

information and communication services and promoting home shopping. In that sense, Castells reminds us not only of the enormous economic power of the information technology companies that determine the media infrastructure, but also of the significance of the businesses that provide media content. Within that domain, as Castells usefully notes, 'the advertising industry is the economic foundation of the media business' (1997: 257). In recent years, the exponential growth of digital advertising revenues and user-tracking technologies has transformed the ways in which new media networks operate, bringing the era of 'Web 2.0' into being (O'Reilly 2005). This draws our attention to a fundamental feature of media economics: the integrated nature of media commodities. The sale of media products such as videos or music is predicated upon the conjoined purchase of the necessary media hardware and subscriptions for media access. Beyond that, the attention of the audience created around media content represents value to advertisers who can then sell those 'eyeballs' to their clients. The present era of social media produces further revenues from 'scraping' information regarding the authors and viewers of media content. The central point of this is that the media audience itself is not simply a group of consumers but an intrinsic component of the overall package of commodities that make up the media economy.

This integrated commodity form means that the audience is every bit as much part of the product as the content they are paying to access. The existence of a vast international advertising business therefore draws our attention to the fact that academic debates on issues such as cultural identity, national citizenship or technological effects are always offset by a far larger, if no less complicated, commercial interest in media audiences. For producers of media content and providers of media services, audiences are markets first and foremost. An audience seen in this way can therefore be conceived of in terms of an interdependency between media producers, gatekeepers and consumers which attributes agency, albeit unequally, to all these actors. Although such a model encourages some questioning of why consuming-agents make their viewing choices, the terms of the enquiry will always attribute more weight to the decisive act of consumption than to any production of meanings. As such, the most commonly researched questions regarding media audiences are about what they have recently bought and what they might want to buy next. In this context, the advent of a global network society indicates the emergence of densely connected transnational markets available for exploitation via its worldwide infrastructure. Initially, of course, there has to be (and has been) a series of gold rushes in building and selling the technical infrastructure and the necessary software, but as the market matures the production of suitable content and services becomes

essential to its continuation. It is at this point that serious thought has to be given to the forms of content that are most suited to the series of global networked markets described by Castells, whether these are culturally blind homogeneous products, aggregated niche aesthetics or distinctive content from one market re-purposed to 'cross over' to another.

## Narrowcasting the Global

The interlacing of markets as a primary impetus for the global network society can be seen as symptomatic of the increasing power of multinational corporations in respect to national regulators. While the expansion of capitalism and its vested interests provided the prevailing weather for the recent phase of globalization, Castells saw the rise of transnational media corporations as being particularly significant. This is because they combined a commercial interest in market expansion with a supra-national hegemony over the bandwidth required for everyday social communication. As such, little of effect could be said or done without access to global media networks. During the high tide of national broadcast systems, national governments had very considerable regulatory powers over media ownership, content and access. However, this capacity to frame public debate dissipated very quickly with the coming of the second media age, leaving both democratic and autocratic regimes at the mercy of transnational media businesses. According to Castells, 'the change was technology-driven. The diversification of communication modes, the link up of all media in a digital hypertext, opening the way for interactive media, and the inability to control satellites beaming across borders or computer-mediated communication over the 'phone line, blew up the traditional lines of regulatory defense' (1997: 255). Thus, the breaching of national boundaries by media transmission was a direct threat to the nation state as an arbiter of public discussion and social mores. For their part, the increasingly powerful multinational corporations that became predominant at the expense of national media operators tended to display a very firm and obvious commitment to a global network society, a system that itself threatened to make national politics increasingly irrelevant.

The technological revolution recorded by Castells was also accompanied by an acceleration of mergers and acquisitions that created gigantic media companies with interests spread across all forms of content and all parts of the globe. The simultaneous outcomes of a newfound passion for the privatization of state interests, reducing anti-competition regulations and the recasting of the technological field of communication all fed into this

process. With regulations being dropped or rendered obsolete, the larger media businesses rapidly transformed themselves into supra-national forces of autonomous political power. Their power was, and is, as much political as commercial because flows of information necessarily constitute the major channels for social communication and cultural expression in a network society. This simple fact makes media access a prerequisite for any kind of contemporary politics. Access to global media 'airtime' becomes essential for holding power or achieving social change (and this is true for all players, including governments, insurgents and civil society movements). This is why Castells highlights the ubiquitous mediating power of the global communication networks that now structure the world system: "The critical matter is that, without an active presence in the media, political proposals or candidates do not stand a chance of gathering broad support . . . [and therefore] . . . politics is fundamentally framed, in its substance, organization, process, and leadership, by the inherent logic of the media system, particularly by the new electronic media (1997: 317). As such, it is for political as much as technical and commercial reasons that the media operate as the central structure of the global network society described by Castells.

