Trow Television Love No Context

By William Eaton

Zeteo is Reading, November 2015

(1)

One week this past October, *The New Yorker's* television critic, Emily Nussbaum, wrote a piece which began by dissing—as making "little sense"; "élitism in the guise of hipness"—one of the great works of American cultural criticism, previous *New Yorker* writer George W.S. Trow's "Within the Context of No Context."[1] The week after Nussbaum's piece appeared, another *New Yorker* writer dissed Henry David Thoreau's writing as "Pond Scum."

Thus I might write about Americans' struggle not to be held, or not to hold ourselves, to higher moral, political, or intellectual standards than we would like to have to meet. The problem is not that we are in many ways lazy and self-interested, nor that we are lost and do not quite know what to do with our lives.[2] Humans, even in their moments of passion, have long been as we are. The problem would seem to be that—our Puritan and other religious heritages?—we feel guilty, we feel less, and thus we would diss and dismiss those who make us feel this way.[3]

Alternatively, I might—as indeed I will!—call attention to the excellence of Trow's work and to some of his richer observations. But another, larger and not entirely pleasant challenge, waits in the shadows, or nested in Nussbaum's "élitism" accusation. As extraordinarily insightful as Trow's "Within" is, it is hamstrung not only by its lack of an overarching economic understanding of the workings and import of American culture, but also by an understandable unwillingness to touch on sexuality—most particularly on the role

---

[1] Nussbaum, "The Price Is Right: What advertising does to TV," *New Yorker*, October 12, 2015. Trow, "Within the Context of No Context," *New Yorker*, November 17, 1980. The latter essay is currently available in book form from Atlantic Monthly Press.

[2] For more along these lines, see **The American Flag is at Half-Mast Today**.

[3] I am skipping past my idea that the American problem-solution approach, or obsession, is a way of diverting ourselves from the human predicament. See, for example, **The King's Therapy**. In "Within," Trow has similar views.

> A problem is something enjoyed by a piece of the demography. "I'm just a Hoosier." No. No one cares. "I am Youth." Better. "I am a battered child." Very good."
>
> Important programming is programming that recognizes the problem. . . . The most important programming deals with people with a serious problem who make it to the Olympics.

William Eaton is the Editor of **Zeteo**. *A collection of his essays,* **Surviving the Twenty-First Century**, *was recently published by Serving House Books. For more, see* ***Surviving the website***. *Plans are afoot for a next collection. Working title:* The Unsaid. The **title essay appeared in Agni 79**.

Trow's closet homosexuality played in his view of the world.[4] "Within's" unvoiced subtext: Because I am not straight, straightness has been corrupted or has disappeared from the United States. (That straightness was never what it was cracked up to be, that it has always depended on lies, drugs, and alcohol—this Trow, from his vantage point, cannot see.)

Previously, in an essay that ends with *Walden* and begins with *The Importance of Being Earnest*, I wrote about the power of "the unsaid" in various texts. A writer's inability or refusal to speak about something or someone very important to him or her may give a text added force, and it may become the powerful way that the text finds to speak (with lips pressed closed) about its core subject: denial and dissimulation (be this of one's sexual interests, impotence, grief, rage, etc.). Which is also to say that such texts speak, in hushed tones but powerfully, about the difficulty all of us social animals have to be ourselves, speak about ourselves, know ourselves. Certainly this is one of the ways we human beings, and not only in what Trow calls The Age of Television, have long lived in a context of no context.[5] "Theyll let you play anybody but you," as the poet Al Young phrased it.[6]

(2)

Nussbaum's diss of Trow's work turns out to be a kind of backhanded put-down. She ends up writing that "Within the Context of No-Context" has helped focus her attention on certain aspects of television programming. Above all, that essay, and the fact that it can now be put down, gives her a way to air her uneasiness about product integration and product placement in TV dramas and comedies. Among the examples she offers: "On NBC, Dan Harmon's avant-garde comedy, *Community*, featured an anti-corporate plot about Subway paid for by Subway." And she quotes the creator of an "anti-corporate," NBC-Comcast

---

[4] I have had the sense—perhaps incorrect, perhaps not—that the writer of "Pond Scum" has not spent much time reading Thoreau, nor Nussbaum much time reading "Within the Context of No Context." What's most interesting in this regard is how it points toward a similar impression: that Trow himself was not much of a reader. For "Within," he interviews the managing editor of *People*; he looks particularly at magazine covers; and he has watched bits of television, haphazardly. But that's it. Marx, Adorno, C. Wright Mills, Roland Barthes, or any number of other thinkers might have helped him develop his ideas and give them—yes—context, but there is no sign that he even gave such writers a look. At least in this regard he shows himself to be part of his newspaperman father's guild; not so much anti-intellectual as simply lacking intellectual interests.

