

I grew up in Germany, and the extent to which I was exposed to U.S. media and culture as a teenager became only apparent to me recently. Writing *exposed* seems odd to me now since foreign culture was not forced upon me. It was in style at the time, and perhaps *immersed in* describes the circumstances better. When Madonna was a worldwide phenomenon in the 1980s, for example, German musical alternatives existed. They were just less popular.

Three categories of cultural media products prevailed in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s: genuine, imported, and adopted. (In the interest of space, I will limit my exploration to two decades and personal observation.) Genuine are those products with German cultural and historical legacy. Movies of the *Heimatfilm* genre (nostalgic/romantic movies) and *Volksmusik* (folk music) became popular during the 1950s *Wirtschaftswunder* (Economic Miracle) and feature traditional themes of the fatherland (non-political connotation), happiness, love, and family. This trouble-free cultural flavor avoids grief or critical debate, and fulfilled a distinct purpose after World War II: people craved positive images. Films and music entertained and helped coping with post-war stresses. The U.S. media acted similarly after the Vietnam War, but featured hero fighters killing bad people (Croteau and Hoynes 175). I attribute this difference in coping between Germany and the U.S. not only to mentality. Violence and combat were simply intolerable topics in Germany for a long time after World War II. Remorse and sorrow reigned.

American cultural imports had a contagious effect in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. The conquering of global markets let U.S. producers ship their products overseas (Croteau and Hoynes 339). Generations of Germans born in the 1960s and later listened to music whose lyrics they occasionally did not understand, and watched films with sometimes mysterious if not inexplicable sociological meaning. Two reasons come to mind why U.S. media products diffused with relative ease in Germany. First, between 1945 and the late 1990s, the U.S. armed forces maintained vast installations in Germany. Many Germans were steadily exposed to American people and culture. The experience included social contact, movies, music, sports, and celebrities. Cultural presence thus benefited diffusion. Second, consuming dissimilar culture forms allowed Germany's youth to distinguish itself from their parents' legacy of World War II. This form of media-enabled youth revolution happened before (Rock 'n' Roll) and will probably happen again. Surely, other factors that mattered in this generation conflict exist, but they are beyond the scope of this paper.

Some adopted cultural formats trouble me. It is one issue when domestic culture suffers due to imported products (Croteau and Hoynes 356+). Yet in most Western countries, there will always be a market for domestic and imported media to co-exist. But what if domestic media and foreign culture blend? When cable TV emerged in Germany, American TV series, films, and soap operas flooded the channels. Naturally, cable stations featured German movies, news reports, documentaries, and other content, too. However, for the most part, producers adopted foreign format. It is not surprising that success leads to imitation (Croteau and Hoynes 60), but the ubiquity of *Rather*, *Letterman*, *Springer*, and other imitations illustrates that producers became complacent. Germany has a rich media and cultural history dating back many centuries (Bach, Beethoven, Goethe, Schiller, etc.). Sadly, producers did not bother to come up with something of their own, not to speak of something uniquely German. I hope this trend is cyclic and ends soon.

There exist exceptions within above depiction of Germany's cultural landscape since cultural and societal boundaries are not always precise. Family traditions, for example, create exceptions. Still-popular *Volksmusik* is stereotyped as attracting mostly seniors who appreciate it for nostalgic reasons. However, individuals born after 1960 appreciate it too, by choice or because of community norms. Furthermore, it is not so that Germany had zero cultural output of its own in the 1980s and 1990s. In music, the *Neue Deutsche Welle* (New German Wave) was particularly successful. Influenced by Rock and Punk, this genre was refreshingly innovative. Around that time, a debate about the ratio of native versus English lyrics in popular music played on the radio emerged in the EU. Foreign cultural products began causing concern. France even instituted a government agency ensuring language purity (Henley). Conceivably, genre-experiments such as the *Neue Deutsche Welle* and the language-ratio debate helped shaping later forms of hybridized cultural output. The blend of black urban U.S. culture and German themes, for example, resulted in the creation of a lively German hip-hop and R&B scene (see Fischer). This is a positive German example of a cultural composite. Other hybrids that emerged in the U.S., Great Britain, France, and other countries resulted from the meeting of Western, South-American, Asian, and African music genres (Croteau and

Hoynes 261). Though, the influence of cultural imports on domestic culture led to diversity *and* to concerns about potentially negative consequences.

