

Transnational Media Corporations and Global Division of Cultural Labor and Consumption

Les groupes de communication transnationaux et la division globale du travail et de la consommation

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Abstract

This essay describes the new international division of cultural labor used by transnational media corporations (TNMCs) that structurally consolidate and creatively coordinate local and global media production. TNMCs produce culturally and linguistically diverse hybrid media content for television, film, and advertising that complements and contributes to a global consumer culture necessary for neoliberal capitalism. Parallel to this new division of creative labor, a new international culture of consumption popularizes lifestyle identities, culturally proximate images, and stories of individual gratification—underwritten by entertainment media and interlocking transnational advertising firms. The transnational media structure thus plays an instrumental role in creating audiences amenable to mass consumption, individual gratification, and market authority.

Keywords

Transnational media, cultural labor, consumerism, political economy.

Résumé

Cet article décrit la nouvelle division internationale du travail culturel -en œuvre dans les industries culturelles et créatives transnationales (TNMC, pour *Trans National Media Corporation*)- qui consolide au niveau structurel et coordonne au niveau créatif la production médiatique locale et globale. Les TNMC produisent pour la télévision, le cinéma et la publicité, des contenus médiatiques hybrides tant au niveau linguistique que culturel, qui contribuent à une culture mondiale

de la consommation indispensable au capitalisme néolibéral. Parallèlement à cette nouvelle division du travail créatif, une nouvelle culture internationale de la consommation vulgarise des modes de vie, des images culturelles de proximité, et des histoires de gratification individuelle, cautionnés par les médias de divertissement et la publicité transnationale des entreprises. La structure des médias transnationaux joue donc un rôle déterminant dans la création de publics acquis à la consommation de masse, la gratification individuelle, et l'autorité des marchés.

Mots clés

Média transnational, travail culturel, consommation, économie politique.

Resumen

Este ensayo describe la nueva división internacional del trabajo cultural usado por corporaciones de medios transnacionales (TNMCs) que estructuralmente consolidar y coordinar de manera creativa la producción de medios locales y globales. Ellos producen híbrido cultural y lingüísticamente diverso contenido multimedia para televisión, cine, y publicidad comercial. Estas prácticas complementan y contribuyen a la cultura del consumo global que es necesario para el capitalismo neoliberal. En paralelo a esta la nueva división internacional del trabajo, una nueva cultura global de consume populariza identidades en el estilo de vida, culturalmente proximal imágenes, y historias de gratificación individual. Este es promovido por los medios de entretenimiento y las compañías de publicidad globales. La estructura de los medios de comunicación transnacionales es instrumental para la creación de audiencias que son atraídos a consumo, gratificación individual, y autoridad del libre mercado capitalista.

Palabres clave

Medios transnacionales, trabajo cultural, consumo, economía política.

Introduction: The Context of Globalization

While it has always been true that power differentials in social relations have dictated who can speak and when, the transition to transnational capitalism has radically altered how communication is produced and distributed. “*The ability to transcend spatial limitations on commerce [with communication technology] has increased the variety, importance, and organization of various up-front and after-market windows worldwide when calculating potential sales revenue*” (Havens, 2006, p. 38)—permitting transnationals “*the power to exploit minute spatial difference to good effect,*” (Harvey in Havens, 2006, p. 38) taking advantage of differences in labor costs, tax policies, interest rates, access to ancillary services, and so on. Economists have noted that the global predominance of flexible production schemes resulting from the relocation of production to new industrial sites, increasingly in the developing countries, has been combined with accelerated rationalization measures designed to increase labor productivity at previously established sites. Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs, & Otto Kreye (2004) designate this global structural movement the “*new international division of labour,*” arguing that it has led to a manufacturing crisis in industrial countries, as well as to the first steps towards export-oriented manufacturing in the developing countries, and local production controlled by transnational capital merged with national. They see these trends as being largely independent of the policies pursued by individual governments and the strategies for expansion adopted by individual firms. To overcome the social power of organized labor in the

industrialized nations, transnational capital exports production elsewhere. “*The development of the world economy has increasingly created conditions (forcing the development of the new international division of labour) in which the survival of more and more companies can only be assured through the relocation of production to new industrial sites, where labour-power is cheap to buy, abundant and well-disciplined; in short, through the transnational reorganization of production*” (Fröbel, Heinrichs, & Kreye, 2004, p. 15). Labor insecurity is the norm. Companies move on when lower wages, higher tax incentives, or other factors of production beckon. Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John MacMurria, Richard Maxwell, and Ting Wang’s (2005) investigation of the film industry discovers the same structure of production relations, which they term the “*new international division of cultural labor*” (NICL) emphasizing the parallel developments in transnational media that characterize all production by transnational capitalism. For instance, the “*hallmark of pan-Asian cinema is a push towards market consolidation, creating an enlarged, unified film market that sustains investment in medium-to-large scale movies and marketing*” (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p. 110) through cross-border and cross-media structures that position creative producers, managers, and local work forces within the transnational system. In other words, TNMC (transnational media corporation) production creates media commodities, ideologies, and profits, as it also produces and reproduces the capital relation itself (Therborn, 2008, p. 137)—the underlying motivation for capitalist cultural hegemony.