[5] "My view of the civilization as it was presented in the [New York] *Times* of February, 1950, is that in the Second World War the Germans lost and television won." From "Folding the *Times*: New York before television," *New Yorker*, December 28, 1998–January 4, 1999. Reprinted in *My Pilgrim's Progress* (Vintage in 1999).

[6] Al Young, "A Poem for Players"; collected in *Heaven: Collected Poems, 1956–1990*, Creative Arts Book Company, Berkeley, CA, 1992. I have quoted from this poem so many times, and must note again that in its time it was very much addressed to African Americans (or, say, to the future Barack Obama). But I have taken it (appropriated it) as being about human existence more generally.

product, *Mr. Robot*: "If the idea is to inspire an interesting debate over capitalism, I actually think [product integration] can help provoke that conversation even more."[7]

Here, too, we can find ourselves grasping for context. Never mind "avant-garde," what can this compound "anti-corporate" mean next to NBC or Comcast? (And shouldn't Mr. Robot be trained not to put such words in close proximity to one another?) "Within" includes a good segment about how magazines use confusion and anxiety to help create demand and bring consumers to the magazines' commercial clients.

> In the case of the magazine based on a deceptive or convoluted agreement, the nature of the real transaction cannot be revealed without endangering the context of false authority which the editors have sought to establish. . . . It has been some time since there has been a *simple fashion magazine*, for instance—one in which the wearing of certain clothes by certain people has been of any importance. Instead [fashion magazines now] have something to do with the idea of the possible existence of approval and disapproval adhering to clothes, in an abstract way that shifts and runs before the reader with a completely confusing result. What . . . a fashion magazine advances is not the idea that there is one interesting thing to do or wear but the idea of a hundred and one possibilities existing together in a context that is never described . . . [8] [Italics in the original.]

A consumer confronted both with the seeming importance of approval and disapproval related to what she, or he, is wearing, and with the hundred and one possibilities of what to wear, may become driven to shop, if only to feed her anxiety. As Trow writes elsewhere, "The territory is loneliness and envy and the promise of access to a sense of ease." It's a false promise of course. "The con man does give you something. It is a sense of your own worthlessness." The con man and the fashion model, we might say.

(3)

I trust that it is coming to be recognized that in her article, "The Price is Right," Nussbaum skipped past what Trow was writing about in his great essay. Nussbaum writes about

---

[7] The second of these "anti-corporates" comes from the *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner, who used this compound in touting *Mr. Robot* to Nussbaum.

[8] As I suspect Trow himself recognized, *The New Yorker* likely falls into this category of magazines based on deceptive or convoluted agreements. Most media products that make most of their money from advertising fall into this category; a point Nussbaum seems to ignore in the case of her favorite TV shows. She would have us think about product placements, for example, as an intrusion on the core content—the comedy or drama (or sporting event, etc.). "Making television has always meant bending to the money," she writes, "and TV history has taught us to be cool with any compromise." What she ignores: the selling of products and services is the core. The comedy or drama exists only insofar as it is perceived to serve that interest. (Of course the business model becomes more complex when cable fees, re-run rights, merchandising, and so forth are added in, but this does not fundamentally alter the role, in all this, of, say, a writer's jokes.)

television shows, and she presents herself as, either by inclination or by profession, a lover of television shows.

> Those of us who love TV have won the war. The best scripted shows are regarded as significant art—debated, revered, denounced. TV showrunners are embraced as heroes and role models, even philosophers.

In "Within" (first published in 1980), Trow writes some about television, and some about the World's Fair of 1964/65, and about Edward VIII (and Mrs. Simpson). He takes Edward as a prime example of a current "urge to shed any context perceived to be inhibiting and in conflict with the possibility of personal satisfaction." "[N]o one doubted that Edward VIII found in his relationship with Mrs. Simpson a context more powerful and more necessary than the context of British history, of which he was the manifest representative."

