

THE QUEEN
OF AMERICA
GOES TO
WASHINGTON
CITY

Essays on Sex and Citizenship

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I The Theory of Infantile Citizenship

When Americans make the pilgrimage to Washington they are trying to grasp the nation in its totality. Yet the totality of the nation in its capital city is a jumble of historical modalities, a transitional space between local and national cultures, private and public property, archaic and living artifacts, the national history that marks the monumental landscape and the everyday life temporalities of federal and metropolitan cultures. That is to say, it is a place of national *mediation*, where a variety of nationally inflected media come into visible and sometimes incommensurate contact. As a borderland central to the nation, Washington tests the capacities of all who visit it: this test is a test of citizenship competence. Usually made with families or classmates, the trip to the capital makes pedagogy a patriotic performance, one in which the tourist “playing at being American” is called on to coordinate the multiple domains of time, space, sensation, exchange, knowledge, and power that represent the scene of what we might call “total” citizenship.¹ To live fully both the ordinariness and the sublimity of national identity, one must be capable not just of imagining, but of managing being American.

To be able to feel less fractured than the nation itself would be, indeed, a privilege. Audre Lorde tells a story of her family’s one visit to Washington, in 1947.² Lorde’s parents claimed to be making the trip to commemorate their two daughters’ educational triumphs, an eighth grade and a high school graduation. The truth is, though, that Lorde’s sister Phyllis was barred from accompanying her graduating class on its celebratory visit to Washington because she was African American and Washington was a southern, segregated city, not at all “national” in the juridical or the democratic sense. The Lorde family refused to acknowledge racism as the catalyst for its own private journey. Rather, patriotism

was the tourists' alibi, a blinding one that enabled the parents to deny what was everywhere visible: that racism is a national system.

Lorde relates that whenever the family encountered its unfreedom to enter certain spaces of private property, no one would acknowledge the irony: that although "public" monuments like the Lincoln Memorial allow African Americans like Audre Lorde and Marian Anderson access to a space of symbolic national identification and inclusion,³ the very ordinary arrangements of life in America, eating and sleeping, were as forbidden to the Lorde family in Washington as America itself is to those without passports. This is to say that in Washington the bar of blackness exposed contradictions between regimes of democracy and property, effectively splitting the idealized nation from the capitalist one, while each nonetheless governs the defining terms of U.S. citizenship.⁴

Still, they scheduled their visit to Washington on Independence Day. When Lorde bitterly remarks on her exile from the America that patriotism depicts, symbolized in general by the apartheid of the capital, and in particular by a waitress's refusal to let the family celebrate the nation's birthday by eating ice cream they had paid for *inside* a restaurant, she describes it as the line she steps over from childhood to something else, a different political, corporeal, sensational, and aesthetic "adulthood": "The waitress was white, and the counter was white, and the ice cream I never ate in Washington D.C. that summer I left childhood was white, and the white heat and the white pavement and the white stone monuments of my first Washington summer made me sick to my stomach."⁵ Lorde's "education" in national culture provoked a nauseated unlearning of her patriotism — "Hadn't I written poems about Bataan?" she complains, while resolving, again, to write the president, to give the nation another chance to not betray her desire for it — and this unlearning, which is never complete, as it involves leaving behind the political faith of childhood, cleaves her permanently from and to the nation whose promises drew her parents to immigrate there and drew herself to identify as a child with a concept of national identity she was sure she would fulfill when she grew into an adult citizen.

This essay explores a particular national plot: the pilgrimage to Washington.⁶ It focuses not on a news or a biographical event but on an episode of the popular weekly cartoon television show *The Simpsons* titled "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington." It will also engage the other tourist/citizenship pilgrimages this episode revises, notably *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (dir. Frank Capra, 1939). In so doing it seeks to describe the

ways the fantasy norms of the nation form simultaneously produce normative political subjectivity and create public spaces of exaggeration, irony, or ambivalence for alternative, less nationally focused, or just more critical kinds of political identification. This chapter also deals with a particular conflict about identity that is currently raging in the United States: between a patriotic view of national identity, which seeks to use identification with the ideal nation to trump or subsume all other notions of personhood, and a view that is frequently considered unpatriotic and victim-obsessed, in which citizenship talk takes as its main subject the unequal material conditions of economic, social, and political struggle and survival. That this struggle over citizenship is so often about the lives and experiences of racial, gendered, and sexual minorities and the working class means that its story will frequently seem to be solely about subaltern bodies and identities, which bear the burden of representing *desire for the nation* generally. But, as we will see, once the national body is exhumed from the crypt of abstraction and put on display, everyone's story of citizenship is vulnerable to dramatic revision.

This investigation of political subjectivity and its mediations — on the body, in the media, in the nation — introduces one other type of traditional citizen, one that complicates the story of national identity politics I have been telling. This citizen form figures a space of possibility that transcends the fractures and hierarchies of national life: I call it the infantile citizen. The infantile citizen of the United States has appeared in political writing about the nation at least since Tocqueville wrote, in *Democracy in America*, that while citizens should be encouraged to love the nation the way they do their families and their fathers, democracies can also produce a special form of tyranny that makes citizens like children, infantilized, passive, and overdependent on the “immense and tutelary power” of the state.⁷ *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* brings this form into its classic modern representation: as Jefferson Smith (James Stewart) comes to Washington to put nationalist ideology into political practice, he is called, among other things, “a drooling infant” and “an infant with little flags in his fist.” The infantile citizen's ingenuousness frequently seems a bad thing, a political subjectivity based on the suppression of critical knowledge and a resulting contraction of citizenship to something smaller than agency: patriotic inclination, default social membership, or the simple possession of a normal national character. But the infantile citizen's faith in the nation, which is based on a belief in the state's commitment to representing the best interests of ordinary

people, is also said to be what vitalizes a person's patriotic and practical attachment to the nation and to other citizens. Tocqueville's observation turns out to be a very complicated one about the paradoxes of political subjectivity in the United States. Central to the narrative mode of the pilgrimage to Washington, and so much other national fantasy, is a strong and enduring belief that the best of U.S. national subjectivity can be read in its childlike manifestations and in a polity that organizes its public sphere around a commitment to making a world that could sustain an idealized infantile citizen.⁸

To begin to give substance to the paradoxes, limits, and dreams encoded in this ideal citizen form, here is a synopsis of "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington." Young Lisa Simpson wins a trip to Washington ("all expenses paid") by writing a "fiercely pro-American" patriotic essay for a contest that her father, Homer Simpson, discovers in a complimentary copy he receives of a magazine called *Reading Digest*. In Washington the family stays at the Watergate, visits a fictional national mint, encounters Barbara Bush in her White House bathtub, and comments on national monuments. Then Lisa accidentally witnesses a congressman receiving a bribe (one that would precipitate the destruction of her beloved hometown national park by corporate logging interests). Enraged and embittered, she tears up her prizewinning essay about the nation form's natural beauty, and substitutes for it a new essay about how Washington truly "stinks." As a result, Lisa loses the national jingoism contest, and along with it her simply patriotic belief in the promise of the national. A Senate page witnesses her loss of faith in democracy, and calls his senator for help. Within two hours the FBI has jailed the crooked congressman, who instantly becomes a born-again Christian. On witnessing the effects of her muckraking, Lisa exclaims, "The system works!" What could she possibly mean by this? We will return to the question of systems later.

I have described the aspects of this plot that tend to be repeated in the other pilgrimage-to-Washington narratives. Someone, either a child or an innocent adult identified with children, goes to the capital. The crisis of her/his innocence/illiteracy emerges from an ambivalent encounter between America as a theoretical ideality and America as a site of practical politics, mapped onto Washington itself. Because children cannot read the codes, they disrupt the norms of the national locale: their infantile citizenship operates the way Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge predict it would, eliciting scorn and derision from "knowing" adult citizens but also a kind of admiration from these same people, who can remem-

ber with nostalgia the time that they were “unknowing” and believed in the capacity of the nation to be practically utopian.

