Grasping an Enigma—
Cultural Policy and
Social Demand

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural policy is rooted in an enigma. Everywhere, policy interven-
tion hall the public interest as its objective, but nowhere is there
any consensus on what this might mean. Whereas for representa-
tives of corporate interests the public good might involve providing
a wide array of consumption choices, others construct the public
interest as a more sophisticated mode of citizenship. The apparent
dualism of the concept of "public interest" (see also "universal
access", "public service", and others), used to underwrite proposals
diagonally opposed to one another, is a reminder that even when
fine-sounding principles crowd the legal and rhetorical frameworks
of cultural policy-making, these are little more than a starting
point. Cultural policy may have a public service mandate, but as
intense lobbying efforts demonstrate, the meaning of that mandate
is very much up for grabs.

That is only part of the enigma, however. Communications
media are a pervasive component of the cultural environment, lying
at the juncture between symbolic representations and social prac-
tices. By intervening in the way communications media are orga-
nized, cultural policy is therefore an intervention into existing
alignments of citizenship and democracy, and the struggle over

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cultural policy is a struggle over the cultural environment. Even if public debate frames this struggle, though, the actual implementa-
tion of the policies is carried out by the complex machineries of the
state, and it is here that cultural policy's enigma is completed.
Policy intervention, after all, depends upon solid bases of legitima-
tion: within the institutional order of the state, general reliance on
a policy rhetoric of "public interest" is insufficient for policymakers,
who require empirical data about the citizenry—the objects of
policy—with which to justify their actions.
Underlying the struggle over terms such as "public interest" are
the data which authorize policy decisions. Behind every data array
lie a set of organizing principles: what type of question was asked? Which was not? How were the research subjects conceptualized? In the case of communication policy, for example, the bulk of such data is currently produced as industrial audience research measur-
ing a "market demand", because it is industry which has undertaken
ambitious research programs to collect such data. Because it too
makes use of this research, however, policy legitimation is skewed
towards measures which conceptualize public interest as "what the
public is interested in," that is, what people are prepared to con-
sume. Empirical data necessarily mobilize a specific representation
of the audience, and that representation underwrites all further
decisions made using that data: "audience concepts, unspoken
though they may be, are among the most powerful determinants
of public policy" (Wesover and Philen 1994: 20).
The enigma of cultural policy, then, is the uncertainty that char-
acterizes the schism of the citizenry's double identity, as both the
subjects in whose name ("public interest") policies are made, and
the objects (data arrays) of policy who are to be managed. It is an
unresolvable enigma, since by definition no empirical research can
semantically reproduce the living population it purports to repre-
sent (T. Miller 1996). But it is also, as we shall demonstrate, a useful
enigma: if the citizenry cannot be wholly known or spoken for as
a single, already-constituted entity—if the citizenry is an always
complex and contradictory creature, multiple, changing, taking on
new forms, and evolving—then the problematic can no longer be
the Reithian normative model of prescribing policies decreeed to be
for the good of the public from up above. Rather, cultural policy-
making is forced to move towards involving citizenry themselves in
decreasing their ongoing interests. The challenge, therefore, is not
to resolve the enigma, we shall suggest, but to acknowledge it by
making use of the constitutive role of the citizenry's unknowability. Writing about public broadcasting—and this may be extended to the "public interest"-bound media environment as a whole—Ross
Ezerman contends that 'public broadcasting should not exist merely
to ensure that programming serves the public interest. Its aim
should also be to enable the public itself to determine wherein its
interest lies. In other words, the main justification of public owner-
ship in public broadcasting lies in the value of public participation'
(1994: 6). The same, it might be said, goes for public policy inter-
vention in the communications media.

We would argue that this needs to be nuanced precisely because
of cultural policy's enigma, however. Rather than talking of the
"public" determining wherein "its interest lies", it is necessary to
talk in terms of "publics" and their "interests". Such a task requires
an alternative form of "ways of knowing" the citizenry/media-
consuming public. Industrial audience research attempts both
to perfect its representation of the audience, and to substitute its

How might an alternative program for empirical research be
devised which would put the public into public policy? We contend,
in other words, that an alternative form of audience research, based
on a more sociocritical approach to cultural analysis, would allow
for the legitimation of cultural policies that incorporate a fuller
conceptualization of the public interest and its ties to the exercise of
citizenship. We call this alternative basis for policy legitimation
social demand, by which we mean the full range of expectations with
respect to media that are expressed independently of economic and
political considerations. This article discusses how a clear under-
standing of social demand could allow cultural policymaking to
work in tandem with a democratic cultural citizenship through
renewed methods of investigation and collaboration with the actual
citizens in whose name policies are made—surfing, so to speak,
the enigma that is at the juncture of cultural analysis and cultural
policy.

1. MARKET DEMAND

Recent scholarship in cultural analysis has discovered new uses for
communication studies and a new enthusiasm for sophisticated
inquiries into space and place. That is no coincidence. The digital
merger of computers, broadcasting and telecommunication systems, the increased mobility of people, money and ideas, and the new ascendancy of international trade policy as a framework for what was once called cultural policy have forced us to focus on the social and cultural complexity of even the most tightly circumscribed geographies: "The world we live in now seems rhizomatic, even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups, on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other," writes Arjun Appadurai (1990: 271). Even to think in terms of a "public interest" or of "public service" seems risky in this context, and it is tempting indeed to try, as Bruce Robbins suggests, to move "away from the universalizing ideal of a single public and [attend] instead to the actual multiplicity of distinct and overlapping public discourses, public spheres, and scenes of evaluation that already exist, but that the usual idealizations have screened from view" (1995: xii). But where does that leave policymaking?

