

UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

Title

Global Television Distribution

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6bx1q7db>

Journal

American Behavioral Scientist, 48(7)

ISSN

0002-7642

Authors

Harrington, C Lee
Bielby, Denise D

Publication Date

2005-03-01

DOI

10.1177/0002764204273175

Peer reviewed

Global Television Distribution

Implications of TV “Traveling” for Viewers, Fans, and Texts

C. LEE HARRINGTON

Miami University

DENISE D. BIELBY

University of California–Santa Barbara

This article focuses on the sale and purchase of TV programs and formats at international trade fairs and its implications for our understanding of global television audiences, fans, and texts. Through analytic engagement with the core concept of flow, the authors explore three related issues: (a) how viewers and fans are positioned in distribution practices, (b) the ease through which various televisual elements travel through the distribution process, and (c) the limitations of a conceptual reliance on “traveling” discourses to our understanding of global TV trade.

Keywords: *global television; television distribution; flow; fan studies*

Nordenstreng and Varis (1974) published, for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, the first-ever study of the exchange patterns of exported television. Relying on questionnaire data from more than 50 different countries, the authors analyzed the content and percentages of imported versus domestic television programming. Providing documentation of the dominance of U.S. programming in the then-global market and the preference by importing markets for entertainment television (rather than the news, for example), Nordenstreng and Varis’s report generated ongoing debate about the democratization and varied consequences of cross-border media flows. During the past 30 years, there has been an explosion of global flow studies located in a variety of academic disciplines and examining virtually every region of the world. Following Nordenstreng and Varis’s lead, scholars continue to focus on what type of programming sells, where it starts and where it ends up, the cultural

Authors’ Note: *An earlier version of this article was presented at the Console-ing Passions Conference and at the International Communication Association Meeting, both held in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2004.*

AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST, Vol. 48 No. 7, March 2005 902-920

DOI: 10.1177/0002764204273175

© 2005 Sage Publications

and economic power gained (and lost) by media flows, and the uses of imported media to local audiences.

As White (2003, p. 99) observed, scholarly emphasis on notions of flow ultimately situates television according to a kind of "traveling theory" that evokes certain logics to explain global television institutions, texts, and modes of receptions. The concept of flow generates discourses of tourism, migration, global trade, and diaspora as well as the image of both TV programs and TV viewers as travelers, tourists, sojourners, exiles, vagabonds, pilgrims, or nomads (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000; White, 2003). This discourse and imagery is potentially problematic for any number of reasons, including the fact that in our reading, most global flow studies actually do not examine the process of traveling per se. As just noted, most research examines the meaning(s) of TV programming before and after its arrival in a new cultural context, thus, obscuring the actual process of getting there. Moreover, conceptualizing the "getting there" as "flow" implies a fluid, smooth, and uninterrupted journey. The movement of TV programs and audiences around the globe is anything but that.

In their dialogic model of a circuit of culture, du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (1997) suggested that cultural meanings are produced at a number of different sites and are circulated through a complex set of reciprocal processes and practices; they emphasized five major processes at work, including representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (p. 3). We emphasize a sixth, that of distribution, which is implied by regulation but warrants direct examination. The examination of any cultural product requires an examination of the circuit as a whole, because "it is in the combination of processes—in their articulation—that the beginnings of an explanation are to be found" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 3). In this article, we focus on the sale and purchase of TV programs or formats at international trade fairs and its implications for our understanding of global television audiences, fans, and texts.

Each year, four major international conventions or fairs bring together members of media industries for the marketing and purchase of television. These gatherings "form at the intersection of domestic distribution sectors (outputs) and international acquisitions sectors (inputs)" (Havens, 2003a, p. 22). The major fairs include the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE) convention, which is held in the United States every winter; MIPCOM and MIP-TV, which are the Midem Organization of France's annual fall and spring events located in Monte Carlo; and the by-invitation-only L.A. Screenings in Los Angeles which are held for 2 weeks in late May to early June. Attendance at these venues can number in the thousands; for example, NATPE 2000 registered more than 17,500 participants involved in various aspects of the television industry (NATPE, 2000).

