THE NEW YORK satirical magazine Vanity Fair (unrelated to its latter-day lounge-lizard/coffee-table/hairdressing salon namesake) ran from 1859 to 1863. Page 215 of the October 27, 1860, edition earned the periodical enduring fame, because the first known use of the word “makeover” appeared there, in a notice headed “Adornment.” It referred to a fictional figure: “Miss Angelica Makeover. The men like her and the women wonder why.” Angelica’s gift was the ability to transform her “coarse” hair “into waves of beauty” through “miracles of art and patience.” Her “eyes were by no means handsome, but she . . . learned how to use them,” utilizing “art and culture” to pass “for a fine woman” (“Adornment” 1860).¹

The word “makeover” reappeared in women’s magazines of the 1920s and 1960s. In 1936, Mademoiselle magazine offered what has been described as the first formal makeover of an “average” reader, who had asked for tips on how to “make the most” of a self that she deemed “homely as a hedgehog”
and “too skinny” (quoted in Fraser 2007: 177). The article turned into a regular feature, and the term “makeover” entered routine parlance in the 1970s. I argue in this book that it describes a long-term tendency in US culture that has intensified in the contemporary moment.

The grand promise of the United States is that what its people were born as need not define them ever more. The Latin@ writer James Truslow Adams coined the signal term “the American Dream” in 1931 as the core of his wide-ranging overview of national history, *The Epic of America.* Adams argued that since the 17th century, voluntary immigrants had been attracted here not only by “the economic motive” but also by “the hope of a better and freer life, a life in which a man might think as he would and develop as he willed” (1941: 31). The “American Dream” was “of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller . . . , with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement.” Measured by something beyond commodities (“merely material plenty”), it was “a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman,” defying class barriers (405, 411).

That grand meritocratic promise still has the power to fascinate. It is expressed and achieved through the ultimate Yankee desire: self-invention via commodities. This is an irony, for, as Marx noted, commodities originate “outside us” (1987: 43). But commodities are quickly internalized, wooing consumers by appearing attractive in ways that borrow from romantic love but reverse that relationship: People learn about romance from commodities, which proceed to become part of them through the double-sided nature of advertising and “the good life” of luxury: the culture industries encourage competition between consumers at the same time as they standardize processes to manufacture unity in the face of diversity. Transcendence is articulated to objects, and commodities dominate the human and natural landscape. The corollary is the simultaneous triumph and emptiness of the sign as a source and measure of value. Commodities hide not only the work of their creation but their postpurchase existence as well. Designated with human characteristics (beauty, taste, serenity, and so on), they compensate for the absence of these qualities in everyday capitalism via a “permanent opium war” (Debord 1995: 26–27, 29–30). Wolfgang Haug’s term “commodity aesthetics” captures this paradox (1986: 17, 19, 35), what Seyla Benhabib calls “the promesse du bonheur that advanced capitalism always holds before [consumers], but never quite delivers” (2002: 3). It is embodied in the difference between those with and those without the class position and capital to define luxury and encourage emulation through identity goods such as fashion items (Sarah Berry 2000).
Commodities appeal because they provide a way to dodge that old Hegelian dilemma: what to do about ethical substance? In the United States, a sense of ethical incompleteness comes courtesy of origins in the underclass of Europe and Asia, the enslaved of Africa, and the dispossessed of the Americas. It encourages an ongoing self-criticism that falls back on faith and consumerism as means of surviving and thriving. One alternately loving and severe world of superstition (AKA religion) is matched by a second alternately loving and severe world of superstition (AKA consumption). In times of economic dynamism and uncertainty, these worlds merge with old myths about meritocracy and religion to inform the way we think about the nation. D. H. Lawrence identified “the true myth of America” as: “She starts old, old, wrinkled and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing of the old skin, towards a new youth” (1953: 64). The detritus of other lands needs remaking, as do successive newcomers and newborns.

Life is very much a project in the United States—but not a straightforwardly individual one. A duality of free choice and disciplinary governance is the grand national paradox. For example, many migrants arrive here cognizant of the country’s extravagant claims to being laissez-faire—but they encounter the most administered society they have lived in! From dawn to dusk, life is laid out across a bewildering array of public and private institutions. Various forms of government are present every day and in every way, from municipal to state to federal agencies, along with less accountable intruders such as church and business bureaucrats—not to mention the venerable third sector of venture philanthropists, nosy foundations, and do-gooder associations. Even the summer break from school for young people is orchestrated via the bizarre ritual of camp, while those preparing for college entry must ritualistically embark on volunteerism to boost their application packets. Simply being—leading life without a bumper sticker avowing one’s elective institutional affinities—seems implausible. The corollary is an earnest search for a self that can operate within this disciplinary complex. Wander through virtually any bookstore across the country, for example, and you will be swamped by the self-help section, edging its way closer and closer to the heart of the shop, as the ancestral roots of an unsure immigrant culture are stimulated anew by today’s risky neoliberal one. In the three decades to 2000, the number of self-help books in the United States more than doubled. Between a third and a half of Yanquis buy them, lending their credit to a $2.48 billion-a-year industry of tapes, DVDs, videos, books, and “seminars” on making oneself anew, frequently with “spiritual” alibis—a whole array of
consumables in place of adequate social security. Each item promises fulfillment but delivers a never-ending project of work on the self (McGee 2005: 11–12). Consider another powerful instance: Hollywood’s promise of the makeover, of turning an off-screen farm girl into a film star, or an on-screen librarian into a siren. It stands at the heart of such projects and has been advertised as such ever since 1930s fan magazines promoted the emulation of actresses through cosmetics, with stars like Joan Blondell instructing readers that “the whole secret of beauty is change” (quoted in Sarah Berry 2000: 106; also see 107, 27).

Many cultural critics demonize such tendencies. For example, Christopher Lasch’s influential 1970s tract, *The Culture of Narcissism*, a requiem for the national “character,” was rejected by most scholars but embraced by pop intellectuals and then-President Jimmy Carter. Lasch identified a turn for the worse caused by “bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption, and in the last analysis . . . changes in family life and . . . changing patterns of socialization.” He discerned a “pathological narcissism” of the “performing self.” People had become “connoisseurs of their own performance and that of others,” with the “whole man” fragmented. This critique bought into a longstanding obsession, exhibited since the 19th century in literature and philosophy, that associated the nation with Adam prior to the Fall, as a site where new forms of life could be invented that reprise d a life before desire (Lasch 1978: 32, 67–68, 93; Stearns 2006: 203; Crawley 2006).

This perverse US fixation on “character” is invoked with inquisitorial reverence in election campaign after election campaign to question presidential candidates. Distinctions are avidly drawn between “personality”—the psychological cards one is dealt—and “character”—how one plays them. A failing that derives from “personality” (which seems to be about fun and the id) can be overcome by “character” (which seems to be about repression and the ego/superego). In the 2000 elections, George Bush Minor’s character was routinely valorized by the bourgeois media as distinct from the Republican norm, because of his putative compassion and bipartisan tendencies. He was not evaluated on the measurable materiality of his public service—spectacular public-educational underachievement and record high rates of execution while governor of somewhere named Texas—or his recreational drug record, nepotistic affirmative-action entry to the Ivy League, and sordid business history. It took years for *Newsweek*’s alarming 2003 cover story “Bush and God” to uncover the policy implications of Minor’s alcohol-addiction- and business-failure-fueled conversion
to evangelical Protestantism and its electoral appeal (Republicans were overwhelmingly supported across class lines by white Protestants during the 2003 Iraq crisis and the 2004 presidential election). Conversely, Al Gore Minor’s character was routinely problematized in 2000 because of his fundraising activities on behalf of Democrats and putative tall tales about inventing the Internet, inspiring Love Story, and investigating Love Canal. He was not evaluated on the measurable materiality of his public service—spectacular economic growth and record high rates of educational attainment under his vice-presidency (Newport and Carroll 2003; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2004).

This obsession with personality versus character has a long history. In Ancient Greece and Rome, the body was the locus for an ethics of the self, a combat with pleasure and pain that enabled people to find the truth by mastering themselves. Austerity and hedonism could be combined. Xenophon, Socrates, and Diogenes believed that decadence led to professional failure unless accompanied by regular examination of the conscience and by physical training. Carefully modulated desire could be a sign of fitness to govern others: Aristotle and Plato went so far as to favor regular flirtations with excess (Foucault 1986: 66–69, 72–73, 104, 120, 197–98). For Solon, the key task of any ruler was “to check the desires that are excessive” in order to “make crooked judgments straight” (1994: 39). This did not mean wishing pleasure away but modifying oneself to account for it. Five hundred years later, the sexual ethics of Ancient Rome saw spirituality emerge to complicate exercises of the self as training for governance:

within an ethics that posits that death, disease, or even physical suffering do not constitute true ills and that it is better to take pains over one’s soul than to devote one’s care to the maintenance of the body. But in fact the focus of attention in these practices of the self is the point where the ills of the body and those of the soul can communicate with one another and exchange their distresses; where the bad habits of the soul can entail physical miseries, while the excesses of the body manifest and maintain the failings of the soul. (Foucault 1988: 56–57)

In place of the excesses that had preoccupied 4th-century B.C. Athens, 1st-century A.D. Rome was principally concerned with frailty: the finitude of life and fitness. Moral arguments were imbued with “nature and reason,” so exercises of the self were joined to a more elevated search for truth (Foucault 1988: 238–39). For his part, Saint Augustine explained Adam and Eve’s postapple physical shame as a problem of control: what had been
easily managed organs prior to the Fall suddenly became liable to “a novel disturbance in their disobedient flesh,” as per Adam’s disobedience of God. The result: the rest of us are left with original sin. The pudenda, or “parts of shame,” were named as such because lust could “arouse those members independently of decision.” The “movements of their body” manifest “indecent novelty” and hence shame, because the “genital organs have become as it were the private property of lust” (Augustine 1976: 522–23, 578, 581). Such feelings derived from the capacity of desire to get out of whack. As Foucault puts it, what were once “like the fingers” in obeying the will of their owner came to elude the owner’s control, a punishment for Adam’s own attempt to evade God’s will. Man exemplifies the Fall in the mutability of his penis. So Renaissance paintings of Jesus routinely depict him pointing to or touching his genitals as a sign of his human side: a begotten rather than a created Son (Foucault and Sennett 1982; Porter 1991: 206). For Kant, while the distinctively human capacity for intellect is laden with a moral purpose, it is indissoluble from a craven desire that comes from being alive and mediates access to knowledge. The two modulate each other, with principle and pleasure in a constant combat that is an entirely normal occurrence. Virtue derives not from resolving the conflict, which is impossible, but from governing it (McHoul and Rapley 2001: 439–40).