In delving into the politics of the era, however, Castells also noted a splintering effect that counterposed the aggregation of media businesses into ever larger formations. The personalized media flows arising from hypertext content and the channel multiplication that came with the digitization of television were not merely spilling over national boundaries but also fragmenting the concept of the mass audience. Whereas as few as three television networks had previously captured 90 per cent of the American public with a general mix of programming, the new media environment was splintering the audience across hundreds of specialist channels and thousands of different web portals. The era of broadcasting was giving way to an era of 'narrowcasting' where media consumers were being redirected into various forms of niche programming. Thus, the increasing reach of social communication across time and space was juxtaposed by the dissolution of the 'general public' into various micro-domains, or what Todd Gitlin (1998) has called 'public sphericles'. As audiences begin to aggregate more exclusively around particular interests, content providers seek to capture those audiences by producing niche material. For those wedded to the concept of media balance and an inclusive frame, this tribalization of audiences threatened to replace real debate with innumerable echo-chambers of the like-minded (Reese et al. 2007). Nonetheless, the mutually reinforcing dynamics of narrowcasting and niche audiences has established itself as a distinctive feature of the network society, with the rise of targeted advertising in the past decade reflecting the reality of this newly disparate audience.

## Modernity at Large

In many respects we can see the transnational shift marked by the advent of Castells' global network society as a step change in long-running processes of technological development, economic competition and mass politics. In that sense, there are important continuities in the identification of primary causes, even where the particular affordances of digital media technologies serve to reorient the functional structure of economic and political power. Most likely, this is why Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1996) were keen to emphasize the continuity between theories of globalization and earlier theories of modernization, seeing both as rooted in the diffusionist model of the 'imperial imaginary' of the colonial world. Although Castells regards the 'power of identity' as a substantial force in creating constituencies within the global network society, it is striking that the role of culture *per se* tends to remain reactive to technological and economic forces. Thus Castells sees ethnicity as only constituting a significant factor when it is attached to a particular political programme. In his contemporary exposition of the 'cultural dimensions of globalization', however, the émigré anthropologist Arjun Appadurai takes an opposite tack that sees ethnicity as the central organizing principle of a transnational world order. Equally, Appadurai explicitly rejects the proposition that globalization represents a continuation of long-running imperialist tendencies, and argues with some force that modernity is no longer confined to the centre-periphery model of transmission. Indeed, Appadurai proposes that in the contemporary imagination modernity has become 'decisively at large' (1996: 3).

Appadurai presents 'a theory of rupture that takes media and migration as its two major, and interconnected, diacritics and explores their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity' (1996: 3), going as far as to suggest that a 'mobile and unforeseeable relationship between mass-mediated events and migratory audiences defines the core of the link between globalization and the modern' (1996: 4). Appadurai identifies important disjunctures within the global flows identified by Castells, particularly between culture, politics and economics. Accordingly, Appadurai argued that the effect of these various flows was to construct a series of quite different global landscapes, each one interacting with the other but arising from its own logics. These 'five dimensions of global flows [can] be termed a) *ethnoscapes*, b) *mediascapes*, c) *technoscapes*, d) *financescapes* and e) *ideoscapes* . . . These landscapes are the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would like to call *imagined worlds*' (1996: 33). By this proposition, Appadurai expands Anderson's

notion of 'imagined community' beyond the confines of its original purpose – that is, explaining the emergence of national imaginaries – to the new business of mapping global imaginaries. Reversing the polarity of Castells' account of globalization, Appadurai places his primary emphasis on culture, understood as an interface of ethnicity and media flows. Following this perspective, his attention then shifts to the emergence of complex transnational 'imagined worlds' inhabited by dispersed ethnic communities.

The theory is once again media-centric, since Appadurai points to the role played by transnational media currents in shaping and sustaining equally transnational audiences. They do so by addressing 'deterritorialized' ethnic subjectivities (which he describes as 'diasporic public spheres') that are 'diverse amongst themselves' yet constitute 'the crucibles of a postnational political order. The engines of their discourse are mass media (both interactive and expressive) and the movement of refugees, activists, students and laborers' (Appadurai 1996: 22). Such a position is indicative of Stuart Hall's earlier proposition that transnational migrant communities, or diasporas, 'are at the leading edge of what is destined to become the truly representative "late-modern" experience' (Hall 1993: 362). This centralizing of migrant subjects within the discursive construction of the cultural dimensions of globalization was subsequently underlined by Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair, who suggested that, 'to the extent globalization presents more and more people with the experience of difference and displacement, the diasporic experience becomes not so much a metaphor as the archetype for the kind of cultural adaptiveness which our era demands' (2000: 15). As such, the position taken by Appadurai has enjoyed widespread authority in the discussion of media and globalization. Clearly, the role played by the diaspora of human beings in shaping currents within the worldwide diaspora of media content necessarily forms an important component of transnational media consumption. The 'work of the imagination' which is so central to Appadurai's notion of 'modernity at large' also reflects the continuing influence of Anderson's notion of an 'imagined community' when it comes to understanding the relationship between media reception and political identity.