Transnationalizing production to local sites does not disturb the TNMC “*organizational hierarchy or the forms of specialization which stratify the working class and create a social layer of administrators and overseers who rule—in the name of capital —over the day to day operations in the workplace*” (Harvey, 1999, p. 31), no matter what nationality, ethnicity, or gender supplies the workforce or management. The global restructuring of media production has created giant, regional enterprises “*with complex links between film, video, television, telecommunications, animation, publishing, advertising, and game design*” (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p. 65)—all based on acquiring multinational talent and the cheapest creative labor possible. TNMC production forces national governments, small media firms, and local workers to compete among themselves over wages, benefits, and working conditions. In China, Mattel requires workers to be on the job 10-16 hours a day, seven days a week (Asian Monitor Resource Center, in Miller, et al., 2005, p. 122).

Apple may be one of the most admired companies in the world with its sleek sophisticated media devices, but the polished image does not correspond to its actual business practices outsourcing labor to contractors in China and elsewhere. Marisol Sandoval (2013) draws our attention to the material source of media production, in her thorough analysis of Apple’s contract labor practices in China. “*Before and after information and communication technologies (ICTs) serve as the instruments of the mental labour of software developer, journalists, designers, new media workers, prosumers, etc., their production and disposal is shaped by various forms of manual work such as the extraction of minerals, the assembly of components into the final product, and the waste work needed for their disposal*” (p. 318). Corporate watchdog groups have found that illegal long working hours, low wages, child labor, and poor occupational health and safety are rooted in the unethical purchasing practices of Apple (in Sandoval, p. 322).

Beyond the bright side of so-called mental and immaterial labor, one discovers its seamier counterpart—the production of the actual material infrastructure for new media. In this space, rather than illustrating how indigenized media and information technologies contribute to cultural diversity and human freedom, the TNMC environments that localize flexible production appear as nothing less than crasser exploitation maximizing corporate control over labor. The production of media and their content are not “*merely a simple reflection of the controlling interests of those who own or even control the broad range of capital plant and equipment which make up the means by which cultural goods are made and distributed. Within the media are men and women working within a range of codes and professional ideologies, and with an array of aspirations, both personal and social. The ambitions can be idealized; much cultural production is routine, mundane, and highly predictable*”

(Golding & Murdoch, 1991, p. 25-26). Beyond their technological characteristics and capabilities, radio, film, and television further present restrictions on communication that have been “*deeply shaped by advertisers, investors, and other actors within the capitalist class*” (Poster, 2008, p. 688). Overall, the autonomy and creative contribution of these workers is curtailed within transnational production structures that prescribe who does what and who makes decisions on what will be done.

Transnational Division of Labor in Cultural Industries

Hollywood “*has managed to export and even refine domestic disciplinary systems, effectively disempowering and deskilling workers they hire off-shore by monopoly practices*” (simultaneously undermining competing local businesses ability to profit)... and this is “*happening at the level of popular textual production, marketing and information—data processing everything from airline bookings and customer warranties to the literary canon and pornographic novels—as well as high-culture limited edition work*” (Miller, et al., 2008, p. 122). Martin Hand and Barry Sandywell (2002) observe that the same is true for new media which increasingly disseminate film and television content: “*The Web is no more than a new culture industry elevated by corporate market powers into a position of global hegemony*” (p. 202). In contrast, enthralled by the “*sixty-five thousand cultural objects*” that are uploaded on YouTube daily, Mark Poster (2008) mistakes ease of user production with effective distribution and reception when he asserts that the consumer “*has become a user, maker, or creator*” and “*cultural production has clearly shifted from an elite system with major capital resources*” to “*a bottom-up mass movement*” (p. 692). Sixty-five thousand uploads? Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. has almost that many employees reporting to work every day. Even the millions of total visits to Psy’s “Gangnam Style” video pales compared to Liberty Media, a modest second-tier transnational, that reaches over 160 million households. Every day, STAR TV has well over 100 million viewers in 53 countries in Asia alone. In terms of real media impact, transnational production and distribution have the upper hand when it comes to media access and production. Attempts to circumvent their technological control over distribution (like Napster’s music server) are subject to copyright infringement laws and other government regulation. Simultaneously, TNMCs are constantly on the lookout for creative initiatives that can be herded into their own cultural hegemony, while willing academics and entrepreneurs eagerly line up for the chance to join the ranks of profiteers. The transnational production regime, Internet and all, keeps the average consumer blogger on the margins.

