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*"You keep buying things, but you don't need them
But as long as you're comfortable it feels like freedom."*

—Billy Bragg

"To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life."

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

"We created the [gourmet coffee] business."

—Howard Schultz, Starbucks CEO

The power of global capitalism lies in its ability to define the boundaries in which citizens can act and effect change in their local communities.¹ As globalization signifies the interdependence of national governments, international trade organizations, and transnational business interests, the lines between local and global issues blur, making it unclear to whom citizens must appeal in order to effect change.² The most recent round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, for example, prohibits passing any local legislation that regulates business in a way that can be interpreted as a restriction to free trade. This means that if citizens in Illinois pass a local law banning certain pesticides from food, the World Trade Organization, not the people of Illinois, have the ultimate power to decide whether that law can stand.³ Such trade agreements reshape traditional notions of citizenship by limiting the agency individuals can achieve through civic participation in electoral and legislative matters.

As citizens lose some of their traditional power, a new vision of citizenship becomes increasingly relevant. Saskia Sassen adopts the term *economic citizenship* to describe how globalization decreases the importance of national sovereignty and redefines citizenship in economic terms. Economic citizenship means accepting the task of defining political agency around the roles each of us plays in the cycle of global production and consumption. Many political acts we perform each day, in terms of our economic citizenship, occur not in the voting booths or even the statehouse but in the stores, the workplace, and in our homes.

Economic citizens act politically by making critical choices as consumers and producers, by buying or refusing to buy, working or refusing to work, by writing and speaking out about trade agreements, IMF practices, and corporate behavior. Additionally, I would suggest, economic citizens act by critically examining and questioning the dominant narratives that are circulated in and about the economic system. James Berlin discusses a similar issue when he describes a need to interrogate “the insertion of myth between the realm of truth and the realm of ethical action” (55). Cultural narratives that “aestheticiz[e] politics,” according to Berlin, often evade critique, allowing people to overlook contradictions in existing material conditions. Similarly, Paul Smith describes the present economic moment as marked by the “hyperextension of interpellative discourses and representations” (35). In other words, like Berlin, he sees the powerful role language and symbolic representations play in creating subjects who overlook gaps between the “news” about the economy and everyday realities. Powerful economic narratives naturalize a system of global exchange where trade and business priorities take precedence over other concerns, including the well-being of workers, consumers, and the environment.

One necessity of the global economy is continual economic growth; this requires businesses to create new customers and new products for customers to need.⁴ New and often contradictory consumer needs are created, in real terms, all the time. Commodities that didn’t exist until recently—such as gourmet coffee, cell phones, and sports-utility vehicles—are now things many swear they can’t live without. We live in a country that sells both escalators and stair-masters. We drink gourmet coffee and take sleeping pills. We eat McDonald’s and drink Slim-fast. This is a curious, if not sad, state of affairs.

Can rhetoric help by facilitating economic citizenship?

Citizenship and civic engagement have been longstanding concerns of rhetoric. Orators and rhetoricians as historically and ideologically diverse as Cicero, Quintilian, Hugh Blair, Margaret Fell, Sojourner Truth, Kenneth Burke, James Berlin, and Edward Schiappa have shared concerns about the relevance of rhetorical studies for developing active citizens. In “Intellectuals and the Place of Cultural Critique,” Schiappa exhorts intellectuals to see themselves as active citizens, participating in public debates through newspaper writing and addressing public forums. For key figures in classical rhetoric, Schiappa notes, to be engaged in rhetoric was to be directly involved in pressing civic debates, and he encourages contemporary rhetoricians to see ourselves in that tradition.⁵ He suggests that intellectuals should engage in cultural critique “not only [in] the classroom or academic books and journals, but also ‘in the streets’ and in other nonacademic public and private forums” (21). To avoid participating in public discourse and to work only in the classroom, Schiappa suggests, results in

“‘trickle-down’ citizen participation” (23). In *Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures*, James Berlin worries about how well education is preparing students to be “critical citizens of the nation” in the face of the drastic global economic and cultural shifts associated with postmodernity (52). He describes how restructuring financial markets and the shift toward a post-Fordist flexible system of production create a new climate in which we live and work. Berlin’s work indicates that the rules of citizenship are changing, as rapidly as the economy is, and we need to be attuned to those shifts as teachers and as scholars.