Trow also writes a good deal about *People* magazine, at the time a relatively new phenomenon. Indeed, the commercial success of *People* may have been the initial inspiration for "Within." Trow uses the example of Farrah Fawcett who, Wikipedia now tells me, "rose to international fame when she posed for her iconic red swimsuit poster" and starred on the television series *Charlie's Angels* (1976–77). At the time of Trow's writing, "Farrah" was breaking up with her celebrity husband and trying to become a more liberated woman. Trow writes:

> The figure on the cover [of *People*] is someone so well known that that person can give a little sense of home. That the figure is often bereft, himself, of a sense of home is ignored at first and then is exploited if the exploitation promises to give us some comfort. So Farrah is a story, and Farrah having a problem is a story, and Farrah talking about her problem is a story. . . . We wonder if she exists. And if she knows that we wonder if she exists. And if it hurts when she feels that we wonder if she exists. . . .

Somewhat further on he writes, as regards television: "It has to do with . . . the human being's eagerness to perceive as warm something that is cold, for instance; his eagerness to be a part of what one cannot be a part of, to love what cannot be loved."

This is to suggest that one of Trow's subjects is love, or our lack of it, our longing for it, our isolation. The last few years of his life he was mentally ill, and he ended up dying (in 2006) alone in Naples, Italy, the police discovering his body days after his death. The following year, a gossipy *New York* magazine article stated that many of Trow's closest friends had never met a lover or boyfriend of Trow's. The songwriter Jacob Brackman is quoted:

> "George didn't like guys who were like him; he liked rough trade. He had a completely other life, which was his homosexual life, which was the Anvil [gay sex club] and Rikers Island [city jail] characters that he never brought

around. When we were at Harvard, nobody was out of the closet. George, even twenty years out of Harvard, still wasn't talking about it."[9]

I would not, however, have this be a story about being a homosexual in the United States in the decades leading up to gay marriage. Rather, it seems to me that Trow is writing not only about love and "pseudo-intimacy" in the "Age of the Television," but also about how closeted we all have been—and remain. On a very basic level, he is writing about what it feels like to be an American in our times.

In a beautiful passage in the "Long Introduction" to his collection of essays *My Pilgrim's Progress*, he writes about something that few Americans have ever challenged themselves to write or even think about:

> People fall off the high wire invisibly. There is no net; they crash. They pick themselves up secretly, in the quiet of their own mind, having had to face some near infinite pain about delusion, and about lack of protection, about abandonment, about no one being there, about nothing being there; and they crawl away from their accident, and when at last they stand up again, if they do, they're a little deformed. And that's a lot of us now.[10]

The passage can bring tears to the eyes. And particularly if one can remember one's own fall, or falls. And if one can appreciate that, among other things, Trow is finding the best way he can to write about his own experiences, his own pain, his own failure to live up to his father's fantasy (or to his own fantasy of his father's fantasy). From the concluding segment of "Within": "It turns out that while I am at home in many strange places, I am not free even to visit the territory I was expected to inhabit effortlessly."[11] (This is pure speculation on my part, but reading between the lines I have the sense of a man who was torn between feeling, on the one hand, that, because of his lack of straightness—because of his inability to be the patriarch of a nice, WASP, suburban family—he did not deserve his father's love; and then, on the other hand: Was his father in fact capable of loving anyone but himself?[12])

---

[9] Ariel Levy, **The Last Gentleman**, *New York* magazine, October 24, 2007.

[10] *My Pilgrim's Progress: Media Studies, 1950-1998*. Right from the get go—the Preface and Dedication—the latter work offers any number of nuggets. For example, in his first paragraph Trow proposes that in 1950 the United States was about to be at the height of its power, in a way similar to the moment when Victoria assumed the throne of England or Napoleon got set to dismantle the Holy Roman Empire. On the second page he proposes: "We like to think that it is because we are so fascinating as a people that we are—or have been—so successful, but the core of our fascination has been the fact of our Total Sweep in World War II." Might makes right, we could call this.

[11] See the biography of John Cheever for an example of how—and how painfully—a homosexual could be head of a suburban family in the 1950s.