In the United States, I sense that all this palaver about personality, character, and the control and expression of drives works as a grand metaphor for managing the differences and difficulties of language, history, race, gender, class, and faith that color the nation’s history. It references the risk and opportunity embodied in the longest-standing makeover aspect of US society: immigration. A triad of personality-character-immigrant indexes the coterminous pleasure and pain of a “touch-and-go” existence, a suddenly anonymous personal history of “individual independence and differentiation” and the “right to distrust,” alongside a need to map new selves and spaces (Simmel 1976: 88–89; Jameson 1991; Gabaccia 2006).

Ironically, today’s encounter with difference is finally making the United States look truly American—it is coming to resemble the Americas. The first great wave of immigrants at the turn of the 20th century left the country 87% white/Euro-American, a proportion that remained static through the 1950s. The 20th century saw the US population increase by 250% (the equivalent figures are below 60% for both France and Britain). In the past decade, its Asian and Pacific Islander population increased by 43%, and its Latin@ population by 38.8%. Latin@s and Asians are increasing at ten times the rate of Euros. The minority population topped 100 million in 2007—
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44 million Latin@s, 40 million African Americans, 15 million Asians, 4.5 million Native Americans, and a million Pacific Islanders. Most people who live in California, Texas, New Mexico, and Hawaii are minorities. If today’s trends continue, 82% of the increase in US population between now and 2050 will come from immigrants and their offspring. Whites will be a minority. The foreign-born segment of the country is 36 million—double the proportion from 1970, half as many again as in 1995, and back to Depression-era levels—and across the 1990s immigration was up 37.7% from the previous decade. Almost half the people living in Los Angeles and Miami were born beyond the border, and Latin@s accounted for half the growth in the nation’s population between 2003 and 2004. Of course, these official figures do not disclose the full picture. It has been suggested that 9 million new residents lack immigration documents, and they are joined by 300,000 new arrivals annually. There was a net increase of 2.5 million people without papers between 2002 and 2006. A reaction of fear is clear in events such as the 2007 scuttling of immigration reform. And hybridity is increasingly the norm. In 1990, one in twenty-three US marriages crossed race and ethnicity. In 2005, the figure was one in fifteen, an increase of 65%. As for the labor force, in 1960, one in seventeen workers was born outside the United States, the majority in Europe. Today, the proportion is one in six, mostly from Latin America and Asia. And the trend is accelerating: between 1996 and 2000, people born overseas comprised close to half the net increase in labor (“Hispanic” 2000; Hispanic 2005: 46; “Centrifugal” 2005; El Nasser and Grant 2005b; United Nations Development Programme 2004: 99; Pew Hispanic Center 2006; “The Americano” 2005; US Census Bureau News 2007; Pew Research Center 2008; “Open Up” 2008; Massey 2003: 143; Bloemraad 2006: 27; Hispanic 2005; El Nasser and Grant 2005b; Mosisa 2002: 3, 9; Tienda 2002; Castles and Miller 2003: 5; Schweder et al. 2002: 27).

Coinciding with these cultural changes, economic life for many US residents, both long-term and recent, is getting worse and worse. Successive population waves—no longer just white ones—have fled the inner city, in vain search of a turn to Arcady. The United States recently became the first nation in the world to have more than half its people living in suburbia—a quarter of whom are minorities—and 75% of new office space is constructed there. But as this historic demographic shift continues the trend from a rural to an urban to a suburban country, middle-class people are increasingly disarticulated from subsistence, from the state, and from the experience of country and city life. By contrast with European welfare systems, the capacity to exit poverty in the United States has dimin-
ished over the last three decades of neoliberalism and suburbanization, thanks to a gigantic clumping of wealth at the apex of the nation, atop a poor, unskilled, and unhealthy base. For twenty years, the state has pursued monetary policies that favor financial over productive capital, with obvious results—40% of corporate profit is in finance sectors, which employ just 5% of private-sector workers (“The Gentleman’s Bailout” 2008; “Wall Street’s Crisis” 2008: 11). Forty-six million US residents are indigent (even the Bush Minor administration admits that 13.3% of the population lives in poverty, the greatest proportion in the Global North); 52 million are functionally alphabetic; and 46 million lack health insurance, with an additional 36 million going without it at some point in the two years to 2003. One in six adults who has medical insurance experiences severe difficulties meeting his or her medical expenses. And access to money and net worth are massively stratified by class, race, and gender. In 2003, black men earned 73% of the hourly wage rate of white people, for instance, and the gaps are widening. Migrants are disproportionately represented amongst the poor, with wages averaging 75 cents for every dollar paid to Yanquis. In the first six years of his rule, George Bush Minor presided over a 9% increase in the poverty rate, a 12% increase in people without heath insurance, and immobile family income. Minor himself has been forced to proclaim that “income inequality is real—it’s been rising for more than 25 years” (Younge 2007; Minor quoted in Sawhill and Morton 2008: 3).

Twenty years ago, neoclassical economists hailed the impact of market precepts over social democracy, because just 20% of the public’s future income was predictable based on paternal income. By the 1990s, and two more decades of deregulation, that figure had doubled. Some figures suggest it now stands at 60%. In the two decades from 1979, the highest-paid 1% of the population doubled its share of national pretax income, to 18%. Incomes of the top 1% increased by 194%; the top 20%, by 70%—and the bottom 20%, by just 6.4%. In 1967, chief executive officers (CEOs) of corporations were paid 24 times the average wage of employees. Thirty years later, they received 300 times that amount. The average Yanqui CEO “makes” more in an hour than an employee does in a month. The Congressional Budget Office reports that during the late 1990s, the wealthiest 1% of US households had a greater combined income than the poorest 40%. In California, where I live, the economy is larger than all but a few sovereign states around the world. So what? Working-class family income in California has increased by 4% since 1969, while its ruling-class equivalent has grown by 41%. Nationally, corporate profits are at their highest
level in five decades, while wages and salaries have the lowest share of the national pie on record. Over Bush Minor’s first term, corporate profits rose by 60%, but wages by just 10%. In 2004, after-tax profits for corporations grew to their highest proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since the Depression. In the eyes of Fortune magazine, corporations “deserve credit for their restraint,” because “[i]nstead of hiring recklessly, they found ways to produce a trim workforce.” The Fortune 500 group of companies received $785 billion of income in 2006, up 29% from 2005, adding up to the biggest profits in the half-century life of the index. Half the money made goes to a tenth of the population, even as the tax burden has shifted dramatically away from companies and onto workers. In the three years 2003–6, hourly wages (adjusted for inflation) declined, despite the increase in productivity. Between 1999 and 2004, the bottom 90% of US households saw their income rise by 2%; for those “earning” over $1 million annually, income grew by more than 87%. In 2005, real wages fell for all but the top 5%, while productivity rose by 3% and GDP by 3.2%. The Gini index saw inequality attain the same level as during the Great Depression. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development categorizes the US halfway down its thirty member-nations in terms of the average worker’s net income. Only Hungary has greater income inequality. Whereas there were 290,000 individual bankruptcies in 1980, 2005 saw more than 2 million. Over a similar period, mortgage foreclosures increased five times over, and the personal savings rate became negative for the first time since the pit of the Depression (Lexington 2005; Skocpol 2004; Webster and Bishaw 2006; Thelen 2000: 552; Freeman 2004; “Centrifugal” 2005; Sered and Fernandopulle 2007: 213, 222; Patrick Harris 2006; “Ever Higher” 2005; Madrick 2007: 20; “Breaking” 2005; Yates 2005; Hutton 2003b: 133, 148; Taibo 2003: 24; Bernstein 2006: 6, 34, 120; Henwood 2006; Kotkin and Friedman 2006; Hacker 2006: 13, 94, 138, ix, 2; Tully 2007; Wallechinsky 2006; “Time to Act” 2007; Francis 2005; Francis 2007; Sawhill and Morton 2008: 3).

Put another way, the gap between what labor produces and what it reaps is greater than at any point in recorded history. This bizarre reconcentration of wealth in the hands of the bourgeoisie is unprecedented in world history since the advent of working-class electoral franchises. No wonder The Economist captioned a photo of the Queen of England greeting Bush Minor and his wife, Laura, as “Liz, meet the royals.” We are back in what Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner (1874) biting satirized as The Gilded Age, the 19th-century heyday of capital when Andrew Carnegie
coined the term “The Gospel of Wealth” to legitimize his race, class, and gender privilege. No wonder Warren Buffet avowed in a 2003 letter to Berkshire investors that “if class warfare is being waged in America, my class is clearly winning” (“Ever Higher” 2005; Garfinkle 2006: 15). Even some unrepentant fans of capitalism complain that “many Americans are one lost job and one medical emergency away from bankruptcy,” while James Glassman, one of the reactionary American Enterprise Institute’s pop thinkers, acknowledges that “we’ve redistributed income about as much as we can.” Almost half the population does not see hard work as the means to a better life. Employment is less secure and fluctuations in household income are more intense than people were brought up to remember. Risk is “offloaded by governments and corporations onto the increasingly fragile balance sheets of workers and their families.” In sum, if we juxtapose aggregate prosperity against personal insecurity, the economy is doing well by ruling-class indices; but it is doing poorly by working-class indices, in terms of both inequality and instability. Non-supervisory employees remain driven by the “Dream”—and it’s not about wealth but simply economic comfort. Despite this modest objective, their pursuit of it has failed in their own eyes, wrecked on the shoals of stagnating wages, accelerating costs of basic needs, agglomerating debt, and perishing retirement income. Workers are far from sanguine about their own future and their children’s—and this anxiety is felt by college graduates, for the first time (Lake Research Partners 2006; Tully 2007; Cohen and DeLong 2005: 113; Glassman quoted in Hall 2006). Even the intellectual bloc of the plutocracy, represented by the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, the Heritage Foundation, and the Urban Institute, concurs that the Dream has been disrupted by our national decline in economic mobility. They are posing the ultimate political quandary for capital: “What happens if the public begins to question its prospects for upward mobility?” (Sawhill and Morton 2008: 2).