Economics, to some extent, already figures in rhetorical investigations of political and public discourse (see for example Robert L. Brown and Carl Herndl’s analysis of the John Birch Society or Richard Marback’s exploration of the Joe Louis Memorial in Detroit). What I am suggesting is a shift of degree and not kind by focusing on the economic aspects of citizenship. What is changing is how completely the global economic sphere seeks to delineate and shape the political, as Berlin suggests (40-41). If rhetoric is the “ability to see the available means of persuasion” as Aristotle suggests, rhetorical analysis can be an act of citizenship by interrogating how economic forces seek to predetermine and limit the means available to citizens (1355a).

One aspect of economic citizenship worth considering is the roles language and persuasion play in defining habits of consumption. Cynthia Enloe, a political scientist, argues that scholars need to take the consumer-market relationship far more seriously than they usually do because it “not only mirrors changes in the global dynamics, it is helping to shape those dynamics” (197). I am not suggesting that narratives alone create or sustain consumer needs; rather they interact with complex and changing material conditions and engage consumers in a process of persuasion. Products like coffee and cell phones do provide certain tangible, material pleasures and conveniences to consumers. The social system itself can make some purchases—like a car or a caffeinated beverage—literally necessary to get through the working day. The problem, however, is that corporate narratives in the forms of PR and advertising offer myopic visions that magnify the positive attributes of a commodity and disconnect the consuming experience from alternative experiences, the material conditions that precipitate the need, how and by whom the product is produced, and how the profits are distributed. When we act as consumers, we assent, even if incompletely or momentarily, to such partial and fragmented narratives. They are comforting because they allow us not to look beyond the story to see the global picture.

This condition can be explained by introducing the concept of *scotosis*: rationalized acts of selective blindness that occur by allowing certain

information to be discounted or unexamined. According to the *OED*, the etymology of its root word, *scotoma*, means “dizziness” and “to darken, to make dim-sighted” (251).⁶ *Scotosis* is a term that can help explain more fully the rhetorical process of interpellation as an ideological subject, in this case a consumer. One isn’t duped, nor are false needs created. Rather, one is persuaded by the justifications offered within the narratives to remain, perhaps only momentarily or uncomfortably, within its parameters. It is thinking and acting within the frame offered. Nawal el Saadawi provides a good example of this type of blindness when discussing her training to become a doctor. She says she was drawn to medical school out of her passion for people, but once there she was taught to lose sight of whole people, instead to fragment them into pieces, to see spleens, kidneys, blood; this is an instance of scotosis. To suffer scotosis is to accept the rhetorical presence of a given narrative frame and act in the directions that frame suggests. It is analogous to looking in one direction without turning your head.⁷

I suggest that corporations circulate persuasive narratives that justify themselves, their products and the economic system. The stories are often “true,” if one remains within the narrow parameters they set. Corporations seek to induce consumer scotosis in an effort to create new consumer needs. Analyzing the condition of scotosis is to look beyond the narratives offered and to name what is missing. It’s an effort to broaden the cultural stories, and thus perspectives, about producers and consumers within the global capitalist framework. This is useful cultural work for economic citizens, as Herbert Marcuse’s words remind us: “Naming the ‘things that are absent’ is breaking the spell of things that are; moreover it is the ingress of a different order of things into the established one” (68).

Rhetorical analysis as an effort to disrupt scotosis requires that certain questions be asked: How do narratives frame people as consumers? What needs do they promise to satisfy? What other needs do they deny? Where and how are the producers in these narratives portrayed? What material contradictions get ignored? What are consumers asked not to see, not to consider? What lies unspoken outside of these discourses? It is not enough to say *that* language creates narrow scripts for consumers and producers. Rhetorical analysis can interrogate the inducement of scotosis, which then sets the stage for critique, responses, and action.⁸

Scotosis at Work: The Narratives of Starbucks

“Coffee is one of the special things I have, instead of a social life.”