[12] Among the sources of my speculation are a comment Trow made about his father being an eternal child and a segment in *My Pilgrim's Progress* ("Notes Toward an Overview") in which Trow writes:

In these half-full United States, speaking of failure and isolation is rarely easy. "What is so defeating," Trow writes, "is this everlasting *good-spiritedness*, the application of enthusiasm against loneliness." He proposes that his world view was shaped in part by his experience giving VIPs tours of the World's Fair. "People didn't like the Fair," he writes (and I would say as much about the World Series that has just been broadcast and which hit a viewership high). About the Fair, Trow goes on: "People tried to like it, though. They agreed to like it. . . . Not to like it was the same thing as to break the agreement that was all that stood between them and being alone."

(4)

Someone might argue that Nussbaum is a better TV critic than Trow was a culture critic. However, because of the different foci of the two sets of work, Trow's essays are inevitably of greater and more enduring interest than Nussbaum's. At *Zeteo* we speak, after Baudelaire, of a particularly engaging goal: finding the eternal in the passing show. No text can achieve this goal, and even the most ambitious may only get a few rungs up a ladder that rises without any walls to lean on. But Trow's work may be thought of as climbing this ladder—however awkwardly, however weighed down by secrets and by Americans' fear of thinking about how their lives are being shaped by their economic system.

For Nussbaum, no ladder. She is enclosed within (and earns a nice living within) the now, writing for it and about it. In "The Price is Right," she does try to leverage Trow's essay to get some critical distance on her subject, but the attempt falls flat (and gets lost among avant-garde, anti-corporate, major television networks).[13] Trow and other observers of our postmodern period have pointed out that we are losing a sense of what distance is and why we might need it. It is also the case that social and economic forces have long worked against ambitious critics' attempts to get some critical distance on their subjects.

> Walter Winchell [a famous newspaperman and radio gossip commentator] had a son: Walter Winchell Jr. I have always been vaguely aware of the fact, and known that Winchell Jr. killed himself. What else could he have done? What were his *options*? His *opportunities*?
>
> His father was an extreme narcissist, naturally expected him to toe the line. With such a father, if you altered the received text in any way, you were dead. How to *replicate* the received text then?

The segment is titled, "A Parallel Life." [Italics in the original.]

[13] In his 1998 essay "Folding the *Times*," *op. cit.*, Trow comments about *USA Today*, then a new phenomenon, that it was "a downloading of the mind you already have." We might say that this was not only the *USA Today* publisher's goal, it has become a goal of writing and other cultural products more generally. Along these lines I note the current idea that people no longer read any opposing views. We seek out those news sites, podcasts, TV comedians, etc., that agree with what we, the consumers, already believe. We seek not to be challenged, stretched, etc., but to be confirmed—in our beliefs and in the more formal sense of becoming a member of a specific "faith." Trow might class this with other attempts "to alleviate the sense of loneliness that is a condition of life" and particularly of life amid "the grid of the two hundred million" (as it was in 1980).

Toward the end of *My Pilgrim's Progress*, Trow observes that—obviously, we might say—writers and publications cannot criticize the level of literacy of their readers. Rather, he says, writers have to work the semiliterate soil or rock-and-roll of their readers into the style and approach of their texts. This would give us another way—another élitist way, Nussbaum might write—of viewing "Pond Scum" and "The Price Is Right."[14] We're not that far from Mr. Robot's idea of using product integration to provoke conversation about, say, product integration. If the audience is almost entirely embedded within the now and caught in its various dynamics (consumer capitalism and its various media . . .); if critical distance becomes not only difficult to achieve and unwanted, but strange and foreign seeming—then, Trow is reminding us, a writer or publication (or, now, tweet, app, etc.) has to embed itself within this reality.

On a more basic level I would propose, as Trow might were he still alive, that we are so caught up in and busy sharing our enthusiasms for various media products, we may simply be falling out of the habit of autonomy. We used to feel pressure to conform; now conformity is coming naturally. Otherness, difference, the possibility and value of distances between selves—or, say, between an elite and a non-elite, spectators and parade, critics and their subjects—abandoned or lost somewhere.

> In a segment of "Within" titled "The Decline of Adulthood," Trow writes:
>
> In the New History, nothing was judged—only counted. The power of judging was then subtracted from what it was necessary for a man to learn to do. In the New History, the preferences of a child [for products or programs] carried as much weight as the preferences of an adult, so the refining of preferences was subtracted from what it was necessary for a man to learn to do. In the New History, the ideal became *agreement* rather than well-judged action, so men learned to be competent only in those modes which embraced the possibility of agreement.