Role and Impact of the Media

Movies, before the advent of documentaries, mainly entertained audiences. Newspapers, on the other hand, used to mostly inform us. While the medium's nature and role were somewhat clearly defined during media's infancy, this view is too primitive today. Previously discreet appearance and purpose attributes converged and created seemingly new media forms. For example, writing and print united symbolism and text (Briggs and Burke 9, 37-44), and today's movies entertain as much as they facilitate social discourse and commercial interests. Recent examples include the documentary "The Corporation" and the box-office (and merchandise) hit "Spider-Man." Newspapers, in contrast, inform about current affairs, entertain, and advertise consumerism. TV and the Internet's hypertext joined the previously mentioned and other media forms. Images, audio, and text carry intellect and ideology to those connected, regardless of time and space. The media's pervasiveness, reach, vigor, and discrimination set off arguments about its merit and influence.

Conglomeration in particular stimulated the debate after an industrial trend emerged during the globalization wave of the late 20th century. Some multinational firms produce consumer/ industrial products *and* own publishing houses, TV networks, media production firms, as well as media distribution channels. Their size and worldwide reach enables market domination. Conglomerates benefit from economies of scale since production and diffusion scale better. Synergies result from repackaging opportunities and productive efficiencies arise from cross-platform distribution. In short, global media firms can improve revenues with minimal input. Moreover, content specialization and catering to a variety of discrete audiences reveals new revenue sources. In combination, size and specialization ensure market authority, secure revenues, enable cost advantages, and facilitate cross advertising. Disney and Bertelsmann, for example, are two potent media conglomerates (Croteau and Hoynes 41-44).

Another part of the debate concerns the "Cultural Imperialism Thesis" (Croteau and Hoynes 260). It argues that the diffusion of values and beliefs through global media conglomerates inhibits domestic culture in developing countries in particular. Corporate heritage and centralized ownership exemplify dominance in this context: the "big five" media conglomerates all call developed countries their home (344). Though, Croteau and Hoynes note that the idea of a plan "to subjugate" (260) the world through media dominance is exaggerated for three reasons. First, income potential in markets abroad, not ideology, is the principal motivation for the industry to export its products (261, 356). Second, consumers "make local interpretations of ... media products" (260). I, for example, was unaware of the intended therapeutic effect of "Rambo" (see Croteau and Hoynes 176) when I saw it. Third, existing media diversity is a reason why dominance is so overrated. Low-cost media channels prevail despite conglomerates' dominance. Even as their program does not scale for wider reach, domestic productions create room for content, preserve tradition, and can be exported (261).

Globalization and the information age gave the media a greater role in socio-political matters. Digitalization and increasing importance of international trade and politics provided it with a market and with responsibility. The pairing of the media's duty to inform with its appetite for profits is problematic for three reasons. Take an event like the Tiananmen Square uprising (Croteau and Hoynes 262). First, generating profit from tragedy is a source of ethical concern. How does a correspondent draw the line between factual reporting and sensationalism? Should the journalists' report help those involved? Second, the media wants to attract audiences, which it sells to advertisers (58-9). Content is secondary when consumerism values higher than quality. Third, media actors avoid irritating their revenue sources. Investigative depth suffers when objectivity is less important than maintaining the source of information or income (see Mitchell and Schoeffel 21-2). In addition to all this, information truly is a force in the worldwide knowledge economy, when the media shapes opinion through *carrying* or *forming* perspective on issues. On the one hand, it can help restoring balance. Croteau and Hoynes cite an incident in Russia: after insurgents shut down local TV stations during a revolt, Russian citizens obtained information carried by CNN (262). However, media reports that are hardly distinguishable from ideology are problematic. Fox News, for example, has a wide reach (see Rendall for details) and features a high ratio of opinion-based, single-sided commentary (Kurtz, see also Editor & Publisher). Objectivity demands that contrasting views help the audience decide. Media reports that do not meet this goal are problematic since they become commanding means when forming public opinion.