—Joel Achenbach

The Seattle-based Starbucks Coffee Company is a major contributor to, if not entirely responsible for, the rise of a gourmet coffee culture in the United States. Starbucks' Chief Executive Officer, Howard Schultz, says that he can be personally thanked for the gourmet coffee craze: "I came back [from Italy] with the drink *caffè latte* in 1982. That word was not in existence in this town before we opened up our first coffee bar in April of 1984 in downtown Seattle. We created this business" (Gower 19). According to its shareholder report, Starbucks is the "leading retailer and roaster of specialty coffee in North America" (2). Since 1989 Starbucks' sales have increased more than 500 times, last year netting \$996 million. Through an aggressive expansion policy, Starbucks has grown to more than 1,900 stores, mainly in metropolitan markets of North America (up from just 17 stores in 1987) (Starbucks, "The Company"). In 1994 Schultz boasted that his firm is creating a "Starbucks nation," expanding at a rate of four stores per week, and he accurately predicted that he would have "thousands and thousands" of Starbucks locations worldwide by the end of the decade (Gower 19).

Building a "Starbucks nation" requires creating a group of Starbucks consumers who are persuaded to act within the narratives that the company offers. Starbucks offers consumers "fanatical commitment to quality" (Starbucks, "Shareholder Report" 2), strict attention to detail and standardization, a unique language with which to talk about the products as well as elaborate narratives about a unique coffee experience. Starbucks is not the only gourmet coffee company that uses a specialized vocabulary, but it is the biggest and it was the first to do so on a mass scale.

So what do we buy when we buy a cup of Starbucks? One might be tempted to argue, "Just good coffee." But that position itself engages in *scotosis*, because it looks narrowly at the quality of the product (something the consumer somehow "deserves") and ignores the Starbucks worldview as well as the ramifications of its practices within the global economy. When we consume Starbucks, we consume justifying narratives along with the products. This is a similar argument to Shekhar Deshpande and Andy Kurtz's analysis of *The Body Shop*, a London-based cosmetic company. Deshpande and Kurtz argue that rather than the products, it is the discourse of "social responsibility" and "profits with principle" surrounding the Body Shop that legitimize it and make it profitable. They argue that the products consumed there are not only soap and shampoo but also discourses of liberal-politics. Like the Body Shop, Starbucks "produces as many explanations, justifications, and illustrations as it does primary goods" (Deshpande and Kurtz 38).

At Starbucks the justifying narratives can be found within the physical set-up of the store, in the process of buying coffee, and within the vast amounts of

literature it produces. The stores are generally located in urban or suburban high-traffic and high-income areas, and despite individual variations, are recognizably homogenous. Cherry-wood and brass accents set the scene, and at center stage in every store is a long coffee bar dominated by a “\$7,000 dreaded espresso machine” (Van Matre 1). Behind it bustles an often-frantic, highly energetic staff of workers, called *baristas*; this term, which is Italian for “bartender,” has become an industry standard for people who make espresso. The *baristas* wear matching uniforms consisting of green aprons and logoed baseball caps or visors. All orders are communicated and passed along verbally, in a system of call-and-response. The orders rapidly repeated back and forth take on a strange cadence, given the denseness of the terminology: “*doppio con panna*,” “double tall skinny iced decaf no whip skim mocha.” With all the scenery and action, set to the hiss and sputter of the espresso machine, a Starbucks store contains all the elements of a theatrical performance. In *A Primer for Daily Life*, Susan Willis describes how places of consumption often take on the look of a “postmodern museum” and a theater (17). She describes shopping places as stages for costumed employees to enact service:

Often, the employees’ pert hats and aprons mimic the colors and patterns of the store’s interior decor, making the [store] a stage for sales and the costumed employees the actors enacting service. . . . This is an instance where labor is truly rendered as performance, and hence, a commodity—customers consume the spectacle of work. Such spectacle stands in the place of any reference to the hundreds of laborers who cultivated, harvested, packed, shipped and marketed [the goods]. (17-18)

Thus, at Starbucks one need not even buy a cup of coffee, for one is a consumer the minute she walks in the door and comes face to face with its costumed employees and its chrome espresso bar—a consumer of the spectacle and the narratives created to surround the products. This sort of spectacle is one way scotosis is induced. Consumers are encouraged not to think of the people who plant, harvest, and transport coffee but instead to see only the performing *baristas* who take center stage, enacting the service of making coffee.