TNMCs are well positioned to take advantage of efficient decentered sites of production. The new international division of cultural labor (NICL) affects workers at all levels: from janitors, accountants, drivers, and tourism commissioners to designers, scriptwriters, best boys, and radio announcers. Internet networks and digital technologies allow the sharing of off-line editing, special effects production, and musical scores, further encouraging TNMCs to cut costs through cross-border chains of production that maximize profits and minimize wages. One consequence of this restructuring of production is the increased concentration of media ownership, now consolidated across nations. “*In the music industry, a mere handful of firms control 80 percent of global CD production, and similar trends are found in newspaper, periodical, and book publications, as well as radio, film, and television*” (Poster, 2008, p. 689).

TNMCs rely heavily on “runaway production” for all media productions to establish new norms for the division of labor, but once a film is shot, song recorded, or book written, TNMC control over work also crosses borders. Digital taping and transfer permit editing from any location, shared software editing programs allow directors and editors easy and quick exchange for re-editing for the final version. Telecommunications and IT hardware and software not only break down time and space barriers, under the control of TNMC they are also used to depress labor costs and deskill workers. Miller et al. (2005) offer a model of production placing integrated and consolidated transnational media companies at the top of an international system of intermediate zones of

production with subordinate labor holding it all up. Local entrepreneurial and media industry production of content “diminishes” centralized global production (Keane, Fung, & Moran, 2007, p. 44), in location only, not in ownership or media form—and certainly not in distribution capability.

Although individual access to media technology in the Internet age is unprecedented, the capacity to reach others is severely limited and always subject to the “off” switch controlled by privately-run servers, as Egyptian democracy activists discovered when their social media challenged the Mubarak regime in 2011. Satellite technology is even more centrally controlled by transnational institutions. Despite her claims of a satellite-induced Aboriginal “cultural renaissance” (p. 73), Lisa Parks reveals that content and satellite use always depend on economic and political power more than Aboriginal discourse. With underwater cables, fiber optics, satellites, mobile phones, the Internet, and other new media technologies, men and women should have exponentially increased ability to share messages, images, and ideas. Unfortunately—and contrary to Poster (2008) and other celebrants of the digital age—*“new media technologies [do not] enable anyone to start their own culture industry”* (p. 699). Due to the dictates of transnational capitalism, our information age has remained one of unbridled reception of TNMC messages. The power to tell stories drifts to global media networks that have excessive control over communication via satellites and other media technology (Schiller, 1999, p. 66-68; Thussu, 2000).

What Miller, *et al.* (2008) report about Southern California in 1998, has become the model for regionally centralized media cities across the world: *“an interconnecting mass, a cluster of technology, labour and capital that operates through contracts and with investments from the studios, rather than ownership by them”* providing a *“flexible delivery of services by specialized countries, intense interaction between small units that are part of a dynamic global industrial center, with highly diverse and skillful labor, and a functioning institutional infrastructure”* (p. 129). Distribution arrangements with similarly organized and interlocked firms further TNMC influence over media access, as described below.

The structures of production vary across regions due to the diverse historical legacies of commercial dominance (US), dual track public and private media development (Europe, Australia), more direct state regulation (East Asia), and state/ corporate monopolies (Japan, Hong Kong). The production process still includes creative development and pre-production of the concept, production and filming of the actual program or film, post-production editing, followed by distribution. However, as TNMCs adopt transnational regimes of production, the more interlocked firms have outsourced production to independent studios, paralleling the flexibility of labor relations. At the same time, before outsourcing, TNMCs systematically plan for marketing, syndication, and local adaptations (Keane, Fung, & Moran, 2007, p. 195). Centralizing creative control reflects the inflexibility and consolidation of the transnational system. Independent studios and repurposing formats for local broadcast provide myriad opportunities for creativity, even for television production which *“relies on incremental adjustments to tried-and-trusted formulas”* (Keane, Fung, & Moran, 2007, p. 195).

For countries and firms that depend on outsourcing for income, their chief asset is low-paid skilled labor, their chief benefit is access to the techniques and norms of TNMC production. Ultimately, the cultural hegemony of transnational media is the economic and political reward obtained from rapacious free market policies that encourage individual entrepreneurialism and undermine social solidarity among workers on all levels by temporarily but repeatedly subcontracting abroad with smaller independent studios and employing workers in different countries. Deregulation in Britain, for example, produced a *“proliferation of networks and the inevitable search for cheap overseas content”* ...the advantages accruing to the transnational leadership so emulated by local media firms is actually *“built on and sustained by the internal suppression of worker rights, the exploitation of a global division of labor”* and the dominance of the English language in business transactions (Miller, *et al.*, 2005, p. 161, 131).

