

Jeffrey Jones
Citizenship, Politics and Television Panel
Unboxing Television @ MIT
November 2007

In *Technologies of Truth*, Toby Miller notes that the “public is formed and reformed on a routine basis through technologies of truth—popular logics for establishing fact.” Miller, of course, is building on Foucault’s claim that every society has a “regime of truth” that is comprised of “the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorized for obtaining truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.” For much of the twentieth century, the news industry served as a primary institution in America’s regime of truth. The discourse produced called “news,” based on its supposedly “objective” reporting techniques, was what society “cause[d] to function as true,” and was central to the status granted to the news industry as arbiters of that truth in public life. The “informed citizen” model that arose in the Progressive Era and dominated much of the twentieth century (as detailed in Michael Schudson history of American civic life) was centered on a public formed through newspapers (and later broadcast news). This in-formed public was conceived as universal subjects, the enlightenment model of rational man [*sic*].

With media convergence, we are now witnessing the on-going demise of one network (the verticality of newspapers and television) and the rise of another (the horizontality of convergent technologies). As a result, I argue, the public is experiencing a new subjectivity (how citizens conceive of themselves and their relationship to the state, as well as how the state and market conceive of citizen-consumers). Political subjects today are “monitorial citizens,” engaging in a form of DIY citizenship where the constant and habitual scanning of culture for commodities, persons, issues, values, styles, rhetoric, and politics is the means through which civic identity is increasingly established, constituted, and maintained (this is where I see some connections with Anna’s work on ambient screen culture and the lived-with, always-on, networked and updateable qualities that first, second, and third screens provide). These are the ingredients through which we form an understanding of ourselves and our world, and ourselves in the world—including the public world of politics.

But this new subjectivity is also the product of the ways in which state and market are actively involved in leading, directing, controlling, and producing subjects (the processes of governmentality that Laurie’s work addresses). Neither the state nor the market distributes information so that citizens can make rational choices (as per the previous model). Both want to *know* their audience/constituency, and both have been successful in doing so through surveillance practices—the gathering of information abstracted from daily life employed in their efforts toward rationalization. Both seek to develop *relationships* with citizen-consumers that are more efficient than information-centered appeals. As the head of CBS Interactive put it, the network wants to “evolve from a content company to an audience company.”

What I am interested in exploring are the ways in which this turn toward monitorial practices highlights a different relationship of citizen to state as manifest on television—one not based so heavily on information (arguments, positions, knowledge, expertise) but on “representation” (the emotional and/or visual recognition of tastes,

choices, values, positions). For instance, television narrowcasting of taste cultures has, it seems, finally caught up to politics and citizenship. For the political right, Fox News allows for certain affective relationships to politics—Colbert’s conception of “truthiness,” or my own conception of believable fictions, constructions of reality where truth *in fact* is less important than truth *in essence*. For the political left, Comedy Central (Stewart, Colbert, *Lil’ Bush*), HBO (Bill Maher), PBS (Moyers), and MSNBC (Olbermann) provide an alternative set of relationships.

In short, in what ways do monitorial citizens now engaged in the assemblage of their own truths (or “popular logics of establishing truth”) in a convergent, mash-up, redactional culture, and how is television related to these processes? Similarly, how do state and market attempt to “govern” these processes, and again, how is television related here?