Especially for sectors which, like communications and cultural policy, depend on notions of "public service" as their very raison d'être, this becomes a tricky problem, because cultural reception research has "mixed us from viewing the audience as a unitary and sometimes malleable mass to seeing it as a mosaic of small collective interests and identities. There is no longer any workable theory of an average... viewer, listener or reader" (Emke 1994: 227). If audiences are fragmented and plural, how can an overarching "public interest" be identified in order to implement policy solutions for building and maintaining a media environment that meets its public service responsibilities? A Canadian case study provides a valuable insight into how public interest requirements might be retained even in acknowledging the citizenry's diversity. As Ivan Emke suggests, the

"regulatory conundrum brought about by the notion of a plural audience might be resolved by opting for a common denominator in an effort to find some evidence of the interests of the public. One such denominator is the [Canadian] Charter [of Human Rights], and since its explicit purpose is to serve the interests of Canadians, then adherence to its principles (and those of the legal opinions surrounding it and giving it meaning in the everyday world) would mark an action in the public interest." (1994: 227)

Emke's suggestion poses the question of the intertextual relations that obtain between communication law and citizenship. Canadian
broadcast law is posed explicitly in the terms of the documents that
regulate Canadian citizenship, and so the Broadcasting Act's decree
that the Canadian broadcast system should

"serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspi-
ration of Canadian men, women and children, including equal rights,
the linguistic duality and multicultural and multiracial nature of
Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal groups within that
society..." (Canada 1991. 3.d.ii.)

stitches together (problematically) a national media-consuming
"public" by incorporating conditions and language from legislation
governing the field of citizenship—the Canadian Charter of Rights
and Freedoms (1982), but also Canada's Multiculturalism and
Citizenship Act (1988), Official Languages Act (1968), and Employment
Equity Act (1986)—which works across and through its respective
texts to constitute a Canadian citizenry as gendered, multicultural,
linguistic, postcolonial. Faced with the inability of ascertaining the
public interest of a plural audience, in other words, a legal repre-
sentation of the population is substituted, and policy text stands in
for the unknowable citizenry. Ironically, the centring of media
within a more heterogeneous construction of the public is achieved
through an entirely sexual representation of the public.

This, then, might seem to constitute one way to work through
the enigma which calls upon cultural policy to at once base itself on
the contours of the citizenry, and transform the practices of the citi-
zenry on which it is based. By rearticulating a legal construction of
the "public" rather than attempting a mimetic representation of
some untainted public purported to exist outside of governmental
relations, communication policy is able to mediate communication
programming obligations through the interface of citizenship, with
all of the social and cultural obligations that that entails. This is but
a partial solution at best, however. True, it provides a basis for
retaining the notion of a public service-obligated communications
system in a context where the "public" is difficult to define. But
simply retaining a public interest mandate is insufficient; it is also
necessary that such a mandate be met. As we have already seen, the
meaning of "public interest" can depend greatly on who is allowed
to define it. The juridical juxtaposing of citizenship with communi-
cation law may delimit the field to a certain extent, but like any leg-
islation, communication laws can only intend outcomes, not
determine them—and the road to good intentions is a rocky one.
While law can be made to position communication as a mode of citizenship, asymmetrical relations of power characterize the relationships between the various parties whose lobbying and intervention efforts are critical to determining the meaning of the letter of the law. Larger, better-financed groups—typically corporate broadcasters and their professional associations—are able to expend greater resources on lobbying, including both appearances at public hearings and private backroom dealings, whereas smaller groups, among them public-interest and social groups, must suffer the fate of reduced access to decisionmakers (Raboy 1995). Nor is the difference exclusively one of scale: in particular, industrial interests make great efforts to support themselves with empirical data such as audience ratings, market studies, revenue projections, etc., to support their policy interventions. Those groups representing different publics to policymakers, on the other hand, tend to rely on grand principles or on buzzwords like public service, cultural development, national identity, etc. Policymakers are required to base their decisions on solid bases of legitimation; within the institutional order of governmental bureaucracy, quantifiable information is a legitimated form of knowledge possessed principally by commercial broadcasters who themselves carry out this type of research, "motivated and legitimized for its role in rationalizing managerial decision-making procedures", in order to "constitute [the] 'television audience' as a manifest, nameable object" (Aug 1991: 22, 32). The effect of this is that regulated broadcasters supply the regulator not only with their own interpretation of "public interest", but also with data based on that interpretation. In terms of demonstrating commitment to the public interest requirement, private broadcasters thus gain the upper hand.

The audience measurement figures researched by private broadcasters are not, of course, the only empirical yardstick by which public-service performance can be judged. In Canada, for example, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), which regulates all telecommunications, broadcasting and distribution undertakings, registers and investigates complaints lodged against any undertaking within its jurisdiction. Studies and reports are commissioned by the CRTC on an occasional basis, for example on violence, sexism or ethnic stereotyping in the media; non-corporate research—polling, for example—is occasionally carried out by public advocacy groups, funds permitting, and can then be used as empirical evidence. These provide alternative
sources of media user data apart from industrial audience research. Similarly, industrial audience research is not used only in evaluating public interest compliance. In Quebec, for example, audience ratings are used to determine which television programmes qualify as children's programming, which is regulated differently than non-
children's programming, and on one occasion audience ratings were used by the Quebec government to advocate for the launching of a French-language public service all-news channel, by demonstra-
tring that such a station would reduce the linguistic transfer of francophones to English-language broadcasting (Malo and Giroux forthcoming: 5).

