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TV *Urgente*

Urban Exclusion, Civil Society, and the Politics of Television in Venezuela

John Patrick Leary

"Aqui no hay barrios" (There are no barrios here) was what real estate agents told me when they showed me apartments in one of the middle-class zones of eastern Caracas, to assure me that the slum districts that house roughly half of the city's population, called *barrios* in Venezuela, were safely distant. Shortly after I arrived in the country, a security official at the U.S. Embassy warned me never to travel into the slums. "The people there are so desperately poor," he insisted earnestly, "that they'll rob your shoes, your shirt, your eyeglasses, your belt—and that's if you get out alive." The barrios are often identified in everyday conversations like these as a kind of cancer on the city, pouring bodies into and draining resources out of the valley of Caracas. Caracas's slums have been steadily growing since the 1950s, but in the 1990s, their population surged alongside the marginal quarters of Bogotá, Lima, and the other outsized metropolises of Latin America. But in Venezuela this constituency has succeeded in leveraging its local energies into a national political movement. In a country where over 85 percent of the population lives in cities, the radical social-democratic government of Hugo Chávez has counted largely on barrio residents for its base of support.[1] The politics of media and journalism, moreover, have played a uniquely prominent role in the class conflict that has occupied Venezuelan society for the last six years. On both the right and left, the airwaves have become a critical theater in the political and social conflict of a divided nation.

This study will concentrate on the politics of representation in contemporary Venezuelan television news and documentary, which in its

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dominant mainstream forms have produced an urban imaginary that models national citizenship on the geographic, class, and racial divisions of the Venezuelan metropolis. The country's political conflict demands careful attention from scholars, activists, and media workers confronting the concentration of media ownership, cultural capital, and even urban populations themselves in a moment that presents both unprecedented technological possibilities for popular television and cinema and unmatched unfreedom in the official media sector. As Latin America, and the world, become majority-urban societies for the first time in history, the power of popular media to mobilize populations has arguably never been greater. In Venezuela, one barrio-based television station, Catia TVe, with the recent assistance of the Chávez government, has created an alternative television model that both reflects the radical possibilities and exposes some of the limitations of the Venezuelan political experiment. Catia TVe's political objective is to raise popular consciousness, as radical avant-garde movements before them have done. However, it also aims to revise the old vanguardism. Instead of simply "developing the taste of the masses," as the Cuban cinema of the 1960s sought to do, Catia TVe claims to put the masses behind the cameras, in a "participatory" model of television production that mirrors the *chavista* ideal of participatory democracy, an antibureaucratic democratic ideal that proposes to devolve power and statecraft to local populations. At the same time, this radical appeal confronts a conservative media industry that has generally transcended the authoritarianism of its predecessors. Although Venezuela's private TV has by no means abandoned the traditional appeals to *patria*, public order, and anticommunism, the alternative to *chavista* radicalism now wears a distinctly liberal, up-to-date costume—that of "civil society."

Catia TVe is an over-the-air UHF station based in Catia, the popular name for a large part of impoverished west Caracas, where almost all of its staff and volunteers live. The station's programming consists of studio chat shows and digital video documentaries on neighborhood organizations, cultural life, and local history in Caracas's working-class communities. Its name contains a pun on the Spanish verb *ver*, "to see": pronounced Catia *Te Ve*, or "Catia Sees You," the station's name proclaims to its viewers that they are indistinguishable, at least in theory, from its producers. The station's ubiquitous slogan, "No vea televisión, hagala"—Don't watch television, make it—emphasizes that Catia TVe's principal interest lies in transforming the means of television production, rather than altering the consumption of televised images. The station carefully tracks the neighborhoods where its broadcast signal reaches, but Catia TVe staff do not attempt to quantify their viewing audience—training producers is their priority instead. The station's life as a licensed broadcaster began in 2001, after the Venezuelan constituent assembly passed a landmark telecommu-

nications law in June 2000 that granted broad legal recognition to community broadcasters. In order to qualify as a "community" broadcaster, 70 percent of a station's programming must be produced from within a particular geographically defined community, and the station must provide training and airtime to local citizens, who may not be clergy, party officials, or military officers. This law has made Venezuela's airwaves some of the most open in the world for low-watt and neighborhood radio and television broadcasters. (Caracas also has dozens of low-watt radio stations, most of them located in the barrios, where population density makes even weak signals very effective.) Because of its speedy growth and its place in the national capital, the flashpoint of the national political conflict, Catia TVe has since become the unofficial leader in a national network of local, partisan television stations in Venezuela—from one of the first, TV Rubio, in a small Andean mountain village, to urban stations like TV Lara in the barrios of Barquisimeto.

Catia TVe is distinguished by its organizational structure, which is built around what it calls Equipos Comunitarios de Producción Audiovisual Independiente (Independent Community Audiovisual Production Teams), or ECPAIs. Catia TVe's ECPAIs—there are approximately two dozen—are groups of anywhere from two to six people charged with scripting, filming, and editing the station's programming, using handheld digital camcorders, Macintosh computers, and Final Cut editing software provided by the station. The station mandates that every volunteer complete a rigorous orientation course on filmmaking techniques and film form before joining the station. The ECPAIs produce the vast majority of the programming with a minimal amount of editorial control from the station's central staff, and they are the center of Catia TVe's double communicational and pedagogical mission. The station produces a wide variety of programming this way, from documentaries on local political movements to public service announcements to cultural reportage with no explicitly partisan content. For example, ECPAI Yaowe, which operated until 2006, was organized by a small team of students from the Armando Reverón School of Art, down the street from Catia TVe. Yaowe chronicled the folk histories and myths of Caracas's barrios and the surrounding coastal communities. Its project, said Julio Loaiza, a member, was to assemble "oral history as a resource for the reconstruction of the collective memory of the community in Cota 905, Guzman Blanco barrio."[2] Two programs explored an unlikely story, given the dense urban setting: the residents' secret histories of their neighborhood's beleaguered natural landscape. In *El Pino: Cota 905*, neighbors recounted their stories of a long-dead pine tree, known as "el Pino," that was known to harbor malevolent spirits. Even after it was cut down, the local story goes, the same supernatural forces stubbornly continued to haunt the street where it once grew. Another

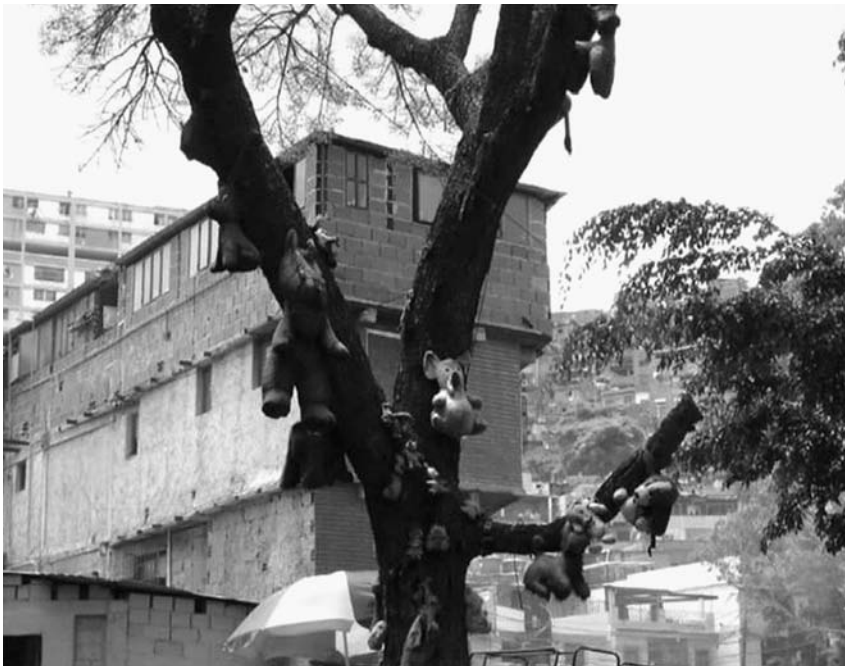

Figure 1. The "Arbol de los peluches" (stuffed-animal tree) in the 23 de enero (23rd of January) barrio. Behind the tree are brick *ranchos* built by their inhabitants both on available land and on top of already existing houses. In the upper left is one of the public housing projects from the 1950s in the area, a relic of a different era in working-class housing. ECPAI Yaowe, *El arbol de los peluches*, Catia TVe, 2006. Courtesy of Catia TVe.