And the reaction to these shocks and shifts in culture and economy? As immigration has become more diverse and complex, and wealth has been systematically redistributed upwards, vast numbers of people have pledged themselves to two potent forms of makeover: religion and psycho-pharmacology. These developments are reshaping a tendency toward reinvention that is central to the mythology and lived experience of the entire nation. Each trend comes complete with transformative claims, as if they were rescue columns promising deliverance from peril. I address them in turn.
God-Botherers

True conservatism flows from a singular unifying belief: God. In private life and in the public square good liberals can take Him or leave Him, but true conservatives must always seek Him and strive to heed Him. In the conservative creed human beings are moral and spiritual beings. Each of us has God-given personal rights and God-given social duties, God-given individual liberties and God-given moral responsibilities.

—John J. DiIulio, Jr., Bush Minor’s first Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (2003: 218)

At the time of its formation, the United States was not very religious (perhaps 15% to 20% of the population were God-botherers). In 1683, 83% of Salem (Salem!) taxpayers were not aligned with any church (“O Come” 2007: 8, 10). Three hundred years later, the same proportion of the US population regarded the Bible as the word. Its annual sales veered between $425 and $650 million (“The Battle” 2007: 80). Puritanism had long been the object of obloquy and mockery as much as adherence. The Constitution did not mention God, and 1797’s Treaty of Tripoli specified that the country “is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion” (Kevin Phillips 2006: 108; Elliott 2001: ix; Treaty quoted in Allen 2005). But a clear relationship developed between immigration, economic change, and religious uptake in the United States. Religion offered comfort to new arrivals and reaction for nativists, very much as for today’s right-wing religious rapture; and it became a national player because churches provided services in competition with one another to recruit migrants, who were not aided by the state. For free settlers and enslaved ones alike, faith provided reasons to flee, forms of succor, and means of collective identification. It helped maintain ethnic solidarity in a new environment, leavened a lack of class bearings, gave solace throughout the horrors of slavery, and delivered social services denied by the brutality of capital and the plutocracy of the state. With the emergence of industrial capitalism and its collective pressures, the selfish aspects of Protestant religion also offered a form of possessive individualism to counter the dictates of obedience at work. Immigration and economic change coincided between 1890 and 1920, as the mass arrival of Eastern and Central Europeans changed the ethnic equilibrium and factory life developed.

Now the two trends are cycling again via new racial formations and postindustrialization. Each period has been providential for the particular superstitions of Evangelicals, characterized by a demonization of secular positivism—most obviously evolutionary theory—and by imperialistic
desire and militarism. These bigotries tie into a longstanding obsession with fertility and conversion as means of defending and expanding terrain. The nation’s repeated bursts of God-bothering are called Great Awakenings. As measured by leaps in the percentage of the population attending and affiliating with churches, these bursts occurred in 1850 (34%), 1890 (45%), 1926 (56%), and 1980 (62%). Those dates correlate with devastating forms of economic faith: nutty Malthusian racism, embodied in the 1885 Chinese Exclusion Act; contractionary class inequality and the 1924 Immigration Act under Depression-era Republicans; and the neoliberal warlock craft of the contemporary moment, as per welfare reform and regressive taxation (Peck 1993: 11–14, 36, 81; Kaufmann 2006; Phillips 2006: 116; Greene 1999: 39, 44; Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 316).

*Time* magazine ran a cover story in 1966 entitled “Is God Dead?” and *The Economist* published his obituary in its millennial issue (“In God’s Name” 2007: 5). Such secularism is inconceivable today. We can discern a homology between what Marx called “the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world,” which conceal the secular reality of human action forging faith, and the way that the value of commodities is disarticulated from the labor that makes them (1987: 77, 84). Based on his extensive interviews with true believers across the country, Pulitzer Prize–winning former *New York Times* journalist and Harvard Divinity School graduate Chris Hedges suggests that the “engine that drives the radical Christian right in the United States, the most dangerous mass movement in American history, is not religiosity, but despair.” Whereas capital, government, and suburbia were failing much of the population, the magical hereafter promised them relief and release that could not be falsified by their drab diurnal existence (2007). And one Puritan element that was never compromised? A bold and fierce nationalism that claimed for the United States something akin to predestined domination (Fessenden et al. 2001: 2).

Of course, for all these compelling sociological explanations that show why people sign up to believe, the United States constantly surprises in the fervor of its commitment to, well, magic. Evangelical Christians speak of an almost physical, trancelike transformation, from a faith based in ideas to something that resembles transubstantiation. Not surprisingly, they have powerful ties to millenarianism and the supernatural (Luhrmann 2004; Peck 1993: 8). One must ponder hard a nation where the vast majority attests to the existence of a devil and individuated angels; 45% of people say aliens have visited Earth; three times more people know there are ghosts than was the case a quarter-century ago; over one-third think houses can be haunted; 84% credit posthumous survival of the soul, up
24% from 1972; only 25% subscribe to evolution; almost two-thirds anticipate millennial doom and rebirth; 55% are certain that Satan exists; 44% know there are demons (the same national proportion that has seen Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic paean to sadomasochism, *The Passion of the Christ* [2004], where his screen and social identities of oleaginous businessman, vengeful messiah, anti-authoritarian larrikin, and right-wing real-estate magnate collided); and in the South, 44% believe lightning is sent by God to punish wrongdoers. The country has approximately 335,000 religious congregations, and 79% of its citizens identify as Christian, with 41% converts to fundamentalist evangelism across a bizarre array of groups, and 18% aligned with the religious right. The latter are the most skeptical people in the Yanqui population about environmental protection. Apparently there is no future for the planet. God's design is to destroy it and deliver true believers to safety in a kinky theological draft of wind (Hutton 2003a; Mann 2003: 103; Pew Internet & American Life Project 2004; Gallup 2002–3; O'Connor 2005: 8; Grossberg 2005: 140–41; Newport and Carroll 2003; "The God Slot" 2006; Association of Religion Data Archives 2006; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2004b; Hartford Institute for Religious Research 2007; Pew Research Center 2005a: 17; Baylor Institute for the Study of Religion 2006b; Stearns 2006: 70–71). Yet people in the United States know almost nothing about the Bible—60% can't recite even half of the Ten Commandments, 50% don't know the name of the first book in it or who preached the Sermon on the Mount, 25% don't know what Easter is, and 12% believe that Noah married Joan of Arc ("The Battle" 2007: 81). The proportions of the Bush Cabinet covered in this survey are not available.

The population's embrace of superstition places the United States alone amongst nations with advanced economies and educational systems. The 96% of people who believe in a higher power, and the 59% who state that religion is crucial to their life, represent more than twice the proportions for Japan, South Korea, Western Europe, and the former Soviet bloc. Unlike any other First World country, most US residents connect belief in God to morality and wealth. Unlike their fellow antisecularists in much of the Third World, they reject state intervention to assuage social ills, so forbiddingly individual is their account of person and deity. (In the late 1990s, 94% of US citizens between aged 15 and 24 equated citizenship with assisting other people individually.) But they do favor state intervention to destroy and punish others: preachers were key firebrands in many US conflicts, perhaps most notably the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and the oily Oedipal invasions of Iraq. Don't
bother yourself with social justice, political representation, or inequality. Just help the next person across the street, or defeat them in battle, and all will be well. It’s a grotesque national smackdown, pitting Albert Camus against Norman Vincent Peale on pay-per-view in hysterical mode, with a quarter of the population sufficiently deluded to speak in tongues. Perhaps the best exemplification of this trend is the megachurch—churches with weekly attendances in excess of 2,000 people. By 2006 there were over a thousand such entities. That number has doubled since 2001, as has their average attendance. The megachurches use satellites more and more, and four megachurch pastor-authors have featured on the *New York Times'* bestseller list, with tens of millions in sales (Luhrmann 2004: 520; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2002b and 2003b; Kevin Phillips 2006: 122; Westheimer and Kahne 2004: 6; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2006b; Baylor Institute for the Study of Religion 2006; Redden 2002: 34; Thumma et al. 2006).

This is not quite what social science predicted—neither right-wing modernization theory nor Marxist developmentalism. Secular modernity was conceived as postreligious. But we are witnessing the dread revival of superstition, its ironic triumph as a postsecular phenomenon. The United States seems to be a society where transcendence in the *hic et nunc* can be followed or trumped by deliverance (or at least persistence) after death. And true believers want to transform others, not just themselves. Faith is regarded as a sign of moral superiority that must be carried into public life. In the 1960s, 53% of the population favored no role for religion in politics. Today, 54% favor direct participation by religious organizations in government, and 60% of white Evangelicals want the Bible to guide lawmaking over the will of the population (Pace 2007; “Therapy” 2003: 13; Jeffries 2006; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2006a).