(5)

We come now to the fact that Trow and his friends were poseurs. And thus—skipping too blithely over the dissimulation and lying that goes hand in hand with our business and politics, with business and politics everywhere—I note that Trow and his friends, among other things, reflected, and likely knowingly, the poseur aspect of American life. So many of us have tried to pass for people we are not. Trow's mentor and surrogate father was the long-time *New Yorker* Editor William Shawn, who was Jewish. In the memoir *Wish I Could Be There*, Shawn's son Allen writes about how his father "seemed to shrink from identifying

[14] Nicely, the "e aigu" accent in "élitist" is *New Yorker* style. Am I less elitist for not using it myself?

himself in any open way with a group that had been despised." A semi-secret social history of the United States peeks out.[15]

Trow's own WASP father was a city editor of the pre-Murdoch *New York Post*. His mother was from an Irish family. Like many middle-class Americans (myself included), Trow and his buddies were part of the ethnic stew, but, half-tongue-in-cheek, they were trying to pass for representatives of an old WASP upper class. Don Quixote had his Dulcinea del Toboso, who, Sancho Panza notes, was a whoreson wench who could fling a crowbar as well as the lustiest lad in her town.[16] On a small plot of land not far from the Hudson River, Trow built his Livingston Manor or Hyde Park.

The *New York* magazine article about Trow quotes DeCourcy McIntosh, best known as the long-time Director of Pittsburgh's Frick Art and Historical Center, and also one of Trow's prep school and college classmates: "George and I used to roar over the fact that we were both called arrogant and supercilious at Exeter. We used to argue over who was *more* arrogant and supercilious." In 1961, after graduation from Exeter, Trow, McIntosh, and 59 of their classmates "arrived en bloc in Harvard Yard," McIntosh said. "I think the other students were aghast."[17] (From "Within": "What is a cold child? A sadist. What is childish behavior that is cold? It is sadism.")

My sense is that in their youth Trow and his buddies found a great deal of a certain kind of fun in their posing. I can imagine some outside their circle anxious to get in, and many eager to cross to the other side of the quad or street.[18] In "Within," Trow proposes, "Duplicity is surrounded by a nervous strength. That is its charm." It is also not easy to sustain. Of Trow's closest friends, one, Doug Kenney, best known for having been one of the scriptwriters of *Caddyshack* and *Animal House*, committed suicide at 33. Another, Tim Mayer, a playwright, died before 40 of weak lungs and too many drinks, snorts, and cigarettes.

---

[15] For a chapter of this history, see **My Bar Mitzvah (and Thanksgiving) Speech**.

[16] *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, First Part, chapter XXV; as translated by John Ormsby (Restless Books, 2015); translation first published in London in 1885.

[17] Levy, "The Last Gentleman," *op cit.*

[18] This passage in "The Last Gentleman," *op. cit.*, helps add dimension to the story:

> "It was such fun, I can't tell you," says [the Antiguan writer] Jamaica Kincaid of her early days in New York City, when Trow was her mentor and social guide. Trow would take her to the parties and events he covered in "Talk of the Town," and he found Kincaid so amusing he decided that she too should write for *The New Yorker*. "George took me to lunch with Mr. Shawn at the Algonquin. I was always hungry, I had no job, and I didn't know when I would eat again, so I ordered the most wonderful, expensive thing on the menu. Mr. Shawn ordered a slice of toasted pound cake and I thought, Oh, gosh, I've spent all his money; I've reduced him to toasted pound cake," she says. "I went to the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn and I made some notes and gave them to George, and I thought he would rewrite them and make them into something proper. George gave them to Mr. Shawn and he printed it just as it was written."

Nussbaum also has—as we all do—her particular class and ethnic background.[19] But whereas Trow brought bits of his autobiography, and certainly of his posing, into his writing, what Nussbaum brings to her task is a love of TV, of *Mad Men* and similar. I can't help thinking that this is as much a pose as Trow's "high bourgeois" self-definition. ("Theyll let you play anybody but you.") But there is, of course, this essential difference: Trow was, as Nussbaum puts it, "élitist." Or, as the songwriter Brackman put it, Trow was striving to be one of those people "who wear tuxedos to their own little events in their own little buildings and you can see them out on their balconies with their tuxedos".[20] Nussbaum, to the contrary, slips into wanting to be liked and read because she shares our tastes; the shows that *New Yorker* readers like to watch, she likes to watch them too!

