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interviews and even whole radio 'news' broadcasts for distribution to Canada's hundred of private TV and radio stations.

With its shiny image tarnished in the commercial media of late, the Tories have been paying for videotaped interviews of PC Members of Parliament on the hill, and sending the \$750 satellite feed (free of charge) to regional news stations. But when audiences see the clips, or hear a 'news' broadcast from parliament, they are not told it was paid for with Tory money.

The technique has proved remarkably successful, according to the December 2 edition of CBC's Journal, of the 60 stations targeted for the publicity packages, 45 used the clips.

by Mike Gordon Canadian University Press

In the large old auditorium seething with tradition, a throng of bright, cheery, multi-racial faces, clad in the uniform of individuality — brand new Levi jeans and shiny new white sneakers — anxiously await their leader.

In what could be described as a youth rally for the 18-20 year old ad market, the hall echoes eerily as they clang the trademark aluminum cans above their heads in unison, chanting his name.

Finally, a single TV screen blips to life. The crowd roars, as the blond, blue-eyed, computer chiseled face chirps on screen. They laugh, on cue, and follow his command with utmost enthusiasm: drink Coke.

Nowhere is the myth of the benevolent corporate state, using and producing technology for the public good, more prevalent than in the media.

While Max Headroom's chipper delivery of 'Catch the Wave' makes it seem hip to be part of the collective "we," it does more than capture the tradition of drinking Coke. He is the cartoon spirit of the computer age, a popular and likeable character that puts a happy face on one of the world's most criminal multinationals.

In promoting the idea that technology and progress are inseparable, corporations become part of a twisted cultural logic that paints them as progressive institutions.

Technology is made seductive as it depicts its global threats, it is readily accepted as a natural extension of industrial, consumer capitalist countries.

Both as consumers and citizens, the public is hooked into that complex for a technological "fix." "Security," for example, is a key word in many ad campaigns. On a personal level, you might not make it through the day without the right underarm deodorant. On a national level, your country might be open to attack if you don't have the latest in nuclear weapons.

Todd Gitlin, a professor of sociology and communications at the University of California, Berkeley, is outspoken in his analysis of how the mainstream media frames images to reinforce the systems of power and privilege on which it is based.

In *Watching Television: A Panther Guide to Popular Culture*, a collection of essays he edited, Gitlin supports the notion that cultural devices can be used to mask corporate motives, and garner endorsement for technocratic values.

For example, he explains how by creating a mythical, surreal landscape of appearances, a corporation can sell anything from cars to law enforcement.

"We build excitement" is not only Pontiac's newest commercial slogan for cars, says Gitlin, "But about the current incarnations of America's perennial dreams: freedom, power, technology."



act out his sw
man's topgown

Not surprisingly then, he extends the analogy to America's top figurehead: "We all know that Reagan is only 'acting,' but he's so damn good that we can't quite be sure."

In this sense, it becomes very easy for corporations like Pepsi, or politicians to co-opt popular or traditional themes and figures (like black musicians) to sell their image.

Pepsi's real operations behind Michael Jackson, their public spokesperson for the "Pepsi Generation", reveals a less innocuous picture.

Take, for instance, Pepsi president, Donald Kendall. Kendall was instrumental in securing Richard Nixon's first job on Wall Street. With Pepsi's extensive bottling plant in Chile, he later chaired a council of 40 multinational corporations that helped finance the CIA-backed 1973 coup that overthrew democratically-elected socialist president, Salvador Allende and imposed the current fascist dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

"They don't want you to know that when you're drinking Pepsi, you're helping a corporation that has set up a fascist regime," said long-time Canadian peace activist Ken Hancock.

Gitlin says this style is current through popular television and film like *Miami Vice*, which rely more on show than substance to create a false image of reality for entertainment.

From the simplistic legal battles of *People's Court* to the comic book battle scenes of the *A-Team*, in order to succeed, TV must come as close to the line of simulation as possible, as demonstrated by what Gitlin calls *Watching Television*.

This, in turn, puts news in the context of entertainment. By giving equal priority to images, writes Sorkin, "it makes a can of pop as consequential as a murder, that allows the cut from commercial to carnage, from starving babies in Ethiopia to Morris the finicky cat."

Reagan was elected by selling his own patriotic vision of America. Using charm, rhetoric, and a nostalgic, inaccurate recounting of history, he is able to maintain a popular image despite policies that might otherwise be seen as disastrous and inhumane.

It is this kind of "fantasy of innocent power," says Gitlin, that led to the slaughter of three million Vietnamese and 60,000 Americans in the Vietnam war.

Reagan's Star Wars vision comes from the "wishful premise" that whatever problems technology has caused, no matter how devastating, it can solve.

This, however, is not a point the commercial media is wont to stress, being owned and controlled by a few conglomerates. As part of the corporate system, the seeming disidence of mainstream news is only aimed at deflecting any structural criticism against itself. Even the most seemingly credible sources, such as TV network news, only give the viewers the impression that they've made informed decisions on their own.

The same irony is employed from TV news to advertisements to preserve the status quo, says Mark Crispin Miller in *Watching Television*.

"These corporations pretend to take our side (while taking sides against us), diffusing our rebelliousness by seeming to mimic it."

"AT&T advises us, through the soft-spoken Cliff Robertson, to reject its big, impersonal competitors, as if AT&T were a plucky little mom-and-pop enterprise; Apple likens IBM to a totalitarian state as if Apple Inc. were a cell of anarchists; GE depicts a world of regimented silence, its citizens oppressed and robotized, until the place is gloriously liberated by a hip quartet bearing powerful GE tape players as if that corporation were a hedonistic set and not a major manufacturer of microwave ovens, refrigerators and — primarily — weapons systems."