The re-enchantment of politics dates from Jimmy Carter’s decision to roll back special privileges accorded to Christian academies that had exempted them from federal taxes. The end to that outrageous subsidy pushed creepy Christians into the political domain. And since Richard Nixon had scored zero on political morality, post-Watergate Republicans proceeded to stress personal morality, targeting the left and social movements in areas of symbolic power. Campaigns for civil rights, feminism, and gay liberation provoked counteroffensives by fundamentalists (anti-obscenity and anti-abortion), nationalists (anti–flag burning and pro–English Only), and political conservatives (anti–affirmative action and anti–civil rights). Time-series analysis demonstrates that the last three decades have seen activist Democrats become more secular and modern, and activist Republicans more
religious and antimodern (Flint and Porter 2005; Rieder 2003: 30; Schmidt 2000). Democratic partisans have favored abortion, queer rights, and women’s issues, and Republicans have opposed them, from the moment they alliterated the 1972 Democrats as the party of “Acid, Amnesty, and Abortion” (quoted in Rieder 2003: 23). Migrating “southward down the Twisting Tail of Rhetoric,” Republicans focused on “the misty-eyed flag-waving of Ronald Reagan who, while George McGovern flew bombers in World War II, took a pass and made training films in Long Beach” (Keillor 2004).

Yet Bill Clinton affiliated with a strangely fervent Christianity, his hypocrisy matched only by the righteous selfishness of reactionary US Protestants and their claims to superiority over others (Hutton 2003b: 28). Consider Clinton’s two inauguration speeches—grotesque assortments of biblical and Catholic teaching plus clichés from the Gipper that signaled an ecumenical but strong religiosity indebted to conservatives. A form of “civil religion,” these addresses troped the United States as a chosen land, even alluding to the Bible’s claim that God changed history by referring to the end of the Cold War as a sign of “the fullness of time” (Pitney 1997; Clinton quoted in Bacevich 2003: 1). Clinton was indebted to reactionary politics, despite being animated by progressive social movements. Liberal on cultural questions and neoliberal on financial ones, but avowedly a god-botherer of the first order, he was like many progay, prochoice, anti-welfare suburbanites. In keeping with his indebtedness to this group, the economic dividend that Clinton was presented by the end of the Cold War in the form of mounting surpluses was not spent combating internal and external poverty (Falk 2004: 26)—the secondary moral outrage of his presidency after the failure to act in Rwanda.

But even Clinton’s level of superstition was not enough for the right.

The Homeland Security Act (House of Representatives 5005, 2002) mandates bankrolling “faith-based” groups to further “civic engagement and integration.” Of course, during Minor’s first term, all such support went to Christians, and not a brass razoo to Sikhs, Jews, Muslims, or Buddhists (Kaplan 2004: 22). For example, “MentorKids USA” received funding until Constitutional watchdogs protested that the organization required volunteers to sign a pledge avowing that “the Bible is God’s authoritative and inspired word that is without error . . . including creation, history, its originals and salvation” (quoted in Freedom from Religion 2004).

Evangelical organizations generally intervene in sex, not economics, and resolutely oppose adequate welfare and proworker policies. Instead, they fight to diminish privacy. For example, anal and oral sex and the use
of vibrators remained crimes in many states until a 2003 US Supreme Court decision. In the same session, the court upheld new rules severely restricting family visits to prisoners. Only one of these decisions (decriminalizing non-procreative penetrative sex) drew the wrath of so-called family-oriented religious think tanks and lobby groups. They showed no interest in the 1.3 million children whose fathers were (and possibly still are) incarcerated. These protestors were not animated by the material well-being of the groups in whose name they spoke. There was no call to strengthen families rent asunder by prison. Protestant evangelist Pat Robertson was too busy mobilizing his Christian Broadcasting Network, calling on creepy Christians to pray for the removal of three judges who had voted to decriminalize volitional sex (he chose those with significant health problems) in order to aid Bush Minor’s project of altering the court. Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group, set up six coffins outside a federal courthouse, each one inscribed with Supreme Court decisions that displeased the organization, and proceeded to set fire to them, a reaction in keeping with two decades of terrorism by the Christian right over sex. Of course, religious attendance correlates strongly with both committing crimes and heralding punishment of others (no wonder, given the malevolent moralism and prying pressure of prelates). Those states of the union dominated by this unremitting, unforgiving, and above all hypocritical, censoriousness have the highest proportions of teenage pregnancy, out-of-wedlock births, murder, and divorce, even as bastions of morality like Chuck Colson, the Concerned Women of America, the American Spectator, Linda Chavez, and the Heritage Foundation blame torture at Abu Ghraib in 2003 on pornography, gay culture, feminism, and Hollywood (DiIulio Jr. 2003: 219; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003: 3–5; Pollard 2003: 70; Risol 2003; Rosen 2003: 48; Coltrane 2001; “Us” 2003: 12; Rich 2004; Portes and Rum-baut 2006: 329; Douglas 2004).

Despite the poll numbers, it would be wrong to regard the makeover right as an organic movement that operates from the ground up. Its ideas come from an elite of over three hundred “coin-operated” think tanks in Washington. Funded by such wealthy US foundations and families as Olin, Scaife, Koch, Castle Rock, and Smith Richardson, these organizations ideologize extravagantly on everything from sexuality to foreign policy. Ghostwriters render the prose of resident intellectuals attractive as part of a project that is concerned more with marketing opinion than with conducting research—for each “study” they fund is essentially the alibi for an op-ed piece. Their immediate audience comprises a second-tier grassroots network stretching across the National Right to Life Committee, the
American Family Association, the Liberty Alliance, the Eagle Forum, the Family Research Council, the Christian Action Network, and the Christian Coalition. Then there is a more public audience. Progressive think tanks had just a one-sixth share of media quotations compared to reactionary institutions during the 1990s. In the decade 1995–2005, the right averaged 51% of citations, and progressives 14%. The people who appear on the three major television networks’ newscasts as expert commentators on society and culture are indices of this success: 92% of such mavens are white, 85% are male, and 75% are Republican. In all, 90% of news interviewees on these networks are white men born between 1945 and 1960 (Kallick 2002; Karr 2005; Alterman 2003: 85; Dolny 2003 and 2005; Hart 2004: 52; Claussen 2004: 56; Love 2003: 246; Cohen 2004; Rendall and Broughel 2003).

These civil-society tactics, both protests and op-ed pieces, came from somewhere uncomfortably close to the left. Having learned from progressive social movements that the personal and the cultural were political, the right declared itself the ideological foe not only of subaltern groups seeking enfranchisement, but also of liberal, humanistic expressions of universality and secularism. Minorities and feminists had protested antidefamation with great impact, so why shouldn’t the right protest the defamation of its values—fundamentalism, homophobia, and nationalism? Such methods parroted civil-rights legislation and the rhetoric of subject positions around which contemporary social movements waged their struggles. The National Rifle Association, for example, was a rather mild-mannered, Clark-Kentish advocate for field sports for a long time. Following an internal coup in the mid-1970s, it left New York City for the wilds, campaigned for people owning guns as a Constitutional right/responsibility—and overtly borrowed tactics from the civil-rights movement. The same period marked the advent of the Moral Majority, again drawing on the rhetoric and methods of civil rights. Ten years later, this indebtedness to civil-rights activism was carried forward by the United Shareholders Association, whose consumerist politics disempowered workers and turned corporations into ventures of speculation rather than generators of infrastructure. Then evangelical Christians modeled their anti–queer marriage movement on anti-tobacco activism. Today, both Stanford and UCLA feature organizations dedicated to undoing “institutional racism”—a concept long derided by the white right that is now perversely embraced by it to claim that groups such as the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan, formed at the height of creative Chican@ cultural politics in the 1970s, have become so powerful on campus that
they must be stopped for fear of disadvantaging white folks. In 2004, the Sierra Club fended off a takeover by anti-Latin@ candidates who opposed immigration on environmental grounds. All of these groups were underwritten by far-right think tanks and foundations—artful practitioners of an identity politics they profess to despise, rearticulated through the supposedly benign and unquestionable dogmas of faith and opportunity (Hutton 2003b: 85, 104; Coltrane 2001: 395; Lovato 2004).

Earlier battles that had been won by the left through the use of spectacle have been waged anew, with spectacle as much a tactic of reactionaries as of radicals. The umbrella term for this front, “culture war,” originated toward the end of Reagan’s presidency. It became media orthodoxy when Republican Congressman Henry Hyde sought to condemn flag burning as “one front in a larger culture war” in 1990 (quoted in DiMaggio 2003: 80). (A decade on, after his service as chair of the congressional committee that recommended Clinton’s impeachment, Hyde further distinguished himself by writing to Bush Minor upon the election of the leftist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency of Brazil in 2002 that a new nation had joined the “axis of evil” purportedly formed by Iraq, North Korea, and Iran [quoted in Youngers 2003]). Grover Norquist, a key zealot and Republican apparatchik who heads an antitax front organization for the party, has summed up the times with his tasteless statement, “Bipartisanship is another form of date rape” (quoted in Keillor 2004), while public broadcasting’s McLaughlin Group TV show dedicated much discussion to the notion that Clinton was Satan. This virulent think tank and social-movement anti-statist subsided once the Republicans took control of both the executive branch and Congress. A previous hostility to the state transformed into a warm embrace. Sixty-nine percent of the Republican Party soon held that government functioned for the good of all (Alterman 2003: 145; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2003d: 2, 8).

Here is a recent, rather secular ethno/demography of these magician-nativists:

Hairy-backed swamp developers and corporate shills, faith-based economists, fundamentalist bullies with Bibles, Christians of convenience, freelance racists, misanthropic frat boys, shrieking midgets of AM radio, tax cheats, nihilists in golf pants, brownshirts in pinstripes, sweatshop tycoons, hacks, fakirs, aggressive dorks, Lamborghini libertarians, people who believe Neil Armstrong’s moonwalk was filmed in Roswell, New Mexico, little honkers out to diminish the rest of us.
Is this the irritated rant of an urban hipster, mercilessly mocking those beyond the world of downtown lofts and polymorphous pleasure? Did these words drop from a laptop as it hurtled across the fly-over states? No. The quotation comes from a true son of the Midwest: Prairie Home Companion’s Garrison Keillor (2004) was responding to the latest wave of right-wing reaction to the difference that colors US life. That politics follows many of the tenets and life forms of fundamentalism more generally in its identification of an inviolable ancient text with a contemporary sociopolitical strategy, thereby offering internal cohesion and external power. But in keeping with the traditional characteristics of reactionaries, despite the purportedly positive guidance provided by an originary text such as the Bible, it is used in a negative way, to construct an ideology known by what it opposes as much as if not more than what it supports. No wonder the distinguished former president of Argentina, Raúl Alfonsín, worried aloud that the United States was headed for neofascism because of the far-right forces unleashed by creepy Christianity (Pace 2007; Anguita and Colectivo Prometeo Prometeo 2003: 43).