similar program investigated a curious landmark in the 23 de enero barrio: the "arbol de los peluches" (stuffed-animal tree), a shade tree hung with dozens of plush children's toys over the years for reasons that no one quite recalls.[3] In *Timbores de Guayabal*, Yaowe left Caracas for the fertile Barlovento coast, which lies some fifty miles east of Caracas along rocky mountain roads. There, shortly after the village's anniversary celebrations of slave emancipation in Venezuela, Loaiza recorded a public rehearsal of the African drumming troupe of Guayabal, a small riverside village that was founded by fugitive slaves from the coastal chocolate plantations. (Guayabal, too, has its own fledgling local station, Tele Cimarrón, named after the Spanish word for an escaped slave or "maroon.") Meanwhile, ECPAI Mente colectiva (Collective Mind) reported on Catia's elaborate Carnival floats, and ECPAI Bienvenidos a nuestro barrio (Welcome to Our Barrio) interviewed residents of a neighborhood named Casalta about a government affordable housing program. Visual style and levels of technical expertise vary from show to show: Bienvenidos a nuestro barrio, for example, favors the scene "wipes" familiar to home videographers every-

Figure 2. A young boy studies the drummers of Guayabal during an impromptu performance in the village school. ECPAI Yaowe, *Timbores de Guayabal* (*Drums of Guayabal*), Catia TVe 2006. Courtesy of Catia TVe.

where, and its affable host at one point accepted the hospitality of a Casalta family he was interviewing by holding a coffee cup up to the handheld camera and tipping it back, as if drinking through the lens. Yaowe, on the other hand, photographed and composed its subjects with careful attention to avant-garde visual style.

Catia TVe has grown impressively during the Chávez years, when it moved from a volunteer effort run out of a room in Caracas's National Library to a funded organization with a staff of thirty. In 2003, the station moved into a renovated nineteenth-century railroad warehouse in Catia donated by the city government. As in many small, community-based organizations, its growth has not been painless. Some ECPAI members complain privately that Catia TVe has become too complacent in its community networking, distant from its base neighborhoods, unaggressive in recruiting new members and new viewers, and newly bureaucratic. New programming is irregular and increasingly infrequent, and the station frequently rebroadcasts material produced by the national public channels. Most volunteers, working people who are unpaid for their labor at the station, struggle with the burden of producing new programming. The station traces its roots to a "cine-club" founded in 1992 by several residents of Manicomio, a barrio in northwest Caracas near an old psychiatric hospital

from which it takes its name (*manicomio* means "insane asylum" in Spanish). Cine-clubs began to appear in the 1960s across Venezuela to screen and share Latin American films as well as locally produced material—"*una imagen propria*" (an image of our own) marginalized by an ascendant global mass culture. According to veterans of the cine-club movement, the Communist Party of Venezuela played a prominent role in these popular education and film programs, which inspired Catia TVe's founders.[4] Despite these difficulties, Catia TVe's emphasis on the production process and a culture of what it calls "participation" has roots in both these politicized neighborhood film clubs and the *cine urgente* movement of the 1960s, the Venezuelan manifestation of the Latin American "Third Cinema"—the left-wing, mainly documentary film movements that famously thrived in Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina. The *cine urgente* proposed documentary as a superior film form for demystifying the cinema and bringing the viewer closer to the production process. Thirty years on, Catia TVe intends to bridge this gap between the spectator and producer by remaking the production process itself.

1989: Year Zero

To historicize Venezuela's contemporary political transformation, most historians point to the *caracazo*, the popular riots in 1989 against government-imposed "structural adjustment" measures and the largest such mass uprising in Latin America's recent history.[5] The riots began shortly after Venezuela's newly elected populist social democratic president, Carlos Andrés Pérez, abruptly reversed campaign pledges to resist IMF-mandated economic reforms and implemented a set of austerity measures barely a month into his term (the sudden policy change was boldly named *el gran viraje*: "the big turnaround"). The most immediate cause for the revolt in Caracas, however, was sudden, steep raises in gas prices resulting from the removal of price controls on gasoline, and the private bus companies' speculative exploitation of fare increases, which fell hardest on the barrio communities and working-class suburbs of Caracas. The demonstrations and looting continued for days.[6] The *caracazo* was put down by violent military repression in the barrios that left anywhere from 277 (the official number) to at least 1,000 dead. The 27th of February is now commemorated by the national government and local municipalities as a formative national tragedy—"the day that changed Venezuela," as the tagline of a recent sentimental Venezuelan film about the revolt called it,[7] or as one west Caracas activist described it to me, "year zero of the Bolivarian Revolution," using the popular name for the radical political movement in the country. The uprisings were an explosion of discontent from the slums with Venezuela's national political machine and the plain failures

of its democratic pretensions, yet none of Venezuela's left-wing political parties anticipated, much less organized, the 1989 events—including the nationalist officers' movement that Chávez then led as a dissident army officer. The 1989 uprisings signal, at the movement's beginnings, the distinctions between Chávez and *chavismo* that many critics overlook: the movement that bears the president's name emerged from a spontaneous mass uprising that the future president himself never anticipated, and it has retained a measure of that autonomy ever since. Although the Bolivarian Revolution is famously ambiguous ideologically—revolutionary and third-worldist in much of its rhetoric and at its grass roots, but social-democratic in much of the state's actual economic policy—the political movement's consistent antiparty and pro-barrio platform dates to the *saqueo popular* (popular looting) of 1989.

Catia TVe places its own origins in 1989 as well. In the story customarily told to visitors, local residents took a looted and abandoned government grocery store and transformed it into the Manicomio Casa de Cultura (Culture House), where the station began. Its founders point to the uprisings as a formative moment that underscored the need for an autonomous broadcaster, since the *caracazo* was an event heavily mediated by television. Images of looting occupied Venezuela's television screens throughout the riots, and the government's attempts to manage the situation through televised propaganda revealed how ill equipped it was in the face of popular rage. When the minister of the interior went on live television on the afternoon of 27 February to announce a curfew, he was so overcome by nerves that he could not deliver his speech. Disney cartoons abruptly interrupted the broadcast of the suddenly helpless minister.[8] Later that day, President Pérez addressed the nation and announced the imposition of martial law. As the violence spread, the president pleaded with his constituents: "No one must forget that I only have twenty days in government, this government that was born from the people and which will be for the people. The people must have confidence that everything will come out in a satisfactory way."[9] That same afternoon, Guillermo Barrios, president of Pérez's social democratic party Acción Democrática, referred to the ongoing uprisings as a dangerous television event. The foreign media, Barrios complained, showed "the horror, the primitiveness" of the looting in the capital. They showed "the entire world the other face of Venezuela, the face of slums, of the hungry masses, of marginal people."[10] Yet while foreign media broadcast scenes of military violence against barrio residents, domestic television concentrated on images of looting and suppressed the story of state repression that Acción Democrática later sought to cover up. This domestic act of epistemic violence, then, compounded the military brutality of those days, as the activists that founded Catia TVe emphasized later.

Barrios's notion of television as an instrument of cultural instruction and political order in an aspirant third-world nation like Venezuela raises an important contradiction. Venezuela's populist social-democratic party could maintain this double discourse—between the oligarchic elitism of Barrios's disavowal of "the primitive" poor, and Pérez's populist gesture to the wisdom of the *pueblo*, or "the people," the plebeian heroes of nationalist myth—because both positions contained a fundamental mistrust, and no little fear, of what appeared to be a new, dangerous, and disobedient population: the barrio. The inhabitants of this apparently "new" urban geography—although by 1989 it was no longer terribly new—were seemingly cast out of the Venezuelan modernity of which Caracas itself was once a showcase. They could therefore not be relied upon to simply "have confidence that everything will turn out well," as Pérez had instructed them to. Such a people were not given to political rationality, either; they could only "erupt like a volcano," as Chávez opponent Teodoro Petkoff, the ex-guerrilla, reformed Communist, and leader of the moderate left-wing Movement Towards Socialism party (and now a prominent newspaper editor), said in a congressional address after the *caracazo*. The Venezuela that "suddenly" erupted, Petkoff continued, "was not the Venezuela of workers organized in trade unions or associations. No, it was another Venezuela, it was the nonorganized Venezuela, the Venezuela that has been piling up in a huge bag of wretched poverty."[11] Could such a "wretched" people really be a part of *el pueblo* at all?