## Mediascapes

In keeping with the broader sweep of globalization theory, Appadurai puts the electronic visual media at the heart of contemporary social change. He identifies transnational media practices in particular as constituting a catalyst for and primary evidence of a changing world. Appadurai's focus upon

transnational media exchanges is also significant in that he seeks to discard rather than nuance the centre-periphery models of modernization which dominated earlier debates on media and cultural imperialism.

The crucial point is that the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes. The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson's sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media. The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice . . . The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (Appadurai 1996: 31)

Appadurai is emphatic that the 'cultural imperialism' thesis should be discarded as a totalizing explanation. Even where media dispersal is conceived of and undertaken with 'soft power' in mind, the effects on the ground are far from certain. Furthermore, the inherent portability of media products that allows for the 'media outreach' ambitions of dominant states also facilitates the widespread dispersal of alternative products. As digital technologies simultaneously lowered production costs and offered limitless and costless global distribution, the previous structural bias towards the developed world was effectively negated. Thus, in a globalized world interlinked by digital systems, transnational media flows simply cannot be explained through any of the unidirectional models of dissemination constructed by the mass communications theories of the mid-twentieth century. Thus, Appadurai's notion of the mediascape seeks to describe the emergence of a multi-polar world, where transnational media flows span borders in all directions. To be fair, even in the United States, Hollywood has never been the *only* source of media products. Indeed, the bulk of the world's media industries, however discursively orientated they might be towards a national public, have fairly consistent histories of exporting products to audiences outside of the 'national' domain. The growing visibility of 'contra-flows' from the East and South also has a number of precedents, but the expansion of this activity during the 2000s has provoked extensive commentary from media scholars (see, for example, Thussu 2007). For Appadurai, this expanding matrix of overlapping information flows was directed less towards a new global cosmopolitanism and more towards the shifting

human terrain of the ethnoscape. That is, the growth of transnational media currents was closely identified with a human population on the move.

It is critically important that Appadurai's 'global ethnoscape' is an imagined world defined by ethnic particularity. This ethnocentricity explains his assertion 'that we regard as cultural only those differences that either express, or set the groundwork for, the mobilization of group identities' and that therefore 'we restrict the term culture as a marked term to the subset of these differences that has been mobilized to articulate the boundary of difference' (1996: 13). If we do so, then we will naturally expect migrants to extend the mediascape of their 'indigenous' culture when they relocate to other countries. This social imaginary is then sustained by media flows from the homeland, and by the newfound capacity to maintain this distant cultural environment within the new physical location. According to Appadurai, the audiences emerging from the new diversity of media flows would be distinguished by their adherence to their own globalized ethnic culture. The ethnoscape concept therefore suggests a mosaic of ethnic cultures sustained by easy mobility and media connectivity. This cultural geography is no longer contained within the political geography of nation states, but instead manifests as a dense patchwork of transnational public spheres. By this model, the Indian mediascape expands to include communities in New York and Sydney, while the mainstream American media encompass Anglo-Saxon audiences in Australia and Britain but not, perhaps, the entire population of the polyglot United States. For Appadurai, transnational global ethnicities were destined to replace national citizenries as the primary cultural and political unit. In that respect, Appadurai's reading of the cultural dimensions of globalization was remarkably similar to Anthony Smith's ethnic model of national cultures, albeit radically mobilized by air travel and satellite television.

## Transnational Agents

One of the common features amongst the predominant explanations of globalization was their adherence to a discourse of powerful media influence, conjoined with a strong technological determinism that positioned information technologies in particular as a, if not the, primary driver for the great transnational shift of the 1990s. In that respect, it can be argued that both Castells and Appadurai were essentially casting globalization as a series of media effects. Having said that, the influence of 'active audience' theory also makes itself felt in both narratives. This is noteworthy, since the notion of critically aware, and therefore 'active', audiences had emerged from two

decades of intellectual opposition to the idea of all-powerful media on which much globalization theory rests. In addressing the consequent question of agency for the masses, Castells allows media audiences to move from the 'passive' mode primarily through the actions of grassroots politics. That is, he sees resistance to the interests of a global ruling elite emerging via a growing host of social movements that now compete for bandwidth in a global media system that serves as a battleground of ideas. Agency is available therefore to those who are sufficiently organized to develop an effective media platform and get their message across.

