radically to interrupt, to render impossible, to block or prevent all other action." This is not simply a question of representation. The ubiquity of electronic witnessing in real time means that the camera is a participant in humanitarian conflicts, not only shaping our understanding of the conflict but also affecting the play of conflict itself, locally and in the cosmopolitan public sphere. Electronic witnessing operates as a virtuality that shapes the possibilities and parameters of strategic engagement. The television image thus constitutes a field of action and a curious logic of reciprocity. In Keenan's words, it is, on one hand, the "becoming public of the event," and on the other it is a mode of address that constitutes a new sense of the public as addressee of this event, an addressee defined as "what is hailed or addressed by messages that might not reach their destination. [. . . W]e could even say that what defines the public is the possibility of being a target and of being missed."

The larger issue, then, is whether the public constituted by instantaneous electronic witnessing is capable of action. In the Rodney King case, actions were certainly produced. But it could also be said that this "citizen video" was a local witness responding to a local situation. The example of the Bosnian conflict produces a more

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disturbing conclusion. Keenan suggests that the deliberative side of the public sphere is beginning to disappear in the global proliferation of media witnessing. What if, Keenan asks, the belief in the public's capacity to respond is part of the problem and the faith we put in the informative power of images not only failed to stop what happened but prevented it from stopping?

Here we return to some old but still-relevant lessons about image and interpretation. The sense of an image, like that of any sign, is always incomplete. An image demands interpretative actions, often in contexts that are missing from the original emission. Moreover, the interpretation or action called for might just as well miss as reach its target, setting off a chain of unintended interpretations and actions. The difficult lesson of the media reporting of the conflict in Bosnia, and the attempt to theorize its misfires, is that reporters and victims placed too much faith in the power of image and information. As Keenan says, quoting Avital Ronell, "The image has no guaranteed meaning and remains only to testify, to demand, to induce a responsibility—even if [. . .] 'it is a responsibility that is neither alert, vigilant, particularly present, nor informed.' The responsibility of the viewer is coextensive with the lack of self-evidence of the image: it dictates nothing, compels nothing."

We circle back to a question raised implicitly by all the authors in this issue. In the form of cosmopolitan citizenship evoked by electronic communication, our challenge is to respond properly to the demand for ethical action, since the individual and not the state is interpellated in this way. Only the state or mutual defense organizations can police; like the spectator, the camera can only witness. This means that the space of politics disappears, at least in the liberal sense of strategic and responsible deliberation in the face of new information. If global and instantaneous electronic witnessing opens new fields of action, we miss their potential by calling up an Enlightenment concept of the public and a faith in the power of the image and the press to inform and in so doing to induce action. None of our contributors offer clear solutions to this predicament. But they lucidly pose the problems that confront us, in our roles as teachers, as intellectuals, and as responsible participants in the cosmopolitan public sphere of global media. The global electronic media participate in the constitution of a cosmopolitan public sphere, and this sphere requires new modalities of citizenship. In creating a global sense of interrelatedness, collapsing space and time, proliferating channels of communication, and accelerating the delivery of information, global electronic witnessing repeatedly calls for ethical self-consciousness, an awareness of the economic and social web of relations that bind peoples otherwise separated by geography, economy, and culture. We may respond to this call or not, but we cannot ignore it. Curiously, then, there is a forceful humanitarian side to a global information space otherwise dominated by the commodity form. All the powers of the global information environment also participate in the creation of this self-perpetuating call for an ethical mode of participatory citizenship. The most compelling and difficult problem now confronting us is to invent new ways of understanding the modes of political action, identification, and participation called for by this ethos. Responsibility for the success or failure of this politics resides in the new forms of citizenship we might create in the fields of action constituted by the image and by electronic media networks.

Notes

[1] See, e.g., Gerard Delanty's interesting book *Citizenship in a Global Age*.

[2] As Robert W. McChesney notes in "The New Global Media," "Together, the deregulation of media ownership, the privatization of television in lucrative European and Asian markets, and new communications technologies have made it possible for media giants to establish powerful distribution and production networks within and among nations. In short order, the global media market has come to be domi-

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nated by the same eight transnational corporations [. . .] that rule US media: General Electric, AT&T/Liberty Media, Disney, Time Warner, Sony, News Corporation, Viacom and Seagram, plus Bertelsmann, the Germany-based conglomerate." Also see his book *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*.

[3] See his book *The New World Border*, discussed in this issue by Foster.

[4] See, e.g., Pierre Lévy's book *Collective Intelligence*.

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