Catia TVe's cofounder and longtime director, Blanca Eekhout, described the significance of the *caracazo* in terms of the media accounts that first stigmatized the poor as savage and then erased the repressive violence the state employed against them: "I think that there was a break in the confidence that the people could have in the media, in the possibility of believing in the world that they were selling. Now people knew that there was no access to that world, and that was the break. So from there, the need to have your own media, your own image grew up."[12] During the moment of crisis that the *caracazo* presented, Eekhout argues, television journalism abandoned the civic function most journalists claim in times of social peace—when journalism, as what Thomas Carlyle called the "fourth estate," autonomously mediates the various interests of the state and citizenry in a democratic system. Instead, says Eekhout, it took a polemic stance as an informational apparatus of a repressive state. Today, Venezuela's class polarization remains visible on the nation's television screens. On one side, there is a cosmopolitan, middle-class Venezuela; on the other, state channels and new community networks project a third-worldist, mostly urban nation. Until 2008, the country had two state channels and six privately owned stations available on national television; the oldest of these, Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), has moved to cable

following the Chávez government's revocation of its broadcast license. Venevisión, which exports programming all over the Hispanic world, is controlled by the politically influential family of Gustavo Cisneros, scion of a Cuban exile family that in the early 1960s parlayed a soft-drink fortune into his new country's nascent television industry. Like Venevisión, Televen shows a mixture of news, game shows, and soap operas. Globovisión, a twenty-four-hour news channel modeled on CNN en Español, went on the air in 1995. Also available are an all-sports channel and a Catholic Church–funded nature channel.

The polarization of Venezuelan television is perhaps nowhere more pronounced than in the Sunday battles between Hugo Chávez's weekly call-in show, *Aló Presidente* (*Hello, President*), broadcast on state television, and Globovisión's six-day-a-week response, *Aló Ciudadano* (*Hello, Citizen*), hosted by the charismatic Leopoldo Castillo, Venezuela's ambassador to the military government of El Salvador in the 1980s. Both programs are hours-long and offer a simulated participatory format. On Chávez's largely improvised, often hours-long show—which treats a different topical theme from a different location each week—the *comandante* is in absolute control, despite the format's performance of audience participation. On the other hand, Castillo's daily, two-hour-long program claims to offer a more genuine audience participation through viewer polls, a text-message crawl across the bottom of the screen, and supposedly unscreened phone calls. *Aló Ciudadano*'s audience, callers, and studio guests are overwhelmingly anti-Chávez.[13] Both programs ultimately have more in common than they might acknowledge—they are utterly dominated by their stars, and they are polemic, although some Globovisión officials, when pressed, still maddeningly refuse to acknowledge their station's obvious partisanship. ("The government just doesn't like bad news," one producer blithely told me when I asked about left-wing criticism of Globovisión's reporting.)

Television, print, and radio media have been one locus of *chavista* cultural policy, in large part because of a deep, sometimes visceral distrust by government partisans of the commercial broadcast media for its antigovernment stance and, especially between 2000 and 2004, during the height of the conflict between the government and its opposition, the television media's often virulently abusive rhetoric. Luis Duno Gottberg has described how the Venezuelan television and print media constructed an image of "the masses" during this period as a racialized, irrational, and violent *turba*, or mob.[14] In 2002, Carlos Ortega, then head of the opposition-aligned trade union federation, the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CTV), appeared on Globovisión to discuss the "Bolivarian Circles," the pro-Chávez neighborhood organization named for Venezuela's national liberator, who were constantly rumored to be planning violent attacks on east Caracas. "The terrorist circles, the violent circles that Chávez has

armed, are going to take over the malls," said Ortega. "They are going to loot. They are going to kill, assassinate, massacre Venezuelans. That's what is planned for this country, that's the project."[15] In referring to imminent looting and violence by the *chavista* Bolivarian Circles—who served at this time as the shorthand for the sum of all racial and class fears—Ortega gestures to a memory of the *caracazo* as an explosion of barrio aggression. On 27 February 2002, the thirteenth anniversary of the *caracazo*, the well-known Televen journalist Marta Colomina described the circles—"misnamed the Bolivarian Circles," she added in the consistently vociferous, exclamatory tone that characterized her exhausting show, *La Entrevista*, "rather than the *chavista* circles"—as popular gangs plotting attacks on anti-Chávez citizens. No details were provided.

After the April 2002 coup d'état that briefly overthrew Chávez, many feared a return to the military rule and U.S. intervention that Latin America had recently escaped.[16] Many journalists on the left distinguished the Venezuelan overthrow as a peculiarly modern "media coup" because of the participation and endorsement of major broadcasters. These stations, then, did not need to be taken over by the generals, as in other coups d'état, but were enthusiastic allies from the beginning. The networks conducted an information blackout of the popular rallies and the military dissenters that demanded the return of the elected president, and some stations' owners reportedly met with the short-lived president, Pedro Carmona, after Chávez's overthrow. After Venezolana de Televisión, the state channel, was forced off the air, several networks aired cartoons and nature programs while hundreds of thousands of mostly poor *caraqueños*, as residents of Caracas are called, besieged the occupied presidential palace in protest, an uncanny repetition of the *caracazo* episode when the minister of the interior's failed speech was abruptly replaced by Disney films. Maurice Lemoine, writing in *Le Monde diplomatique*, attributed the coup's success largely to the uniform support of what he called, a bit hyperbolically, "hate media."[17] Yet this analysis, like many media critiques on the left, overstates the instrumental power of television's ideological messages and social role and attributes to the medium powers that it does not by itself possess in the absence of popular protest and an organized military conspiracy. These had developed over the previous three years of massive opposition mobilization. Other critics have pointed to television's important auxiliary role in organizing the anti-Chávez popular movements and its power to organize social collectivities and define the terms of social exclusion. Television's political influence in Venezuela raises the vexed question of what, exactly, is the political use of television. Is it, as many suggest, the most important contemporary tool for defining social collectivities—the instrument of the "modernization of citizenship," as one Venezuelan communications theorist puts it?[18] Such claims about politics in the "TV age" show a hasty

technological determinism that overlooks, or even deliberately obscures, the lasting importance of movements, parties, civic participation, and social networks. Chávez, after all, was restored to power in April 2002 mostly by mass pressure in the streets of Caracas, despite an unceasing mass-media campaign against him before and during the coup. That is, does not Chávez's restoration to power in April 2002 rather show corporate TV's ultimately limited power to define the terms of political debate?

State and "Alternative" Media

Besides grassroots television efforts like Catia TVe and community radio stations across the country, there are efforts at the state level to counter the hostile commercial airwaves. The Venezuelan government funded national television stations of its own, such as the traditional state channel, Venezolana de Televisión, two new public broadcasters, and a Caracas-based cable news network, Telesur, which is jointly funded by the Venezuelan, Uruguayan, Argentine, and Cuban governments. The government has also pursued legislative initiatives like the 2000 Telecommunications Act and the controversial 2003 Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television, which aimed to establish "the social responsibility of the providers of radio and television services, advertisers, national independent producers, and users, to foment the democratic equilibrium between their duties, rights, and interests with the end of promoting social justice and contributing to the formation of citizenship, democracy, peace, human rights, culture, education, health, and social and economic development of the Nation."[19] The law was initially heavily criticized by the television networks, which ran frequent commercials during daytime and evening hours calling it, with their own characteristic hyperbole, a "gag law." Human Rights Watch denounced the legislation as a threat to press freedom, due to what it called the "subjective" nature of its strict regulations against sexual material, violence, and other "unacceptable" content. It went on to claim that the law's imprecision on the definition of inappropriate content would encourage so-called "self-censorship" by broadcasters.[20] However, the most dire predictions of the law's opponents have not been fulfilled. There have been no credible allegations of censorship under the law, and its primary effects have so far been for cultural-nationalist and puritanical ends. The law banned on-air cigarette and alcohol advertising, mandated hours for "family programming" and government-produced commercials, and compelled radio stations to devote 50 percent of their airtime to national artists.