There is by no means a one-to-one correspondence between indus-
trial audience research and data sets for public interest performance evaluation. But the relationship between the two is crucial. Few other methods of empirical data collection exist for evaluating pub-
lic interest performance, and communication and cultural policies continue to be made inside a bureaucratic apparatus which


demands empirical data as justification, especially in the face of uncertainty about the meanings of the abstract notions which frame policymaking. State intervention attempts to enforce the public interest through policies which insert citizenship entitlements into the cultural industries, but without empirical research based on these entitlements, non-industrial intervenors are able only to artic-
ulate overarching principles quickly drowned out by the steady


stream of figures presented by broadcasters to the bodies that regu-
late them. This means that, whatever its textual construction of the citizenry (in policy texts, legislation, regulatory orders, and so forth), the broadcasting system's public mandate becomes aligned with an audience maximization, or what we are calling market
demand, model. The market demand model takes form through the extensive and constantly evolving apparatus set up to gather audience ratings and measurements in order to generate the man-
ageable figures needed to sell audiences to advertisers, determine programme popularity, and other aspects of the business of elec-
tronic media. The model is based on gauging the quantity and demographics of persons consuming given programming; the notion of public interest it encodes is very much based on an atom-
ized conception of the viewing audience or community of users as individuals who come into being when the medium is in use, cease to exist apart from the medium, and whose interests are therefore served almost exclusively by finding programming which they do
consume, for whatever reason. Therefore, while cultural policy-makers attempt to take into account citizenship considerations and non-market models of the public interest—of something other than "what the public is interested in", that is, commercial success—existing data sets are insufficient and lead them to fall back on market demand in conceptualizing the public in whose name they regulate.

An impressive and diverse body of research has been compiled on how the industrial apparatus of audience measurement acts as an uneasy solution to the broadcast business's own audience enigma: "...it is the specific achievement of audience measurement that it converts an elusive occurrence—the real occurrence of people actually using television in their everyday lives—into a hard substance, a calculable object, an object suitable for transaction" (Ang 1991: 56). The broadcasting industry's enigma, characterized by the gap between the irreducibly complex social positioning of the individuals who use media and the fictional audiences slotted neatly into demographic categories, can no more be resolved than can that of cultural policy. David Morley has repeatedly traced market demand's basic flaw to its making "ceteris paribus assumptions" on the basis of which "much audience research assumes that 'watching television' is a one-dimensional activity which has equivalent meaning for all who perform it. However, at the simplest level, we already know, for example, that 'pure' television watching is a comparative rare occurrence" (1992: 176). Clearly, the connection between audience measurement and actual media consumption is tenuous: market demand models for television remain unable to take into account the amount of attention paid to individual shows; they cannot explain and therefore generalize what may be extreme fluctuations in viewing behaviour based on external factors, from happenstance events in viewers' lives to weather conditions that keep everyone indoors; they are impermeable to factors influencing programme decision such as the intrahousehold and gender dynamics which indicate who controls the remote. Even if ratings' very value lies in the aura of scientific accuracy they provide, television ratings are not "accurate". Rather, they act as "convenient fictions", the acceptance of which enables economic transactions to take place; these transactions are the reason for their existence, and the exigencies of the marketplace shape the way that ratings are collected.

Industrial audience measurement thus manages its own enigma at two levels. At the first level, it is characterized by a constant effort
to ameliorate and refine the technologies with which it keeps track of media use, moving from elaborate "diary" and other voluntary methods, to techniques such as telephone polling during peak media use hours, home recording devices registering "when the television is turned on and to what channel, or different variations of electronic "peoplemeters". The increased use of computers to manipulate and massage the data collected is paralleled by continuing efforts to attain the "holy grail" of the ratings industry, a "passive people meter" which would be able to distinguish between different individuals in a household, identify them, and constantly monitor and report their television use (Gane 1994). The relentless march to perfect the surveillance of the media consumer is an unceasing struggle whose significance might be said to reside more in its persistence than in the innovation which each new technique affords; as Ian Ang writes, "[t]he frenzy around people meters clearly suggests that there is more at stake than just a desire for methodological improvement: at stake is the problem of control" (1991: 83). Concurrent with the market demand model's insistence on its ability to perfect its representation of the audience, it is critical for audience measurement to be able to make its representation stand in for the audience itself; the desire to attain greater accuracy in the future coexists with the need to insert itself into its industrial role in the present, facilitating on-going business practices on the part of broadcasters by making audiences knowable and bringing them within a corporate calculus. "What a syndicated audience measurement service seeks to establish is a social convention", in other words: "[c]are and detail in measurement do matter, of course, but when these goals conflict with coverage, they are likely to be subjugated" (P. Miller 1994: 66, 71).

As a way of rendering media audiences "knowable", the significance of audience measurement therefore reaches beyond the question of its accuracy to the issue of its effectivity. Accurate or not, the market demand model serves as a focal point for an array of industrial techniques and procedures through which the media are made material. These techniques and procedures act as interventions into the cultural and social environment; to the extent that it is an enabling agent for these techniques, the calculation and use of market demand have significant consequences for the social and cultural lives of citizens. By setting into play a particular way of imagining the audience—according to a certain demographic, or based on a certain conception of the role 'TV should play for
audiences—media position their users and their audiences, addressing them in a particular role and challenging them in a particular manner. This process is an elaborate one, plainly, cutting across programmes, programmers, production; even the design of television sets to appear appropriate in certain parts of the house is part of this process, as though to underline the ways in which the television apparatus operates across a farflung set of social and technological inscriptions.8

2. SOCIAL DEMAND

Up until now, we have been discussing how media constitute the subject. This is not the same as saying that viewers/media users are automatons; all agree that audiences are active. But that does not mean media are not powerful either; simply to observe that audiences are active is banal (Morris 1988) and is not saying much. Once we can agree that audiences are active, the question becomes: precisely how are they able to be active, in what ways.