Appadurai, by contrast, goes much further in that he sees media consumption alone as representing a site of agency for consumers. Consumers are naturally quite different from social movements, in that they are individuals rather than party organizations but also because their engagement with the media tends to be personal rather than political in a broader sense. Appadurai also opens up some space for the role of gratification, or pleasure, something which is conspicuously absent from most academic studies of media audiences. As he puts it:

it is wrong to assume that the electronic media are the opium of the masses. This view, which is only beginning to be corrected, is based upon the notion that the mechanical arts of reproduction largely reprimed ordinary people for industrial work. It is far too simple. There is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and in general, *agency* . . . this is not to suggest that consumers are free agents, living happily in a world of safe malls, free lunches, and quick fixes . . . Nevertheless, where there is consumption there is pleasure, and where there is pleasure there is agency. (1996: 7)

In particular, Appadurai emphasizes the role of media consumption in fostering a more active social imagination, the capacity of which is transformed by the expansion of the media system to the global scale. This explains his assertion that imagined worlds are a recent phenomenon for most people, since: 'it is only in the past two decades or so that media and migration have become so massively globalized, that is to say, active across large and irregular transnational terrains' (1996: 9). The agency that Appadurai identifies amongst media consumers is derived from a process of empowerment triggered by the expansion of media access and control over content. By his reading, agency is itself an 'effect' of media systems. The specific outcome of this effect during the 1990s being that: 'the imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies' (1996: 5). Because media consumers are considered to be increasingly aware

of a whole series of 'imagined worlds', their reception of media content is likely to be influenced by an increased scale of reference and a more critical awareness of their place in those worlds. This has obvious implications for their choice of content, their reading of materials, the messages they author, and for their social imagination in general. As such, the notion that individuals are active agents in processes of mediation due to their own 'mental maps' of the world becomes critically important to the study of transnational media flows.

## Reading Transnational Audiences

Looking back, we can see that the period of 'high globalization' from 1991 to 2007 was generally regarded as an era dominated by media power. It was also a period of far-reaching technological remediation, as digital systems replaced analogue ones. Given the prevailing tendency to see new technologies as an overarching explanation for social change, all of the major theories of globalization gave central importance to the advent of digital satellite broadcasting and the public Internet. While the interests of different thinkers focused variously upon politics, economics or culture, the new media environment was consistently identified as a major constituent of the sudden shift towards a transnational world order. In the anticipated new world system, the tidy alignment of markets, cultures and media systems within sovereign states was expected to give way in favour of a single integrated global market, a multicultural society and a universal media apparatus. As Castells puts it: 'The globalization/localization of media and electronic communication is tantamount to the de-nationalization and de-statization of information, the two trends being inseparable for the time being' (1997: 259). Taken as a whole, globalization theory provides us with a vision of technologically interactive, physically transnational, but culturally ethnic, niche audiences taking over from technologically passive, nationally defined, but culturally homogeneous, mass audiences. Its prevailing ideas around media reception are technologically determined, but necessarily complicated by the increasingly interactive nature of the system. Its prevailing ideas around culture are ethnically determined, but complicated by the constancy of cultural exchange and the inevitable diversity of all human societies.

For researchers, the functional contribution of media systems to globalization can be empirically identified at a number of levels. Examining a logistical role for media technologies that favours international relationships provides one set of evidence for *globalization through media*. Identifying a

growing volume of international trade in media content points to the ongoing *globalization of media markets*. Finally, assessing the internationalization of capital ownership in the media business provides evidence of an emerging *global media apparatus*. At the conceptual level, we can plainly see how the overarching idea of globalization picks up various strands of functionalist, traditionalist and liberal thought on nationalism and adapts them for a new technological and geopolitical setting. The substantive claim, that transnational communication represents a fundamental break with the nation-state system, is far-reaching and is yet to be established in truth. Certainly, the global media market was becoming more integrated throughout this phase of high globalization, with this scale increase being matched by increasing content diversity and the rise of narrowcasting. This directs us towards a lesser claim of globalization theory: that old national publics are giving way in favour of transnational constituencies centred upon specific interests (which might be political or ethnic depending upon which theorist you choose to follow). This proposition is more amenable to meaningful research. In a practical sense, the task of giving substance to, or falsifying, either claim falls to audience researchers.

## Recommended Reading

- Arjun Appadurai (1996) *Modernity At Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nestor Garcia Canclini (2014) *Imagined Globalization*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Manuel Castells (1996) *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. I: The Rise of the Network Society*, Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.
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- Jean K. Chalaby (2005) *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a New Media Order*, New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Nick Couldry (2012) *Media, Society, World*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Nataa Durovicova and Kathleen Newman (eds) (2009) *World Cinemas: Transnational Perspectives*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Shani Orgad (2012) *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Daya Thussu (2007) *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra Flow*, London: Routledge.
- Steven Vertovec (2009) *Transnationalism*, London and New York: Routledge.