Perhaps the most controversial media confrontation of Chávez's tenure came in May 2007, when the Venezuelan government refused to renew the national broadcast license for RCTV, arguing that the station

had transgressed the terms of its license by inciting rebellion during the 2002 coup. The station subsequently moved to cable TV, where it now broadcasts as RCTV International. Its space on the public airwaves has been replaced by TVes, a new state network with a name that mimics the pun of Catia TVe's name—the station is pronounced *te ves*, or "you see yourself"—but is otherwise modeled on European state-funded "public" networks like the BBC. The government's move against RCTV was denounced in European and North American news outlets as an act of censorship. The decision was political in motive, of course—RCTV's support for the 2002 coup was well documented, and it was known as a platform for anti-*chavismo*. RCTV was also embarrassed by a prominent whistleblower, Andrés Izarra, a senior producer who detailed the station's policy of procoup censorship during the April 2002 overthrow (Izarra later became president of Telesur). In a recent article in *The Nation*, Daniel Wilkinson characterizes the RCTV shutdown as punitive and politically motivated, an episode that exemplified a central contradiction in the *chavista* project: that between the participatory democratic ideals of the Bolivarian Revolution and the authoritarian personalism of Chávez's own leadership style. RCTV was not, as Wilkinson correctly notes, alone in continuing news programming hostile to the government; nor was it alone in its enthusiasm for the 2002 coup. With its license up for renewal, RCTV was, of course, a target of opportunity for the government. The closure of RCTV briefly galvanized Venezuela's opposition, who were enraged by the provocation. Few *chavistas* deny the political motive behind the license revocation; control of the public airwaves, in this case, is an issue of revolutionary sovereignty. RCTV, others pointed out, had itself practiced the censorship of which the government now stood accused.[21]

Wilkinson does point out a crucial contradiction in *chavismo* that extends to Venezuela's media battles—the radical movement's reliance on its charismatic namesake. This contradiction is visible on Catia TVe, which on the one hand embodies the radical democratic ethos of *chavismo* in its aim to disseminate the means of media production to the urban poor. On the other hand, as new ECPAI-produced programming remains sparse and infrequent, more hours on the station's airwaves are given to rebroadcasting presidential speeches and national campaign slogans. Despite these contradictions, the crucial distinction that Wilkinson clings to in his piece on Chávez's media politics—that between authoritarianism and pluralism—would be rejected at Catia TVe. "Pluralism," they say, is a liberal ideal that fails to take into account structural economic inequities that make true plurality impossible—what good is it, in other words, to talk of the pluralism of six corporate giants?[22] The revocation of RCTV's license was, perhaps, a strategic miscalculation by Chávez, as Wilkinson asserts—a provocation that went too far, reviving a previously dispirited

opposition instead of prodding it into overreaching as Chávez had successfully done before. The move opened a door previously closed to all but the most partisan argument—that the Chávez government disrespects opposition criticism and represses free speech. After the RCTV controversy, however, "free speech" could be defined not in terms of free access to the means of media production, still mostly controlled by corporations and the state in Venezuela, but rather in terms of the "freedom" of several voices to speak as loudly as they always have.

Catia TVe's relationship to the state has also been the source of some controversy. At the station itself, funding—and not just state funding—has brought with it a new hierarchy among paid employees and volunteer ECPAI workers. In addition, the station's ties to government have become more visible onscreen since 2002. Aside from its donated headquarters, grants from the telecommunications ministry and loans from PDVSA, the national oil company, together provide a minority portion of its operating costs. For some domestic critics, the station's acceptance of such funding raises the question of its independence, especially since a frequent critique of private media in Venezuela is its fealty to conservative commercial and political interests. Such critics, like *El Nacional* journalist Oscar Lucién, have argued that Catia TVe's pro-Chávez sympathies and its state funding compromise the station's independence and its declared "community" function. Shortly after an opposition-aligned mayor ordered a police raid on Catia TVe's transmitter in 2003, Lucién wrote, "Much has been said of the poverty, not only technical but on the level of programming, of the so-called community television and radio stations. [The] majority of them have compromised their spirit and basic proposals to transform themselves into uncritical cheerleaders for official policy, and their programming hides an ugly official [*oficialista*] manipulation."[23] (One RCTV reporter put it more crudely, in a well-publicized incident in which he charged a Catia TVe reporter and broke his video camera at an opposition rally they were covering: "Stop filming me, you spy, and tell your daddy Chávez to buy you a new camera."[24])

Lucién's criticisms of "*oficialista* manipulation" also echo the critiques of Venezuelan "populism" that are frequently made in the Venezuelan and U.S. press. Confusing "populism," clientelism, and caudillismo into a pathology of Latin American political underdevelopment, such accounts present an image of a charismatic leader bypassing institutional controls and dispensing largesse to key sectors that respond with loyalty or choreographed gratitude. Mass-media representations of populism frame the poor as passive objects of demagogic manipulation (the usual implication, of course, is that wealthier citizens are too sophisticated to be manipulated). Yet these critiques themselves seem so blinded by the light of the *comandante*'s charisma that they cannot imagine that the "masses"

might have the agency to condition or withdraw the support on which Chávez's political life rests. Used in this way, "populism" becomes shorthand for an underdeveloped political culture—an ordered, coherent *system* of manipulation, rather than a contingent discourse or a set of political *practices*, which subaltern groups can turn to their advantage and even help to craft.[25] Yet the failure of a 2007 constitutional referendum promoted by Chávez shows that the *chavista* masses are not simply obedient.

One example from the Venezuelan press demonstrates the erasure of popular agency in mass-media representations of the "populist" political subject: a front-page photo in *El Mundo*, an afternoon paper, shows a dark-skinned man crouching in the crook of a tree. He gazes off to the distance while meekly holding the Venezuelan flag; the caption identifies him as a "government sympathizer" demonstrating outside congress in support of the Movimiento Quinta República, Chávez's old party (the current governing party is the newly formed Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, or the United Venezuelan Socialist Party). The text continues: "Just like in the times of ancient Greece, the decisions will be made in the street, except that in this session the representatives listened to the sovereign's slogans, and not his proposals."[26] The ironic reference to ancient Greece underscores the caption's caustic assessment of this plebeian "representative": he is an instrument of his populist "sovereign" without political desires or will of his own, capable only of an emotional response to the

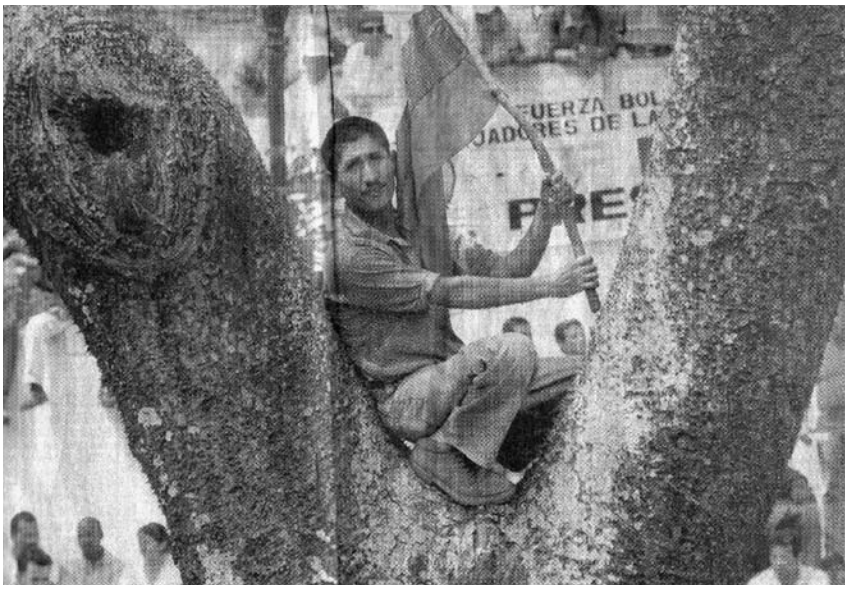

Figure 3. An unidentified supporter of Hugo Chávez demonstrates outside the National Assembly in Caracas. From the front page of *El Mundo*, Caracas, 7 June 2003. Courtesy of *El Mundo*.

leader's charisma or to his own humiliation—that is, an irrational political subject mobilized by *affect*.[27]

Catia

> Barrios: Residential settlements of progressive development, constructed through invasions of lands that do not belong to their residents, and which without a plan, or more specifically, without a project, meet the same requirements that any urban development built regularly in the same city at the same time must meet.
> —"III Inventario nacional de barrios: caracteristicas socioeconómicas de las unidades de planifación física y las unidades de diseño urbano del area metropolitana de Caracas," FONDACOMUN, 1993