As it is, citizen adults have learned to “forget” or to render as impractical, naive, or childish their utopian political identifications in order to be politically happy and economically functional. Confronting the tension between utopia and history, the infantile citizen’s stubborn naïveté gives her/him enormous power to unsettle, expose, and reframe the machinery of national life. Thus the potential catastrophe of all visits to Washington: Can national identification survive the practical habitation of everyday life in the national locale? Can the citizen/tourist gain the critical skills for living nationally without losing faith in the nation-state’s capacity to provide the wisdom and justice it promises? Is the utopian horizon of national identity itself a paramnesia or a Žižekian “fantasy” that covers over entrenched contradictions and lacks in national culture?⁹ Are naive infantile citizenship and paralyzed cynical apathy the only positions a normal or moral American can assume? How a given text answers these questions has little to do with the particular infantile citizen who generates its national crisis; it has everything to do with the contradictions threatening “adult” or “full” citizenship in the political public sphere.

The transition in Audre Lorde’s life — from patriotic childhood to a less defined but powerful rage at the travesty everyday life can make of national promises for justice — marks a moment in the education of an American citizen that is typical of the personal and fictional narratives of the pilgrimage to Washington. When cinematic, literary, and televisual texts fictively represent “Washington” as “America,” they theorize the conditions of political subjectivity in the United States and reflect on the popular media’s ways of constructing political knowledge in a dialectic of infantile citizenship and cynical reason. They also reflect on the power of the other form that mediates the nation to itself as a durably tangible thing that already exists in nature and in history: the national body. After thinking through at more length the different scenes of the nation’s mass mediation I will return to *The Simpsons*, as it prods the patriotic ideology of national identity without bursting its utopian bubble.

Technologies of Citizenship

Audre Lorde’s story takes place in 1947, a particularly intense time for U.S. self-reflection on what citizenship was about. Stephen Heath ar-

gues that recent dramatic developments in global media culture have so changed the conditions of political subjectivity that the category “citizen” is now archaic. Many worthy theorists of television concur, arguing that the ruptural force of its technologies and the monopolistic tendency of its capitalization have radically transformed the material conditions and normative representations of national culture and political agency.¹⁰ It is now a commonplace in television criticism to say that the structure of televisual experience promotes the annihilation of memory and, in particular, of historical knowledge and political self-understanding. This may be an effect of its ontology and ideology of “liveness,” which encourages mass subjective absorption in the present tense through regimes of banality, distraction, interminable “flow,” and periodic catastrophe or scandal; it may be an effect of the implicitness of capital in generating the aura of “free” entertainment (which makes the consumer’s engagement with commercialized renderings of contemporary power, history, and identity both the problem and the critical promise of the medium); it may be an effect of the “global” images that have come to saturate the scene of consumption, soliciting consumer identifications to a postpolitical and postnational utopia of “culture” and confusing the era of the present tense with an imminent yet obscure future; or, most likely, it may be an effect of some combination of these factors.¹¹ But because in all areas of its mode of production television encounters, engages, and represents both the social and political routines of citizenship, and because it underscores the activity of animating and reflecting on as well as simply having a national identity, the problem of generating memory and knowledge in general becomes fraught with issues of national pedagogy, of how to represent what counts as patriotism and what counts as criticism to the public sphere.¹²

If, as I have described, the pilgrimage to Washington is already all about the activity of national pedagogy, the production of national culture, and the constitution of competent citizens, the specific role of mass mediation in the dissemination of national knowledges redoubles and loops around the formation of national identity. There is nothing archaic about citizenship — instead, its signs and cadences are changing. As Margaret Morse argues, television makes history by annexing older forms of national self-identity, cultural literacy, and leisure.¹³ It does this continuously to reacclimate consumer identifications during structural transitions in national and international public spheres. In these conditions of uneven development, the work of media in redefining citizenship and

framing what can legitimately be read as national becomes more, not less, central to any analysis of political identity in postmodern American culture.

This is to say that the definitional field of citizenship—denoting simple identification by a national identity category, a reflexive operation of agency and criticism, or a mode of social membership—is precisely what is under contestation, as the development of what we might call “mass nationality” changes the face of power, both in the United States and globally. Consider, for example, the escalating claims made on behalf of televised populist town halls, conservative talk radio, and elite “expert” insider-culture talk shows, that they are sites where the core nation reveals itself to itself; or track the constantly changing stream of representative men who replace each other on magazine covers because, at particular moments, they represent to the dominant media the current state of political hegemony; or follow the trajectory of the public discussion, pursued in chapter 5, about what kind of face can be said to be the “true” face of America, a game of representative naming that encodes concerns about whether the histories and struggles of people of color, especially among the U.S. working and nonworking poor, will be deemed legitimate subjects of patriotic discourse, state policy, and ordinary social life. All of these modes of publicity are normative technologies of citizenship that seek to create proper national subjects and subjectivities. Yet even as they do this, by intensifying certain social antagonisms in order to consolidate specific interest groups, all those involved in the production of mass nationality would say that their main concern is with serving citizens by bringing a truly democratic public sphere into being.

The question of how publicity mediates the form of proper nationality predates the postmodern televisual moment, and requires a much longer investigation than will happen here. Briefly, since *The Birth of a Nation* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, pilgrimage-to-Washington narratives have foregrounded the problem, place, and promise of different media in the business of making nationality and making it personal to citizens; many also show the costs of the mass media’s control over the terms and scenes in which critical national identifications are produced, even while these technologies are also considered vital for any sense of a citizenship in the United States that is politically agentive.

A film like *In Country* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1989) epitomizes one kind of case in which the routes to citizenship are traced, where the central question is how to create citizens through technologies of na-

tional memory, technologies that assume an a priori distance between the nation and “the people.” These are narratives about which media will enable the production of the national present tense from the materials of the past. They focus more on stable communicative objects like monuments and personal artifacts than on the apparatus of mass culture, whose effects are nonetheless everywhere (like the televisions that are always on in a room showing the standard news stories of an era) and constitute the evidence of a plot’s location in a specific historical moment. In this mode of national narrative, stories of mass trauma like war or slavery are encoded in plots of familial inheritance, wherein citizens of the posttraumatic present are figured in a daughter’s or a son’s coming to public terms with a generational past that defines her/him and yet does not feel fully personal.

In *In Country*, Samantha Hughes (Emily Lloyd), the daughter of a deceased Vietnam veteran, finds her father’s letters and diary from Vietnam, his dog tags, and pictures of his life in a kind of shoebox museum her mother keeps hidden in a room where the detritus from the cultural radicalism of the sixties is also stored. In the 1980s, this archaic material returns to sight as so much crazy colorful excess. Meanwhile, her mother has become a normal suburban housewife trying to leave the working classes and build a professional life, and the sixties and Vietnam seem almost like a dead moment, an adolescent phase the family/nation went through and survived, unlike the father.

The trauma of coming to know these personal forms of publicity makes Samantha progressively more restless, for every story she hears and reads about Vietnam is an unfinished one, still pulsating like an exposed wound long after the war is officially ended. A traumatic story is always interminable — that is what makes it traumatic. Samantha compulsively devours every text and story she can until she feels entirely impossible, bearing as her own the unconcluded tales of her grandmother, her uncle, and other Vietnam veterans (who, though survivors, are all still sexually and physically disrupted). Samantha then sees that *everyone* she knows is a Vietnam veteran: the men who are living with horrible memories and no economic or sexual prospects; the women who are desperately trying to produce normality for the men.

She wants to save all of these people from dying or becoming mere story, like her father. Her main object lesson is her uncle, Emmett Smith (Bruce Willis), a self-destructing vet who is still plagued by the war’s saturation of his bodily senses, but who refuses the therapeutic repara-

tions the postwar culture offers him, including every form of talk. At first Samantha thinks that telling the war's whole story will cure the war's trauma. Yet as she makes the rounds to elicit and tell the traumatic stories she is collecting she sees dramatic evidence that repetition just aggravates psychic wounds. *In Country* stages the image of the successful therapy Samantha finds in the figurativeness of its title: a euphemism for being in Vietnam, "in country" comes to refer to the rural South, and then to the United States. To enter the next stage of her own narrative, Samantha must break free of the local trauma circuit and make a pilgrimage to Washington, to the classic national monuments, and to the Vietnam Memorial. She takes on her trip her traumatized uncle and her dead father's elderly mother.