Already one-third of “Hollywood” TNMCs shot productions outside the US, especially in Canada, Britain, and Australia. Of course, Disney’s UTV and Patagonik, Sony’s SET, and Warner’s Asia productions, as well as dozens of other co-productions by smaller firms (Lionsgate, Weinstein Bros., etc.) in Asia and Latin America are not “Hollywood” productions because organizationally and geographically those studios are “foreign.” Mexico is an attractive site for TNMC television and film production: a union carpenter in Los Angeles makes \$30/hour, in Baja, Mexico, News Corp.’s Fox carpenters are paid \$4/hour. Using Chinese extras and the Beijing Film Studio, the action adventure *Kill Bill* (2003) disguised China as Japan, to take advantage of low wages and the absence of unions, even shooting action sequences with stuntmen rather than computer simulated segments that have become more typical. Post-production for many TNMCs filming in Asia has been done in Thailand or Australia, with special effects completed in Hong Kong or the U.S. (Miller, et al., 2005, p. 151). Following privatization in Czechoslovakia, the government sold off 75% of the public film and television studios, “freeing” 500 skilled media workers, eleven sound stages, and on-site editing laboratories for TNMC purchase. *Mission Impossible* (1996) was filmed in Prague with government facilitated non-union, low-wage, highly-skilled creative labor. *Mission Impossible* revealed on many levels how transnational capitalism had “*taken firm root in the Czech Republic*” (Millea, in Miller, et al., 2005, p. 151).

From “The Simpsons” to “Ninja Turtles,” 90% of the world’s television cartoons are co-produced in Asia with low-cost, “flexible” labor by skilled animators and programmers. Commercial digital graphics for animation and special effects firms in India offer TNMCs “a major back-end hub” (estimated to grow from \$5 to \$15 billion) for editing and labor-intensive post-production work in computer-generated images, compositing, color correction, and digital sound. Overall, TNMCs’ international division of cultural labor (NICL) “*facilitates the free movement of capital into cheap production locations, contains labor mobility and undermines labor solidarity*” as “*a mobile elite happily exploits whichever country charges the least*” (Miller, et al., 2005, p. 152; Seguin, in Miller, et al., p. 171). Ironically, movies filmed in runaway production countries from China to Czechoslovakia are later “imported” from the production studio’s ostensible “home” nation—instances that can be considered actual “imperialist” economic relations.

An essential feature of transnational media’s capacity for organizing and profiting from the new international division of cultural labor is the existence of shared cultural business norms sustained through extensive co-productions and joint ventures. In China, local publishers have formed joint ventures with several TNMCs, including Hachette (*Elle*, *Marie-Claire*, *Woman’s Day*), Hearst (*Cosmo*), Condé Nast (*Vogue*), and Shfunotomo (*Rayli*, *Mina*). The local editions receive some text and photos., but more importantly staff from the head offices in Paris, New York, and Tokyo are sent to train Chinese staff and editors, directing and modeling the required business norms of communication, editorial decision-making, content tone and style, marketing, audience research, and managerial practices—cultivating the local publishers in the ways of TNMC operations, including preferences for structure and content of the medium itself to become more amenable to advertising, such as changing “*magazines for reading to magazines for seeing*” (Frith & Feng, 2009, p. 169). Throughout the training, facilitators coach participants and model appropriate business behavior in social interaction, humor, and even affectations. In short, transnational capitalist class solidarity is cultivated and reproduced around shared commercial interests and these agreed upon “best practices” for production, distribution, subcontracting, and labor relations. Local and national media, including those applying for TNMC agreements, look to successful transnational capitalists for economic, political, and cultural leadership.

Television producers and network executives see “*light entertainment formats as insurance against uncertainty: they offer broadcasters more commercially efficient strategies of maximizing audiences*” (Keane, Fung, & Moran, 2007, p. 198). Genres such as game shows and reality TV attract viewers, limit expenses for scriptwriting and acting, and take advantage of low-cost labor in all local

adaptations. Around the world, governments agree on deregulation and commercialization, while TNMCs can expect standardized, equivalent media worker skills and pro-industry attitudes at lowered costs. The combination of work norms across national media labor markets and standardized formats with predominant mediated images echoing individualism assures substantial media profit with minimal labor solidarity across gender, ethnicity, and national borders. For now. Without this global culture of production organized by capitalist social relations, TNMCs could not successfully negotiate cultural hegemony in practice or in image. Whatever hybridity theorists might imagine, common dominant values, attitudes, norms, and behaviors are being cultivated in and by transnational media production.