The rhetoric of exclusion exemplified by the *El Mundo* image and caption—in which the leader is excoriated for his demagoguery and his supporters for their due obedience—relies further still on the mass-media image of the *barrio* that the crouching man implicitly also represents. However, the "participatory" television of Catia TVe is reflective of a broad trend toward a cultural and political revindication of the *barrio* that has accompanied the rise of *chavismo* and its allied social movements. Catia TVe, television, and politics in general in contemporary Venezuela cannot be explained without understanding these movements and this new constituency. When the last urban census was taken in 1993 by the official urban development organization FONDACOMUN, metropolitan Caracas was home to 2,685,901 people, of whom 1,085,543, or 40.4 percent, lived in barrios, figures that make Venezuela's capital relatively small by the new standards of third-world urban demography—metropolitan Mexico City, for example, now shelters some 20 million inhabitants. As FONDACOMUN makes clear, all barrios have been founded as illegal invasiones (invasions) of public or private land "without a plan or a project": in English they would somewhat more obliquely be called "squatter settlements" (the Spanish term retains more bluntly than our English phrase a sense of legal and even moral transgression). Although the Venezuelan historical literature on the subject is rather scarce, these "invasions" took off during the 1940s and 1950s, largely due to the effects of petroleum-based capitalism, which crowded out domestic, particularly agricultural production by driving up the value of the national currency and making imports cheap. Oil capitalism thus undermined Venezuela's peasant agricultural sector at the same time as it created tremendous urban employment in the public works sector of the cash-rich state. During the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1948–58), the use of oil revenues for massive public works projects in Caracas and other Venezuelan cities drew laborers to the expanding barrios.[28]

Central Caracas is built in a river valley within a range of mountains that spans the central Caribbean coast of Venezuela, and the old city center is surrounded by mountains to the north and smaller, steep hills to the west, south, and east. As the city has grown, middle-class *urbanizaciones* (neighborhoods) have grown up on the valley's eastern *colinas* (hills), whereas barrios (poor neighborhoods) have spread to the *cerros* (barrio hills) of the north, west, and far east—thus the economic divisions of the area have been linguistically codified in the city geography. Between 1949 and 1971, the number of *caraqueños* living on the *cerros* grew from 117,337 to 682,000. As the city has grown, many formerly separate municipalities have been incorporated into the Distrito Federal. Catia, the geographical area from which the television station takes its name, cannot be found on any map. It is instead the popular name for the area between the nineteenth-century working-class districts of Caño Amarillo and La Pastora in the city center and the western limits of the city today. Catia is a well-known place, but because of the informal nature of the neighborhoods it contains, it is a highly ambiguous one: as one Caracas historian puts it, Catia "es todo y es nada" (it is everything and it is nothing).[29] Until as recently as the 1940s, sugarcane and coffee grew on plantation land in much of the area now referred to as Catia. During the urban boom of the 1940s and 1950s, the force and numbers of rural migrants began to compromise these old titles by attrition. In 1946, the Flores family, who owned much of the area, tried unsuccessfully to evict some inhabitants of the newly settled Barrio Nuevo (New Barrio), today one of Catia's older neighborhoods.[30] The oil booms of the 1950s and 1970s spurred the growth of Catia and the expansion of Caracas in general, and much of Catia TVe's work reflects an interest in the largely unwritten history of neighborhoods that have undergone tremendous transformation in only a few decades.

Catia's historical ambiguity is appropriate since many barrio neighborhoods are often unmarked, or only approximated, on city maps and in most cases have been considered illegal "invasions" of private or public land. The irregularity of modern third-world slums, gradually built piecemeal by their inhabitants, is one of their principal defining characteristics across countries and continents. Even as modern governments have abandoned the slums and their infrastructure to their inhabitants, they have also seen in them the threat of ungovernability, as did earlier governing regimes. For the urban reformers of nineteenth-century Britain and the United States, the metropolitan tenements were dangerous bellwethers of future disorder and despair. For those who chronicled this urban poverty, the slums were also epistemologically impenetrable, except for those few authors daring enough to venture into the city's depths: "Deep are the

'Mysteries of London' and so environed by difficulties that few can penetrate them," wrote George Godwin in 1854. Already excluded from the city proper, the impenetrable London slums were buried again in their literary representation—they could only be accessed and interpreted through the eyes of an expert outsider. This rhetorical tradition of elite commentary on the ghetto mysteries of the European industrial city found its way into American literature, as well, when Jacob Riis, the muckraking journalist, took the readers of his best-selling book inside the New York slums of the Lower East Side to see *How the Other Half Lives* (1890).

The large slum districts of the modern contemporary third world recapitulate some of the same problems Riis saw in turn-of-the-century New York—overcrowding, crime, inferior public services, unregulated exploitation of labor, poor nutrition, and so on. Yet these newer districts, largely built by residents themselves on claimed land, and rapidly growing in spite of contracting urban labor markets, are part of a profound, even epochal demographic shift under way in the third world today.[31] Catia TVe is, therefore, one of the first efforts to document and represent this transformation in formally new ways. Nevertheless, the representational terms familiar to readers of the Victorian city fictions still appear in both literary and state discourse around the barrio. In much of the material generated by Venezuelan state reform organizations, the legal transgression intrinsic to barrio expansion—so massive that after its initial phases it has generally discouraged even the pretense of enforcement—is rephrased in moral terms, in which the *cordón de miseria* is placed outside the norms of civilized society much as English observers looked on the "rookeries" and "fever nests" of nineteenth-century urban Britain as sites of moral and physical degradation. In at least one case, a government institution threatened to turn this rhetorical practice of exclusion into a literal uprooting. In the introduction to its 1963 report to the Acción Democratica government, the state's Committee for the Rehabilitation of Barrios wrote, "Every day, we see in the newspapers stories about crime, rapes, assault, etc., and unfortunately these are committed by young men who come from or live in these [barrio] districts. They do not recognize the law and act as if it does not exist."[32] The committee was puzzled by residents' insistence on staying in barrio neighborhoods once the construction jobs that first drew them disappeared; it could only desperately conclude that "they are stubborn and have not wanted to return to the country."[33] The report concluded by recommending the "eradication of the barrios within 10 years," through the relocation of residents of neighborhoods deemed unsafe or beyond repair to temporary camps in the Caracas suburbs, followed by demolition and the construction of large-scale public housing (Manicomio, where Catia TVe began, was on the list of neighborhoods to be demolished).

The pharaonic plan never got far off the drawing board, however. Besides its callousness—there is no suggestion that the residents to be evicted should ever be consulted in the plan—the report exemplifies deeper conflicts within Venezuela's modern cultural and political history, particularly in its telling reference to peasant naïveté. Venezuelan literature, in particular, has generally charted social division and exclusion along the geographic axis of city and country, a distinction that, in the early 1960s, was transforming as the country moved to the city. Yet in government reports like this, the barrio looks like the closest contemporary cultural equivalent to the "barbarism" of Venezuela's wild *llanos* (plains) in Romulo Gallegos's canonical novel of Venezuelan nationalism, *Doña Barbara*. Written during the dictatorship of the military caudillo Juan Vicente Gómez (1908–1935), *Doña Barbara* charted the nation along the lines of the cultured city and the barbarous *llanos*, beyond the reach of the law. Gallegos's hero—a Caracas intellectual with the significant name Santos Luzardo (Holy Light)—triumphantly resolves this intractable conflict in his campaign against the despotic female landowner of the novel's title. The allegorical conflict between lettered city and lawless country reproduces the classic episteme of Latin American nationalist ideology, which was defined by the struggle between civilization and "barbarism" in the young republics. Today, however, the terms of this struggle have largely ceased to be defined by a national geography—the divide of city and countryside—and instead describe the urban imaginary of the contemporary nation of cities and slums.

This urban imaginary has been in large part produced on television, and it is in large part Catia TVe's project to reverse the elite gaze of the slum chronicler, through the content of its programming and the structure of its documentaries' authorship. One important theme in several of the station's shows has been to contest the moral terms in which the original property transgression of barrio communities has been cast. In 2006, the ECPAI Vencedores (Victors) addressed this question by examining the meaning of the common word used for slum districts—*invasiones*—in a digital documentary called *Invasores o Desplazados?* (*Invaders or Displaced People?*). The film's first half chronicled a land reform project under way in the barrios that seeks to regularize land tenancy by granting residents title to the houses they inhabit, to turn ambiguous "invasions" into legal ownership. Then, the filmmakers interviewed residents to find out what they thought of the term *invasores*, or invaders. All the subjects answered the question by referring not to tenancy or ownership rights, but to the years they had spent building their houses and the family roots they had established in their neighborhood. In other words, the belonging and citizenship in the city that may be legally certified by ownership is, more fun-

damentally, guaranteed by the labor of home- and community-building, which alone gives the law its content.[34] For such residents, the barrio was above all a home, which they had built. In this way, Catia TVe aims to represent barrio communities engaged in active self-management, rather than depicting them negatively as social problems or sensational spectacles. Ricardo Márquez, a Manicomio native who until 2008 served as director of the station, says, "For fifty years we've been passive receptors of media. And the mass media have broadcast garbage. When they come to a poor neighborhood they denounce the murders, the criminals, the rapes. But they've never come to document the community organizing itself, the community fighting for its children, the community doing cultural activities. Nothing. They come to make news that bleeds."[35]

Figure 4. Freddy Rodriguez, a boxing coach in the Caracas barrio of Propatria, seen behind him here. From *Freddy Rodriguez*, Catia TVe, 2006. Courtesy of Catia TVe.