**Pill-Poppers**

The neurogenetic-industrial complex . . . becomes ever more powerful. Undeterred by the way that molecular biologists, confronted with the outputs from the Human Genome Project, are beginning to row back from genetic determinist claims, psychometricians and behavior geneticists, sometimes in combination and sometimes in competition with evolutionary psychologists, are claiming genetic roots to areas of human belief, intentions and actions long assumed to lie outside biological explanation . . . [:] political tendency, religiosity and likelihood of mid-life divorce.

—Steven Rose (2006: 6–7)

In addition to religiosity as a response to cultural and economic change, there is a more rational, less ideological, but equally far-reaching, reaction to cultural change. For nowadays, nestling alongside big faith, “big science’ and ‘big technology’ can sit on your desk, reside in a pillbox, or inside your body” (Clarke et al. 2003: 167, 164), offering “personalised medicine” via cosmetic pharmacology (“Billion” 2007: 71). One trend remodels belief. The other remodels the brain. The selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) world of the psychological makeover through pharmacology provides a strange meeting point of the body’s exterior and its interior, a site where commodities encounter emotions, mediated formally and informally
through professional knowledge and intervention, and mass-produced in pill form. Pharmaceutical corporations promote fast, efficient solutions to life’s problems—a call to stop reading and start swallowing.

In the quarter-century to 2003, US expenditure on pharmaceuticals grew from $12 billion to $197 billion, a seventeenfold increase at a time when spending on cars and clothes doubled and tripled respectively. Expenditure on pharmaceutical psy-drugs increased by 638% in the United States between 1990 and 2000 (as opposed to 50% in Japan and 126% in Europe), and dosages of psy-drugs increased by 70%. During that period, as a proportion of the overall market for pharmacology, the United States was more obsessed with mental health than anything or anybody else, with psy-drugs accounting for 18% of the pharmaceutical market. By the turn of the 21st century, 38 million people in the United States had tried Prozac, and over 10 million new prescriptions were written for it in 1999 alone. In 2004, 91 million people, 45% of the population, took prescription drugs regularly, and only a quarter never did so. That represents 64% of all households, filling 3 billion prescriptions a year. In the ten years to 2000, a period of minimal inflation, US expenditure on pharmaceuticals doubled, to $100 billion. A decade ago, US residents averaged seven prescriptions a year; now it is twelve (Rose 2007: 209; Erica Goode 2000; Fox 2004; Petersen 2008; Rowe 2006).

This is the era when the head of AstraZeneca can smile as he offers this tidbit of grandiose pharma-hubris: “Death is optional” (quoted in “Billion” 2007: 69). For if the self is “a cultural invention” (Kessen 1979: 815), and we are en route to a “posthuman self” (Davis 2000), then the newest “darlings of Wall Street”—pharmacorps—are its leading manufacturers (Healy 2002: 2, 353). The drug makeover experience clearly appeals to people who have decided to abandon former existences. They are living out the latest trend in a makeover nation: “SSRIs, hormones, brain boosters, neurotransmitters.” Instead of old-style recreational objects that Yanquis liked to put in their mouths (alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and illegal substances), which promised instantaneous joy and release—tied in some cases to eventual death, disability, pain, contempt, or incarceration—the new substances, legal and controlled, offer a general overhaul (Davis 2000; Elliott 2003a). No huddling outside the office building, no stains on the paperwork or keyboard, no obvious need to be like others. No quick pleasure, no hangover, no nightly snoring or morning cough driving those around you to distraction, no staggering to the bathroom to be ill, no breathlessness walking up two flights of stairs, no emanations from the mouth, hair, or clothes to
mark one out. Instead, a quiet daily insurance backs up the gains made the
day before within one’s not-so-hard drive of a body, and without the fear of
employer drug testing. Rather than forming illicit, informal relationships
with others through the shared experience of ingestion, new drugs “melt
invisibly into the texture of the everyday” (Davis 2000). They forge a ster-
ing relationship with the self that can be invisible to others and oneself—a
preparty preparation, the perfect makeover. Or more publicly, they can be
redisposed as membership badges via water-cooler discussions about
whether last week’s Prozac has taken hold yet, almost as per Evangelicals’
seemingly insatiable need for recognition of their status as “born again”
(a charming critique of mothers and birthing centers). These drugs ful-
fill the dream of learning the code, cracking the means of making oneself
anew, leaving life as something more than when one arrived—and doing
so in a seamless way that does not draw attention to itself unless desired.
What may have begun as a search for authentic feelings via confession and
therapy—the real me revealed—turns commodified transmogrification
into authenticity itself (Elliott 2003b: 22, 29–30). For Prozac guru Peter D.
Kramer, enhancement pharmacology may be “the American ideal” (2003:
xi). Instead of illness cured, one type of wellness substitutes for another
(Elliott 2003b: 50–51). Some say this is the corollary of a macroeconomic
change, that “the scientific management of production, so prevalent in the
eyears of the twentieth century, has been displaced by a new scientific
management of consumption” (Hansen et al. 2003: 1). What differentiates
this era of enhancement technologies from others is the sense that con-
sumer purchases displace political activism as a means of improvement.
The mythic quest to “restore a lost normativity” looks modest by contrast
with this hyperconsumerism (Hogle 2005; Rose 2007: 81).

Enhancement technologies have become topics of everyday conver-
sation with the spread of brain boosters to improve concentration (Hib-
bert 2007). What used to be part of drug subculture—pills to transform
the self—has become central to corporate capital. To quote the New York
Times, “Big Pharma Ogles Yasgur’s Farm.” So we find Viagra sponsoring
a tour by Earth, Wind & Fire, a ’70s rhythm and blues/soul/funk group,
as part of a search by its manufacturer, Pfizer, for consumers who once
associated popular music with illegal, recreational drug use and who might
now be open to a legal life-style equivalent (Leland 2001).

Deregulation has propelled marketing into the forefront of drug de-
velopment, and pharmaceutical companies deem conventional scholarly
research and education too slow for their financial rhythms. The phar-
maceutical industry’s proportion of US health research grew from 13% in 1980 to 52% in 1995. Marketing, not medicine, decides how to develop a new pharmacological compound once it has been uncovered, asking the following questions: Will it be announced as a counter to depression or premature ejaculation? Will it be announced in journal x or y? Which scholars will be chosen to front it and produce consensus over its benefits? Major advertising agencies that work with pharmaceutical corporations, such as Interpublic, WPP, and Omnicom, have subsidiaries like Scirex that conduct clinical trials. Known as medical education and communications companies, they aim to get “closer to the test tube.” These desires for sales and speed versus protocol meet, ironically, in scholarly journals. Despite the cult of speed, scholarly legitimacy is a key part of this merchandising. Pfizer describes academic publication as a means “to support, directly or indirectly, the marketing of our product” (quoted in Moffatt and Elliott 2007). Medical education and communications companies provide ghost-writing services, paid for by corporations, that deliver copy to academics and clinicians—and then pay them for signing it. Many faculty shill for corporations by allowing their names to go on articles that they have neither researched nor written—for all the world like football players or basketballers who have not even read, let alone penned, their “autobiographies.” Instead, these corporate subsidiaries write papers on behalf of academics. Such practices are increasingly common across the domain of big pharma, with few if any concessions to the notion of a conflict of interest or even to the notion of open declaration of this cash-for-research-and-comment love fest.

Thankfully, the whistle is occasionally blown by potential recruits who reject an offer (Fugh-Berman 2005). Such revelations have led the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors to establish criteria that investigate who does the research and writing that medical journals publish. Even with these criteria in place, one in ten papers in leading medical outlets is the work of ghostwriters, and an astounding 90% of articles published in the Journal of the American Medical Association derive from people paid by pharmacorps, which pressure medical journals to print favorable research findings in return for lucrative advertising copy (Healy et al. 2003; Moynihan 2004). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (2003) offers a wry column about these authorial phantoms. Entitled “Ghostwriting: The Basics,” it lays out the dimensions and norms of the scam, noting the scandal of Fen-Phen as the most prominent disaster resulting from cash-register research of this kind: people shopping for weight reduction ended up with heart and lung damage. Similar investigative reports have
come from ABC News, the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, and many other media outlets. Of course, pretend authorship is only part of the conflict of interest. Away from ghostwriting, pseudoscholars from medical schools and professional practice routinely accept monetary and travel gifts from companies in a quiet quid pro quo for favorable publicity. Pharmacorps’ budgets for marketing to clinicians are skyrocketing (Moffatt and Elliott 2007: 19). The result? The permanently ethically and intellectually challenged oxymoronic notion of the “business school” has been overtaken by the medical academy in the collegial disgrace stakes.