The “professional” norms of skill hierarchy and decision-making that become “common sense” through enforcement and repetition on the job are legally backed by intellectual property copyright protocol and non-compete penalties that prevent workers from developing their own creativity (Bettig, 1997). Because TNMCs are vertically and horizontally integrated and interlocked with other communication technology companies, transnational media business and programming standards are duplicated across media platforms and delivery systems, from television, film, satellite, broadband, and mobile technologies, facilitating a leadership position for TNMCs in new media uses, as well. Democracy and public access to production by the millions of workers and citizens in general never enter the equation of transnational production costs and revenues.

Transnational commercial media consolidation and concentration assert the conditions for producing media, including their aesthetics, style, form, and content. Reliance on formats, for instance, maximizes the adaptation of content and the distribution of standardized codes and conventions. The formatted television program is not difficult to remake—even improve—as *Pokémon*, *Ugly Betty*, and “Who Wants to Be A Millionaire” demonstrate. Although national governments and cultural organizations, including religious groups, frequently attempt to block “foreign” imports of culturally “inappropriate” values, TNMCs have hegemonically adapted. TNMCs have “stripped away” those questionable elements and “substituted local flavour and values,” so that the hybrid program “provides the DNA, the recipe, and the technology for invigorating local television” with commercially-structured and commercially-viable formats (Keane, Fung, & Moran, 2007, p. 200). Commercial success for TNMCs includes localizing production for local languages and cultures, as well as producing content for segmented national audiences: the cosmopolitan elite who own and manage industries, speak English, and participate fully in world economics and politics; the affluent middle classes, including managers, technicians, academics, politicians, and small business people; the working classes, both skilled creative workers, contractors, builders, and less skilled service workers; the lower working class of manual and casual laborers.

Similar structural conditions set the parameters for media distribution as well. Although “independent” studios produce more films than major studios, TNMC films dominate in distribution reach, marketing, and at the box office. Additionally, TNMCs have other outlets in addition to television broadcasting and theater showings for marketing their products: DVD, broadcast licensing to television and Internet firms, and merchandizing. Besides, worldwide theater exhibition is dominated by a handful of firms that have interlocking structures or production-exhibition agreements with TNMCs distributors. Philip Anschutz’s Regal Entertainment is the largest theater chain in the world, with over 7000 screens and \$2.68 billion in annual revenues. AMC (now owned by China-based Dalian Wanda Group) brings in some \$2.6 billion a year from US, Hong Kong, and European theaters. Cinemark has almost 4000 screens located in Latin America, Japan, Taiwan, and Europe. National Amusements (which owns CBS, Viacom, and Paramount Pictures) runs 450 screens. India-based Cinemapolis has theaters in Mexico and throughout Latin America, while Reliance’s BIG Cinema covers most of West Asia and Malaysia. A smaller transnational theater group, PVR is 40% owned by Australian based filmmaker Village Road Show. These major exhibitors prefer TNMC products because those films are heavily marketed, better recognized and

preferred by large audiences, and come as part of film packages that assure exhibitors have access to many films at low cost.

More importantly, there is no crisp separation between production and exhibition. In television, media content is not haphazardly determined. “*Local executives [acting] as intermediaries between viewers and exporters, decid[e] which programmes to purchase and how to schedule them based upon their own understanding of the culture*” (Havens, 2006, p. 3). Tim Havens (2006) found that a small number of buyers filter the international flow of programming, meeting at global trade shows and television genre fairs dominated by transnational media producers who provide incentives and perks to buyers, emit promotional “buzz” for well-funded programming, and exude important business rituals which all but assure TNMC predominance in international sales and distribution (pp. 66-94). Although similar patterns of production-distribution alignment have been true for cinema, it’s about to get even tighter. Warner, Disney, Lionsgate, Universal and Paramount have partnered with AMC, Regal, and Cinemark on a satellite terrestrial digital distribution system that locks in studio productions with theater exhibitions (Giarnina, 2013). 2013 may be the last year that film prints are distributed in the U.S. and this new distribution agreement assures close collaboration and profit-sharing between producers and exhibitors. The transnational capitalist perspective that reorganized the international division of cultural labor has also rationalized the international processes of delivering movies to audiences, further consolidating the gatekeeping leadership of the TNCC and its cultural hegemony. Films by major TNMCs have even more assurance of seamlessly reaching a broad public and maximizing profits.