Once in Washington, they walk to the memorial and find the father's name. The monumental minimalism of the epitaph is stark and moving, collapsing all desperate need for story into the perfect boundedness of the name. Climbing an unstable ladder, Samantha and her grandmother trace out the letters that spell her father's name on the stone, and they can barely stay on the ladder for all the intense bodiliness their touch enkindles. Contact with the monument, though, means more than gaining deeper, if prosthetic, intimacy with the father's remains (they have more personal things like his letters, after all, to cherish back at home). The monument makes the father's life public: only the immortalizing impersonality of U.S. citizenship can bring Samantha and her family resolution, happiness, and peace. Engraved in monumental time, it is as though his physical self were only now truly dead, a name and not a living story, while in contrast his national self still lives in a state of pure and enduring value.

This infantile citizen's pilgrimage to Washington represents the ways solid contact with the nation's official media can seem to complete citizens' unfulfilled lives — and even a relation of mere seeming can make optimism look plausible, and not deluded. *In Country* and many other pilgrimage-to-Washington films argue that contact with the monumental nation can turn a citizen's infantilizing rage, anger, and crazy-making feelings of betrayal into a calm, stabilized, mature or adult subjectivity ready to "let the past go" and, with amnesiac confidence, face the prospects of the present. On the other hand, the name of the father inscribed with so many others in stone on a national monument portrays the mute historical blank that defines a large part of the collective and personal content of traumatic political memory.



In contrast to the pilgrimage-to-Washington plots that narrate surviving, remembering, memorializing, and containing the traumatic national past, there is another species of narrative that involves surviving a present moment that feels menacing. This mode of pilgrimage plot tends to use what Benedict Anderson has identified as the simultaneity-effect of paper and electronic media, whose consumption is said to produce a general sensation of constant collective citizenship.¹⁴ In this version of the pilgrimage-to-Washington narrative, the brush with mass-mediated

citizenship involves a crisis of the present tense, and casts the personal experience of national identity as an overwhelming and exciting shock to the systems of so many alienated, cynical, ignorant, or almost-dead Americans.

Examples abound of this narrative variant, which portrays citizenship through representations of overstimulated political subjectivity and intensified nationalist pedagogy.¹⁵ The classic instance of frighteningly live nationality is *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, which popularized the convention of using real media personalities in a film about the present tense to authenticate the “news” being made on the spot and manipulated in the filmic plot.¹⁶ (However, as in *In Country*, in *Mr. Smith* national monuments and personal media like hand-printed newspapers and carrier pigeons remain the sacred sites for the formation of trustworthy and intimate national identifications.) *Mr. Smith* stages its struggle over who controls the meaning of mass citizenship as a war between two newspapers: a big Hearst-like influence-peddling paper and a paper, *Boy's Stuff*, produced by young Boy Rangers and distributed to “the people” by boys pulling little wagons. But telephones, radio, and telegrams are here even more central communicative devices for the formation of the mass nation. The rapid transmission of real and false information for the purpose of rallying the “public” into active opinion-making both enables and disables the communicative contexts democracy requires, which means that the structural critique the film offers of the anticknowledge effects of U.S. patriotic ideology tends to get overwhelmed by plots about putting “good men” in the places where national power becomes concrete.¹⁷ As for the rest of the citizens, they are taught to accept that they are, and even desire to be, “average” — that is, passive, distant, and relatively uninformed about the workings of the national machine, except in those moments where they are solicited to act nationally by giving opinions, money, blood, or votes.¹⁸ These examples, I hope, begin to suggest why television's role in constructing the hegemony of the normative nation must be understood as a partial, not a determining, moment in a genealogy of crises about publicity, ideology, and the production of national subjects.

More than a struggle to establish a political public sphere, norms of proper national subjectivity and concepts of social membership are at stake in the problem of creating images of mass nationality. One other aspect of the ways media technologies create national subjects needs airing here, and this concerns the construction of the image archive that

provides corporeal models of normal citizenship. Whenever citizenship comes to look like a question of the *body*, a number of processes are being hidden. The body's seeming obviousness distracts attention from the ways it organizes meaning, and diverts the critical gaze from publicity's role in the formation of the taxonomies that construct bodies publicly. Hortense Spillers has argued that nationalized bodies always appear to have a magical, mythical aura of meaning invulnerable to the pulsations of the historical nation.¹⁹ The general iconicity of the national body thereby veils how historical, contingent, and incoherent body typologies are. For example, if everyone hails from some specific place and some specific people, when and why does a person become a *kind* of thing like a national ethnicity? Or when did "woman" begin to be explicitly a political category, a category designating not a body with organs, but a kind of experience-related opinion?

You may have noticed that, in the filmic examples above, the citizen whose story is in question is a man in public, a white man, the modal American. When a given symbolic national body signifies as *normal*—straight, white, middle-class, and heterosexual—hardly anyone asks critical questions about its representativeness. In mass society its iconicity is intensified by commodity culture's marketing of normal personhood as something that places you in the range of what is typical in public and yet is personally unique. Subaltern personhood, in contrast, allows for no subtlety or personal uniqueness in mass society, producing reams of national stereotypes, with all of their negative transhistoricism. It has no institutions that make available to it the privileged status of the unmarked. Thus even when subaltern style cultures are appropriated for the ornamentation of privilege and the extension of hegemonic subjectivity to new realms of sensation, technique, and cynical knowledge about power, the very availability of these borrowed practices tends to intensify the aura of incompetence and inferiority—the subalternness—of the subaltern subject. The subaltern body's peculiar burden of national surrogacy enables many stories of minoritized citizenship to be "included" in the self-justifying mirror of the official national narrative while being expatriated from citizenship's promise of quotidian practical intimacy.

Because "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington" tells its story from that under-defined space where a stereotypically normal U.S. "family values" ideology and the struggles and social alienation of the U.S. working classes overlap, its infantile citizenship narrative forces the stratifying proce-

dures of official national culture to become explicit. Tracking the Simpson family from the fictional Springfield, TA, to Washington, D.C., will thus require formulating a logic of national subjectivity from the bottom's diverse perspectives and, at the same time, understanding how those very perspectives become irrelevant to both the jokes and the moving anecdotes the national story tells about them.

Incompetent Citizens, Junk Knowledge, and the U.S. Working Class

The ur-infantile citizen narrative is actually the presidential autobiography. Currently, the most vital instantiation of this form appears cinematically every four years at political nominating conventions, where a candidate establishes the value of his "character" by way of an infantile citizenship-style autobiography that casts his pilgrimage to Washington as a life-structuring project that began in childhood (see also Senate confirmation testimony speeches such as the famous "bootstraps" speech of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas).

In critical contrast, "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington" shares with *Born Yesterday* (dir. George Cukor, 1950), *The Distinguished Gentleman* (dir. Jonathan Lynn, 1992), and other "Washington" narratives a rhetoric of citizenship that initially locates the utopian possibilities of national identity in the anarchic, frightening, and/or comic spectacle of someone's personal *failure* to be national. The scene of citizenship is revealed by way of events that humiliate an ordinary citizen, disclosing him/her as someone incapable of negotiating the semiotic, economic, and political conditions of his/her existence in civil society. And just as the dirty work of representing the detritus of a white, bourgeois national culture will almost inevitably go to the citizens whose shameful bodies signify a seemingly natural incapacity to leave behind the vulgar and become "cultured," the plot of "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington" is embedded not in Lisa's story but in the gross activities of the failed proletarian father, Homer Simpson.

