

nants que pour les étudiants qui voudront s'initier aux théories des organisations en allant directement à la source.

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Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things

Scott Lash and Celia Lury

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Promoted on the back cover as a “‘dialectic of enlightenment’ for the age of globalization,” Scott Lash and Celia Lury’s *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* purports to offer a culture industry thesis for the twenty-first century by tracing the metamorphosis of seven cultural objects—Euro ’96, the films *Trainspotting* and *Toy Story*, the animated Wallace and Gromit film series, the art movement YBA (Young British Artists), and global brands Nike and Swatch—as they are produced, distributed, marketed and consumed around the world. Notwithstanding the promotional invocation of Adorno, the authors are quick to distance themselves from the framework developed by Frankfurt School critical theory. While Horkheimer and Adorno’s thesis may have adequately described the Fordist, national culture industries of the past, Lash and Lury argue that the logic, mechanism, characteristics, and effects of the *global* culture industry require an entirely different set of conceptual tools. In particular, the book is organized around the idea that culture is no longer “superstructural” or even “representational” but now takes the form of objects that have become ubiquitous in everyday life. Culture “no longer works primarily as hegemonic ideology, as symbols, as representations” but instead involves “the emergence of things become media, of media become things” (4).

Like other works of postmodern social theory, *Global Culture Industry* relies heavily upon a series of conceptual binaries to sharpen the distinction between old and new. In the first chapter, for example, Lash and Lury identify seven key shifts that distinguish contemporary cultural objects (and the cultural theory appropriate to them) from the mass culture (and outdated Frankfurt School approach) that preceded them: from identity (the production and circulation of determinate objects with fixed meaning) to difference (indeterminate objects spinning out of control in heterogeneous encounters with the reflexive subjects of information capitalism); from commodity (standardized goods with a value determined by exchange) to brand (unique, virtual entities which acquire value through particular event-experiences); from representation (culture as that which is “interpreted”) to thing (culture as that which is “used”); from symbolic (an ideological dream world) to real (a stark “desert” in which meaning is operationalized through brute immediacy); from mechanistic power to vitalistic or bio-power; from extensity to intensity; and from actual to virtual.

At one level, the book offers an interesting set of empirical accounts of the many twists and turns that characterize the life cycle of different cultural commodities as they flow through the circuits and networks of global markets and into the “social imaginaries” of consumers. The methodological choice to “follow the objects” (16), influenced by a wide range of sources from the anthropology of material culture studies to Gilles Deleuze’s reflections upon repetition, generates detailed, “thick” descriptions of how the global culture industry functions. Despite a promise to “find out as much about [these objects] in as many places in time and space from as many points of view as possible” (20), the design, distribution and consumption stages of an object’s life cycle receive far more attention than the conditions governing its material production. The only place one finds any reference to this latter stage is in the chapter on Nike and, even there, the labour process receives scant attention com-

pared to the meticulous dissection of how the Nike brand is constructed, promoted, and consumed. Nevertheless, there are some interesting discussions that raise important yet often under-examined dimensions of global culture, including issues of rights management and the crucial intermediary role which rights brokers play in cultural spectacles such as Euro '96 and an intriguing theorization of the brand as a proactive, virtual colonization of the possible (as opposed to the appropriation of the real).

Overall, however, the book is quite disappointing in terms of its failure to offer any normative foundation for a critique of the global culture industry. Where Adorno and Horkheimer sought to expose the complicity of capitalist culture in sustaining a catastrophic system of domination (both over humanity and the natural world), Lash and Lury are largely content to describe the chaotic, heterogeneous flows through which objects move in and out of the lives of consumers who seemingly have ample opportunity to use them as they see fit. Symptomatic of this approach is the book's treatment of animation as an emerging cultural form that contributes "to a culture of play, of returning the adolescent or the adult to a state of childhood, in which characters 'pop up' to enliven the everyday world" (105). The associated discussion of how consumers make use of the merchandise that accompanies such media reads more like a marketing treatment than a critical analysis, euphorically concluding that "as companions to the mundane routines of daily life—as alarm clocks, as mugs, as key-rings, as back-packs—the resulting merchandise offers the reminder of a child-like ability to be beside oneself, to be transported beyond oneself" (103–04). Such a celebratory mode is entirely oblivious to how the media-licensing-merchandise dynamic, inaugurated by the spectacular success of the *Star Wars* franchise and perfected in the deregulatory restructuring of children's media in the United States during the 1980s, has facilitated the hyper-commercialization of children's culture which, among other effects, has seriously *eroded* the creative, imaginative dimensions of children's play.

In their chapter on the "post-conceptual" aesthetics of the so-called YBA, Lash and Lury explain that this new generation of artists "operates in a world in which classical critique is no longer possible.... At stake is a much more Nietzschean politics of affirmation: of *amor fati*, and the inescapable grain of the empirical" (72–73). At best, this art participates in the "ecstasy of communication" while, at worst, "it gives us a set of idle references: a set of unproblematic cross-media utterances" (75). Unwittingly, perhaps, the authors provide a fitting judgment not only for a certain species of contemporary art but also for their own resolutely *post*-critical theory. As a collection of highly specialized case studies of different cultural commodities seasoned with dense theoretical musings, this book will be of interest to scholars of consumer culture. However, those looking for a critical account of the global industries that dominate the production and distribution of culture and communication are advised to look elsewhere.

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Dispersed Relations: Americans and Canadians in Upper North America

Reginald C. Stuart

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Historian Reginald Stuart's *Dispersed Relations* is a useful contribution to the emerging interdisciplinary field of North American studies. It emphasizes the pervasiveness of interdependencies within "Upper" North America in four specific "realms"—cultural, social, economic, and political. Stuart argues that questions of political