But how did the media become so pervasive and influential? Rantanen explores the role of the telegraph and

news agencies in the 19th century and finds that historians undervalue the role of globalization and news sourcing agencies in particular (607-8). Several factors helped shaping today's global media landscape. First, news commodified when "editors and publishers [began viewing] their readers ... as consumers" (608). Demand rose because news is an ephemeral good and since the 19th century news market grew quickly (608). Economies of scale mattered and emerging news agencies began satisfying the desire for information. Rantanen credits Havas, Reuters, and Wolff with "[starting] the global mass-production of news" (609, 612). Second, the telegraph changed time related paradigms. It built bridges between events and consumers because electricity moved news faster than traditional trade-related transportation modes (607, 611). In addition, time synchronization via the telegraph established that content *and* its recentness had become major factors in the commodification of information (610). Third, sociological aspects changed. Rantanen explains that electronic transmission substituted for interpersonal news exchange and created an "abstract electronic space" (612). The technology began mediating social contact and therefore simultaneously connected and separated us. Fourth, geographical aspects mattered now. As the telegraph network grew, the *remoteness* of the place from which news arrived created additional market value (612-15). Fifth, and last, the dominating news agencies emerged from countries with a history of colonization (France, Great Britain, and Germany). Besides following the telegraph cables (613), they also benefited from the colonization pursued by the governments of the countries they called home (615).

The dominance of global media through central ownership and control is a particular point of contention in the cultural imperialism discussion. Yet van Elteren believes that "[t]raditional critiques of cultural globalization have missed the point" (183). He examines alleged "U.S. cultural hegemony" (175) and explains that U.S. culture is dominant due to five reasons. First, "a huge domestic market that offers economies of scale" (173) lowers input costs and benefits exports. Second, the U.S. produces media output in the world's language: English. Third, a long-standing immigration tradition facilitates that "foreign [individuals] ... continue to consume U.S. cultural products when they return home" (173). Fourth, the industry enjoys government support through favorable policies concerning export, technology, and copyright (174, 177). Fifth, U.S. "corporate capitalism" and "managerial thinking" influence economies worldwide (177-8). van Elteren contends that the perceived "Americanization" of domestic cultures is in actuality suggestive of "the profit driven culture of consumerism" (179). Thus, "imperialism" takes place, but perfect "cultural insubordination" is a myth (171-2). van Elteren explains that societal conventions facilitate the U.S.-made "Triumph of Capitalist Consumerism" (180). U.S. society exhibits "possessive individualism and consumerism," values "unlimited, quantitative growth...", and admires "sensational spectacle, ... outstanding performance..., [and] the intense emotional thrill" (180). Moreover, advertising became "the dominant mode in which thoughts and experiences are expressed," so that "appearance and image [became] of prime importance" (182-3). While the critique is quite uncomplimentary, it merely explains that mature business practices, enthusiasm, vigorous self-representation, and passion for profits "[gave] globalization a U.S. face" (177). The "global diffusion of consumerist beliefs and practices" (184) is mistaken for homogenization efforts.

Koch's explanation of technology-caused media discrimination arouses curiosity how "global" the media really is. She observes access-inequality not only between "the first world [and] the fourth" (29) but also on domestic and city-levels. Economic prosperity, human-, and property rights determine who is connected and who is not. Koch does not believe that technology alone facilitates social advancement and suggests that "[s]ocial process is bound inextricably to the principle of justice, so that technological process can be a medium of social process, but never the thing itself" (30). She holds politicians responsible for the divide (30-1). Seemingly, this calls for governance and technological change, as suggested previously by the NWICO initiative. Contrastingly, Mowlana believes that addressing media ownership and control, not technology issues is important to working out inequalities and one-dimensional reporting. I am doubtful whether Western capitalists will welcome any such initiative.

Impact of New Media Technologies

Technology progressed vigorously since the early 1900s. As it matures, research and governance always seem to be a step behind. In respect to mobile communication, for example, Thurlow and Brown suggest to "acknowledge the speed with which these communication technologies are changing and how academic research ... slides towards obsolescence before it even gets going." Yet the term *new* media technology misleads.