Deciding to make a purchase at Starbucks, one is faced with another inducement to scotosis in the form of Starbucks’ specialized terminology. Starbucks offers its consumers an overwhelming array of drink choices; including all sizes and different options, the drink selections number in the dozens. Because many different drinks are available, one can entertain the illusion that a drink choice is tailored specifically to one’s individual desires.

This narrative that much is available emphasizes a myth of “pseudo-individuality” to encourage standardization while maintaining the illusion of the autonomy of the individual, a claim Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno assert as endemic of the culture industry (154). They also argue that the presence of so many choices encourages total reliance on what is offered (142). Since Starbucks stresses so much choice within a fixed setting, to comply with what’s offered, consumers must transform their desires. A need that may have begun as “I am sleepy,” or “I am overworked,” taken to Starbucks must be translated to, “I need a cup of coffee,” and then further specialized to something like “I need a doppio almond espresso ristretto from Starbucks.”

Given the number of minor variations, ordering a drink could easily turn into a lengthy process between consumer and *barista*. Such a dialogue would not be desirable to Starbucks since it could be time-consuming, and would also allow too much of the kind of “space” that both Marcuse and Adorno and Horkheimer describe as necessary to critically consider items outside the menu. To speed up the interaction, each drink choice has a “proper” name, which is a phrase with a correct word order, such as “Iced Grande Skim Hazelnut Latte.” The Starbucks lexicon is used by the employees and taught to customers through verbal repetition and an assortment of brochures, which act as instructional literature. Drink names may contain upwards of five words, and there is a correct word order. Options are printed on the menu overhead; syntax is not. One must learn the “proper” word order from the coaching of the *baristas* and the repetition that follows. The drink names at Starbucks exemplify functionalized language as described by Marcuse: it is noun-based, and thus processes are frozen into things (84-88). Such cumbersome language, once repeated often enough, becomes just another “natural” part of the purchasing ritual. Marcuse suggests that “the ritualized concept is made immune against contradiction” (88).

Starbucks attempts to persuade consumers that drinking its coffee is a transcendent gourmet experience. The language and images of Starbucks bolster the assertion that its beverages are not merely coffee; rather they are made from incomparable ingredients and prepared to exacting standards. Therefore, the language used to describe the drinks must be completely different. This belief is reinforced by stamping one of two slogans on its disposable cups. One, “The Weather Changes Our Grind,” tells customers that a variation in weather can drastically change the taste of a cup of coffee. At the same time, the message assures consumers that Starbucks adjusts its grinding technique in order to offer a consistent cup: “Our coffee preparation is so exacting that the grind of our coffee is constantly monitored. Even a change in weather can precipitate a change in our grind. It’s our guarantee that your next cup of Starbucks will be as

good as your last.” How truthful or valid this statement is makes little difference; the message is consumed by people purchasing the coffee, by others standing with them at bus stops, and by anyone else faced with the cup once discarded as trash. The assurance that Starbucks will provide the drinker with a perfect cup of coffee in any weather lives on long past the actual drink. A second message gives espresso drinkers the “10 second rule” strictly followed by *baristas*. If a shot of espresso is not served within 10 seconds of brewing, it is poured out. Again, this message of efficiency, which actually valorizes wastefulness as a virtue, becomes an integral part of the product served by Starbucks.

More prevalent than the messages on its coffee cups is Starbucks’ logo, a ubiquitous image that even passers-by recognize and consume. Willis describes logos as images first used in the 1930s and 1940s by the oil industry to demarcate roadside gas stations. Highway travelers, whether stopping or not, would consume the logo (58). Starbucks’ logo is an ambiguous female Siren or mermaid. Her hair is long, her body is curvy, and her mouth is open. Her arms are spread out to her side, and what appears to be her tail is spread wide, disappearing behind her crowned head. Willis contends that “if logos are predominantly graphic abstractions, they allow the consumer to interpret them according to his or her fantasies” (53). This sexualized logo is a form of visual rhetoric, appearing on store signs and disposable cups as a constant reminder of the company and its products, perhaps appealing to the majority-male Starbucks’ repeat customers (Gower 22).