The Global Culture of Consumption

A new transnational culture of consumption has grown in tandem with the new international division of cultural labor. As transnational production temporarily undermines labor identities and labor solidarity through temporary and casual labor regimes, defended by national legal systems, consciousness of social class and shared circumstances is muted. The combination of a hegemonic pull to consent for some reward and institutional coercion seeps into everyday life. Lifestyle identities attract otherwise alienated men and women (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 55). In terms of cultural hegemony, absent other more social relational identities, lifestyle norms are an appealing benefit provided by capitalist class leaders and their media. The accumulation of wealth by the TNCC and its managerial and political elite has created an international market for the affluent and their interest and ability to purchase high-end consumer goods, consume large amounts of media and culture commodities, including media technology, media content, live concerts, and travel. The Taiwanese consumer culture, for instance, “*hungers for diverse Japanese and Korean imports, including mobile phones, electronics, automobiles, cosmetics, clothing, and so on*” (Huang, 2012,1, p. 8). Consequently, in Taiwan and globally, cosmopolitan elites attract targeted media and advertising. Transnational marketing to this social class both reflects its consuming power and reinforces its prestige and ethos as cultural trendsetters. Subsequently or simultaneously media are produced, priced, and targeted for other social classes based on the lifestyle aesthetic established by elites, contributing to capitalist cultural hegemony both materially and symbolically which is actively consented to by consumer behavior.

Transnational media thus both profit directly and facilitate the profit of other TNCs; commercial media produce and distribute material products, which also always contain symbolic and social meanings. TNMCs have developed separate TV stations with different languages and formats appropriate for advertisers targeting these different segments. TNMCs have likewise produced audience-specific films, magazines, newspapers, and music genre. Chua (2006) even discerns “consumer communities” from dedicated fans to occasional consumers that parallel the uneven flows among the targeted transnational East Asian media markets, including fan clubs that are established by the celebrities or production companies themselves as a “means of sustaining consumer interest”

(p. 10). Importantly, across all the national accents and social class cultural preferences, themes of consumerism and individualism predominate: independence, freedom, career success, sexual satisfaction, self-gratification, and so on, jump out from all the TNMC produced stories and narratives, serving the interests of transnational capitalism and its yearning for increased profits.

On the other hand, media content production that truly represents the popular, that releases creativity and unearths narratives of solidarity for human progress, cannot be consistently expressed through TNMC programming or format; at the most, such narratives can be occasionally smuggled in. Democratic media requires upending capitalist control over production and distribution, including securing decent working conditions, higher wages, and equitable access to media production. The power of individual consumer choice is woefully inadequate for the democratic social construction of work, culture, and their meanings. Fans electing their favorite member of the Japanese idol-band AKB48 “vote” by purchasing a CD—a commercial distortion of democracy (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012b). Following the “Hello Kitty” craze in Taiwan that expressed youth resistance to regimented education and dress, candidates in the presidential election campaign in Taiwan generated support and profit by marketing stuffed animals as campaign icons to non-political youth (Yang, 2010). In both cases, resistance and political expression was metaphorically available in a commodity—a weak substitute for an informed citizenry. Hsin-Yen Yang (2010) argues that “*consumer subjectivities*” become a “*subversive political rhetoric*” because “*softening the images of politics add[s] consumerist participation*” into the “*new vistas for local liberation*” (p. 132, 135).

Passing off consumer choice as democracy (or pleasure as power in some variants) is a worn-out cliché and will not hold, although noting the denigration of the electoral process to a sales contest seems accurate. More importantly, as argued earlier and demonstrated regularly around the world, the contradictions between the production and content of global capitalist culture and the experiences and conditions of life for labor and its allies will continually erupt in organized political and social resistance—washing away the pretensions of consumption as political power. For the moment, the shiny bubble of transnational entertainment predominates, attempting to cover the fragile, brittle social order with diversionary fun, games, and shopping.

Advertising and the Global Consumer Culture

Production of media content for magazines, newspapers, film, television, radio, and the Internet has no consequence until the article, movie, or program reaches readers and viewers, which explains why TNMCs have horizontally integrated production with distribution across companies and borders. To streamline the distribution of media content, TNMCs have ramped up their use of marketing and advertising for their own products. Self-advertising and self-promotion increase the sales of magazines, DVDs, video games, mobile applications, and media-branded consumer products from cereal to clothing. Media advertising is essential to the capitalist economic cycle. Profits from production can only be realized by selling the goods. Advertising greases the production process, by influencing consumption. Advertising expenditures topped \$557 billion in 2012 (Nielsen, 2013) indicating a vibrant profitable industry and illustrating its importance for all other industries. Globally, the advertising industry has consolidated like the rest of transnational capital.