Global TV distribution fairs serve a variety of business and cultural functions. In addition to the actual sales transactions that occur, the fairs "facilitat[e] efficient networking, concretiz[e] power relations among participants, differentiat[e] otherwise similar products, and prov[e] the terrain on which

distributors construct their corporate brand identities” (Havens, 2003a, p. 19).¹ Somewhat surprisingly, trade fairs have “rarely captured the interest of media researchers” (Havens, 2003a, p. 20) and remain an overlooked site in the circuit of culture. Ang (1990) pointed out nearly 15 years ago that conceptualizing media reception as a social-psychological moment obscures the fact that it is a deeply politicized and highly complicated process. Since that time, scholars have invested considerable time and energy in articulating the complexities of certain sites on the circuit of culture, namely production and consumption. We argue that the site of global TV distribution has been similarly oversimplified. The term *distribution* implies a one-off behavioral transaction, the mere handing over of TV shows to the highest bidder. This obscures the extreme stratification, fierce competition, and basic brutality of the marketplace (Caldwell, 2004; Havens, 2003a). In this article, we explore three related questions: (a) What happens to TV viewers and fans in the process of distribution and as a result of that process? (b) What televisual elements do and do not travel well (i.e., what flows in but does not flow out of global trade fairs—or what fails to continue the circuit)? and (c) What kinds of traveling are implicated by the distribution process: for texts, audiences, fans, and nations? We point out up front that our interrogation of traveling theory is somewhat awkward in that we must necessarily use the very discourse we critique in critiquing it—we do this partly as a method of revealing its limitations and partly because the discourse of traveling is ubiquitous in global media studies (there is currently no workable alternative). We return to this point in the concluding section.

Our article is based on participant-observation research undertaken at trade fairs between 1998 and 2003, along with analysis of what Caldwell (2004) referred to as the “deep industrial texts” of the production industry—that is, the material and nonmaterial artifacts that reflect how the industry makes sense of itself, to itself, and that serve as “user guides and road maps for practitioners” (p. 185). Deep industrial texts include various items available at trade fairs, such as promotional brochures, conference seminars and panels, daily briefings on proceedings, and self-evaluations. TV viewers and fans never see deep texts; indeed, they “precede and prefigure the kinds of film/television screen forms that scholars typically analyze” (Caldwell, 2004, p. 165). Our research includes analysis of deep texts or trade artifacts collected and/or observed since 1998.

IMAGINING AUDIENCES, IMAGINING FANS

One of the most interesting and salient features of global TV distribution is the relative absence of a seemingly key player: the viewer. In some types of trade fairs, regular consumers are welcomed participants and mingle freely with professional buyers and sellers. For example, Peñaloza (2001) explored the cultural functioning of beef trade shows, where the general public participates in a range

of entertainment, education, and business activities. Most consumers at beef trade fairs are not members of the culture they consume; instead, the fairs function, in part, as a site of consumer socialization into the history and meanings of the American West. In another example, sport trade fairs such as the U.S. National Basketball Association draft picks serve at least two distinct functions: Their business function is to distribute athletic talent and labor between buyers and sellers, whereas they function culturally as huge, raucous fan events that are televised nationally as a form of entertainment.

Although global television syndication fairs serve numerous cultural functions, as noted earlier, their main purpose is facilitating business-to-business transactions. At NATPE and MIPCOM, for example, “regular” viewers would no doubt be entertained by the presence of famous celebrities promoting their latest TV programs, the extravagantly lavish hospitality suites hosted by major corporations, and the (somewhat deceptive) party-like atmosphere that permeates the convention floor. But the everyday audience does not consume the fairs: NATPE and MIPCOM have promotional strategies that are largely internal, prohibitive registration fees, coded entry badges that restrict who can access the sales floor (and effectively advertise one’s status to other trade fair participants), and a well-established pecking order reinforced by structural mechanisms that keep nonplayers and small-time players away from the main business of the fairs (Havens, 2003a, p. 26; see also Caldwell, 2004).