Through extended narratives found in its brochures, Starbucks addresses its drinkers’ libidos in a technical way, by drawing from the languages of science and technology at the same time as sex, art, and fantasy. The language, and the drinks, speak of unbridled pleasure that is absolutely, scientifically the most pleasurable of all. These brochures emphasize the company’s paradoxical marketing approach: to portray the making of great coffee as a precarious combination of scientific exactness and uncontrolled passion.

One brochure, “Espresso: What You Need to Know,” borrows heavily from the discourses of technology and science. Technological terms such as *standardization*, *high-pressure commercial quality units*, *rate*, and *capabilities* communicate a sense of machinery and exactness. This meticulousness is carried over into day-to-day interactions within Starbucks. At every locale the espresso machine is the focal point around which the coffee bar is built. Because of the “10 Second Rule,” employees are expected to work in an assembly-line fashion with machine-like consistency and speed. According to one Starbucks employee, corporate representatives randomly and secretly pose as customers, purchasing drinks to assure consistency; they check that the *baristas* use the

proper drink names, and, with a concealed thermometer, they measure the exact temperature of the drink (Lofton). Espresso beans, if ground but not brewed within one hour, are thrown away. A tendency to transform waste into need is a characteristic of consumerist "one-dimensional" society, according to Marcuse (9). Before Starbucks ever made such rigid freshness claims, pouring or throwing out good coffee would have been considered a wasteful procedure, rather than a sign of careful brewing. But once proclaimed as a motto, which is reproduced on cups and brochures, such efficiency is written into the narrative of what consumers "need" and thus are asked to demand.

Closely related to the technological language (and procedures), the "Espresso: What You Need to Know" brochure contains numerous references to science and medicine. The very title assumes the dire, medical tone more commonly associated with an informational brochure on venereal-disease prevention than one for a coffee shop. Other examples of medical language include "the right dose," "extraction," "method," "variables," "experiment," "optimum temperature," "results," and "critical." By detailing the meticulous steps involved in coffee brewing, Starbucks spins a narrative that a successful cup is always elusive. The company promises, however, that following the instructions carefully will improve one's "chances of achieving good results." Good results, as defined by Starbucks, depend on strict attention to a confusing array of variables: bean type, roast, grind, "dosage," equipment, and even climate changes. Since "The Weather Changes Our Grind," is never backed up with information about how Starbucks adjusts for climate changes, it reminds consumers that they can never match Starbucks' exacting standards. Coffee is positioned no longer as a drink, but as a drug that must be administered by skilled professionals in its proper "dose."⁹ The company can then justify its elaborate rituals and higher prices all in the name of good science, and firmly establish its authority. To either learn all the nuances of brewing, or to avoid the hassles and buy brewed coffee from the pros, one must defer to the knowledge of the *baristas* and to the awkward and confusing language they speak.

Starbucks' discourse, crucially, does not rely on the language of technology and science alone. At the same time as emphasizing strict brewing procedures, Starbucks promises how sensual and refined an experience drinking its coffee will be. To capture this element of eroticism and connoisseurship, Starbucks echoes language commonly used to describe sexuality, wine-tasting, art, philosophy, and European imperialism. As an erotic experience, espresso-drinking is presented as a momentary thrill, one which will leave the drinker almost painfully wanting more. This is achieved by the use of phrases like "savored momentarily," "burst of flavor sensed throughout the mouth," "fleeting flavor," and "rewarding the drinker." Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer all

discuss how eroticism can be manipulatively used as a means of “(controlled) satisfaction” (Marcuse 75), sexual pleasure that has been reduced to “a masochistic semblance” (Horkheimer and Adorno 140).