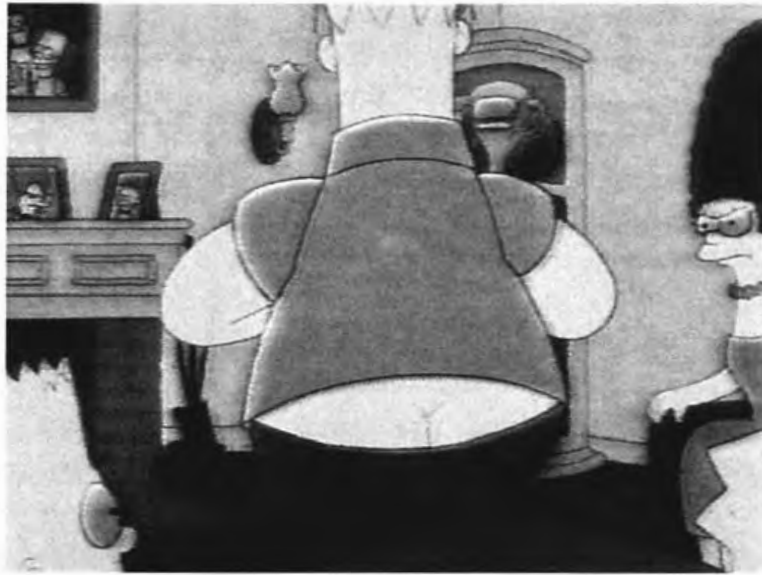
The show begins with Homer opening his junk mail. He is reading what the mail says and commenting sarcastically about the letters, outraged by their mistakes (for example, one is addressed to "Homer Simpson") and their promises of sudden wealth with no risk or labor. Yet, for all his cynical knowledge, Homer makes a gravely optimistic reading error. Rapacious and desiring to the point of senselessness, he takes a representation of a "winner's check" in a Publishers Clearing House-like

contest to be a representation of real money that he has won. He goes to the bank to cash the million-dollar pseudocheck — which is covered with phrases like “void void void” and “This is not a check” — and is devastated to find the “deal,” as he puts it, “queered.”

Throughout the episode, Homer continues to show himself incompetent in the face of money — indeed, in a scene toward the end he makes the very same error with another check. When the eventual winner of the patriotism contest symbolically shares his prize with Lisa, a prize represented by what the young man calls an “oversized novelty check,” Homer yells from the audience, “Give her the check!” and then, amidst everyone’s laughter, protests whiningly, “I wasn’t kidding.” At every moment that money appears in the show, Homer has no understanding of it — unlike Bart, who understands and exploits to his great pleasure the ambiguity of the word “expenses” in the phrase “all expenses paid.” In contrast, Homer is surprised and betrayed at his constant discovery that even in Washington money is not “free.”

What Homer does do well is drool and moan and expose himself compulsively like an idiot relegated to his insipid appetites. Immediately after his humiliation by the nonnegotiable pseudocheck, he becomes, literally, the “butt” of more jokes about freedom, personhood, and money: recovering from the shock of his ineptitude with money he stands up and shows the *Simpsons* audience the top, cracked part of his partially exposed rear. This is the initial perspective from the bottom “Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington” establishes, the baseline of political incompetence. Like a bald spot or an unzipped fly, the crack of the butt winks at the cruel superior public that knows how to use money, how to distinguish between real and false checks, and how to regulate its body.²⁰ Homer has no capacity to think abstractly, or to think, period, as when, facing a sheaf of freshly made money, he drools on the head of a worker at the Mint, or when he self-righteously sputters, “Lousy, cheap country!” on learning that the Mint does not give out free samples.

There are many other instances in this episode of Homer’s humiliation by the tacit text of bourgeois nationality. Receiving his free copy of *Reading Digest* completely changes Homer’s life, as well as the life of his family. Homer becomes so excited by getting knowledge about the world on a scale he can comprehend (exciting narratives, little sound bites) that he tries sincerely to enter the public as someone with language and knowledge. But his working-class brutishness is constantly broadcast, like his butt in the earlier scene. For example, after the triumph of Lisa’s essay in the “Veterans of Popular Wars” contest, a contest



judge feels suspicious of young Lisa for having written such a beautiful essay. The judge opines, “Methinks I smell the sickly scent of the daddy,” and decides to interview Homer. But Homer becomes entirely aphonic, grunting in the face of her interrogation. As a result, she gives Lisa extra points for having survived descending from such a brute. Later, snorting down “free” food at the convention in Washington, Homer keeps losing language, even at moments when he sincerely wants to express the way his life has been improved by reading *Reading Digest*. Speaking to a spokeswoman for the magazine, he tries but fails to think of a word that would adequately attest to his love of the magazine’s vocabulary-builder sections; then he asks for but is unable to retain the information clarifying this chain of signs: “V (very) I (important) P (person).” Why should he? for he is none of these things. With none of the social competence of a person who has knowledge about money or the world, he demonstrates what George Lipsitz has called the “infantile narcissism” of consumer self-addiction: “Who would have thought,” Homer says to Lisa, “that reading or writing would pay off!”²¹

“Have . . . You Ever Run into Any Problems Because of Your Superior Ability?”: Lisa Simpson, Smart Girl Citizen

When Homer “loses” the million dollars, his wife, Marge, consoles him by showing him the “free” *Reading Digest* they have received in the mail. Like Billie Dawn (Judy Holliday) learning to negotiate the topography

of power through print and other national media in *Born Yesterday*, Homer becomes a quasi intellectual while he reads the magazine: he pulls the children away from a “period” film they are watching on television about the Anglo-American theft of land from Native American nations (which depicts a white preacher telling an “Indian chief” that the tribe’s homeland will be more valuable if they abandon and irrigate it) and reads them a true-life adventure story; he is caught reading on the job at the nuclear power plant by Mr. Burns, who asks his assistant, “Who is that bookworm, Smithers? . . . His job description clearly specifies an illiterate!”; he reads “Quotable Notables” as a substitute for eating lunch. But when Homer reads that *Reading Digest* sponsors a patriotic essay contest for children, he loses interest in the magazine and throws it out. This is when “Mr. Lisa” takes over the plot: fishing as usual through the garbage of her family’s affections to salvage some emotional capital, she becomes, as Bart says, “the pony to bet on.”

Of what does Lisa’s smartness and competence consist? When she first attempts the patriotic essay, she props a book in front of herself, tries dutifully to quote Ben Franklin and to narrate how a bill becomes law. When this form of quotational patriotism fails, Mr. Lisa tries another tack, and bicycles to Springfield National Park for further inspiration. In so doing she derives the authority of her interpretation from the nation’s putative alliance with nature. In the theory of this alliance the United States is a domain of value untouched by history or hierarchy: the nation’s priceless essence is located in what transcends the world of practical citizenship, with its history of nationally sanctioned racial, sexual, and economic exploitation. (This conjuncture of nature and nation directly cites *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, in which Jefferson Smith expresses his national feeling by writing legislation that would establish a national summer camp for underprivileged boys: there, the boys would be turned into infantile citizens through the “American values” that would be inculcated in them by immersion in the nation’s natural order.) “America, inspire me,” Lisa says to the park, and a bald eagle straight from the national seal alights in front of her. This collaboration of nature and the National Symbolic animates Lisa, who then writes passionately, not from books, but naturally, from feeling.²² The show provides a montage of the speeches by several “patriots of tomorrow” in which Lisa’s speech takes top honors.

During this little speech-making montage, the “nation” imagined by its youth is usually signified by a pastel national map marked by the kinds of local-color images that airport postcards often sport, by some regional

accents, and by the homely spun-out puns and metaphors of American children.