The audience is not entirely absent, however, and TV viewers can be said to participate in trade fairs in two key ways. First, they participate as a form of data, represented most frequently through Nielsen ratings or other comparable ratings indicators and market research. This is, at best, an unsystematic form of participation in that methodologically consistent ratings data have only recently been available from all regions of the world, with some regions still lagging far behind. In addition, market research in other countries is extremely expensive. Some buyers simply cannot afford it, whereas for others there is little economic incentive for conducting research because imported shows typically draw lower ratings than domestically produced programming (Havens, 2003b, p. 426). Finally, even the most exhaustive research cannot guarantee a hit show. The unreliability of market research in domestic contexts, where even the industry hit makers readily admit that “nobody knows anything,” is magnified when programs or formats go global.

The second way viewers can be said to participate in trade fairs is through programming buyers, who function as surrogates for the generalized audience. Havens (2003a) wrote,

Buyers are the primary consumer in international television sales, but they ultimately serve a surrogate function because the success of an internationally syndicated program lies with viewers. Though independent, buyers’ choices are never wholly their own. Instead, they receive their authority because they lay claim to being privileged interpreters of viewers’ tastes, much like book reviewers. (p. 22)

Buyers make purchasing decisions on the basis of a variety of factors, including the distributor's reputation, country of origin, word of mouth on the program or format, marketing and promotional materials, and the buyer's own preferences in television entertainment. This latter ingredient holds considerable sway. According to Ben Silverman (1998), international packager for the William Morris Agency, his personal likes and dislikes are key in facilitating global transactions:

[I] look for shows obviously that are good. I mean, just something that strikes my own personal interests is my biggest driving factor. . . . When I stick that tape in, if I like it [I go for it].

Buyers' surrogate function helps to ease the potential challenges of conducting business transactions cross-culturally:

Because buyers function as surrogate consumers in international television, distributors can focus their promotional efforts on courting their favor, rather than trying to create programming that appeals to viewers around the world with far-flung tastes. This practice rationalizes the process of international television trade and makes manageable the otherwise insurmountable task of trying to understand the cultural affinities and dislocations between specific national and sub-national groups and specific television series or films. (Havens, 2003a, p. 29)

Again, this rationalization is necessary because of the fundamental uncertainty that underlies the production of entertainment television in both local and global contexts (Bielby & Bielby, 1994; Bielby & Harrington, 2002).

We have been attending global distribution fairs for the past 6 years, and two things strike us as notable. First is the lack of any meaningful or substantive discourse about the viewing audience (not only are viewers physically absent but they are discursively absent as well). Articulated repetitively at trade fairs are discourses relating to textual properties such as genre, quality, popularity, innovation, and so on. There is obviously an implied readership or viewership inherent in some of these discourses, but viewers themselves are not treated as a relevant (or perhaps knowable) topic of conversation. Second, we are struck by what this viewer absence tells us about the fundamental disconnect between the global TV industry and scholars who study that industry. The media industry is famously secretive about its practices—its audience research, its efforts to secure deals, its revenue from international sales, and so on. Scholars are obviously not that secretive, and we have at least 30 years of reception studies that offer rich insight into viewers' experiences and preferences with TV programming from other countries. What do we make of this continuing disconnect? What, if anything, can we do about it?

So if in the process of global TV distribution the viewer is largely absent, the result or outcome of that process is less a search for viewers in new cultural

contexts than an effort to generate fans of imported programming. As the cost of television production increases, competition increases and profits decline; TV industries worldwide have shifted their focus from generalized ratings to target demographics, and this is true in the context of global syndication as well. The shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting brings new niche markets, including those based on youth, gender, and racial-ethnic identities and histories, under increased scrutiny by global syndicators (Havens, 2003b). Fans are another niche market both actively sought and deliberately cultivated by producers and programmers (Jancovich & Lyons, 2003; Jenkins, 2001; Willis, 2003).² Global TV sales are accompanied by increasingly complex promotional efforts to construct a fan following in new cultural markets (often before a show even hits the local airwaves), with the hope that word of mouth will then attract a broader audience. Said Bob Kuperman (2001) of TBWA Worldwide,

You need to start changing people into *fans* of the brand. People who really want to engage in the brand, because this is no longer an atmosphere in which you can push yourself on the consumer, you're going to have to pull them in.