Bolter and Grusin explain that "transparent immediacy"(21) in mediation softens barriers between object, viewer, and medium. Perspectivism, for example, reduces to comprehending meaning and symbolism of a painting,

not canvas or paint (24-6). Digital images imitate photography and film, which imitate reality (28). Video games mediate traditional games (89) and narratives of films and novels (94). Media technologies thus attempt simulating authenticity for our cognitive senses. The process is intrinsic to the name: mediation is "the action of mediating between parties in *dispute*" (Oxford). Hypermediacy, on the other hand, symbolizes quantitative aspects. Bolter and Grusin call it a "representational practice" (31) that re-emphasizes the medium Immediacy sought to eliminate (33) because it introduces interaction into the mediation. One example is a "baroque cabinet" called the "*Wunderkammer*" which mediates the contents of its compartments *and* the process of accessing them (35-6). HTML hyperlinks and interactive CD-ROMs (40-3) also serve the double-purpose of an offering and an interaction-opportunity. These media "compete for ... attention" (32) through multiplication of symbols, meaning, and complexity. They constitute an evolutionary step in media representation and human cognition.

Remediation is an extension of Immediacy and Hypermediacy, according to Bolter and Grusin. However, refashioning of content on a different platform is no recent phenomenon. Writing, for example, "borrowed" speech (45). Maps mediate reality and integrate with text and paintings (45). Beginning in the 20th century, digital convergence joined the Internet, radio, and books (46-7). Bolter and Grusin believe that new forms facilitate exposure to new technology, context, and content, and that fragments of old media structures always subsist. Remediation dissolves boundaries and lets diverse media platforms co-exist (45, see also Briggs and Burke 5-6). It follows that new media are not truly new. They only become more sophisticated and variable since media technologies shape bidirectionally (48).

Blogs seem to be the next big thing. Yet the idea that any Internet user can publish media content accessible for a worldwide audience is not new. It seems only as if more and more users discovered their exhibitionistic tendencies in recent times. Whether blogging is journalism by substance (see MacKinnon) or by status (see Hiltzik) has yet to be determined. Besides author and content credibility, search technology should concern us. Commercial and non-commercial blogs will supplement massive amounts of data. How does a user find relevant information in this collection? Of more than 300 billion currently existing Internet pages (Globalreach, Global Internet Statistics), Google, for example searches roughly 1% (Sullivan)! I do not know the answers to legal, ethical, and technological questions but hope we will find them soon.

Conclusion

Media globalization is an imprecise and overvalued term, as only the affluent and connected access media content with ease. The Internet's population comprises circa 900 million people. Approximately 85% of the world's citizens have no access to it. Thirty-seven prosperous, well-developed countries (for example, the U.S., Canada, most EU countries, South Korea, and the UAE) provide 866 million telephone lines to their citizens. The remaining 198 countries (including India, Romania, Morocco, Sudan, El Salvador, Nepal, and Ghana) offer only 287 million lines. The ratio in prosperous countries is roughly 35 lines per 100 citizens and constitutes five times the amount available in developing and small countries (seven lines per 100 citizens). The ratio of TV sets in developing and small countries is slightly better at nine TVs per 100 citizens, versus 42 per 100 in prosperous countries (Data derived from ClickZ, CIA World Fact Book, and Nationmaster). Koch sums it up:

The point is that once the ideas of simultaneous ubiquity and equal and simultaneous access ... become practical in the sense that a shared experience of these media has come within everyone's reach, then it becomes possible to imagine a politics that makes use of the electronic medium of the computer as the decentralized communications medium of a similarly globalized and cosmopolitan civil society. (31)

Some scholars believe that participation in the global economy and access to capital and technology are the only hope societies have. In contrast to such technologically deterministic and capitalistic views stand proposals to de-emphasize consumption. Gardner and Assadourian, for example, argue that personal wealth comprises more than "material accumulation" (179). They believe that "a higher quality of life rather than the mere accumulation of goods" (165), close-knit relations within the community and with nature, and equal distribution of essential goods, safety, and freedom (178-9) could lead to an "achievement [as great as] the tremendous advances ... were in the 20th century" (179): human well-being. Such change in priorities has the potential to mitigate poverty, hunger, and inequality. It would severely shake the foundation of Western beliefs, and given its role in global consumerism pose the question where the media fits in this scenario. Social constructivism theory suggests that it cannot have a dominant role.

In respect to the cultural imperialism theory, we seem to be approaching a point at which not scholars but reality will finally disprove it. Barton believes that China's "emergence as an economic power" had worldwide impact. Moreover, he contends that its "impressive growth has enhanced its global influence and, some would argue, helped shift the world's balance of power toward Asia." Following van Elteren's analysis, globalization's appearance will therefore change. How *Asiazation* will change the world's cultures and societies, we will have to see.

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