The deregulatory, deprofessionalizing impulses of privatization have also been applied to the creation of drug consumers as patients, reinterpellated as sovereign consumer-citizens able to govern themselves orally. TV commercials for prescription drugs, banned for thirty years by UN protocols that restricted direct-to-consumer marketing by pharmacorps, have been washed away from US obligations (the only other nation to do this, Aotearoa/New Zealand, is rethinking the policy). In 2001, $2 billion was spent promoting pharma to Yanquis, up from $300 million three years earlier. By 2004, the figure was $4 billion; in 2006, $4.5 billion. More money is spent selling psychiatric “wonder drugs” than on medical school and residency training—in 1998, Eli Lilly and Company paid $95 million just to market Prozac. The Government Accountability Office has found the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at fault for lack of oversight of false pharma commercials, while the Kaiser Family Foundation says that direct address of consumers in advertisements has increased prescription drug sales by 12% (Allen 2007). The key site of promotion is new diseases as much as their treatment—companies vend the problem coevally with the cure. Companies are forever developing products to deal with circumstances that have been newly defined as maladies, like baldness, obesity, and impotence: “insomnia, sadness, [and] twitchy legs” become “sleep disorder, depression [and] restless leg syndrome” as part of “the medicalization of everyday life” (Welch et al. 2007). There are also carefully orchestrated product placements undertaken by front organizations. The 2004 Academy Awards telecast saw a Boomer Coalition commercial urging adults to have their cholesterol tested, without disclosing that the coalition was invented by an advertising agency and underwritten by Pfizer. TV commercials promote pills to counter hair loss, muscle loss, and erection loss—in fact, everything bar Lacanian loss. In 2005, drug manufacturers outlaid $240 million to create and sustain erections. Republican Bob Dole, baseballer Rafael Palmeiro, race-car driver Jeff Fuller, “football”

4 coach Mike Ditka, and a National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) event all
need help with their erections, and “footballer” Ricky Williams seeks alleviation from anxiety. Big pharma has devoted such massive proportions of its wealth to the creation of need via promotional expenditure that approximately one-fifth of its revenue goes to research and development versus one-third to marketing. Pfizer even stations marketers inside laboratories to ensure that scientists don’t waste time looking to create compounds that nobody can be made to want. The corollary is a drastic drop-off in new medications coming to market (Jaramillo 2006: 272; Scherer 2005: 72; Esposito 2006; Rose 2003: 51, 56; Healy 1997: 25; Rubin 2004: 373–74; Gates et al. 2002; Hearn 2005; Kovac 2001; Sollisch 2000; Reitman 2003; “Billion” 2007: 71; Jack 2006; Bloom 2000; “Beyond the Pill” 2007; Petersen 2008). Even waking up is set to become easier. Drugs are planned for the “sleep market” (Marsa 2005) and to enhance memory—matters of far greater interest to pharmacorps than the treatment of illness (Breithaupt and Weigmann 2004), since their military and educational market potential outstrips the temporal and spatial limitations of sickness. The British Medical Journal has conducted a febrile debate over what it astringently refers to as “non-diseases,” appositely deriding such commercial projects as “disease mongering” for profit via “an ill for every pill” (Moynihan et al. 2002; Moynihan and Smith 2002: 859). Even the always-awful Los Angeles Times, located in the center of imagined disorders, wonders about the will “to treat . . . benign personality traits” (Gottlieb 2000).

In order to ensure a neat articulation between the politics, economics, and culture of drugs, and despite criticism from the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, Bush Minor’s administration introduced a New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003), featuring former drug-company mavens, to screen US residents for mental illness. Children were the first targets for mandatory evaluation, because the commission’s pharmacorps members recognized schools as ideal testing venues for identifying 50 million potential customers. Their favored method was the Texas Medication Algorithm Project, a policy adopted during Minor’s disastrous governorship. The project dressed up in mathematical discourse what amounted to a flowchart ratcheting medical treatment up from one drug to another, culminating in electroconvulsive therapy. Officials associated with the project were implicated in bribes from companies whose products they placed on the critical path. So who could be surprised when it was recommended nationally by the president’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health in 2003, even as the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors and the New York Attorney General criticized the pharmaceutical sector for hiding negative clinical trials from professional and
public evaluation (Graham 2004a and 2004b; “Executive Summary” 2005; Rose 2007: 249; President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health 2003: 68–69; Lenzer and Paul 2006; “Trials” 2004)? Or that early in 2008, a comprehensive study basically found that antidepressants are the same as placebos in their impact on what they are supposed to treat—based on unpublished studies conducted by pharma (Kirsch 2008)?

Meanwhile, cost pressures militate against complex psychotherapy, encouraging self-help software and company-sponsored electronic listeners in addition to Texas warlock craft. Corporate intranets provide around-the-clock access to cognitive-behavioral band-aid therapy through employee assistance programs. The American Psychological Association (APA) offers “Questions to Ask Your Employer’s Benefits Manager” on its Web site as part of a “Consumer Help Center” (Hansen et al. 2003: 106, 123, 56), and the HSM Group’s “Productivity Impact Model” (2004) estimates the cost of employee depression to company revenues. It operates from the assumption that 50% of depressed workers are “untreated” and miss between thirty and fifty days of work a year as a consequence. To start the depression evaluation/treatment process, simply log on to http://www.depressioncalculator.com, the neoliberal employer’s perfect wake-up page, no doubt.

The grand industrial-era projects of land reclamation and skyscraper construction have contemporary nano- and digital equivalents in biomedicine and the Internet. The trade in spare human parts is worth hundreds of millions of dollars annually, and the United States has over a thousand firms that sell products made from dead people (who are vended for upwards of $230,000 each). Biotechnology offers the prospect of absolute control/development of people through drugs that destroy or augment memory, block or enhance fertility, create hypermusculature, and defy resistance to bacteria; and micromachines that give sight and hearing to the disabled—or take them away. The next phase, genetic engineering, promises to alter the who, what, when, where, and how of being human. Newsweek predicts “made-to-order, off-the-shelf personalities.” The promise is “a shift from reactive to preventative and more personalized medicine” that will be at the center of economic prosperity, both as objects in themselves and as stimuli to productivity—even if the reality so far is a story of incremental development, especially in pharmaceuticals. The fact that forty cognitive-enhancing drugs were in commercial development in 2004 both excited and terrified social critics of all casts. For Jürgen Habermas, there is a sinister aspect to all this. Elements of chance and choice that characterized the meeting of genes, society, and individuality in the past are being
superseded, as “the depth of the organic substrate” becomes susceptible to prenatal intervention and recoding (2003: 12–13, 23). But for the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), this is part of a “transition to a more biobased economy,” which all actors should welcome by removing “inappropriate barriers” and stimulating “opportunities” (Sharp 2006: 11; Kass 2003; “Supercharging” 2004; Newsweek quoted in DeGrandpre 2006: 57; Nightingale and Martin 2004: 564, 566; OECD 2004: 3).

This recoding appeals as much as anything because medical-enhancement technologies provide a convenient way into contemporary reinvention, at least rhetorically—and as pills, machines, and surgeries, they can easily be counted. The search for new selves is restless, imbued with cosmic ambivalence. It accompanies immigrant underclass culture as an animator of capitalist innovation and retardation and social chaos and cohesion. The next question is how to conceptualize religious and psychotropic responses to difference and economic inequality.

Conceptualization

Suicide by race, by color, by occupation, by sex, by seasons of the year, by time of day. Suicide, how committed: by poisons, by firearms, by drowning, by leaps. Suicide by poison, subdivided by types of poison, such as corrosive, irritant, systemic, gaseous, narcotic, alkaloid, protein, and so forth. Suicide by leaps, subdivided by leaps from high places, under the wheels of trains, under the wheels of trucks, under the feet of horses, from steamboats.

—Edward G. Robinson in his role as an insurance investigator, Double Indemnity (1944)

“Risk society” (Risikogesellschaft in German sociology of the mid-1980s) and “moral panic” (from British criminology of the early 1970s) help explain the makeover nation during this revolutionary reallocation of resources of finance, faith, and pharmacology. Unusually for sociological and cultural theories, these concepts are freely used by, for example, the mainstream UK, Australasian, and Filipino media; the British National Council for Civil Liberties; and the British Academy, while The Lancet has run a column called “Doctoring the Risk Society.” Slow as ever, even the US media recently caught on. The New Yorker’s venerable “Talk of the Town” column, the New York Times’ Women’s Fashion Magazine, Slate, and the libertarians over at Reason have deployed the idea of risk society, and “risk” appeared in the title of several new magazines in the 1990s. Risk periodical
began, aptly enough, in the 1987 stock-market crash year. Its Web site, http://www.risk.net, is for “anyone who needs to manage risk” (for which read, those in search of derivatives). Numerous professional associations advertise risky elements of their occupations, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have utilized the rather ominously named “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System” since 1990. Academically, while risk society is mobilized in sociology and media studies through to anesthesiology and philanthropy, moral-panic discourse is prominent in critical criminology and media and cultural studies. The former is manifested almost as a technical specification from beyond ideology, while the latter is used mostly by progressive critics. The British Medical Journal cares enough to have attacked the moral-panic framework, while the reactionary communitarian Alan Wolfe has begrudgingly utilized it to criticize the way Republicans focus on terrorism rather than economic distress (Fitzpatrick 2003; Barker 1999; Wichtel 2002; Critcher 2003: 2, 53; “An Avalanche” 2002; Tan 2001; Shafer 2005; Power 2004: 12; Gillespie 2003; Žižek 2005; Daniels 1998; Wolfe 2006; Jeffries 2006).

What do the terms “risk society” and “moral panic” mean? According to Ulrich Beck, society is characterized by “institutions of monitoring and protection” that seek to protect people from “social, political, economic and individual risks,” servicing the time-discipline required by capitalism. Risk society “organises what cannot be organised.” It embodies and propels the desires of capital and state to make sense of and respond to problems, whether of their own making or not. If early modernity was about producing and distributing goods in a struggle for the most effective and efficient forms of industrialization, with devil take the hindmost and no thought for the environment, risk society is about enumerating and managing those dangers. Rather than being occasional, risk is now a constitutive component of being and organization that can be sold, pooled, and redisposed. This second modernity is characterized by an ever-increasing number of sophisticated mechanisms for measuring risk, even as the range and impact of risks grow less controllable. As technologies and markets become “better,” they cause greater potential and actual harm—which in turn become the object of predictive technologies and markets (Beck et al. 1994: 5; Beck 1999: 135; Power 2004: 10, 17; Smutniak 2004; Jeffries 2006).