We emphasize that fans are now being targeted not just at the level of production but again at the level of global distribution, and not necessarily with programming that was consciously produced to be fan friendly worldwide. For example, Rob Tapert (1998), executive producer of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (which was designed to be fan friendly in the domestic market) was asked during a NATPE seminar whether the references to popular culture sprinkled throughout the show travel well to other countries. With a surprised look on his face, he responded that he has no idea.

An interesting implication of this shift in business practices is that it forces us, as scholars, to rethink our understanding of the relationship between TV audiences, viewers, and fans. In the past 15 years, the notion of the audience has become increasingly problematic in media and cultural studies. As various forms of media technology are naturalized in everyday life, the audience is understood to be both "everywhere and nowhere" (Bird, 2003, p. 3). "How do we draw the line in our data collection between audience research and the study of society, the family, the community?" (Seiter, 1999, p. 9). In short, "if we cannot define an audience, is it effectively impossible to study it?" (Bird, 2003, p. 4). A similar ambiguity applies to fan studies, where the distinction between fans and followers of cultural texts remains fluid, arbitrary, and contested (Hills, 2002). Although scholars studying fandom tend to emphasize a particular dimension of experience, such as identity, affect, or activity, they seem to share the assumption that fans are a particular "kind" of consumer. In the context of TV fandom, fans are typically conceptualized as a subset of viewers: An audience is generated, and out of that audience (if producers are lucky) emerges a

smaller, more avid group of fans.³ In this understanding, fanship presupposes consumption (viewership).

Our observations of global TV trade fairs, however, suggest a different understanding of the viewer/fan relationship from the industry's perspective. According to du Gay (2000),

With market-dependent consumption playing an enhanced role in the formation of consumer subjectivity and identity, the reproduction of the market requires the continual creation of new ways for consumers to be. In other words, as the economic folds seamlessly into the cultural, the battle for market share becomes articulated as a struggle for the *imagination of the consumer*; organizational success becomes increasingly dependent upon the ability to win over or more accurately to "make up" the consumer. While this is obviously still a matter of "numbers" . . . it is also a matter of "meaning," of interventions aimed at the expressive or symbolic dimensions of consumption practices. (p. 71)

Following this line of thinking, fans are attracted to cultural texts through the promise of imaginative or affective engagement, a capacity that precedes the act of consumption. From the perspective of the global TV industry, then, one might suggest that the target market today is composed of three potential groups: fans, nonfans, and antifans. We borrow and slightly alter Gray's (2003) terminology here. In describing antifans, Gray wrote, "This is the realm not necessarily of those who are against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel" (p. 70). By nonfans, Gray referred to "those viewers or readers who do view or read a text, but not with any intense involvement" (p. 74). In our usage, the concept of nonfans might also include nonviewers, although nonfans and nonviewers are not interchangeable. To be more precise, in our usage, each one of these categories—fans, nonfans, and antifans—reasonably includes people who both do and do not actually consume the TV text in question. Although distributors obviously hope that everyone becomes fans of their programming (and the kind of fans who actually watch their programming), the important point from our perspective is that the capacity for fanship precedes or "leads" textual consumption (viewership).

In the context of global television, then, the question has been transformed from What kind of viewer are you? (with fans a subset of viewers) to What kind of fan are you? (with the notion of viewership subsumed under the fan/nonfan/antifan conceptualization). The question of consumers' imaginative capacity for fanship precontextualizes the reception of programming in new cultural markets and, thus, the deals that are made at the site of distribution. Much as the traditional concept of the television audience has eroded in media and cultural studies, so too may that of the viewer.

