



GODS OF GEEKDOM

MAX HEADROOM

You get 15 geek points for Max. Max Headroom was a fictional computer-generated TV personality that escaped the control of his creator and was generally a pain in the ass, revealing all kinds of stuff that Network 23 would rather not have sent out to the world. The TV show was set 20 minutes into the future, in a dystopian Earth ruled by an oligarchy of TV networks. The show is all about the politics of a world overwhelmingly dominated by media corporations. What will surprise you is that most of the people reading this textbook weren't even born when it came out. Yeah, that's right, all those "new" concerns about media and politics ... they ain't new at all. All that stuff about social construction of inequality, elite manipulations of media content, commercial corporate imperatives polluting news, the disruptive power of the loss of government control over information flows, it was all in Max Headroom.

In some ways, that shouldn't be surprising because all the stuff in the show was essentially stuff that people argued about when satellites first started having an effect on TV news; or when TV started to take hold; or when radio began to spread, and the telegraph, and the printing press; and at countless other moments in history. Put it this way: basically anything you might say about Fox News you can find in century-old discussions of William Randolph Hurst. For some reason, media is one aspect of politics where we suffer from a state of constant amnesia and can't seem to remember what we agonized over and argued about a decade or a century earlier. Max Headroom is a perfect reminder that most of the media stuff of today is not new.