Risk society references the psychological impact of structural economic changes and other shocks that (sometimes) accidentally accompany them. Ideological commitments to Marxism, feminism, or superstition weaken. Unlike the notion of a broad left that once infused such struggles, issues
are delinked, such that a position adopted on ecology says nothing about a position on popular democracy. Through governmental knowledges that offer both aggregated and variegated statistics to define, measure, and model populations in the interest of social control, advanced industrial/postindustrial societies induce massively increased feelings of risk in people. They admit and even promote the irrationality of the economy—as a means, paradoxically, of governing populations. Risk is calculated diurnally, via finance, and registered expressively, by emotion. Feelings become metonyms of economic problems. Routine environmental despoliation, global labor competition, cyclical recession, declining life-long employment, massive international migration, developing communication technology, and the rolling back of the welfare state, alongside income redistribution toward the wealthy, have left denizens of postindustrial societies factoring costs and benefits into everyday life as never before, while their sense of being able to determine their future through choice is diminished (Latour with Kastrissianakis 2007; Rigakos and Hadden 2001; O’Malley 2001).

Risk has a storied history, generally interlaced with religious ideology. Churches ply their trade through fear, with sin leading to damnation. This is especially salient in cases where Christians have stolen and then marketed rituals from paganism, such as Halloween, or Christmas, which was traditionally a time of dread for children because they would be punished for misdeeds, until it was commodified. In the United States, radical-right Protestantism rejects the merciful aspects of Catholicism in favor of a judgmental divinity—a key recruitment device for Evangelicals since the 18th century. Away from superstition, the appearance of stock exchanges in Western Europe from the 15th to the 17th centuries, often articulated to shipping fortunes, represented new class formations and financial and governmental problems, understood as actuarial rather than accidental. From the Industrial Revolution, working people were advised to be prudent and secure their future through insurance. In the United States, the shop was set up to cater to individuals rather than companies in the 19th century. What began as a means of paying for burials led to predicting calculations of every conceivable misfortune. We can see this played out by Edward G. Robinson’s maniacally recited list of the ways that people can off themselves, quoted above.

Risk became an interventionist category during the 19th-century transformation of capitalism that the economic historian Karl Polanyi called “the discovery of society.” Paupers came to be marked as part of the social, and hence deserving of enumeration, inclusion, and aid. The well-being of
the poor was incorporated into collective subjectivity as a right, a problem, a statistic, and a law, and juxtaposed to the well-being of the self-governing worker or owner. Society was held to be simultaneously more and less than the promises and precepts of the market, with risk understood and countered as a collective problem and liability. In some sense, these formally unproductive citizens became the litmus test of society. Along came public education, mothers’ pensions, and Civil War benefits. During the 20th century, this tendency was confirmed by state interventions that provided superannuation to retirees, with contributions and benefits assumed by all. Today, we find such publicly subsidized schemes criticized as drains on individual initiative, and citizens are encouraged to assume risk directly via the market. So whereas the state once underwrote export-credit insurance (in the United States via the Overseas Private Investment Corporation [OPIC] and the ExIm Bank), nowadays that service is privatized, sending risk out into the community. The result: a shift, expressed in general welfare terms but also in the particular field of insurance, away from pooling risk, the better to allocate protection. Flavors of the millennium include allocating individuals to risk groups in order to calculate their likely future—then expecting them to bet against it. The same period has seen the explosion of tort law, because poor people have come to use the legal system to obtain redress against the wealthy and corporations in ways that a mature system of income redistribution, or adequate industrial regulation, would have rendered unnecessary (Polanyi 2001: 89, 82–85; Watts 2000: 197; Skocpol 2003; Stearns 2006: 67–68, 126, 120–21, 123; Briggs and Burke 2003: 30; Rose 1999: 158–59; Rose 2007: 123; Lawrence and Herbert-Cheshire 2003; Strange 2000: 126).

Risk has long been a core advertising method. Since the 1920s and ’30s, magazines, especially those directed at the proletariat, have used fear to sell products at an accelerating rate, with threats to children a particular favorite. The preferred term in the industry is “scare copy.” Consider the song “In the Year 2525 (Exordium and Terminus)” by Zager and Evans. It was a worldwide success in 1969, most notably in the United States. A blend of millennial doom, environmentalism, and the Rapture, its dystopic account of technology picked up on fears of a dehumanized future programmed through machines and pills. But a few decades later, such a future gave cause for delight. What appeared to epitomize an ecumenical, equal-opportunity loss of humanness had become both a leftist rallying cry, via the passion for cyborgian self-invention, and a capitalist rallying cry, via the passion for consumer self-satisfaction. In 2007, the song was even troped in a commercial for Embarq, an Internet service provider. Such dual-faced
panics and celebrations are commonplace: IBM, to name just one company, is notorious for its “FUD campaigns.” Orchestrated around “Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt,” they predict dire consequences absent use of the corporation’s products and services (Stearns 2006: 151, 155).

Harvard’s Center for Cancer Prevention now offers a Web site which permits visitors to calculate the likelihood of various maladies entering their lives (http://www.yourdiseaserisk.harvard.edu). Fear has become “an independent variable,” with “exceptional events” transformed into “normal risk” (Furedi 2005). In 2006 the Center for American Progress and Foreign Policy magazine launched their rather fearsomely named “Terrorism Index,” which surveys “100 of America’s top foreign-policy hands.” It duly found that 81% “see a world that is growing more dangerous for the American people” (2007: 2). But when Inspector Jefe Javier Falcón of Sevilla suggests to the expatriate Yanquis Maddy and Marty Krugman in Robert Wilson’s neo-noir novel The Vanished Hands that the United States has been a society driven by fear since September 11, 2001, he is quickly rebuked: “It’s always been fear” (2004: 41). Of course, close to three thousand people died that day, a day that supposedly “changed everything.” Yet six weeks beforehand, polls revealed that 90% of the public already feared terrorism. And that same year in the United States, 150,000 people died from lung cancer, 38,000 in cars, and 30,000 by gunshot, while 250,000 were raped. Risk society is abetted and indexed by incidents like the media hysteria over anthrax in October 2001—responses that were out of all proportion to reality, given the under-reported plenitude of industrial chemicals and organisms confronting US workers every day and the extraordinary dangers posed by chemical plants to literally millions should there be an accidental or deliberate release of their deadly product. This country is very, very unsafe, because of the immense risks generated by local commerce and masculinity—but ignored by Homeland Security. No wonder New York’s Museum of Modern Art featured a 2005 exhibit entitled “The Perils of Modern Living” (Kellner 2003: 82–83; Furedi 2005). The country is physically founded on risk, with its most expensive real estate built on fault lines and hurricane sites—its wealth distributed to guarantee massive insurance premiums and gambling. This has given rise to gruesomely named and administered catastrophe bonds, which bet on avoiding these cataclysmic events. Between summer 2004 and the end of 2005, US hurricanes saw $81 billion in losses incurred by insurance companies. Meanwhile, the very US financial institutions that invent these fancy instruments for sharing risk have been shown to be incompetent, irrational, and unseemly: the subprime mortgage fiasco has seen them veer away from a
love of deregulation and in favor of regulatory rescue, depending on their needs (Lewis 2007; Leonard 2007).

We might date the ideological welcome of economic risk to a 1971 report for presidential advisors that referred glowingly to “the development of flexible citizens who, as many people have already realized, are the kind of citizen the twenty-first century is going to need.” No wonder, then, that by the 1990s, Business Week was bluntly referring to the “New Economy” as “the rise of risk capital.” The idea of risk as something for which everyone became responsible had become part of the neoliberal discourse of individual mastery of one’s life. As of 1997, the Federal Department of Transportation decreed that automobile “Crashes Aren’t Accidents”—they are caused by human error (quoted in Mattelart 2003: 109, Hutton 2003b: 122; Stearns 2006: 131).

Today’s risks are quantified by everything from earthquake modeling to actuarial estimates and share-price responses. The United States is the risk society, with 50% of the population participating in stock market investments. Risk is brought into the home as an everyday ritual, an almost blind faith (sometimes disappointed) in mutual funds patrolling retirement income. The insurance costs alone of September 11 have been calculated at $21 billion. In 2005, US residents spent $1.1 trillion on insurance—more than they paid for food, and more than one-third of the world’s total insurance expenditure. The industry’s global revenues exceed the GDP of all countries bar the top three. At one level, this represents a careful calculation of risk, its incorporation into lifelong and posthumous planning—prudence as a way of life. At another, it is a wager on hopelessness and fear that has since emerged in religion and pills, because so many risks that Yanquis worry about are uninsurable. As dangers mount, safeguards diminish. So whether we are discussing nuclear power plants or genetically modified foods, the respective captains of industry argue that they pose no risks, but insurance companies decline to write policies on them for citizens—because they are risky. Much of this relates to the deregulatory intellectual and policy fashions of the last three decades, which have aided the historic redistribution of income upwards by opposing the universalization of Medicare, reducing labor protection, and ideologizing against collective action other than in the private sphere—at the same time as people confront spiraling health costs and multiplying economic changes (Martin 2002: 6, 12; Zorach 2003; Mann 2003: 103; Strange 2000: 127; World Trade Organization 2003: 2; Smutniak 2004; Stearns 2006: 191; “Covered” 2004; “Time for a Makeover” 2006; Beck 1999: 53, 105; Kline 2003; Bernstein 2006: 4–5; Martin 2004: 8–10).
This also connects to the financialization of the everyday and the dominance of related myths: that consumption is sovereign, labor is a problem, the economy works because of entrepreneurs and executives, meritocracy is real and omnipresent, and collective action (by progressives) is wrong. Financialization has created a surge in one sector of the economy, such that by 2004, almost 40% of all profits in the US economy were “made” by finance firms. On TV, news stories are presented in terms of their monetary significance to viewers. Neoclassical economic theory is deemed palatable in a way that theory is not accepted elsewhere. The leading sources of wholesale television and Internet news, such as Reuters, make most of their money from finance reporting, which infuses their overall delivery of news as a commodity; primarily political journalists at Reuters refer to themselves as “cavaliers,” and their primarily financial counterparts as “roundheads,” severe metaphors from the English Civil War (Kevin Phillips 2006: 266; Palmer et al. 1998). Business advisors dominate discussion on dedicated finance cable stations like CNBC and Bloomberg, and these advisors are granted something akin to the status of seers when they appear on MSNBC, CNN, and the networks. Former Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan was filmed getting in and out of cars as if he were en route to a meeting to decide the fate of nations. Each sclerotic upturned eyebrow or wrinkled frown was subject to hyperinterpretation by a bevy of needy followers. The focus of “news” has become stock markets in Asia, Europe, and New York; reports on company earnings, profits, and stocks; and portfolio management. There is a sense of vigilant markets stalking everyday security and politics in order to punish anxieties and uncertainties or strike against political activities that might restrain capital. The veneration, the surveillance, and the reportage of the market are on notice to reveal infractions of this anthropomorphized, yet oddly subject-free, sphere as a means of constructing moral panics around the conduct of whoever raises its ire.