In addition to being an erotic thrill, gourmet coffee is portrayed as a pleasure to be appreciated by aficionados with highly refined taste. Europe, especially Italy, is referred to time and again as a romantic world of connoisseurs who should be emulated. The basis for Starbucks’ language is Italian: *Barista, doppio, chiaro, ristretto, machiatto, and con panna* are all Italian-based drink names while sizes are short, tall, or *grande*. References are made to the “authentic,” “Italian coffee culture,” “aficionados,” “in France and Italy,” “Milan and Turin.” Throughout many brochures, coffee-drinking is compared to wine connoisseurship. “The World of Coffee” includes a glossary of coffee-tasting terminology, with terms reminiscent of wine-tasting, like “earthy,” “briny,” “mellow,” “tangy” and even “winy—a desirable flavor reminiscent of fine red wine.” To drink Starbucks and to speak the language allows the consumer to define him- or herself as someone with refined tastes, without requiring the massive costs of fine art or wine collecting. It allows consumers to partake in a fast-food version of a European connoisseur tradition. According to Pierre Bourdieu, command of language is one of the key elements that allows a person the distinction of connoisseurship: “Through his [sic] mastery of a verbal accompaniment, preferably technical, archaic and esoteric, which separates informed tasting from mere passive consumption, the connoisseur shows himself worthy of symbolically appropriating the rarities he had the material needs of acquiring” (279).

While coffee consumption is portrayed as an act of connoisseurship, Starbucks’ narratives romanticize coffee production. Its descriptions encourage consumers to ignore or exoticize the people who plant, grow, and harvest the coffee, by erasing them or by invoking imperialistic¹⁰ images to describe the relationship between Starbucks and the rest of the world. In “The World of Coffee,” Starbucks describes its coffee as “exotic . . . coffee with unusual aromatic and flavor notes . . . [c]offees from East Africa and Indonesia often have such characteristics.” What makes the coffee exotic is that it was grown in such an “exotic” place. The brochure, “The Story of Good Coffee from the Pacific Northwest,” details the company’s purchasing practices as, “Buying the best the world has to offer.” There it’s “the world,” not specific people in specific countries who grow and provide coffee.

Willis argues that US companies regularly portray grower nations in fetishized ways: “. . . the Third World is . . . a cornucopia spilling out a steady supply of ordinary foodstuffs for North American supermarkets” (48). This attitude is especially prevalent in the Starbucks brochure that focuses on “Dave

Olsen . . . [who] travels the world in search of the best beans. He knows the name of a country means something, but not everything. . . . Each variety of coffee has distinctive regional characteristics, which may vary from season to season much like fine wine grapes do" (Starbucks, "World of Coffee"). Countries, in and of themselves, mean very little to Dave or US consumers. People don't seem to exist there at all. All that matters is the quality of the resource that can be taken from each country.

"The World of Coffee" brochure catalogues coffees by country of origin while referring to a highly stylized map. The coffee from each country is numbered, mapped, and divided by location as "The Americas," "East African," and "Indonesian." Visual logos portray each country: Arabian Mocha Sanani is depicted by a man on a camel, Kenya is represented by a large elephant, and Ethiopia by a dark woman in a patterned head scarf. The location of each country is marked with a number on a map drawn to resemble those of colonialist explorers of the seventeenth century. Willis argues that to consumers such nostalgic labels become a chic element of consumption (52). Within the text descriptions, Sulawesi coffee is described as being grown in "the former Dutch colony known as Celebes." The great taste of estate java coffee is directly credited to colonization: "Great coffee has been cultivated in Java ever since the Dutch first transplanted trees there in 1696." Not surprisingly, use of the passive voice leaves unanswered the question, cultivated by whom?

In the world of these brochures, countries exist merely as storehouses of commodities, which seem to be planted, tended, and harvested without the labor of individuals. Erased from this narrative are those who pick the coffee in countries such as Brazil, where almost two-thirds of the people are undernourished, and where workers make a day wage sufficient to buy only a moderate portion of beans (Stolcke 226). Such erasure encourages consumers to believe, as Jean Baudrillard proclaims, that being poor means, effectively, not to exist (Faigley 210).

When depicting coffee producers, Starbucks presents romanticized images while promoting its own work with aid organizations like CARE. Starbucks donates two dollars to CARE from the purchase of a special "CARE sampler" of coffees from Kenya, Guatemala, Sumatra, and Java. The company also boasts other financial donations to global charities as well as donation of its "old" coffee beans to local charities. The advertisement of these donation practices, as well as a health-care package available to part-time employees at its retail stores, allows Starbucks to create a reputation as an ethical, global-friendly coffee purveyor. While retail workers deserve health care, Starbucks undoubtedly benefits from its provision of benefits and charity work as a form of self-promotion:

This two dollar contribution, in addition to Starbucks ongoing annual grant, will help bring clean drinking water and a healthful future to the people of Indonesia and Guatemala; as well as environmental and health education to Kenyan children. As one of CARE's major contributors, we're able to support these vital programs, and we invite you to join us. Together, we can help the people in these coffee-producing countries, and show our appreciation for the years of pleasure their coffee has shown us.