For Ang (1996: 15), “the significance of the new audience studies should not be sought in their deconstruction of the idea of the ‘passive’ audience... but in their exploration of how people live within an increasingly media-saturated culture, in which they have to be active (as choosers and readers, pleasure seekers and interpreters) in order to produce any meaning at all out of the overdose of images thrown before us.” In other words, even if audiences are active, that which they are “acting” with or against (the programme content) is chosen based entirely on market considerations, based largely on audience demographics.9

Why is this necessarily incompatible—as an evaluation mechanism—with the public interest? Because it is disconnected with the social at the point of viewing, beginning and ending with the viewer-in-front-of-the-TV and providing no insight into how programming is taken up in media users’ lives beyond the moment of consumption. In other words, there is no context, whereas the point—if the point is the public interest—should be to connect up different realms of sociality to the social practice of media consumption.

In a market demand model, the fact that something may be “in the public interest” will not enter into the media’s performative criteria of its own accord. This is not surprising, and to expect otherwise is at least naïve, if not unfair; given the commercial logic driving
these media. Indeed, this limitation of the market demand model has been the principal justification for regulating media in liberal democratic societies, where the state, through policy intervention, is supposed to guarantee that the media act in the public interest.

Yet in the absence of a knowledge base appropriate to the exigencies of the real world of policy-making, it is precisely the state which ends up applying its own version of the market demand model. Policymakers are required to base their decisions on solid bases of legitimation; within the institutional order of government bureaucracy, quantifiable information is a legitimized form of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1966) possessed chiefly by commercial broadcasters who themselves carry out this type of research. Market demand, in other words, is a form of knowledge (a way of knowing and representing the public) which underwrites both corporate and state policy, as it moves across the division between the two. But while the corporate sector addresses the individual as consumer, the state, at least in theory, addresses her as citizen. These different modes of address, we are arguing, require different types of knowledge.

For public policy makers, then, the enigma resides in the fundamentally unknowable character of the citizenry in whose name policy is made. Policymakers, like industry, rely on market demand measurement to understand their constituency. The unspeakable question in this respect is this: why is there no alternative model, more appropriate to the goals of public policy? From the perspective of cultural analysis, the absence of a credible calculus for social demand is a missed research opportunity.

Social demand links media use with a critical look at the supply, or offer, on which media use is based. As with market demand, the social demand for communications cannot be known precisely, but only grasped at through its articulations; this points to a research path which develops ways to materialise social demand at specific junctures: methods to quantify social demand, and analytical tools to qualify it. Market demand operates in a similar fashion, of course; a sizable industry exists whose sole purpose is the further development of consumption measurement methods. But the measurement of social demand is a more complicated affair: as a consumption model, market demand is more easily quantifiable because it rests on an a priori division of public and private spaces; that is, it rests entirely on private consumption habits. Social demand, on the other hand, necessarily refrains this division. In this
sense, our notion of social demand is more nuanced than the typical uses of this term which make it synonymous with "that which society needs". In order to get at a social demand for communications, it is essential to look at both public and private as divisions which come into being in society; social demand, in this sense, rests on an understanding of the social as made up of individuals who are, themselves, socially constituted. This means developing an analytical framework which takes into account both larger networks of power in society, and the asymmetrical distribution of individuals among these networks.

The public/private split at the centre of current models of demand, therefore, has to be problematised. Models like that of market demand inscribe a radical break between public and private which entails the conceptualisation of individuals as sovereign consumers, because the social constitution of these individuals—this occurs in society, is therefore public—is thought of as radically disconnected from their private selves. It is in this sense that market demand logic implies that competition and multiple choice empowers the user, whose needs are then fulfilled through the exercise of this sovereignty. That is, the market demand model makes the public/private division into an a priori distinction which precedes the social activity of media use, and its accompanying implication of a sovereign self who turns on the television with fully formed identities, needs, interests, circumstances, aspirations. To suggest, on the other hand, that media consumption is a distinctly social activity, that it is part of the ongoing production of the self, is to suggest an alternative to the market demand calculus which takes a rejection of this public/private split as its starting point. An elaboration of social demand is therefore based on a fuller theorisation of the communicative subject for whom media use is always a negotiation of private and public elements, at once both highly individual and part of the social positioning of the person concerned.

This is not to ascribe irrelevance to the division of public and private spaces: on the contrary, it is to become preoccupied with how they are continually coming into existence. As Silverstone writes, with reference to a specific problematic within this division of public and private:

"The domestic is being seen as increasingly isolated and removed from the mainstream of modern society, and only reachable through technical and heavily mediated forms of communication. Television has been a principal factor in this shifting boundary between the public and
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the private, particularly in its capacity to merge public and private behaviours." (1994: 51)

where market demand postulates viewers as private creatures, social demand understands individuals, and the public-private structures which they inhabit, as socially constituted; this, it might be argued, is more congruent with Canadian broadcasting law concerning the public service mission of the media system. The more complex nature of social demand derives from its focus on, not simply measuring individual practices, but mapping social structures onto individual practices. This mediation between global structures and local practices is at the heart of a research program for social demand, and is the reason why a public interest mandate for broadcasting requires a social demand calculus. As Jhally and Lewis put it, it is oversimplistic to think that "[i]f a social scientist wants to find out how people think, all he or she needs to do is ask them" (1992: 14); here, similarly, it is necessary to avoid the pitfall of believing that by adding up the individual expressions of social demand one can arrive at an understanding of social demand at the level of society at large.

Our theorization of a social demand for cultural policy does not reject the relevance of audience ratings and popularity, but instead tries to connect these up with the social production of their very popularity through the uses people put to the media in everyday practice. In bringing together the vicissitudes of various forms of identities, we frame democratic "citizenship" as a possibility which is tied to the social consumption of media in the articulation of individuals' private and public lives.

This notion of the complexity of the individual, when conjugated with the governmentality of the policy sphere, finds its expression in the figures of citizenship, that political category that mediates between the state and the self. It is therefore important to call upon people as social actors rather than merely consumers of services. It is important, for example, to understand the situation of women or members of a particular ethnic community as women or persons of a particular ethnic origin. Overriding specific identity concerns, it is essential to call upon the subject as citizen.