In short, economic and labor news has been transmogrified into corporate news, and politics is measured in terms of its reception by business.

Bush Minor’s presidential addresses captured political helplessness and diurnal risk very effectively, emphasizing the evils and perils of the world in ways that directly articulate to superstition. Ever ready with a phrase describing or predicting catastrophic, apocalyptic terror, Minor had a lexicon in which the ratio of pessimistic words to optimistic ones was vastly greater than in those of FDR, Reagan, Bush the Elder, or Clinton. In his first term, the word “evil” appeared over 350 times in formal speeches. The 2004 presidential election testified to the efficacy of this approach, as risk of attack was the key issue in determining voters’ choices. It also made
money for his apparatchiks: Paul Bremer, Minor’s _patron_ of Iraq after the invasion, was one of the first to profit from September 11, quickly establishing a Crisis Consulting Practice. He falls into the emergent category of “risk managers,” who quantify danger and the cost of meeting it (“Congressional Report” 2005; Brooks 2003; “Faith” 2004: 27; Pew Research Center 2005: 4; Feldman 2005; Allan 2002: 90).

Media reactions to limit cases of risky-ness, played out in highly exaggerated ways and frequently projected onto scapegoats or “folk devils,” amount to “moral panics,” a term first coined in the early 1970s to describe media messages that announced an increase in the crime rate and the subsequent establishment of specialist police units to deal with the alleged problem. Moral panics are usually short-lived spasms that speak of ideological contradictions about economic inequality. Exaggerating a social problem, they symbolize it in certain groups, predict its future, and then conclude or change. Part of society is used to represent (and sometimes distort) a wider problem: Youth violence is a suitable case for panic about citizenship; systemic class inequality is not. Adolescent behavior and cultural style are questionable; capitalist degeneracy is not. Rap is a problem; the situation of urban youth is not. Particular kinds of individuals are labeled as dangerous to social well-being because of their “deviance” from agreed-upon norms of the general good. Once the individuals have been identified, their life-practices are then interpreted from membership of a group, and vice versa. Critics of the process rightly ask not “Why do people behave like this?” but “Why is this conduct deemed ‘deviant,’ and whose interest does that serve?” (Thompson 1998: 7; Erich Goode 2000; P. Cohen 1999: 192–93; Stanley Cohen 1973: 9–13; Yúdice 1990; Wichtel 2002).

Moral panics are often generated by the state or the media and then picked up by interest groups and social movements (or vice versa), and hence their impact is generally disproportionate to the “problems” they bring into being. The dual role of experts and media critics in the constitution of moral panics sees the former testifying to their existence, and the latter sensationalizing and diurnalizing them—making the risks attributed to a particular panic seem like a new, terrifying part of everyday life. The cumulative impact of this alliance between specialist and popular knowledge is a heightened, yet curiously normalized, sense of risk about and amongst the citizenry in general. When TV ratings are measured—each February, May, July, and November—news programs allocate massive space to supposed risks to viewers. The idea is to turn anxiety and sensation into spectatorship and money. The epithet once used to deride local TV journalism in the United States—“if it bleeds, it leads”—today
applies to network news, where the correlation between national crime statistics and crime coverage shows no rational linkage. The drive to create “human interest” stories from blood has become a key means of generating belief in a risk society through moral panics about personal safety. Such human interest stories occupied 16% of network news in 1997, up from 8% in 1977. Even when crime rates plunge, media discourse about crime rises: as the number of murders declines, press attention to them does the opposite. Similarly, school drug use may diminish, but audiences believe that it increases. The classic case of such absurdities is the popular rhetoric about young African-American men. Rates of violence, homicide, and drug use have fallen dramatically amongst black men under age 30 in the past decade, but media panic about their conduct has headed in the opposite direction (Barker 1999; Jenkins 1999: 4–5; Shaps 1994; Thompson 1998: 3, 12, 91; Wagner 1997: 46; Hickey 2004; Lowry 2003; Glassner 1999: xi, xxi, 29; Males 2004).

Moral panics are a displacement from socioeconomic crises and fissures, a means of dealing with risk society via appeals to “values.” They both contribute to, and are symptomatic of, risk society. But rather than being straightforward mechanisms of functional control that necessarily displace systemic social critique onto particular scapegoats, moral panics have themselves been transformed by the discourse of risk society. Because certain dangers seem ineradicable, moral panics are mobilized to highlight particular aspects of them that may be less intractable, but are nevertheless emblematic of wider problems in a way that deflects danger and anxiety away from their sources in the political economy. A recent example is the British Home Office’s 2004–8 Strategic Plan, which focuses on “anti-social behavior” as something that just is on the rise. It is not articulated to the economy (Ungar 2001; Hier 2003; Thompson 1998; Critcher 2003: 164; Squires 2006).

**Conclusion**

Most of her life, flying, she’d felt most vulnerable right here, suspended in a void, above trackless water, but now her conscious flying-fears are about things that might be arranged to happen over populous human settlements, fears of ground-to-air, of scripted CNN moments.

—Advertising consultant Cayce Pollard in William Gibson’s *Pattern Recognition* (2003: 120)

Despite the fact that the nation fails them abysmally, most of its residents
embrace the United States ideologically. Why? Because the right orchestrates moral panics that explain and place blame for the risk society in which people find themselves, even as it trumpets a national capacity for effective makeovers. Whereas the left and the center focus on public policy logics, researching problems and duly, dutifully, dully coming up with reasoned recommendations, the right leaves policy proposals to its corporate masters and does not undertake rational analyses aimed at technocratic outcomes. It prefers a blend of grass-roots religious superstition and public outreach that stresses column inches and shouted seconds, not cost-benefit policy options: the politics of spectacle. The outcome? The largest technocracy in history—the United States—has re-enchanted its world, turning capitalism and statecraft into magic.

There is a special appeal to this latest Great Awakening. It is a consumerist one, with selfishness and chauvinism characterizing a revocation of traditional Christianity, as if the latter embodied Great Society liberalism. An organic link is posited between apparent logocentric opposites: church and market. Perhaps these creepy Christians hear that famous tag line from San Diego televangelism—“prosperity is your divine right”—ringing in their ears (quoted in Murdock 1997: 96). The market may have torn these people’s lives apart, but the capitalistic basis to today’s Great Awakening gives them ideological backing (and a choice of their superstition) in a way that formal monetary markets do not. The illogic of supporting neoliberal economic policy is of little import. The market has become “an agent of morality, rewarding good and punishing evil” (Grossberg 2005: 117), for all the world a secular fate divinely decreed by a truly invisible hand.

The New Protestantism sometimes seems like a very Old Testament form, so lacking is it in the socialist principles of love and mercy offered by Christ’s teachings. Judgment, harsh and unbending, is its basis. And it makes two bizarre alliances—with pro-Zionist Jews, who might be unacceptable as neighbors, philanthropists, or intellectuals in the United States but are a good fit as custodians of Palestine until they are destroyed by the Rapture; and with corporations, which might be unacceptable as vendors of craven objects of consumption that articulate to sexual pleasure, science, and medicine but are a good fit as brutal bureaucracies that do not forgive failure and do oppose secular collectives such as unions.

The faith makeover and the drug makeover both invest in transformation through consumption. The culture industries are central to this compulsion to buy, through the double-sided nature of advertising and “the good life” of luxury: they encourage competition at the same time as they standardize processes to manufacture unity in the face of diversity. With all
the pleasurable affluence suggested by material goods, the idea of people achieving transcendence has been displaced by the overwhelming force of objects. Commodities dominate a formerly human and natural landscape. The corollary is the simultaneous triumph andemptiness of the sign as a source and a measure of value. Beginning as a reflection of reality, the commodity sign is transformed into a perversion of reality, with representation of the truth displaced by false information. Then these two, delineable, phases of truth and lies become indistinct. Underlying reality is lost. Finally, the sign refers to itself, with no residual need of correspondence to the real. It has adopted the form of its own simulation (Baudrillard 1988: 10–11, 29, 170). When people embrace risk, “human needs, relationships and fears, the deepest recesses of the human psyche, become mere means for the expansion of the commodity universe” (McChesney and Foster 2003: 1).

Is there an alternative, a world where a person can “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner . . . without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” (Marx and Engels 1995: 53), consuming and producing with pleasure and politics joined? A world that will rebut dehumanizing commodity fetishism, turning instead to the Xhosa saying that “a person is a person through other persons” (quoted in Dean 2001: 502)? Where we live between the promise of cosmopolitanism and the loss of national identity (García Canclini 2002: 50) rather than as “desiccated calculators . . . rational-choice rodents moved exclusively by the short range and the quantifiable” (Nairn 2003: 7), with “freedom to choose” once “the major political, economic, and social decisions have already been made” (Mosco 2004: 60)?

Such challenges inform what I have written here. I have come neither to bury nor to praise the makeover, but to criticize it, even as I stand alternately bewildered, amused, appalled, and attracted by it. Foundational myths of the “American Dream” permeate this book. And dreams reference and distort reality. They attract and please even as they horrify and disappoint. So I look at the power of various forms of knowledge about people and their emotions applied to the US population through case studies of therapy, drug treatments, and male bodies that illustrate how sublime makeovers see people actually become commodities, mediated through the psy-function, capital, and culture. If we are to understand an absurdly wealthy and wasteful country, we must question the pleasures of reinvention as well as embrace them, teasing out as we do so the mystification of moral panics and the reality of risk society.