Starbucks shows its "appreciation for the years of pleasure their coffee has shown" not by seeking to pay workers on coffee plantations a subsistent wage but rather by donating to an aid organization. In other words, the company need not concern itself with the economic conditions of its global business operations as long as it donates money to a charity. At the same time, it allows the company to present an image to its consumers as a politically committed enterprise. Consumers are thus encouraged to indulge in connoisseur fantasies while remaining exempt from any guilt.

To summarize, the narratives presented by the Starbucks Coffee Company include spoken and written texts as well as logos and other visual images. They surround its products with claims that equate consumption with connoisseurship by borrowing from scientific and sensual discourses. At the same time, these narratives distort a consumer's view of the acts of production—both by exaggerating the role of *barista* as a performative spectacle and erasing the conditions of non-US laborers who grow and harvest coffee. These narratives not only justify inflated prices for their products, they also invite consumers to view the experience of buying coffee through the myopic lenses they provide.

This case study is an effort to explore how corporations create discourses of consumption and, in doing so, examines just one aspect of economic citizenship. Other questions warrant consideration: What real human needs are not being met that, in their place, corporations promise to fulfill them in the form of a commodity? What are consumers saying about what they buy and what it means? What are the stories of producers? What do they say about their work?

Not to explore these other questions is a mistake, according to Adorno, who sternly reminds would-be cultural critics that examining consumer needs is a worthless enterprise if in doing so one loses sight of the overall system that fosters consumption: "Whenever cultural criticism complains of 'materialism,' it furthers the belief that the sin lies in man's [sic] desire for consumer goods, and not in the organization of the whole which withholds these goods from man: for the cultural critic, the sin is satiety not hunger" (24-25). In other words, the

problem is not a desire for a good cup of coffee, but in the way that desire is written into scripts in a global capitalist system that encourages consumer scotosis. Scotosis is rhetorical, in that the narratives create a persuasive worldview within which it is easy and comforting to remain.

Rhetorical analysis, therefore, as an aspect of economic citizenship, can explore how corporate scripts encourage the beliefs that all human needs can be satisfied within the commodity form and that the unpleasant realities of the commodity system are either nonexistent or inconsequential. To combat this scotosis, it is necessary to go outside the frames, take off the blinders, and consider ways of desiring differently. As John Tomlinson writes, “people have other desires: for health, security, freedom from anxiety, and for autonomy (particularly in the way they spend their time). It is by no means clear that capitalist culture delivers these ‘goods’ with the same efficiency it delivers consumer goods” (131).

Focusing on discourses of consumption and production, rhetoricians can begin to explore the realm of economic citizenship—how we act and interact in a world of producers and consumers. By resisting conditions of scotosis, we can analyze, teach, and speak out (as Schiappa advises) about the ways discourses of consumption and production are justifying changes in our world. We can also boycott, strike, and protest. Voices in journals, newspapers, and in classrooms can seek to envision more humane practices for the global marketplace in which we live. Like the needs explored here, meaningful alternatives cannot be desired by people until they are articulated.

Notes

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²For arguments on globalization, see among others, Saskia Sassen's *Losing Control: Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, William Greider's *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, Richard Longworth's *Global Squeeze: The Coming Crisis for First World Nations*, and Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith's edited collection *The Case Against the Global Economy, and For a Turn Toward the Local*.

³For a discussion of this issue, see “GATT, NAFTA, and the Subversion of the Democratic Process” by Ralph Nader and Lori Wallach (in Mander and Goldsmith).

⁴See Paul Wachtel's *The Poverty of Affluence* for a critique of the psychological dependence on the value of growth.

⁵For other recent treatment of the public responsibilities of rhetoricians, see for example, Peter Mortenson and Elizabeth Ervin.