Rather than understanding gendered or ethnicized daily life experiences as natural aspects of citizenship which stand against the category of "consumership", though, it might be more useful to understand gender or ethnicity as categories which are articulated and made sense of through consumption, on the one hand, and
governmental relations of citizenship, on the other (Nava 1987; Gunew 1995). Thus, television broadcasters and advertisers attempt to address and pull in these fragments of viewers' identities through programming, while governments deploy various modes of containment, typically clustered around notions of national identity—from Canadian policies of multiculturalism or bilingualism to Quebec ads depicting a child "with almond eyes and a Québécois heart"—to do the same. Identity, then, is mediated through both consumption and citizenship, so that each of these categories is constituted around a tension between "the opportunities for all kinds of individual and collective creativity and decoding" provided by media (During 1993: 30; see de Certeau 1984), and the closure that media try to impose in addressing and positioning the subject. If we take up citizenship as opposed to consumerism as the focus of change, therefore, it is less the function of some essential "goodness" in citizenship than the result of the differing forces at work within the two categories: while consumption swings between the individual subject and the profit motive and citizenship between the individual subject and the national "motive", corporations talk of management even as nations talk of democracy. In other words, the government-individual relationship offers greater opportunity for a shift from what Homi Bhabha (1990: 297) calls pedagogic to performed identity: for individuals to act as subjects, not objects, of the processes in which identities are constructed—for which, in Canada, the broadcasting system is a key site.

By focusing on this tension between pedagogic and performative identity at play in citizenship in the theorizing of a social demand for the media as articulated against consumer demand, we are able to avoid the trap that Ang describes in her look at audience-as-market versus audience-as-public in broadcast management (1991: 26–32). Discussing how audience research methods differ among commercial and public broadcasters, Ang notes that

"public service institutions tend to have more problems than their commercial counterparts in coming to a satisfying knowledge about their relationship to their audience knowing the size of the audience alone is not sufficient to gauge the degree of success or failure of public service television's communications efforts, not least because success and failure are a normative rather than a material issue here." (50)

Making use of Raymond Williams' term "paternal system" (1976: 131), Ang goes on to describe how public service broadcasting
"reconcile[s] the two paradigms of audience" by conceiving of an "audience-as-public [which] consists not of consumers, but of citizens who must be reformed, educated, informed as well as entertain[ed]—to shoot, 'serve'—presumably to enable them to bet-
ter perform their democratic rights and duties" (29). Ultimately, the desire of both broadcasting models to transform viewers into an "imagined community" or audience, be it as a commodity to be sold to advertisers or as a national entity, "foster[s] an instrumental view of the audience as object to be conquered." Hence, for Ang, "if it is true that consumers must be made rather than found in order to create a market, so too are the citizens that form a public not natur-
ally there, but must be produced and invented, made and made up, by the institution itself" (32).

In figuring the field of citizenship as a space for intervention, it is thus important that we conceptualize citizenship as something which is tied to the possibility of democratization. Our notion of cit-
tizenship moves away from that of a simple textual construction inside of governmental apparatus and policy, away from the policy-
driven acts of producing and inventing a public, and towards a rela-
tionship between individual subjects and the structures of governance such that state policy is directed at ensuring a measure of control or performativity for the individual over her or his own identity. Our model of social demand as policy intervention is, then, informed by the notion of citizenship as requiring political-
economic policy interventions by the state into a public sphere which
is overdetermined by the global imperatives of capital—citizenship as providing a space for cultural autonomy, not as obligating the adherence to a specified cultural identity.

How might this be operationalized? Jhally and Lewis's work on The Cosby Show is instructive in this regard. Based on the empiri-
cal research currently available to policymakers, the popular American sitcom would seem to give Canadian broadcasters much to learn if they wish to fulfill the Broadcasting Act's requirements for programming that is in the public interest. The show's huge popularity, after all, can reasonably be seen to attest to its ability to fill the "needs and interests" of Americans, and its nearly all-
Black cast—at a time when few non-White actors made it to the small screen, and when even fewer broke out of stereotyped roles—
spoke to the reflection of circumstances and aspirations, if more the latter than the former. Indeed, this was Jhally and Lewis's initial assumption: that "[f]or all its flaws, Bill Cosby's series, we were
inclined to think, had pushed popular culture ever so gently in a positive direction" (1992: 132). With this as a basic premise, the two embarked upon an ethnographic audience study "structured so as to test certain variables that might influence viewers' interpretations of the show: in particular, race, class, and gender" (1992: 10); small focus group interviews were carried out with groups of two to six respondents who were similarly situated in terms of these variables, and who could thus generate a conversation vir-a-vir a particular speaking position. After carrying out their analysis, the researchers had completely reversed their stance toward The guidy Show: "Our detailed, qualitative, audience research study has dramatically changed [our] optimistic view. Our conclusions regarding the show's effects on racism are... profoundly pessimistic" (1992: 152).

Jhally and Lewis's study has significant implications for the manner in which the text of the Canadian Broadcasting Act has been materialized in policy decisions, and particularly regarding the notion of "serv[ing] the needs and interests and reflect[ing] the circumstances and aspirations of Canadian men, women, and children". If we insist upon giving pride of place to this deceptively short phrase, it is because these words and the rest of the Broadcasting Act clause which is built around them constitute a legal basis for actualization of the Canadian broadcasting system's public service mandate—allowing policy to move closer to the lived reality of the media as part of a growing array of information and communication technologies which are embedded in more complex structures of daily practice (Morley 1992; Silverstone et al. 1991). The dynamics of need and desire inherent in the call to serve needs and interests and to reflect circumstances and aspirations are more neatly encapsulated by the concept of a social demand if we think of it in the double sense of the French verb demander as it is rendered into English as "to want", and also "to need": programming that is wanted by its constituents, "Canadian men, women, and children", but also that is needed by them as a "reflection" of...circumstances and aspirations", an engagement with lived experience.