TRAVELING THE CIRCUIT

We have been discussing the role and/or place of the viewer/fan in the process of global TV distribution. We turn now to a discussion of the various elements that do or do not “travel well” on the circuit of culture. Again, most global flow studies look at where texts start and where they end up, which mistakenly implies a smooth and fluid journey from markets of production to those of consumption. Admittedly, this is somewhat of an overgeneralization. In the past 10 years, there has been significant inquiry into the so-called middle-range factors that enable or inhibit the success of imported programming, such as local scheduling practices, promotional efforts, and the impact of culturally specific business models. The middle-range approach foregrounds the analysis of practices through which programming is made available to audiences. However, even middle-range perspectives tend to emphasize activities that occur after a TV program or format has been purchased for airing in a new market. Our interest is in the impact of distribution practices themselves. We briefly discuss factors that disappear in the process of distribution (i.e., they flow into trade fairs but fail to flow out), those that are interrupted by distribution but reconstructed in receiving markets, and those that travel through the distribution process. This is not meant to be an exhaustive or complete discussion but rather, the beginnings of an inquiry into how global TV distribution problematizes our understanding of the circuit of culture.

There is at least one element that generally fails to make it through the distribution process—the reputation of an individual producer, director, writer, or corporation in the eyes of viewers. Television has never enjoyed the auteur status that film has, but certainly in some domestic contexts of production and reception, reputational identity matters in selling programming to viewers. In the United States, for example, it matters to savvy viewers and fans whether Tommy Schlamme is still writing for *The West Wing*, whether a new primetime drama is an Aaron Spelling Production, or whether the movie of the week is part of the Hallmark Hall of Fame series. Individual reputation matters at global trade fairs because it can make or break a deal. To buyers, reputation indicates a program’s potential quality, popularity, or longevity—and in some instances might be said to matter more than the program itself, because deals are regularly based on promotional videotapes only 5 or 10 minutes in length. We see little evidence, however, that programmers in new cultural markets are using reputational identities relevant to markets of production to sell imported shows to local audiences.

Many other factors relevant at local sites of production and consumption fail to travel through the global distribution process. These factors do not disappear per se but rather, are interrupted at the moment of distribution and reconstructed

in receiving markets. The first we have already discussed: the viewer. In short, viewers enter as a form of data, are represented during trade fairs by the buyer-as-surrogate, and exit as an imaginary to be reconfigured out of a locally generated fan community. A second factor interrupted through the distribution process is a program or format's popular success. As noted above, sellers routinely marshal ratings indicators as part of their marketing and sales strategy, and buyers are clearly oriented toward whether an established program or format was successful in its country of origin. Success in one cultural context, however, does not guarantee success in another (e.g., think NBC's *Couplings*). Third is a program or format's success with professional critics (critical response and audience response are not, of course, the same). Although a discourse of quality television permeates trade fairs, as noted earlier, no one really knows what that means, and critical acclaim in one market does not readily influence a show's reception with professional critics elsewhere. A fourth factor that fails to travel well (in that it travels erratically) is profitability. The price a TV program or format fetches in domestic markets is not necessarily related to the price it sells in Country A, which is not necessarily related to the price it might command in Country B (Wildman & Siwek, 1988, p. 4). Profitability is, thus, variably and inconsistently transformed through distribution practices. Finally, most elements of the TV paratext (see Gray, 2003) are interrupted in the process of distribution and must be reconstructed in local markets of consumption: print and on-air advertisements, previews, product tie-ins, local newspaper and magazine coverage, and so on.