Civil Society versus the Mob

If one negative version of "populism" describes an underdeveloped political culture dominated by a charismatic leader and his passive clients, anti-Chávez partisans, on the other hand, have sought to distinguish their political modernity and democratic agency. A popular term among this class constituency has been "civil society," a normally ill-defined concept

that takes on an unmistakable class definition in its Venezuelan context. There, it is used to refer to the organized civilian opposition to Chávez. This is partly in keeping with a popular understanding of civil society as the "private sphere" of political society—that which is unaffiliated with and independent of the state. The term "civil society" is imprecise: it is used ambiguously to refer to constituencies ranging from liberal reformers in former authoritarian Communist countries, to NGOs campaigning against corruption in Latin American governments, to recipients of USAID grants in occupied Iraq. In his examination of the concept of civil society in Antonio Gramsci's work, Joseph Buttgieg argues that the fall of the Communist regimes of eastern Europe in 1989 augured a revival of the term; "civil society" became popular in both East and West as a shorthand for the civic and labor organizations unaffiliated to the state that challenged Communist dictatorships in eastern Europe. As the term migrated into other political contexts, the liberal notion of civil society, Buttgieg charges, often became neoliberal because of its faith in the liberatory rule of markets and its implicit hostility to government as inherently authoritarian. In this "neoliberal" formulation, "freedom" is experienced in privacy; the state is pure coercion. "Civil society," then, refers to a neutral zone where social conflict could be peaceably managed, a "bipartisan" space of negotiation, to use a popular term from U.S. political culture. Buttgieg writes that for Gramsci, on the other hand, "the site of hegemony is civil society; in other words, civil society is the arena wherein the ruling class extends and reinforces its power by non-violent means." For him, civil society was the "formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the ruling class." From this point of view, the liberal notion of civil society as an autonomous public space is itself hegemonic—a nonviolent neutralization of political struggle and a sphere whose independence is ultimately a fantasy.[36]

Venezuelan television has often, in recent years, represented the barrio and *chavismo* in terms of explicit disgust and fear. More recently, however, this tone has been considerably tempered, even if the private media remain politically hostile to the government. Venevisión, for example, which used to air some of the most virulently anti-Chávez programming—some of which was avowedly racist—has ceased all of its political programming. On other mainstream stations, meanwhile, government spokespeople are now invited on commercial news programs, and some of the lurid sensationalism of their barrio news coverage has been modulated. On Globovisión's Sunday program, *Habla la calle* (*The Street Speaks*), a sociologist commentator—he could be one of Romulo Gallegos's characters, had the novelist been able to imagine modern television—walks through unnamed barrios, comments on social conditions, denounces infrastructural problems, solicits complaints, dispenses advice, and offers sympathy to the residents there.

To account for this shift, Duno argues that television media operate according to a versatile "logic of exclusion," which vacillates between a polemic exercise of erasure and an elite populist mobilization of empathy in constructing a national imaginary around the terms of "civil society" and "the mob." Much mass media theory emphasizes the media's role in constituting a social consensus around a set of hegemonic concerns. But Duno considers that in Venezuela, "the imaginary of consensus stops functioning for a period of time, and a curious exercise of exclusion is put into practice, operating through stigmatizing representations of a sector of national life designated as 'the mob.' "[37] In Venezuela's private television, "civil society" is a flexible concept that is called upon to delineate that which it is not—the mob. The use and abuse of the concept is useful for analyzing the antagonistic discourses of citizenship advanced by Catia TVe and Globovisión, the cable news network.

On 11 April 2002, as the Venezuelan coup was under way, the country's middle- and upper-class political opposition filled the streets and television screens of Caracas. Amid live nighttime footage of overwhelmingly white, middle-class protesters celebrating at the east Caracas airstrip where a plane commandeered by revolting officers had just carried Hugo Chávez to military detention, a female Globovisión anchor opined that "the government underestimated civil society," leading to the final provocation that caused what then appeared to be the overthrow of the president. The anchor praised the heroic agency of the protesters while simultaneously urging them to leave the streets, the imagined site of the political confrontation, and return home: "Go home, you have done enough, civil society. You have done enough, you in the street. Or, if you are too emotional over what is happening, stay in your house."[38] Civil society is here the autonomous public "in the street" that can be summoned when needed to correct a wayward state and then dismissed, lest it get "too emotional." This address to civil society was complemented on another channel by a threat to its unseen enemy. The same evening, a uniformed National Guard officer was interviewed on RCTV's evening news program, *El Observador*. Pointing an index finger into the camera, the general addressed "*chavistas* fomenting violence in 23 de enero," a well-known historic section of Catia: "Don't turn this situation into a blood bath because the National Guard has the most strength right now, and we are maintaining peace and tranquility. The same to the Bolivarian Circles (inaudible): We know where you are."[39] "Civil society" is maddeningly vague yet in a way extremely precise: civil society is everything *but* the "mob," and one knows it when one sees it. Here, General Bustillos makes no effort to hide the fact that what Globovisión characterized as civil society's decisive intervention at the airstrip was only made possible by uncivil military intervention—and he suggests that civil society's safety will depend on the same state violence it theoretically abhors.

This discussion of civil society in Venezuela is important to this study of the politics of television because via mass representations of "civil society" and its antagonists, liberal notions of citizenship can be called upon to erase the people of the barrio as legitimate social actors and, in moments of crisis, mobilize violence against them. Whether as passive recipients of elite expertise and empathy, as in *Habla la calle*, or as an invisible threat, as in the general's threatening gesture on *El Observador*, the barrio is written out of "civil society," which then appears as a more class-bound concept than it may initially appear. An anecdote from Globovisión's executive offices underscores this point: a station official admitted to me in an interview that the station's intended audience is the middle and upper class. "The lower classes don't have the culture for news, only soap operas," she added, with an unguarded directness that took me by surprise at the time. She then proceeded to define civil society as, on the one hand, "society as such," the "society that has always existed" throughout the history of nations; but when pressed to give an example of civil society, she named the civic organization Súmate, the powerful, staunchly anti-Chávez NGO that monitors the Venezuelan electoral system. Her definition was revealing in that it nearly emptied the term of all meaning until "civil society" was synonymous with "society" itself, yet the term was specific enough in its colloquial meaning to be identified with the most well-known opposition organization in Venezuela, one headed, no less, by two white media stars from elite families. If there is no "outside" to civil society, to what society does the barrio belong?

Conclusions

Televised media in Venezuela present rival accounts of political citizenship that reflect the divided city. Globovisión claims middle- and upper-class Caracas as its audience, while for Catia TVe, west *caraqueños* are its audience, its producers, and its constituency. Globovisión, furthermore, advances a concept, "civil society," that defines its audience and the station itself. This concept of civil society has in many ways refined "el pueblo," "the people," the older and still-resonant historical constituency of Latin American nationalism. As we have seen, however, in mainstream television and elite political discourse before the rise of *chavismo*, both these political concepts have pointedly excluded the barrio, an exclusion that has accompanied extralegal violence in two major episodes. Yet while liberal notions of civil society defend a journalistic standard of impartiality, Catia TVe has modeled in its programming and its pedagogical function an activist practice of citizenship in which "the media" are both an instrument of forming consciousness and a theater of political action in itself. It is important to note, however, that this mission remains in large

part aspirational—that is, winning an audience, maintaining a community of ECPAI-producers, and preserving the organic link the station desires to the poor communities of Catia are difficult tasks made even harder by bureaucratization that accompanies growth. In addition, the participatory nature of Catia TVe, like the radical-democratic ideal of Bolivarianism, must also contend with the sizable, increasingly indispensable personality of Chávez himself.

Catia TVe understands community media as historical in nature; that is, "vindicating" the barrio as a place of community, militancy, and culture means representing it as a place *with* a history worth telling. For founders like Eekhout, moreover, this project of vindication reflects a long history of marginalization of the urban poor: exclusion punctuated by periodic explosions of violence, as in the *caracazo*. As Duno points out, the "logic of exclusion" in Venezuela's private media vacillates between episodes of racist scorn and instances of populist empathy for, and ultimately symbolic inclusion of, the urban poor. This tension is contained within the term "civil society" as it is practiced in Venezuela: it is a class-specific constituency opposed to the state (and by extension the *chavista* socialist agenda), but it also claims to represent a broad liberal consensus that transcends political, racial, and class interests. Politics, at least at a rhetorical level, is akin to the management of the government bureaucracy, not a battle of competing interests. The demobilizing logic of civil society applies even to itself—even while it celebrated the victories of "civil society" on 11 April 2002, Globovisión was urging its soldiers home to their television sets. Catia TVe, on the other hand, sees its mission as one of consciousness raising for barrio solidarity and the "revolution," and it makes no claim to neutrality.