Our object here, then, is the elaboration of a theoretical model for social demand to inform a program of qualitative research, articulated against the notion of consumer demand which has thus far stood in for social demand among policymakers, and which derives directly from quantitative industrial research practices. Jhally and Lewis, as we have seen, demonstrate empirically the
inadequacy of such research in grasping social demand: using audi-
ience size and on-screen portrayal as indicators they came to one 
conclusion, but ethnographic audience research led them to reverse 
themselves. Clearly, the lack of directed research from a non-
consumption-oriented position into how a broadcasting system can 
"serve ... needs and interests and reflect ... circumstances and aspira-
tions" is a serious one. More than "worthy principles" are needed by 
non-broadcaster, non-corporate interventions into policy: research is 
required which gets in there and looks at how technologies of broad-
casting and their use are embedded in the structures of everyday life. 
Even if the television audience exists only as a fictional construction, 
as Morley points out, "the interview ... remains a fundamentally more 
appropriate way to attempt to understand what audiences do when 
they watch television than for the analyst to stay at home and imag-
in the possible implications of how other people might watch 
television" (1992: 180). By theorising and carrying out qualita-
tive research with individuals collectively affiliated according to class 
(Hall 1973), race and ethnicity (Jhally and Lewis 1992), gender 
(Brunn 1990; Radway 1987; Modleski 1984), domestic structures 
(Silverstone 1994; Morley 1992; Silverstone et al., 1991; Lull 1991), 
and so forth, people who engage in watching television are addressed 
as people who have lives outside of television, too, who are multiply 
identified, just as the social categories listed above necessarily cross 
over in multiple and contradictory ways: one can be a White, 
Armenian-Canadian middle-class accountant and mother of three 
who votes Liberal and listens to reggae music, and life at the shifting 
crossroads of these social positions both affects and is affected by 
media use.9

3. IN THE FIELD

Having introduced a social demand model for communication and 
cultural policy making in the public interest—a central problematic 
of citizenship—let us see how a programme for qualitative media 
use research might be developed along these lines. How can media 
users be studied collectively, conceptualized as a citizenry, while tak-
ing into account both their shared experiences and the very real 
specificities that delineate their differences?

In Canada, as we have seen, the Broadcasting Act's elaborate state-
ment of a policy imperative grounds the public interest in specific
locations and identifies the field of citizenship as a universal category. But this text, however one reads it, is insufficient as a policy mechanism because it cannot function unless accompanied by a method for empirical evaluation of its success in ensuring that the public interest is consequently met. To do so, a textual representation of the public is not enough: the real world of broadcasting must be investigated as well.

Tackling a similar problem with respect to a public service broadcaster’s efforts to know its audience, Ross Eaman concluded his study of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) audience research by contrasting three different models: (1) an “audience maximization model”, used typically by commercial broadcasters to determine what programming is likely to achieve maximum audiences, as we have seen; (2) an “audience feedback model”, which consists of polling viewers to obtain their opinions and reactions about programming; and (3) a “public participation model”, which would integrate the public into programming policy decisions, assuming “that the public knows its own needs and desires with respect to programming better than does any select group of program planners” (224). While the first two models clearly deny viewers any real agency, the third is based on the problematic assumption that people want to be involved in developing program policy. The problem of grasping the enigma of social demand remains unresolved.

Before we can even begin to address this as a policy issue, then, it is essential to engage with Morley’s guideline that “[w]e need to investigate the ways in which a whole variety of media is enmeshed in the production of popular culture and consciousness across the terrain of everyday life.” (1992: 185). As Aru points out, “ethnographic knowledge can provide us with much more profound feedback because it can uncover the plural and potentially contradictory meanings hidden behind the catch-all measure of ‘what the audience wants’” (1991: 169); and, indeed, audience ethnography would seem to approach the type of qualitative, empirically-grounded knowledge required by a social demand model.

In an effort to develop an appropriate methodology for dealing with this, we designed a project that aimed to learn about media use and policy performance among a sample of “active citizens” in Montréal, Québec. There was nothing random about our sample. On the contrary, we deliberately sought out a population comprising members who would, if asked, state that they considered themselves
to be "socially engaged". With this important caveat, we recruited fifteen individuals whose "engagement" ranged from intellectual concern about one or more specific issues in their community or identity group to full-time employment in one or another sphere of professional activism.

Each of these individuals participated an in-depth interview of 1-2 hours, in which they were asked, first, to describe their day-to-day media use practices in detail, and, then, to discuss the extent to which they felt the media served their needs and interests, and reflected their circumstances and aspirations.

Some weeks after all the interviews were completed, the same individuals took part in two group discussions (one with seven, the other with five participants). This time, the focus was, first, on the participants' general attitudes and expectations on a sit the media and, second, on their reaction to the previously-cited article of the Broadcasting Act.

This latter part of the group discussions provided some revealing results. First, upon confrontation with the legal text, several participants expressed astonishment to learn that such a fundamental piece of legislation even existed. In many cases, these seasoned social activists had assumed that broadcasters, like press publishers, were "free" to air whatever they pleased without any legal obligations whatsoever. In one or two cases, participants were outraged at what they saw to be unwarranted state interference in yet another area of social life. A significant amount of discussion revolved around perceptions about the wording of the law, its textual positioning of the Canadian public, and other social categories excluded by the text. Except for those participants whose professional or activist activity specifically involved policy intervention with respect to media, none had ever considered media policy to be an object of political struggle.