In contrast to those elements that either fail to travel or whose traveling is interrupted, our research identifies four elements of global television that manage to travel fairly effectively through the distribution process, although they too are altered by the journey. First is the text itself—buyers are obviously purchasing programs or formats produced in one cultural context for the purpose of airing them in another. Program content, of course, is subject to dubbing, subtitling, censorship, and other practices designed to influence local reception (Koolstra, Peeters, & Spinhof, 2002).⁴ The sale of program formats is similarly predicated on the ability of buyers to reshape key elements to resonate more effectively with local tastes. Altering textual aesthetics means altering what it is that viewers and fans engage with, which ultimately means that experiences of viewership and fanship are unique to local contexts of reception. On one hand, this is an overly obvious statement—decades of research have shown convincingly that consumers make sense of imported programming through local frames of reference. However, scholars have not, we believe, fully taken into account the extent to which those local meanings may reflect textual considerations as well as (or as opposed to) cultural considerations. To put it another way, different cultures respond differently to texts, but the texts themselves are also different. How do we know local interpretations reflect the culture and not the text?⁵

A second element that travels through TV trade fairs is the reputation or image of the nation of production, although it too is altered in the process. The fact that a nation's reputation can influence buying decisions of all kinds is well known by marketers. Although nations are not products, "the notion of the nation as brand has an instant and even populist resonance" even though "the image of a nation is so complex and fluid as to deny the clarity implicit in a term such as *brand image*" (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2000, pp. 56, 58).⁶ In the context of global TV trade fairs, the two main strategies for constructing brand identities are programming genre and national identity. "Programming genres and subgenres form the primary product in international television, around which many distributors build their corporate identities" (Havens, 2003a, p. 29). So Brazil gets a reputation for its telenovelas, Scandinavian countries for reality shows, Japan for its anime, and Germany for its action shows. National images are used by some distributors as a marketing tool; we say *some* and not *all* because building a nation-based brand is expensive and not all sellers can afford to do so (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2000). National images can also be used by buyers as another piece of (albeit unreliable) data on which to make purchasing decisions (Havens, 2003a, p. 31), as well as by local schedulers in promoting imported programming.⁷

A third element of global television that travels fairly well through the distribution process is the reputation or celebrity attached to actors, actresses, and other on-screen personalities. To most viewers in most parts of the world, the power of television rests on the faces and stories appearing on-screen rather than the various other professionals involved in the production and dissemination of programming; hence, this form of celebrity travels much more easily than other forms of reputational identity (see prior discussion). As more and more TV shows are viewed in multiple world markets, and as Web sites celebrate media personalities in ways simultaneously accessible to users in very diverse geographic locations, recognizable TV stars facilitate sales transactions for buyers and sellers and, thus, usher programs and formats through the distribution process into new viewing arenas.

Finally, TV fandom itself, particularly in its Web-based manifestations, is able to travel through the process of global distribution. This might seem an odd claim, given our earlier suggestion that viewers flow in and fans flow out of TV trade fairs (i.e., increased competition for the generalized television audience has led to a new focus on fans as a particular niche market). However, any time spent wandering through fan Web sites indicates that fans can and do create online homages to programs that have never aired on their local TV stations, which, thus, might mean programs they have never seen and actors they have never seen actually acting in anything.⁸ Similarly, the thriving bootleg market for pirated entertainment media (which exists both online and offline) enables TV consumption irrespective of the formal distribution process. Finally, Web-based fan activities include the sharing of information that nonfans in new cultural markets are not privy to (or may not access). For example, we suggested

earlier that reputational identities of directors, writers, producers, and so forth typically fail to travel through the distribution process because they are not seen as relevant to import markets. This might be true for implied viewers of new programming (whether nonfans or antifans) but not necessarily for fans of that programming for whom reputational identity is a relevant, knowable, and exchangeable piece of information. As such, rather than saying fandom travels through global TV distribution, perhaps the more accurate suggestion is that fandom has the capacity to bypass it.

COMPETING DISCOURSES OF TRAVELING

At this point in the article, we have discussed how viewers and fans are positioned via global TV distribution and have explored the relative ease through which various televisual elements travel through the distribution process. In this final section, we return to the traveling theory that increasingly frames our understanding of global media production, distribution, and consumption. As noted earlier, this theory has been widely criticized for its almost reflexive celebration and romanticization of all forms of mobility and hybridity, its tendency to gloss over key issues of social and economic stratification, and its taken-for-granted status within media and cultural studies (Morley, 2000, 2001; Parks, 2004; White, 2003).