Naturally, Nussbaum quotes from the most popular (or most often quoted) line from Trow's 15,000 word essay: "What is loved is a hit. What is a hit is loved." She does not put the quote in its immediate context, but I will:

> What could be more powerful? The love of tens of millions of people. It's a Hit! Love it! It's a Hit! This is a powerful context, with a powerful momentum. But what? It stops in a second. The way love can stop, but quicker. It's not love. There is a distance so great between the lovers that no contact is ever made that is not an abstract contact.

We turn to our favorite TV shows, sporting events, pop stars, to make up for an intimate life now lacking.[21] We make dates with our televisions (or let shows stream in the background as we cruise Facebook, match.com, or do our taxes). We look forward to our hours on the couch with "Homeland" or "Modern Family," or the "Fighting Irish" of Notre Dame. In recent summers my attachment has been to the New York Mets' announcers—Ron Darling, Keith Hernandez, and Gary Cohen—whose company I enjoy not only for their intelligence and forthrightness, but also because they demand nothing of me, and they can be relied on to speak in the same ways and say more or less the same things from game to game.

Even as we may hate, ignore, or indeed enjoy all the product placements and ads, we rarely recognize that they are the point. Or, as Trow puts it, "The true role of [TV] is to grant, to celebrated products, access to the viewer." (Or, as we say in The Age of the

---

[19] According to a **Wikipedia article,** Emily Nussbaum, on her father's side, is the granddaughter of Polish Jewish immigrants who worked—man and woman—in New York garment factories and for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), which was once one of the largest labor unions in the United States and one of the first US unions to have a primarily female membership. Her father, Bernard W. Nussbaum, was an ace scholarship student at Columbia College and then Harvard Law School. He became a colleague of Hillary Rodham's on the House Judiciary Committee that was investigating the Watergate scandal. He subsequently became President Clinton's first White House Counsel. In this position he got caught up (as a presidential advisor) in the Whitewater scandal, and this led to his resigning his White House position.

[20] "The Last Gentleman," *op. cit.*

[21] "Entertainment" is an unsatisfactory word for what [television] encloses or projects or makes possible." ("Within")

Internet: If the product is free, you are the product.) Among the other things we have to be thankful for is how our favorite shows, podcasts, apps, . . . They help us ignore the lack of warmth, even of our touch screens, the weakness of electronic connections, no matter how globe-spanning or rapid they may be.

Trow writes of the people who—quite unlike him—"undertook revolutionary activities" during the 1960s: They

> knew one thing: they knew warm from cold. Not a small thing to know. They saw that the power of the adult world had hidden behind masks and that the masks were fashioned from a pseudo-cheerfulness which was essentially cold. They came to understand that they had been cheated. They did not understand, however, what they had been cheated of.

One of Trow's analogies for what has been denied and lost is the "warm child." It might have been simpler, and harder, for him to have written instead "love." Except that Trow's idea is that in The Age of Television love has moved on and is no longer warm.[22]

(6)

In a segment of another major work of cultural criticism, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" Frederic Jameson, in 1984, shed some fore-light, we could now call it, on the *New Yorker*'s and our own transition from "Within the Context of No Context" to "The Price Is Right."

> The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad [means] the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older anomie of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings . . . are now free-floating and impersonal . . . [23]

---

[22] This is not just words on a page or in pixels. I am becoming increasingly conscious of how many plastic smiles and scripted phrases I am subjected to on a daily basis. Words that used to be associated with warm feelings, but that now suck the warmth from me—and that seem to serve no purpose beyond sucking warmth from people . . . "Welcome to a cold world," seems the refrain. And I can't help wondering if the corporate recordings and e-mails and customer-service stuff, and the people in customer-service jobs, and the other people I encounter in my daily rounds: With these smiles and phrases, are they trying to make sure I am as cold as they are?

[23] As of November 2015, a **copy of Jameson's essay** was available, inter alia, via a University of Virginia website. It has also been published as the first chapter of a much longer book. The title remains *Postmodernism,*

"The most successful celebrities are products," Trow writes. Consider the real role in American life of the iPhone. Is any person as well loved as this device is?[24] "What is loved is a hit."

* * *

or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Duke University Press, 1991). Originally published in the *New Left Review* I/146 (July-August 1984), 53–92.

[24] I have updated a riff from the 1980 "Within": "The most successful celebrities are products. Consider the real role in American life of Coca-Cola. Is any man as well loved as this soft drink is?"