Several important cleavages could be seen separating the sample along lines which appeared to be related strictly to personal attitudes and expectations. Some subjects particularly valued media as a source of information, but felt that they performed poorly in that role; these same subjects often appreciated television as a source of relaxing entertainment. Others, meanwhile, while critical of the values promoted by entertainment television, felt that one could be fairly well-informed by using a variety of media, including the press. Thus, our question as to whether the media "serve your interests" generally elicited complicated and ambivalent responses,
depending on which interests the subject had in mind. In general, the extent to which subjects felt their interests to be well served by media tended to be a function of their expectations, which ranged widely from very high to practically none at all.

Two brief examples can begin to illustrate the rich texture of these results. "J" is a forty-something head of the communication service in a large metropolitan hospital, with a history of involvement in the left wing of the nationalist Parti Québécois as well as radical feminist groups. The ritual aspect of her media use is quite clear:

"I wake up with the radio.... I listen to CBC.... at 6:20 there's a brief summary of the headlines.... Then I listen to the news at 6:30, I get up.... I put on the coffee, I go to pick up the newspaper at the front door...."

She reads various daily newspapers, avoids others to which she professes to be "allergic", and also follows the news during the day as it relates to her professional work. Then,

"In the evening, I come home around 6 o'clock.... I always watch a news program, not always the same one; usually CBC at 10 o'clock.... or else I zap to the American programs.... sometimes I'll watch the French or Belgian news...."

Clearly, this person values information, but she is also highly critical of the information she actually receives, especially from television. In group discussion, for example, she said this:

"My expectations are rather modest.... so I'm rarely disappointed. Television, to me, is mainly for entertainment. As far as the news is concerned, I don't know anyone who turns the tv on to watch the news."

This is partly explained by the fact that her professional work brings her in direct contact with the news media.

"I sometimes 'make' the news, and when I see things come across exactly the way I set them up, I say 'what bullsh*t'.... there's no treatment here.... so I don't expect them to do anything differently with the press releases they get from anyone else."

Yet, the first thing she does when she comes home after a day at work is turn on the tv and watch the news. This same individual is also a fan of the characteritic Quebec television form known as idéoman—although it takes some prodding to bring this out—and
feels that television is relatively more successful as an entertainment medium. But does she feel it has a social role to play?

"I would say yes... I suppose if it gives a large number of people a minimum of information they wouldn't get if they had to read the newspaper, then I'm pleased... If it creates some community... something we can share, something we can watch together and talk about the next day, then okay... Is it for the right reason, is it something basic, I don't know... I suppose sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't... I don't expect much from tv... and I think I've felt this way for a long time, so I'm practically never disappointed, and as soon as I see something the least bit okay, well I'm very pleased, because my expectations are so minimal..."

In contrast, consider "N", a Mohawk elder from Kanehsatake, outside Montreal. At first, his media use seems to follow a ritual pattern similar to J's:

"I listen to the news in the morning before I go to work. I listen to the CBC... I watch the CBC just before I take off on my run (he drives a school bus). When I come back from the run, I listen to (a popular local radio station). I listen to the news. On my way home, I pick up my daily Gazette. I could have it delivered, but I'd rather pick it up. I like to get out..."

A bit like J and her têlê-moan, N seeks—and finds—some cultural identity value in the media:

"They had programs coming from Northern Cree settlements. I used to get up in the morning and listen to those on Sunday. I didn't understand the language but I'm getting the feel from people, listening to them, grasping what they're talking about, you know? I wish I could put myself right in there knowing the language. It's fun. They're so at ease with what they're doing. They've got their own language and that's very helpful. It's a good thing for their people, they're learning something. They're learning what's going on in the rest of the world too. (...) They don't see too much happening but they know what's happening from their small community."

One sees, among other things, that it is virtually impossible, even among the most socially engaged, to make a clear distinction between what is "public" and what is "private", between public and private life, between public and private aspects of life. Media use consists of a series of ritual practices, where public and private are interlaced. Some of these practices are instrumental in character (that is, they have a purpose, for the user), while others are strictly for fun. The line between these functions is often difficult to place,
and it is not unusual for respondents to be at cross-purposes with one another regarding particular habits or attitudes. Our exploratory project can be seen as part of a larger research design to eke out all of the possible material traces of social demand. Empirical research with active citizens is a way of articulating social demand in order to engage with the gap between media law and practice. But we also need to map onto the reporting by individual media users the positions taken publicly by social groups that intervene in the policy process (Raboy 1994), as well as analysis of policy texts and the results of conventional industry audience research. One can thus begin to operationalize a method for grasping the enigma of the unknowable citizenry by referring to several dimensions of the issue, not as a mimetic representation of the public, but as engaging with some of the limit-points of the articulation between citizenship and consumption that comes into play with media use and with the cultural policies that intervene in it.

CONCLUSION

The role of the democratic state is to act, or to refrain from acting, in the interest of its citizenry. Globalization has undermined both the limitations of the state and the heterogeneity of the citizenry, and thus the complexity of that task. The citizenry, by definition, unknowable and elusive, and its very complexity precludes carving out a clear "public interest" as a knowable object. But the figure of the citizenry is the justification of public policy, and its constituents live at the endpoints of policy. The lack of congruity between cultural policy and the intervention it seeks to make into daily life—as reflected in media use—is the enigma that we have referred to throughout this article.

The importance of that enigma is encapsulated by contemporary public debate on the role of the state in cultural policy. Confronted by national populations that can no longer be construed by even the most devious sleight-of-hand as uniform, commercial interests have rushed to lend a united voice to the cause of deregulating communication through markets. To argue that a market-driven approach to planning communication structures cannot alone guarantee democratic communications is to be part of a wide scholarly
consensus, however, contested by only the most ardent of the neo-
regulationists. What, then, accounts for their success?