Our specific point of concern, however, is slightly different. We argue that use of a common discourse of traveling blurs together very different phenomena that occur at or through different sites, moments, and processes on the circuit of cultural meaning making. For example, a major focus of TV flow studies has been the geographic mobility of consumers (who, once mobile, are typically described as tourists, nomads, wanderers, etc.) and the impact of their dislocation on media reception. Raymond Williams's (1974/1992) classic essay on watching American television is the standard here. More recently, Sampedro (1998) examined what it means for students studying abroad to read newspapers from home, Strelitz (2002) explored South African students' construction of a "homeland" space for viewing domestically produced television, Milikowski (2000) analyzed Turkish immigrants' reception of Turkish television in Holland, and Naficy (1999) explored Iranian television as experienced by Iranians in Los Angeles. In these and other analyses, viewers' geographic traveling is argued to precede and implicate other types of journeys: (a) psychological traveling, as in identity reevaluation; (b) symbolic traveling, as in the concept of imagined communities (Anderson, 1991); and (c) ideological traveling, as viewers negotiate textualities in the context of global political economies.

Somewhat in contrast to the evolution of audience studies, fan studies during the past decade have prioritized imaginative rather than geographic traveling. For example, in *Popular Stories and Promised Lands*, Aden (1999) explored the "purposeful play" of media fans, interpreted as symbolic pilgrimages

undertaken in response to the material conditions of fans' everyday lived experiences. According to Aden, "The kind of escape popular stories promote is a ritualistic journey of the mind to spiritually powerful places where a vantage point that is anything but mundane affords us a reassuring view of an imagined promised land" (p. 8). Here, fanship is primarily a communicative experience. In contrast, Hills (2001, 2002) placed subjectivity and affect at the center of fandom, suggesting that media fans compose not an imagined community but a community of imagination.⁹ Hills (2002) wrote, "Experiences of fandom always have to be negotiated between the internal self and its experiences and the external self and its cultural context, meaning that distinguishing between the 'internal' and the 'external' ultimately becomes impossible" (p. 79). Finally, Sandvoss (2003) emphasized both the consumptive and communicative dimensions of football fandom, arguing that fandom provides a social-psychological space for self-examination. Sandvoss wrote, "Football fandom articulates conscious aspects of the self: values and opinions, fantasies and self-reflections. . . . While the habitus articulates who we are, values, beliefs and self-reflection express who we think we are" (p. 26). Although all three scholars account for the structural conditions that help generate and shape fandoms, each ultimately emphasizes imaginative, emotional, and/or psychological experiences.

Much as audience studies suggest that viewers' geographic traveling precedes their psychological traveling, fan studies suggests the reverse: The imaginative journeys of media fans can lead to other forms of mobility. Hills (2002), for example, discussed the growing practice of cult geography, where fans visit the geographical sites where fictionalized events on (or in) their favorite TV shows, books, or films take place.¹⁰ Some of those fans then post pictures and descriptions of their travels online, allowing others to virtually accompany them (Couldry, 2003). More complex are fans' desires to travel to the imaginary entertainment environments created by cultural artists. Here, the desire is not to take a "Frodo tour" to New Zealand to see where *Lord of the Rings* was filmed but to travel to Middle-earth itself—so fans' imaginative play generates imaginative but richly experienced nongeographic travel. The Web, of course, goes further in allowing fans to participate in Middle-earth's activities through virtual travel to its online immersive environment (Lancaster, 2001).¹¹

In addition to its influence on our understanding of viewers and fans, the so-called traveling theory of television speaks to TV texts themselves in central ways. Texts' mobility is most commonly framed as geographic and technological, as programs and formats enter new world markets through an expanding variety of both official and unofficial channels. TV texts are always, of course, assumed to be traveling with a controversial and undesirable seatmate—their cultural signification(s) (see White, 2003). There are still other mobility discourses that surround television. For example, TV is argued to travel increasingly toward the center (as in debates about product homogenization), increasingly outside the home (as in McCarthy's [2001] discussion of nondomestic or

ambient television), and through increasingly complex systems of political and economic regulation.