So burn that flag if you must! But before you do, you'd better burn a few other things! You'd better burn your shirt and your pants! Be sure to burn your TV and your car! Oh yeah, and don't forget to burn your house! Because none of those things would exist without six red stripes, seven white stripes, and a helluva lotta stars!! (Nelson Muntz, Springfield, TA, "Burn, Baby, Burn")

Recipe for a Free Country: Mix one cup liberty, with three teaspoons of justice. Add one informed electorate. Baste well with veto power. . . . Stir in two cups of checks, sprinkle liberally with balances. (Anonymous girl, Rosemont, Minnesota, "Recipe for a Free Country")

My back is spineless. My stomach is yellow. I am the American non-voter. (Anonymous boy, Mobile, Alabama, "The American Non-Voter")

Ding dong. The sound of the Liberty Bell. Ding. Freedom. Dong. Opportunity. Ding. Excellent Schools. Dong. Quality Hospitals. (Anonymous boy, Queens, New York, "Ding-Dong")

When America was born on that hot July day in 1776, the trees in Springfield Forest were tiny saplings, trembling towards the sun, and as they were nourished by Mother Earth, so too did our fledgling nation find strength in the simple ideals of equality and justice. Who would have thought such mighty oaks or such a powerful nation could grow out of something so fragile, so pure. Thank you. (Lisa Simpson, Springfield, TA, "The Roots of Democracy")

There is a certain regularity to what counts as an infantile citizen's patriotic essay: the range of tonalities and rhetorical modes notwithstanding, fiercely patriotic citizenship always requires the deployment of analogies that represent the threat of imaginary violence to the natural body — of the biosphere, the citizen, the flag, the mappable nation. Even the feminine essay, "Recipe for a Free Country," carries the implied warning that bad citizenship and bad government are forms of bad nutrition that threaten the body politic.

Why does Lisa win? Is she simply smarter or more creative than the other kids? She wins with her essay, "The Roots of Democracy," because she uses not just analogy but a national allegory that organically links the

nation's natural growth to the emergence of its political facticity. In addition, her speech is itself an allegory of infantile citizenship, for the nation grows out of "something so fragile, so pure," so young. No secular or human power has yet affected its course, and the notion of a natural course implicitly assures that the United States will extend into the infinite future. In so lushly and economically establishing the United States as a figure of "life," Lisa's intelligence is established as superior to the jingoism of ordinary Americans, all of whom the episode portrays as politically infantile, whether young or old. In front of the White House, the tourists encounter some white, middle-class adult/infantile citizens carrying protest-style placards, which proclaim, "Everything's A-OK," "No Complaints Here," and "Things are Fine." Even the ultimate contest winner, Vietnamese immigrant Trong Van Din, indulges in empty patriotic formalism, declaring, "That's why, whenever I see the Stars and Stripes, I will always be reminded of that wonderful word: flag!"

When Lisa gets to Washington, she feels supremely national, symbolic, invulnerable, intellectual. Although her superiority to other children derives simply from her capacity to sustain a metaphor, and although in Washington she pulls pranks and acts like a kid, she also seeks there an affirmation of her idealized self-image: learning early that the reason people go to national conferences is to find confirming images of their ideal selves, she asks the other finalists, "Have either of you ever run into any problems because of your superior ability?" and hugs them when they assent, saying plaintively, "Me too!"

Lisa's capacity to reflect on language and power marks her as the national Simpson in this episode. But the public surely knows that it is Bart, not Lisa, who has captured the minds and money of consumers who identify with his bratty tactical disruptions and exploitations of the bourgeois public sphere. Her already confirmed failure as a commodity outside the show surely follows her around every episode in which she imagines that she might find a place for her "superior talents" on a national scale. In this regard she is Homer's twin, not his opposite: their excesses of body and language mark them both precisely as American incompetents, citizens unfit to profit from their drives and talents in a national symbolic and capitalist system.

Trauma, Therapy, and National Fantasy: "The System Works!"

While each of the Simpsons is finding and reveling in his/her level of national (in)competence, the federal nation is itself busily corrupting

the natural, symbolic, and economic forms that variously inspire the Simpson family. Scandalous national corruption is tacitly everywhere in the episode: the family stays at the Watergate; their bank advertises itself as “not a savings and loan”; Homer scoffs, “Yeah, right,” at a sign in the White House bowling alley that claims Nixon bowled back-to-back three-hundred-point games there; Teddy Kennedy sits at the patriotism award ceremony looking formless and dissipated; Lisa’s congressman is shown cynically exploiting her for a photo opportunity (a form of presidential mass mediation invented, of course, by Nixon).

But when Lisa witnesses the bribe that threatens to despoil Springfield National Park, the tacit knowledge of national corruption the show figures via “Nixoniana” becomes itself the explicit ground of a counter-national symbolic order, produced by an enraged Lisa. The show figures the political meaning of her rage through a genealogy of aesthetic forms with which national criticism and patriotism have been traditionally organized and mediated. The transformation of consciousness, sensuality, causality, and aesthetics Lisa experiences is, again, typical of the infantile citizenship story, in which the revelation of the practical impossibility of utopian nationality produces gothic, uncanny, miraculating effects on the infantile persons whose minds are being transformed by “true,” not idealized, national knowledge.

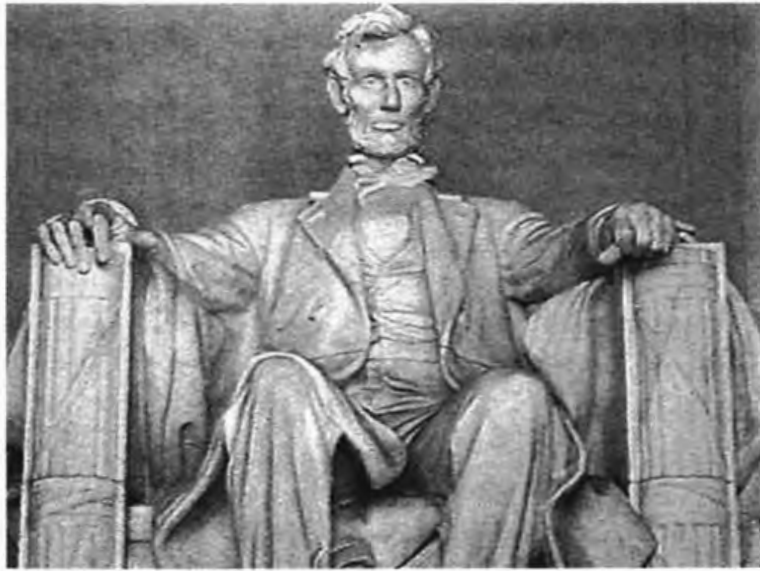
Lisa’s path toward becoming a citizen with complex knowledge follows the double logic of citizenship technologies outlined in the previous section: from sentimental experiences of the nation through contact with its monumental media to political experiences of it as a mass-mediated, crisis-oriented site of intensified publicity. I have described how, in stage one of Lisa’s political education, she immerses herself in the culture of feelings organized by the National Symbolic. Then, early in the morning of the day she is scheduled to give her patriotic speech, she visits a monument from which she can borrow another rush of national inspiration. The monument Lisa visits is fictional: it is the “Winifred Beecher Howe” Memorial, which is said to have been raised in tribute to “an early crusader for women’s rights [who] led the Floor Mop Rebellion of 1910,” and who later “appeared on the highly unpopular 75 cent piece.”