The station does not compete with the private industry on the field of content—that is, it does not aspire to disseminate more "positive" images of barrio residents, in a multiculturalist vein. Instead, it works to transform the forms and structure of television production. The station's pursuit of a nonprofessional, working-class population of producers and its commitment, not only to disseminate different messages than the private media, but also to look and sound as unlike them as possible—that is, to manipulate the forms of mass communication—are important points for creators of oppositional media in other countries who seek not only to change media messages but alter the way people approach and understand the media. In the United States, on the other hand, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's "propaganda model" of media control, which sought to empirically prove media bias based on fealty to elite economic and political interests, has had a lasting impact in Left criticism of the mainstream news media, at least in the English-speaking world. Herman and Chomsky identify five "filters" that determine the content of mainstream journalism: ownership

of media firms, advertising interests, bureaucratic management, the "flak machines" of rightist pressure groups, and lastly, anticommunism. The two authors do not use a Marxist critical vocabulary, but they consider the same question that Gramsci asks in his prison reflections on "hegemony"—what are the cultural processes by which the ruling class extends its dominance by consent, rather than coercion? Their methodology, on the other hand, recalls Louis Althusser's concept of "ideology." Ideology, Althusser wrote, structures the subject's "imaginary relationship" to the social relations of production as a natural fact: the way "things are or must be."[40] This imaginary relationship takes shape in and through "ideological state apparatuses"—the bureaucracies of the government, education, media, and the like. Chomsky and Herman's mass-media "filters" are, like Althusser's "ideological state apparatuses," machines for making compliant subjects. In *Manufacturing Consent,* the authors argue that the modern mass media aim to "inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society."[41] This critique of the media, like Althusser's analysis of the immanence of ideology, tends to leave the reader feeling prone and powerless in the face of such an awesome brainwashing machine. Moreover, Chomsky and Herman only consider the allegedly false *content* of the mass media, at the expense of any substantial critique of the *forms* that mainstream journalism takes. This oversight is crucial to the deep pessimism of Chomsky and Herman's theory—for how can media critics and rank amateurs ever compete with transnational news corporations on the level of content?

In its emphasis on the radical importance of form, Catia TVe's approach resembles many other Brechtian and Marxist theories of insurgent theater and cinema, from the Soviet Union to the Latin American "third cinemas." In his 1969 manifesto, "Towards an Imperfect Cinema," Cuban film director Julio García Espinosa argued that Cuban and Latin American cinema should not imitate the technical mastery of Hollywood and European film since such aesthetic "perfection" simply separated a professional caste of filmmakers from the mass of uninitiated viewers. "We cannot develop the taste of the masses," he wrote, "as long as the division between the two cultures continues to exist, nor as long as the masses are not the real masters of the means of artistic production."[42] Digital technology has made filmmaking more accessible (and more democratic) in Venezuela today than García Espinosa could have imagined in Cuba's film industry in 1969. Catia TVe's devolution of authorship to nonprofessional producers without the financial or cultural capital of media professionals and many urban activists separates this movement for "community media" from the state's funding of Venezuelan professional filmmakers in the 1970s and from many of the student and media activist organizations

in North America and Europe. For example, Indymedia, the most well-known of these, is politically *alternative* without being in any real sense communitarian or *popular* since it is based in communities with the cultural and even financial capital (however limited this may be in relative terms) of radical intellectuals.[43]

The forms taken by cultural texts help to shape, often without us fully knowing it, the meanings we ascribe to a particular work of art and the horizon of possibilities we envision in the social world of which that work, and ourselves, are a part. Catia TVe argues that mass television in Venezuela has produced a passive, exclusionary notion of citizenship. This exclusion is expressed both in occasional mobilizations of violent contempt and, more recently, in civil performances of "nonpartisan" inclusion. On the other hand, Catia TVe's work has shown how impoverished this term "civil society" has become in its Venezuelan context, where its meaning comes largely from its ability to define what it is *not*: "the mob." In the hills of far east Caracas, where Catia TVe filmed one of its most often-repeated programs, the zinc-roofed *ranchos* and the earth roads flood in the rainy season, and residents must pack into jeep taxis for the long trek to the city of glass and concrete below. Yet even there, a resident announced to the Catia TVe microphone with perfect conviction, "Here, everything is possible."[44] How could a viewer believe him? Limited as they are by technological, economic, and even geographical barriers, popular media have power, as we have seen, to challenge both the visual forms and the content of the

Figure 5. A resident of the United Republic of Petare addresses the camera during filming of *Cayapa en la comunidad* (*Cayapa in the Community*), a Catia TVe program recorded in 2004. Courtesy of the author.

radio and television programs with which we are daily surrounded. In so doing, such media might also widen the horizon of possibilities for viewers and producers in a starkly divided city where real equality can seem as remote and inaccessible as Globovisión's gated, multimillion-dollar studio. Anything, then, might seem possible.

Notes

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All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

1. In 1998, the last year for which census data is available, 86.4 percent of Venezuela's total population lived in urban areas, almost all of which are on the country's northern Caribbean coast. United Nations Statistics Division, "Population by Sex, Age Group, Urban and Rural, Census Years: Venezuela," unstats.un.org/unsd/cdb/cdb_years_on_top.asp?srID=14890&Ct1ID=&crID=862&yrID=1998 (accessed 26 January 2008).

2. Julio Loaiza, e-mail message to author, 8 February 2008. Cota 905 is a highway route in Caracas; Guzmán Blanco, the neighborhood's namesake, was Venezuela's dictator for three decades in the early twentieth century.

3. The melancholy hanging of children's toys on city trees or signposts, where they grow dirty and tattered in the elements, appears in other cities, as well. In Detroit, the Heidelberg Project, which turned a street of abandoned houses in a working-class neighborhood into a massive, outdoor art installation, includes something similar. On Heidelberg Street, however, the animals memorialize a spot where children once lived and played; the toys are at once a sign of mourning and artistic reinvention. In 23 de enero, by contrast, the tree is a meeting spot in a crowded neighborhood.

4. Wilfredo Vásquez, a cofounder of Cineclub Manicomio and host of the Catia TVe chat show *Una hora con el cineclub Manicomio* (An Hour with the Manicomio Cineclub), credited the Communist Party's film and popular education programs of the 1970s with inspiring Catia TVe. The Party is today a staunch ally of Chávez in national politics (Wilfredo Vásquez, public lecture, "Aniversario de Catia TVe" ["Anniversary of Catia TVe"], Caracas, 29 March 2006).

5. Some scholars, like Javier Corrales, argue that the severity of Venezuela's "neoliberal" period has been overstated in order to explain the rise of *chavismo*, since the country's dalliance with deregulation and free-market austerity was milder than that in Chile in the 1970s or Mexico in the 1990s. Yet the uprisings suggest that even if the country's economic restructuring was relatively limited, in Venezuela it was popularly understood as disastrous. In other words, if Venezuela's neoliberal turn was so mild, then why did thousands of people revolt against it? And why would they have cared if Chile had it worse? See Javier Corrales, "In Search of a Theory of Polarization: Lessons from Venezuela, 1999–2005," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 79 (2005): 105–18. For an alternative viewpoint on the decline of Venezuela's petroleum-fueled welfare state and the rise of *chavismo*, see Kenneth Roberts, "Social Polarization and the Populist Resurgence in Venezuela,"

in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, and Conflict*, ed. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 55–72.

6. Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: The Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33 (1991): 316.

7. *El Caracazo* (2005), dir. Román Chalbaud.

8. Coronil and Skurski, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation," 321; Margarita López-Maya, "The Venezuelan *Caracazo* of 1989: Popular Protest and Institutional Weakness," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35 (2003): 28.

9. Sanín, *Los muertos de la deuda, o El final de la Venezuela Saudita* (*The Dead of the Debt, or The End of Saudi Venezuela*) (Caracas: Centauro, 1989), 26–27.