A handful of transnational, interlocked corporations produce and distribute advertising in alliance and consultation with other TNMCs and other transnational corporations. The largest advertising firm in the world, Dentsu Japan, controls about 30% of the market in Japan and East Asia, owns McGarryBowen (US), and recently acquired the Aegis Group, parent to the Carat and Vizeum global media networks, expanding its presence in Europe. Dentsu’s 2012 revenue topped \$22 billion. Bigger! Better! New and improved! Catch phrases by the industry seem to drive it as well: global ad giants Omnicom and Publicis Groupe merged in 2013 to become Publicis Omnicom Group (which includes DDB, BBDO, Leo Burnett, Saatchi, and other firms) with over \$35 billion in assets and \$23 billion in revenue. WPP is a full-service marketing-advertising firm that houses Ogilvy & Mather

and Grey Advertising, ranked the top ad agency by Forbes in 2012. London-based WPP revenues are about \$10 billion annually. There is no space here to provide a full accounting of the advertising industry, which is closely and directly interlocked with transnational media, finance, and consumer goods producers, including: AIG, New York Times, Pepsi, PrimeMedia, Nabisco Quebecor, Lazard Freres, Target, Bain & Co., Avis, Heinz, ProQuest, National Geographic, Showtime, Gannett, CBS, Time Warner, the Annenberg School, JP Morgan Chase. The top four firms also have members active in the Trilateral Commission, the World Economic Forum, Council of Foreign Relations, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Directors and shareholders of transnational advertising corporations are part of the transnational capitalist class and fulfill an important economic and political role in securing consent for consumerism, the free market, and the production of corporate profit.

Deregulation of media, which is all but complete on a global scale, has unleashed the friendly dogs of advertising. Astride neoliberalism and transnational production, advertising and entertainment media jockey for the speedy development of consumerism. From their review of dozens of studies, Hye-Jin Park and Zhongdang Pan (2004) learned that “*as the market economy develops Chinese consumers are acquiring a more positive attitude toward the quintessential capitalist message form—advertisements*” (p. 492). In their own study, they found sufficient evidence of the effects of capitalism and advertising to draw “*causal inferences on media impact of consumerist values*” with advertising being “*a vanguard of the emerging consumer society*” (p. 492-493). Media advertising directly contributes to individualistic and consumerist values, such that exposure to advertisements relates to the acceptance of conspicuous consumption, self-fulfillment, individual indulgence, and the worshipping of affluent lifestyles (p. 495). Frith and Feng (2009) reached similar conclusions in their study of women’s magazines in China, which were largely funded by fashion advertisers, including L’Oreal, Procter & Gamble, Estee Lauder, Shiseido, Kose, Unilever, and Benetton (p. 166). Across Eastern Europe and Russia, a similar neoliberal media process unfolded under the direction of TNMCs and their advertising allies (or in the case of Central European Media Enterprises directly owned by a major advertiser, Estee Lauder). Following deregulation of the media, Russia became one of the most rapidly growing advertising markets in the world, leading to a search for niche audiences and diversity in entertainment for delivering advertisements (Vartanova, 2008), while public media and social and cultural needs went unfulfilled.

Like media content in general, transnational advertising does not always rely on globally standardized specific messages. In most locales, advertising strategies “*use well-known nationalist songs, popular commercial film actors and the sponsorship of cultural and sporting events that evoke strong national support*” (Fernandes, 2000, p. 615). In Japan, celebrity idols actually depend on advertising campaigns to market their own careers (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012). In South Korea, K-pop music stars and their marketing managers use social media to speak to their fans about their personal lives and the products they use (Beattie, 2012). Advertising firms consciously attempt to align marketing strategies with specific national and local cultural conditions, making explicit linkages between products and targeted social classes (Fernandes, 2000).

All industrial production relies ultimately on the purchase of goods and services, so advertising is crucial for maximizing profits. By influencing consumer behavior, advertising increases product sales and increases the pace of product sales. Certainly technological changes have altered the speed of delivery of messages and product, while the accompanying transnational media flow steps up the production-consumption cycle because the near instantaneous release of media and products pushes distribution, advertising, and consumer purchasing. Specifically, the “instant obsolescence” caused by advertising campaigns for the latest, newest, or best product increases the speed of consumption (Garnham, 1990, p 47).

Recognizing the centrality of advertising for the realization of capitalist profit, we should amend the production-distribution-consumption model that expresses the process of accumulation of wealth

from labor. The flow of production to profit is more accurately understood as: production—advertising—media production—distribution of media content with advertising—distribution—consumption. This cycle clarifies transnational capitalism and its media system: advertising is essential to the worldwide distribution of commodities wherever they are produced. Advertising comprises part of the economic logic of media production—audiences are produced for sale to advertisers who in turn feed audiences persuasive messages intended to increase sales of other products. Sut Jhally (1990) provides an elegant appraisal of advertising’s role in media production in which meaning becomes a commodity as well.