Howe’s motto, “I Will Iron Your Sheets When You Iron Out the Inequities in Your Labor Laws,” measures the absurd space of Lisa’s imaginary relation to American nationality. Given the way patriotic discourse normally veils national capitalism’s undemocratic effects and relegates women’s value to the private sphere, it is ludicrous to think that the



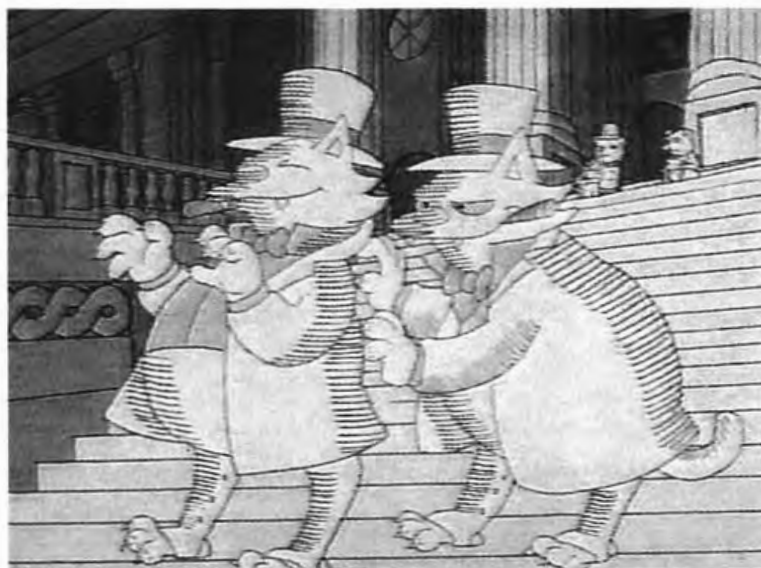
United States would honor as an ideal citizen a female labor activist who led demonstrations against the exploitation of women's work; it is absurd to think that the nation would preserve in stone the wild ungoverned state of a working-class housewife's body in messy domestic regalia. But Lisa does not note this absurdity, which exists only for the audience: the United States in which *she* lives has a tradition of respecting class struggle, women's political efforts, and female citizenship in general. Instead, Lisa's disaffection from the nation form arises when she sees her congressman take the bribe.

Lisa is heartbroken. "How can I read my essay now, if I don't believe my own words?" To solve this soul-wrenching problem she follows fastidiously in the tradition of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *The Littlest Rebel* (dir. David Butler, 1935), and many other pilgrimage narratives, by turning to Abraham Lincoln.²³ Lisa looks up from the reflecting pool at the Lincoln Memorial and asserts that "Honest Abe" will "show me the way." Unfortunately, the Lincoln Memorial is overcrowded with Americans obsessed with the same possibility. In *Mr. Smith* the crowd mills around the monument walls as a child reads aloud the "Gettysburg Address": a montage of white people, Jews, and African Americans merge in rapt appreciation of a bygone world where a visionary man would risk making the nation into a practical utopia for all members of "the people." In "Mr. Lisa," the same crowd reappears in cartoon form, this time projecting questions to Lincoln's stony, wise, iconic face. They



range from “What can I do to make this a better country?” to “How can I make my kid brush more?” and “Would I look good with a mustache?”

Lisa, crowded out in the cacophony of national-popular need, then goes on to Jefferson’s memorial; here the cartoon refers to a scene in *Born Yesterday* where Billie Dawn also visits Jefferson’s memorial, seeing in his example the possibility of her own revolutionary emancipation from ignorant and degraded patriarchal working-class privacy to nation-tinged, literate middle-class romantic intimacy. Alas, Jefferson’s cartoon statue



Shirley Temple (in *The Littlest Rebel*) achieves with a “living” Lincoln what Jeff Smith and Lisa Simpson dream of as they look at his statue: intimacy with the president’s body. (Above)

yells at Lisa, resenting that his own accomplishments are comparatively underappreciated by the ignorant American people, and she slinks away. Resting, dejected, on the Capitol steps, Lisa has a conversion experience. Right in front of her very eyes, federal workers in their white-collar suits turn into pigs, their true, symbolic selves: there is a brief music video

during which she sees the federal pigs with skins engraved in the mode of dollar bills scratch each others' backs, gorge themselves at troughs overflowing with cartoon dollar bills, and then wipe their mouths on the flag.

This mutation of the cartoon (in the style of Thomas Nast and others) places this episode of *The Simpsons* in a classic American genealogy of critical editorial cartooning, where national criticism takes the form of deeply felt sarcasm. Moreover, the gluttonous snorting of the pigs refers to Homer's own grotesque greedy excesses, thus retroactively reframing the class hierarchies and incompetence of national culture that the Simpson family embodies into what is truly repulsive, the patriarchal and economic corruption of both the National Symbolic and the U.S. federal system. The migration of U.S. grossness from the working classes to the state itself is reflected in the change Lisa forces when, the scales having fallen from her misty eyes, she changes the topic of her essay from "The Roots of Democracy" to "Cesspool on the Potomac."

But this explosion of the affect, vision, sensation, and aesthetics of normative American citizenship is followed by yet another dislocation in Lisa's experience of being national. This involves resituating her in the crisis logic that makes modern citizenship not monumental, but electric. "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington" makes this transition in a montage sequence that takes place at the moment the Senate page beholds Lisa's loss of faith in democracy. The page telephones a senator; the FBI entraps the corrupt congressman, on videotape; the Senate meets and expels him; George Bush signs the bill; a newspaper almost instantly reports the congressman's imprisonment and conversion to a born-again consciousness; Lisa says, "The system works!"

As in the telephone, telegraph, newspaper, and popular-media montage sequence of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *The Simpsons* produces national criticism through a transformation of time, space, and media that involves shifting from the lexicon of patriotic monumentality and classical national representation to accelerating postmodern media forms: video, microchip bugs, cameras, late-edition daily newspapers. In addition, here the FBI's mastery establishes it as the guardian of America, much as in the films *Gabriel Over the White House* (dir. Gregory La Cava, 1933) and *The Pelican Brief* (dir. Alan Pakula, 1993). In contrast to the corrupt and lazy local print media of *Mr. Smith*, *The Simpsons*, and dozens of other pilgrimage-to-Washington films, mass-media formations are the real citizen-heroes here. Televisual technology itself becomes the repre-

sentative of the “average man” who rises above his station, protected by FBI agents who seek to clean out and preserve all sorts of purity: of language (the FBI agent uses a southern drawl in his criminal guise and reverts to a television announcer’s “pure” generic intonations in his “real” persona as the police), of region, and of the stream of faith that connects residents of the “mythical” Springfield, TA, to the nation that represents America in Washington.

In two minutes of television time and two hours of accelerated real time, then, the national system heals itself, the cesspool is cleaned out, and nature returns “home” to the discourse of national growth. Nothing feels complicated about this swift transformation. The performance of mass media-orchestrated political culture reveals the official or normative national culture industry to be a system of meaning in which *allegory is the aesthetic of political realism* at every moment of successful national discourse. Allegorical thinking helps to provide ways of explaining the relation between individuals’ lives, the life of the collectivity, and the story of the nation form itself. But much less benign things can be said about the normative deployment of national allegory.²⁴ As all of the infantile citizens’ patriotic essays satirically remind us, the overorganizing image or symbolic tableau emerges politically at certain points of structural crisis, helping to erase the complexities of aggregate national memory and to replace its inevitably rough edges with a magical and consoling way of thinking that can be collectively enunciated and easily manipulated, like a fetish. In this way, for example, patriotism can be equated with proper citizenship. This means that the politically invested overorganizing image is a kind of public paramnesia, a substitution for traumatic loss or unrepresentable contradiction that marks its own contingency or fictiveness while also radiating the authority of insider knowledge that all euphemisms possess. Extending from these sources of collective imagination, hegemonic allegories of the social appear to confirm inevitabilities and truths where strange combinations of structure and chaos reign behind the screen of the sign.

The competent citizen knows this about the hypocrisy of nationalist rhetoric, and learns how to read conveniently and flexibly between the lines, thus preserving both utopian national identification and cynical practical citizenship. Nothing shows this better than this episode of *The Simpsons*, which critiques the corrupt world veiled by patriotic bromides via pastiche and broad jokes rather than leaving anyone with a bad taste in her mouth. This temporalizing or narrative mode of resolving questions about the way power dominates bodies, value, exchanges, and

dreams in the national public sphere is typical of the infantile citizenship genre, for narrative temporality isolates events that might also be represented as a protean system characterized by consistent violence and unevenness. As it is, when Lisa says, “The system works!” she embodies the Reaganite “patriot of tomorrow,” because despite all the perverse privileged prerogative she has witnessed she continues to believe that a system exists, that “bills” motivated by democratic virtue do become law, and that a truly good nation will always emerge heroically to snuff out the bad one.