10. Coronil and Skurski, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation," 321–22.

11. Ibid., 327.

12. Blanca Eekhout, interview by Naomi Schiller and the author, Caracas, July 2003.

13. Castillo's program is nominally a response to Chávez's show, but the best U.S. analogy for *Aló Ciudadano* is a cable news program like Fox News Channel's *The O'Reilly Factor*. Unlike Bill O'Reilly, Castillo has a coterie of assistant hosts, but both shows are driven by their presenters' dynamic personalities, conservative politics, muckraking tone, and the cultivated sense of solidarity between the host and his audience.

14. Luis Duno Gottberg, "Mob Outrages: Reflections on the Media Construction of the Masses in Venezuela (April 2000–January 2003)," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 13 (2004): 115–35.

15. Carlos Ortega, live interview on *Asi son las cosas* (*The Way Things Are*), Globovisión, 6 April 2002. My thanks to Duno Gottberg for sharing this clip with me from his research.

16. Although U.S. government agencies were not directly implicated in the overthrow of Chávez—as the CIA was, for example, in the 1973 Chilean coup d'état—American support for the new president, Pedro Carmona, was swift and enthusiastic, which fueled suspicions that the Bush government had quietly endorsed the coup beforehand. For a review of the circumstantial evidence of U.S. foreknowledge of coup plans, see my "Bush Lends a Hand," *Left Turn*, July/August 2002, 12–15.

17. Maurice Lemoine, "How Hate Media Incited the Coup against the President: Venezuela's Press Power," *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 2002, mondediplo.com/2002/08/10venezuela.

18. Marcelino Bisbal, "En el aire: Nuestra pantalla televisiva" ("In the Air: Our Television Screen"), in *Television, pan nuestro de cada día* (*Television, Our Daily Bread*), ed. Bisbal (Caracas: Alfa Grupo Editorial, 2005), 39. Bisbal's claim recalls the occasional euphoric discussions of the power of the Internet and bloggers in U.S. presidential politics.

19. Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela, Ministerio de Comunicación y Información, *Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio y Television* (*Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television*) (Caracas: Imprenta Nacional, 2004), chap. 1, art. 1.

20. "Self-censorship" refers to censorship performed by journalists themselves in expectation of future government repression. Aside from being unprovable, the charge necessarily requires an existing climate of state censorship to bear any scrutiny. Human Rights Watch, which is critical of Chávez, conceded at the time that such a climate did not exist in Venezuela, though it suggested that the law's

broad wording might lead to "self-censorship" by reporters ("Venezuela: Media Law Undercuts Freedom of Expression," 24 November 2004, hrw.org/english/docs/2004/11/30/venezu9754.htm).

21. For two examples of *chavista* responses to the accusations of censorship, see Salim Lamrani, "Hugo Chávez y RCTV, ¿censura o decisión legítima?" ("Hugo Chávez and RCTV, Censorship or Legitimate Decision?"), aporrea.org, 22 January 2007, and Greg Grandin, "Free Speech Is Alive and Well in Venezuela," Alternet.org, 22 June 2007.

22. Catia TVe organizers published an article before the RCTV controversy erupted that used a Marxist vocabulary one rarely hears around the station itself: "Today in Venezuela, the existing debate over 'freedom of expression' is little more than an excuse that the National Bourgeoisie [sic] uses to monopolize spaces of power in corporate media outlets that they themselves own and operate." Catia TVe Collective, "Catia TVe: Television from, by and for the People," trans. Marie Trigona, Venezuelanalysis.com, 19 July 2006, www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1843.

23. Oscar Lucién, "For a True Community Television," *El Nacional*, 21 July 2003.

24. Naomi Schiller discusses the RCTV incident in "Catia Sees You: Community Television, Clientelism, and Participatory Statemaking in the Chávez Era," in David Smilde and Daniel Hellinger, eds., *Participation and Public Sphere in Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

25. I am indebted to Robert Jansen for these insights into the distinction between populist "practices" and populist "systems" in Latin America ("Populist Mobilization: Peru in Historical and Comparative Perspective" [PhD diss., UCLA, 2009]). In addition, Naomi Schiller's "Catia Sees You" adeptly interrogates a related term, *clientelism*, taking Catia TVe—the allegedly passive "client" of a manipulative government—and its negotiated relationship with the Venezuelan state as a case study. She argues that the unidirectional lines of authority implied by the term *clientelism* ignore the complex negotiations of political power and "participatory statemaking" by subaltern or other nonelite sectors like community media workers.

26. *El Mundo*, 7 June 2003.

27. There are various examples of this affective notion of populism in the press. Bernard Aaronson called Chávez a "fake democrat" and lamented the lack of a Latin American political language to "counteract the siren song of populism and demagoguery" among the continent's "masses" ("Venezuela's Fake Democrat," *New York Times*, 14 August 2004). The *Economist* defined "the values of populism" by referring to Chávez: "partisanship and confrontation, the concentration of power in his own hands, the blurring of the lines between president, government and state, and the granting of benefits to the poor in return for their political loyalty" ("The Case against Hugo Chávez: Venezuela's Referendum," 14 August 2004).

28. J. Posani, "La vivienda actual, el rancho, y el superbloque" ("The Current House, the Farm, and the Superblock"), in *La vivienda en Venezuela* (*Housing in Venezuela*), ed. Posani (Caracas: Artes y Oficios, 1979). For historical discussions of the social space, architectural history, and political organization of Caracas's barrios, see also Graziano Gasparini and J. Posani, *Caracas a través de su arquitectura* (*Caracas through Its Architecture*) (Caracas: Fundación Fina Gómez, 1969); Talton Ray, *The Politics of the Barrios of Venezuela* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); and more recently, Teolinda Bolívar, *Densificación y vivienda en los barrios caraqueños: Contribución a la determinación de problemas y soluciones* (*Densification and Housing in the Barrios of Caracas: Contribution to the Determination of Problems*

and Solutions) (Caracas: Ministerio del Desarrollo Urbano, Consejo Nacional de la Vivienda, 1994).

29. Alfred Manerio, quoted in Jesús Antillano, "Catia: 1845–1986: Estudio de Historia Local" ("Catia: 1845–1986: Study of Local History") (thesis, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1998), 15.

30. *Ultimas Noticias*, 24 November 1946.

31. Mike Davis has offered the best account yet of the political economy of the new urban populations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in his *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006). He argues that the movement of rural migrants to cities that cannot employ or house them is a consequence of both the immiseration of independent agriculture and the decline of permanent urban industrial labor in the liberalized labor and commodity markets of the third world.

32. Comité de remodelación de barrios, *Programa del desarollo y estudio para eliminar y remodelar zonas de ranchos en el Area Metropolitana de Caracas en 10 Años* (*Program of Development and Study to Eliminate and Remodel Rancho Zones in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas in Ten Years*) (Caracas, 1962), 3. The houses in barrio districts are colloquially known as *ranchos* or the diminutive *ranchitos*, terms that retain the ironic meaning of a countryside "ranch" within the sprawling metropolis.

33. Ibid., 4–5. An anonymous dissatisfied reader has written in pencil in the margin of an original typewritten copy held by the archives of the mayor of Caracas: "sin comentario!" (no comment!). The report goes on to say that after relocation, "this group of communities would be more respectful of the law, and lovers of order, factors that support a democratic government" (44). Appropriately, the anonymous critic has added quotation marks around these last two words.

34. Equipo Comunitario de Producción Audiovisual Independiente (ECPAI) Vencedores, *Invasores o Desplazados?* Catia TVe, 2006.

35. Ricardo Márquez, interview with Naomi Schiller and the author, July 2003.

36. Joseph Buttgieg, "Gramsci on Civil Society," *boundary 2* 22 (1995): 27.

37. Duno, "Mob Outrages," 129.

38. *Globovisión*, live broadcast, 11 April 2002.

39. Rafael Damián Bustillos, Division General, Guardia Nacional, on *El Observador*, Radio Caracas Televisión, live broadcast, 11 April 2002. Is it necessary to note that the general's charges of "chavista" violence in 23 de enero were never substantiated?

40. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 164.

41. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 2002), 1.

42. Julio García Espinosa, "Towards an Imperfect Cinema," trans. Julianne Burton, *Jump Cut* 20 (1979): 24–26, www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC20folder/ImperfectCinema.html. When I asked, no one at Catia TVe knew of García Espinosa.

43. Indymedia is predominantly based in the major media and cultural centers of Europe and North America (New York, San Francisco, London) and has been defined as "media for activists, produced by activists themselves."

44. *Cayapa en la comunidad* (*Cayapa in the Community*), Catia TVe, 2004. *Cayapa* is a Venezuelan Spanish word that describes collective labor. This program was a short documentary on the grandiloquently named new barrio settlement "Republica Unida de Petare" (United Republic of Petare).