A key factor, of course, is the exercise of political power by com-
mercial interests in the form of lobbying (Raboy 1995). Here, we
have examined a second factor: The enigma of social demand is not
cultural policy’s alone. Cultural industries are faced with a similar
enigma: just as the state attempts to know and manage the citizenry
in its bid to make policy on the citizenry’s behalf, so must industry
strive to know and to manage a set of consumers—induce them, for
example, to purchase a product based on knowledge of what they
will buy and how they might be appealed to in order that they
should do so. Like government, industry seeks to know, to catego-
rize, and ultimately to concretize its categorizations of the consum-
ing public. Both state and industry seek to resolve their enigmas
through improved methods of representation, but only industry
relies primarily on a mimetic representation, relying on various
techniques of surveillance to represent the public to itself.

Government, on the other hand, is at least nominally required to
incorporate a mode of active participation into its decision-making.
It has been suggested that this makes state policymaking a much
more complicated affair than corporate policymaking; while the
two ultimately handle their enigmas in different ways, such an
assertion is largely unfounded. As Richard Maxwell points out,

"The practice of market research is designed to enhance our lives as
consumers by getting to know us, both inside and out. At the same
time, however, in its pre-scribed prejudgements of value and people,
market research performs a kind of triage that segregates and stratifies
experience, creating its own version of human refuse out of groups it
cannot account for. Its 'dirty little secret', one we know already,
is that in its very design, market research betrays the promise to give
people what they want." (1996: 229)

The market demand model, as we have seen, is locked in an end-
less attempt to both map its moving target—the heterogeneous
consuming public—and turn its target into its map. Such a scheme
implies trying to resolve the enigma of the unknowable public.
Industry measures its success with respect to this goal to the extent
that it manages to both sell goods and services and produce the
desire to buy the goods and services it sells. Inasmuch as a state's
objectives are those of democracy, on the other hand, the state must
have other goals. Rather, democratic governance in the cultural
realm demands the involvement of members of the populace in
the production of their cultural selves, of their desires, of their identities. The commitment of the democratic state to these goals is the entailment of cultural citizenship, and the capacity of the state to successfully mediate to successfully intervene through policy instruments into the cultural environment—depends upon how it deals with the enigma that lies at the juncture of cultural analysis and cultural policy.

What we have outlined in this paper is not a policy prescription, but a research program for cultural analysis designed to produce useful knowledge for cultural policy-making. We have sought to demonstrate that the way in which policy understands the citizenry is basic to policy’s success in meeting its goals, and that the enigma of cultural policy underlies policy’s attempt to understand the citizenry. We have suggested that the use of market demand as a way of resolving this is counterproductive, and proposed the policy component of “social demand” as an alternative. Social demand does not resolve the enigma, however. Indeed, it cannot. This is the core of our argument; that policymaking can be linked to a democratic cultural citizenship only by abandoning the drive to end the elusiveness of the citizenry. Rather, policy must fully acknowledge and make use of the citizenry’s unknowability: not by resolving it, but by understanding it, taking it in hand, and incorporating it. Introducing social demand to cultural policy does not seek to resolve the enigma, but to grasp it.

NOTES

1. This is the second of a group of three articles. The first, exploring the epistemological issues which emerge at the interface of policy studies and reception studies, is currently under evaluation. The third in progress, will present in full detail the results of the empirical research project that is briefly introduced in the final section of this article. The authors thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its support of this research.

2. See, for example, Lynn Spigel (1992), who draws on corporate records at the American network NBC to look at how that broadcaster imagines its audience. Programming was arranged in such a way as to permit one to plan one’s day around the broadcast schedule; television consumption was conceived of as extremely elastic, such that “the whole system pivoted on the singular problem of how to make the derisory audience watch more programming” (85).

3. We are obviously somewhat simplifying here, for this statement does not take account of noncommercially-driven public service and community-based media.

4. Ang (1990: 80) has referred to this as “the problem of public policy in an age of so-called consumer sovereignty.”
5. Serge Poulet and Jean-Pierre Larenteau arrive at a similar conclusion in their ethnographic audience research in a francophone Montreal context:

"La catégorie d'espace sociale inclut les autres identités sociales de l'individu: par exemple, ses appartenances à une famille, à divers réseaux dans son milieu de travail et dans ses loisirs, son identité là à une catégorie socio-professionnelle ou à un groupe ethnoculturel, etc. Il serait sans doute profitable d'essayer extraire problématique de recherche à partir d'une définition de l'individu en tant que parent, citoyen, travailleur, etc.: qui permettrait une prise de connaissance de l'individu au niveau de sa pratique sociale effecitve." (1999: 117-118)

6. A rather more elaborate justification of our methodological choices will be attempted in a forthcoming article dealing strictly with this empirical research.

7. In a phrase, each, our respondents broke down as follows: a retired feminist organizer; a former political attaché; a left-wing Catholic theologian; the head of information services for a labour federation; a social worker in an inner-city community centre; a bio-medical engineer who sits on the volunteer board of a youth employment project; the head of an organization lobbying in the area of race relations; an opposition city councillor; the director of communications for a metropolitan hospital; a community organizer working with tenants groups; a student member of a government committee on constitutional reform; a Mohawk elder and bus driver from a First Nations community; an active member of several ethnic-cultural groups; an organizer with a federation of regional community groups; a student interested in local economic development.

8. "I will sleep better tonight, having learned of this law," one participant commented dryly.

9. On TV5, the international francophone channel which is available on cable systems in North America.

10. In an interview, one respondent told us he knew of no television program which was unmarked by ethnic stereotyping, with the singular exception of Star Trek. Another told us that when he chose to watch television for education, he would watch just about anything—except Star Trek, which he thought to be a ridiculous program.

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