“Spitballs Are Not Free Speech”

I have described how in “Mr. Lisa,” as in every fictive pilgrimage to Washington, national monuments, traditional symbolic narratives, print, radio, and television news coexist with other popular phenomena. Here the right-wing cultural agenda of the Reagan/Bush era is everywhere in the narrative, including in its recourse to sarcasm as a form of criticism and in the subtlety of the Nixon intertext, which “reminds” us, without interfering with the pleasure of the narrative, of a televisual moment when the nation thought it possible to imagine a patriotic mass-mediated *criticism*. It is not just that television histories, children’s textbooks, *Reader’s Digest*, FBI surveillance video, national parks, and national spaces are here brought into conjunction, constituted as the means of production of modern citizenship. It is not just that the Bushes themselves are portrayed here as benign patriarchs—for this might be coded as the text’s return to the modality of wishful resolution that seems to mark the crisis of *having* national knowledge inevitably produced by the pilgrimage.

But the very multiplicity of media forms asks us to engage the genres of patriotism itself, modes of collective identification that have become the opposite of “protest” or “criticism” for a generation of youths who have been drafted to vitalize a national fantasy politics unsupported by either a utopian or a respectable domestic political agenda. The construction of a patriotic youth culture must be coded here as a postmodern nationalist mode of production. In this light, Bill Clinton’s recent appearances on *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, MTV, and so on involve merely one more extension of the national aura to the infant citizens of the United States, who are asked to identify with a “youthful” idealism untempered by even a loving critical distance.

This is to say that Lisa’s assertion that the system works counts as even

a parodic resolution to her crises of knowledge because consciousness that a system exists at all has become what counts as the ideal pedagogical outcome of contemporary American politics. Thus, in the chain that links the fetus, the wounded, the dead, and the “children” as the true American “people,” the linkage is made through the attribution to normal-style citizens of a zero-sum mnemonic, a default consciousness of the nation with no imagination of agency—apart perhaps from voting, here coded as a form of consumption. In other words, the national knowledge industry has produced a specific modality of paramnesia, an incitement to forgetting that leaves simply the patriotic trace, for real and metaphorically infantilized citizens, that confirms that the nation exists and that we are in it. Television is not the cause of this substitution of the fact (that the nation exists) for the thing (political agency) but is one of many vehicles where the distilling operation takes place, and where the medium itself is installed as a necessary switchpoint between any locales and any national situation.

Let me demonstrate this by contrasting the finales of *Mr. Smith* and “Mr. Lisa.” It is a crucial and curious characteristic of infantile citizenship narratives that the accumulation of plot tends to lead to an acceleration and a crisis of knowledge relieved not by modes of sustained criticism but by the quasi-amnesia of ersatz consciousness. At the end of *Mr. Smith*, Jefferson Smith is defeated by the congressional and capitalist manipulation of the law, property rights, and the media. Smith, who has been filibustering and improvising on what discursive virtue might look like in the Senate, is confronted by a wagonload of telegrams embodying a manufactured public opinion mobilized against his cause; dispirited and depleted, Smith faints on the Senate floor. His loss of spirit drives Senator Joseph Paine (Claude Rains) to attempt suicide and to confess everything. In the film’s final moments, a hubbub led by Clarissa Saunders (Jean Arthur) claims victory over corruption, and the mob dances out of the chambers into, presumably, the streets. In other words, overwhelmed by joy at the victory of Smith’s particular truth and virtue, the film leaves Mr. Smith lying there on the Senate floor, unconscious. It feels like a patriotic moment. But it might be interesting to speculate about what Smith would think when he awoke. Would he think the system had worked? How could he, when it totally failed, or was teeteringly maintained by the fragile conscience of one man with national power?

In contrast, it might seem that Lisa’s awakening changes the condition

of her citizenship. But her belief in the “system” is renewed by the shock of national power the television-style media produce for her. By the end, the waste and excess that has dominated the scene of patriotism makes her forget not just what she knew, but what she did not know. And we realize, on thinking back to her speech, that at no point did Lisa know anything about America. She could be inspired by the National Symbolic and disillusioned by the corruptions of capital; she is moved aesthetically by nature’s nation and repelled by the boorish appetites of both professional and ordinary men. But not at all transformed by her experience of Washington, she merely remembers she had experiences there.

It turns out, in short, that Lisa was not that smart. What makes her fail this way? I have described how America is split into a National Symbolic and a capitalist system in “Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington.” But this simple description is for infants, just as Bart’s opening pedagogical punishment on the classroom blackboard, “Spitballs are not free speech,” reduces the problem of protecting costly speech to a joke, a joke that once again allegorizes the conceptual problematic of freedom and its media by locating politics in a disgusting body. Likewise, the violent insult to women’s citizenship this cartoon absurdity clothes in sarcasm is expressed, in the episode, by more corporeal grossness: in the afterglow of the congressman’s sale of his favors to the lobbyist while standing at the foot of the woman’s memorial, they look at Howe’s monumental body and say, “Woof woof!” and “What a pooch!” Lisa’s response to the revelation of sexism and graft is not to think of these qualities as the national system, nor to become an adult; that is, to form a critical consciousness in the place of the passive patriotism the official national culture machine seeks to inculcate. Her first response is to become abjected to America, by visiting Lincoln and soliciting his pedagogy. We have seen there, comedically, even radically, how the overidentification with national icons evacuates people’s wisdom from the simplest judgments of everyday life. It is not surprising, then, that Lisa is so primed to believe what the newspaper tells her about the self-purifying system of the hegemonic nation: this is why she can have faith in the nation, “free” from the encumbrance of ambivalent knowledge.

The infantile citizen has a memory of the nation and a tactical relation to its operation. But no vision of sustained individual or collective criticism and agency accompanies the national system here. The national

culture industry provides information about the United States but has no interest in producing knowledge that would change anything: in what sense is it knowledge, then? To infantilized citizens like Lisa, having at least a weak understanding of an overwhelming mountain of material seems better than nothing, and also the only thing possible. It is not surprising, in this context, that the two commercials between the opening credits of *The Simpsons* and the narrative proper—for the U.S. Army and for an episode of *In Living Color* that featured the violent heterosexualization of a gay film critic—promote the suppression of American gay identity on behalf of a national fantasy of a military life that, even after the Cold War, is more vital than ever for (re)producing national boyhood and heterosexual national manhood. It is not surprising, in this context, that I could pull the script of this episode from a “Simpsons” bulletin board on the Internet, a vast reservoir of knowledge that is said to have “revolutionized” the prospects of political agency and social integration across the nation. Just as every pilgrimage-to-Washington narrative deploys information technologies to link the abstract national to the situated local, underinformed, abjected, and idealistic citizen, so too the rhetoric of the Internet confirms its necessity at every moment for the production of the knowledge that every American needs in order to be competent to the most reduced notion of what citizenship entails.

Yet a distinguished tradition of collective popular resistance to national policy has taken the form of marches on Washington, by dispossessed workers, African Americans, gays, lesbians, queers, pro- and antichoice activists, feminists, veterans of popular and unpopular wars, for example. These collective activities invert the small-town and metropolitan spectacle of the “parade” honoring local citizens into national acts, performances of citizenship that predict votes and make metonymic “the people” whom representatives represent, but they also claim a kind of legitimate mass political voice uniquely performed outside the voting booth. On the one hand, mass political marches resist, without overcoming, the spectacular forms of identification that dominate mass national culture—through individualizing codes of celebrity, heroism, and their underside, scandal—for only in times of crisis are Americans solicited to act en masse as citizens whose private patriotic identifications are indeed *not enough* to sustain national culture at a particular moment. On the other hand, we might note as well the problem mass political movements face in translating their activities into the monumentalizing cur-

rency of national culture. In this light, we witness how an impersonation or an icon of political struggle can eclipse the movement it represents — for instance, in the image of Martin Luther King or Louis Farrakhan on the Mall; in the image of the subaltern citizen in the body of the fetus; or in the image, currently dominating national culture, of the infantile citizen, too helpless to do anything but know, without understanding, what it means that the “system” of the nation exists “freely,” like “free” television itself.

and anxiety it behooves us to try to say what they are and to fight the unworthy ones in their real terms. It goes without saying that this list of counterinsurgent motives can and should be augmented.