⁶*Scotosis* was introduced to me by James Sosnoski, who references this term in *Token Professionals and Master Critics: A Critique of Orthodoxy in Literary Studies* (237). He uses it to describe the tendency (among orthodox critics and others) not to let oneself know what one doesn't know (179). Bernard Lonergan named this act *scotosis* in *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Insight, according to Lonergan, is the “apprehension of relations,” while oversight is an effort to engage in a “flight from understanding” (xi-xiii). Scotosis is an example of a flight from

understanding, a rationalized act of ruling out certain information or viewpoints from one's consideration. According to Lonergan, there is a willfulness to one's acts of scotosis—we allow certain blindspots to exist—yet the actual process of ruling out information is an unconscious and largely emotional response (191-92).

⁷Scotosis, as an integral part of accepting a subject position, is necessary to act in the world, thus certain blindspots are inevitable in all individuals. It's unavoidable that "American consumer" is a partially blind position; the problem arises when alternative visions do not carry equal sway (like that of a Brazilian coffee grower) and when the position of consumer is one that can be occupied all the time.

This description is informed by Althusser's discussion of the process of interpellation into ideology. According to Althusser, as one is hailed, "Hey you," one begins to engage in behaviors that maintain one's place as an ideological subject. I also inform my understanding of scotosis with Gramsci's view of hegemony (12): it has a rhetorical component, in that subjects are persuaded of benefits to self by engaging in certain choices or behaviors. (Richard Ohmann argues similarly when investigating how advertising works in *Selling Culture*.)

⁸This article is part of a larger work in which I analyze justifying narratives related to economic culture and consider how rhetoric and composition can offer useful analytic and pedagogical responses to economic globalization. I see this essay as a continuation of the long tradition of rhetorical analysis of consumer culture, both within and outside the discipline of rhetoric. I owe much to the history of cultural studies, beginning alternately with Antonio Gramsci's discussions of the importance of everyday life and the Frankfurt School's attention to the culture industry, especially Adorno and Marcuse. These traditions were elaborated by the Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. The tradition of cultural studies continues to influence American academics in English departments, especially in areas of composition studies. James Berlin's composition pedagogy at Purdue largely emphasized analyses of cultural binaries and asked students to understand how language constructed them as subjects. Patricia Harkin refined this tradition after Berlin's death (see Mathieu et al.). In the discipline of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke paid close attention to rhetorical analyses of current political issues (e.g., his analysis of Hitler's *Battle*) as well as the way corporate culture created its own "good conscience" (he explores this in *Attitudes Toward History*).

⁹By relying on the discourse of medicine and science, Starbucks echoes the historical tradition of coffee. When introduced to sixteenth-century Europe, coffee was hailed for its medicinal value as a virtual panacea (Schivelbusch 19). In the seventeenth century when it replaced beer as the European morning drink of choice, it was lauded for its ability to make workers more alert and efficient. Historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls coffee an "ideologically freighted drink" that helped society make the transition into the modern industrial age (38): "[C]offee functioned as a historically significant drug. It spread through the body and achieved chemically and pharmacologically what rationalism and the Protestant ethic sought to fulfill spiritually and ideologically. . . . The result was a body which functioned in accord with the new demands—a rationalistic, middle-class, forward-looking body" (39).

¹⁰In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams distinguishes between the original definition of "imperialism" as a form of government and its evolution to refer to an economic practice. The discourse of Starbucks relies on nostalgic references to periods of colonial exploration (through graphics and language choice). At the same time, Starbucks seeks to appropriate the riches of raw materials from the supplier countries and to present such appropriations as a right of Western consumers. William refers to this economic form of imperialism as "neo-imperialism" and "neo-colonialism" (132).

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Cynthia L. Selfe and Patricia Lambert Stock are the featured speakers for the 6th Spilman Symposium on Issues in Teaching Writing, presented by the Virginia Military Institute, November 13, 1999. The topic for this year's meeting is "Composition and the 'Real World': Designing Connections." Faculty from across the disciplines are welcome. Limited registration. For information contact Robert L. McDonald, Department of English & Fine Arts, VMI, Lexington, VA 24450. E-mail mcdonaldrk@vmi.edu.