Advertising has become a crucial component of capitalism, but advertising does more than move products. Advertising provides a “magic system” that transforms commodities into potent social signifiers (Williams, 1980, p. 170). High heels become a sign of femininity; a sports car becomes a sign of masculinity. Williams explains the history of advertising as a communication practice that moved from description of quality and pricing, to a communication industry that influences the market—a system for financing media like newspapers and television and a system for persuading consumers to change their behavior. “Advertising developed to sell goods...but the material object being sold is never enough: this indeed is the crucial cultural quality of its modern forms” (p. 182, 184). In this sense, advertising contributes mightily to capitalist cultural hegemony. Advertising whispers, asserts, and blares from far and wide that consumption brings happiness, that consumer choice demonstrates democracy that living in a world of commodities is the best of all possible worlds. Advertising even offers financial aid to struggling economies: “*Cash-strapped Spain towns a prime target for advertisers*” who strike deals for landmarks, public buildings, and even iconic statues like Christopher Columbus draped in a Barcelona soccer shirt advertising Qatar Airlines (Kane, 2013, p. B2). Participating in an advertised and advertising culture tacitly and actively exhibits and reproduces consent for the social order of production for consumption.

For transnational capitalism, the best working class consciousness is brand consciousness, which can organize individual social practices and define identity. The dominance of the celebrity idol in Japanese advertising and media is closely connected with consumer culture, “*as consumers looked to idols as models for fashioning their identity*” (Karlin, 2012, p. 75). In Japan (and global) television advertising, the celebrity “functions to get the attention of the viewers, and advertising relies on the role of the star to shape audience behavior” through imitation and modeling of celebrity behavior (Karlin, 2012, p. 79). Advertisers spend millions because they have determined that television images are the prompt, proximity to the star is the desire, and consumer behavior is the cultural outcome.

Pleasurable moments and desires are facilitated by entertainment media and exploited by advertisers using that entertainment. The complementary supports of TNMC entertainment and advertising are vital to the cultural hegemony of consumer capitalism. Celebrating men and women as consumers who think, feel, and act in “self-motivated, self-interested, and self-reflexive ways” (Dunn, 2008, p. 79) only shuffles individualism to the top of the deck; it does nothing to build democracy or the solidarity necessary for a less commercial, more humane social order.

Advertising does not seek satisfaction; advertising promotes continuous dissatisfaction that can only momentarily be suspended by some immediate purchase of a commodity. If one purchase provided satisfaction, further purchases would not be necessary. But advertising, and the capitalist commodity system that relies on its persuasive appeals, must have continuous, never-ending, ever-expanding consumption. Desire in advertising and televised images of celebrities can only be reached in the imagination. The permanent lack of actual fulfillment contributes to alienation, which quickly returns after each purchase. In Japan, for instance, celebrity idols are “replaced regularly and endlessly, even destroyed only to be recreated, thereby fueling the continuous movement of capital (Galbraith, 2012, p. 194).

Consent and Consumerism

The dehumanizing essence of capitalism could not be revealed more starkly: human needs and human desires are manipulated as a means to harvest consumer fodder for the never-ending demand for capitalist profits. Obviously, actually satisfying human needs and desires is anathema to such a system. Westinghouse used to produce appliances that would last for decades or longer; to make more profit and keep up with their capitalist competitors, Westinghouse appliances are now made with the expectation of 18-month replacement. Organizing production more rationally for human needs would provide appliances and other goods that work well, last long, and minimize their environmental impact. The marketing of mobile devices provides another clear example of the drive for consumption over rational use. Advertising goods to meet media instigated consumer wants diverts U.S. from rational public conversations on what kind of world we could devise. Advertising and media entertainment—the twin-headed monster of consumerism has roamed the world for decades searching for audiences and consumers, suffocating attempts at human-centered communication. In the 21st century, they finally dominate global culture.

Advertising, news, entertainment, and other mediated communication practices in the 21st Century are organized and directed globally by transnational media companies. As transnational industrial enterprises, TNMCs globalize, localize, and rationalize their chains of production and distribution. As producers of media content—communication and symbolic meaning—TNMCs must also produce and distribute narratives, images, and ideologies that will attract audiences as consumers and citizens as participants in the global culture of individualism, authority, and consumerism. The current structure of global media determines the production of audiences and products for private profit, creating media content promoting social and cultural norms amenable to transnational capitalism. For now, without access to mass media, absent alternative cultural practices and meanings, middle class audiences give at least tacit consent to the consumer culture and bureaucratic, authoritarian politics. Hegemony can never be secure for transnational capitalism, however.

Every act of capitalist production creates social inequality. The drive for profit at the expense of the world working classes and to the devastation of the global environment inevitably creates resistance and the possibility for alternative, more humane social relations. Yet, as the daily experience of citizens conflicts with neoliberal practices and the ideologies expressed in global media programming resistance erupts. From Venezuela and Bolivia, to Tunis and Egypt, and elsewhere, new social movements for justice have and will arise. In the process of resistance and transformation, a new cultural hegemony of democracy, solidarity, and social justice appears on offer.

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