- 26 For an aligned view about the place of irony and archival creativity in critical studies of nationality, see John Caughie, "Playing at Being American."
- 27 See, for example, Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Dominelli, *Women Across Continents*; Ginsburg and Rapp, *Conceiving the New World Order*; Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*; Kaplan and Pease, *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*; Rouse, "Thinking through Transnationalism"; Schneider and Brian Wallis, *Global Television*; Shohut and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*; Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," and "Acting Bits / Identity Talk." See also chapter 5 of this book.
- 28 Habermas laments the exhaustion of the utopia of labor and privatization of society both in contemporary European and U.S. public spheres in "The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies," in Habermas, *The New Conservatism*, 48–70.
- 29 On radical recontextualization as critical method and a condition of historical possibility see Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* and Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory."
- 30 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 45.
- 31 Warner, introduction, *Fear of a Queer Planet*.
- 32 The literature on "identity" is, again, very large: some examples from it include Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, v. 1–3; Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*; Danielsen and Engle, *After Identity*, especially essays by Halley ("The Politics of the Closet") and Coombe ("The Properties of Culture and the Politics of Possessing Identity"); Rouse, "Questions of Identity"; and Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. For an essay that opens new comparative ways of thinking about identity as property in the self, see Petchesky, "The Body as Property."
- 33 The bibliography on the historical relation between U.S. citizenship and corporealized quasi nationality or subnationality is substantial. I summarize it in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, 11–17, 222–23. For an important politico-philosophical engagement with the means by which a culture of democratic rights hypocritically produces a turbulent politics of race, gender, and ethnicity, see Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*.
- 34 Elshtain argues strenuously against the current U.S. drive to consign "shameful" identities to the private or to use shame to draw the boundary between full and incompetent citizenship, a desire she sees as making democracy impossible. See *Democracy on Trial*, especially chapter 2, "The Politics of Displacement," 37–63.

1 *The Theory of Infantile Citizenship*

Much thanks to Ben Anderson, Michael Warner, and the great audience at the Society for Cinema Studies for their critical engagement with this paper/project.

- 1 Caughie, "Playing at Being American." This chapter and this book are indebted to Benedict Anderson's pathbreaking work on the technologies of "emotional legitimacy" that sustain nation-states as the utopian form of political life. See *Imagined Communities*.

- 2 Lorde, *Zami*, 68–71.
- 3 Marian Anderson, an African American opera star, gave a concert at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 because the racist Daughters of the American Revolution denied her request to sing *inside* Constitution Hall.
- 4 An excellent argument for thinking about national/capitalist space can be found in Berland, “Angels Dancing.”
- 5 Lorde, *Zami*, 71.
- 6 In addition to Audre Lorde’s *Zami* and the episode of *The Simpsons* titled “Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington,” the archive for these observations about infantile citizenship in the national-pilgrimage plot includes *The Birth of a Nation* (dir. D. W. Griffith, 1915); *Washington Merry-Go-Round* (dir. James Cruze, 1932); *Gabriel Over the White House* (dir. Gregory La Cava, 1933); *The Littlest Rebel* (dir. David Butler, 1935); *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (dir. Frank Capra, 1939); *Adventure in Washington* (dir. Alfred E. Green, 1941); *Heavenly Days* (dir. Howard Estabrook, 1944); *Born Yesterday* (dir. George Cukor, 1950; remake dir. Luis Mandoki, 1993); *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (dir. Robert Wise, 1951); *The Manchurian Candidate* (dir. John Frankenheimer, 1962); *Coming Home* (dir. Hal Ashby, 1978); *Being There* (dir. Hal Ashby, 1979); *In Country* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1989); *The Distinguished Gentleman* (dir. Jonathan Lynn, 1992); *Dave* (dir. Ivan Reitman, 1993); *The Pelican Brief* (dir. Alan J. Pakula, 1993); *Forrest Gump* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 1994). The film *Born on the Fourth of July* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1989) is an honorary member of this archive. I also thank Howard Horwitz for alerting me to the “Weenie Tots” episode of *Married with Children*.
- 7 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, 250–59, 336–37.
- 8 Negt and Kluge, “Selections from *The Proletariat Public Sphere*.”
- 9 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 87–129.
- 10 Heath, “Representing Television,” 278–79.
- 11 For the main arguments for the pervasiveness of televisual amnesia or information fatigue, see Doane, “Information, Crisis, Catastrophe.” See also Feuer, “The Concept of Live Television.”
- 12 The ongoing pedagogic/civic activity of television is more widely appreciated on the right, and the moral domination of the medium by conservatives has been central to the right-wing cultural agenda of the Reagan/Bush era. What counts as “public” access, “public” television, has undergone massive restrictive redefinition under the pressure of a certain pseudorepresentative form of “public” opinion, whose virtue is established by reference to a supposedly nonideological or non-interest-group-based politics of transcendence that must be understood as fundamentalist in its imagination of a nation of pure, opinionated minds. For overviews and thoughtful reconsiderations on the left, see Lipsitz, *Time Passages*; Rasula, “Nietzsche in the Nursery”; Schwoch, White, and Reilly, *Media Knowledge*.
- 13 Morse, “An Ontology of Everyday Distraction.”
- 14 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37–46.
- 15 On the nationalist media contexts around the production and reception of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, see Eric Smoodin’s fine “‘Compulsory Viewing for Every Citizen.’”
- 16 Christensen, *Reel Pictures*, 45–48.
- 17 Another extensive and historically rich analysis of *Mr. Smith* focuses on its nationalist

media contexts in and outside the plot. See Wolfe, “*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*,” 330–31.

- 18 The final function of the infantile citizen is to promote an image of what the normal citizen must do and be to occupy the nation properly. No more brazen example of the technology of normative patriotism can be found than in the film *Heavenly Days* (dir. Howard Estabrook, 1944), which sets out to define what a good national man is: the answer, repeated incessantly throughout the film, is “an average man.” Fibber McGee, like all Americans, thinks that he is above average, and that his normative national identity secures that status for him. The film disabuses him of his self-esteem by linking the plot of his pilgrimage to Washington (to help with a state project of rebuilding postwar national morale) to a plot that features the real-life person of Dr. George Gallup. Molly McGee inspires Gallup to do a national poll to discover what kind of person the average U.S. man really is. Fibber wins the award from Gallup. First, Fibber is insulted and throws it out; but quickly he realizes what a resource his averageness is, and then stages a parade down Main Street to educate other citizens into proper (average, semiprivate) citizenship.
- 19 Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 66.
- 20 On the class, gender, and sexual politics of the grotesque in contemporary America, see Kipnis, “Reading *Hustler*.”
- 21 Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 70–71.
- 22 In *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* I use the concept of the National Symbolic to describe the archive of official objects and narratives whose possession is foundational for producing citizens who identify themselves with other citizens and the nation form itself.
- 23 On the centrality of the Lincoln Memorial to organizing national identification and memory, see Sandage, “The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939–1963.” For a more global view of nationalist monumentality that includes a discussion of Lincoln’s memorial, see Benedict Anderson, “Replica, Aura, and Late Nationalist Imaginings.”
- 24 The bibliography on national allegory is big and complex. For current arguments about its positive and negative effects, see Ahmad, *In Theory*; Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*.

2 *Live Sex Acts (Parental Advisory: Explicit Material)*

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- 1 Andrea Dworkin, quoted in de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 581.
- 2 Michael Kammen describes the particularly intensified manipulations of national nostalgia and amnesia during the gestation and rise of the Reaganite right in *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 618–88.
- 3 Michael Taussig names this saturation of politics by the nation “state fetishism.” This is a condition in which the state uses a sublime and magical official story of national identity to mask the nation’s heterogeneity. See “*Maleficium: State Fetishism*,” in his *The Nervous System*, 111–40, 223.

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