A related discourse of traveling that shapes our understanding of global television focuses on the Internet. Global media consumption today is defined by the assumed ability of new communications technologies to collapse time/space boundaries, enabling both people and texts to travel the world quickly, extensively, and seemingly without restriction. The discourse of mobility through which the Web is conceptualized is ubiquitous. However, in a recent essay, Parks (2004) challenged the fantasy of “digital nomadism as unfettered flow” (p. 37) by turning it on its head, so to speak. Parks wrote, “Rather than consider web navigation as a form of travel, I am interested in exploring how it is that we have come to imagine or know ourselves to be moving—whether navigating or surfing—while sitting . . . at an interface” (p. 37). Through three linked analyses of ways to conceptualize movement at the interface, Parks aimed to “make discussion of web navigation more material, to complicate discourses of digital nomadism, and to encourage technological literacy, aesthetic experimentation, processes of differentiation, and exposure of global inequalities at the interface” (p. 38). Rather than the “placeless globalism” which the Web is assumed to achieve, Parks examined ways of understanding movement in more place-based terms (p. 54).

Finally, the traveling theory that pervades global media studies applies to nation-states as well. Consider, for example, the May 1, 2004, expansion of the European Union from 15 to 25 nations, with new members including 8 former communist states of Eastern Europe and 2 Mediterranean countries. This form of traveling is and is not symbolic, with renewed contestation about the meaning of Europe accompanied by very real cultural, economic, political, and human consequences to EU membership (see Morley, 2000). In the context of this article, the new configuration of the EU obviously rewrites global media trade patterns for both better and worse (depending on one’s perspective) and allows companies to engage differently in nation branding at TV trade fairs. We were fascinated during our data gathering by the ways buyers and sellers strategically position themselves, the corporations they represent, and their national origin vis-à-vis world geography. It is treated almost as a joke—for example, no one claims to be from Eastern Europe because of the connotations that presumably evokes. Countries widely understood to be part of Eastern Europe are marketed as Central European or simply European on the convention floor, thus, symbolically rewriting contemporary cartography (among other things).

Our point here is not that whatever viewers, fans, texts, Web users, and nations are doing is not some form of mobility or traveling but rather, that a singular discourse blurs the nuance and complexity of the practices, persons, and artifacts that compose cultural meaning making. Processes that occur at the level of the subject are different than those of the nation-state; technological changes and changes in business models certainly inform one another, but they are different phenomena. Until we develop a more situated and precise discourse that

captures the complexity of the circuit of culture, our ability to fully understand global television remains limited.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this article, we positioned our analysis relative to the circuit of culture model proposed by du Gay et al. (1997), arguing that processes of distribution—along with those of representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation—are central to the meanings made of global media texts. Dean and Jones (2003) critiqued the circuit of culture model by observing that there is “a danger inherent in the division of the . . . circuit into moments, in that the divisions themselves will be reified and, in the process, the interconnections between the moments will be lost” (p. 534). To elaborate,

in the model as it was proposed, we seem to have five distinct elements which are then linked to one another, looking out onto each other through “windows.” [We suggest that] each of the five moments does not simply look out on the other four, but *always already includes them in advance*. One will never find any of the elements not involving, in some way or another, the others. So we see each of the “moments”—which can no longer be seen as such—as directly implicated with the others. (Dean & Jones, 2003, pp. 536-537)

As noted earlier, most global media studies focus on markets of production or consumption and, thus, obscure how distribution practices both connect and transform those markets. Our analysis suggests that current distribution practices (a) fundamentally transform our understanding of the viewer/fan relationship, (b) variably enable televisual elements (such as reputational identity, critical success, profitability, and textual aesthetics) to travel from markets of production to those of consumption, and (c) reveal the limitations of a singular mobility discourse to our understanding of global TV trade.

We noted earlier that our interrogation of the traveling theory of global television is awkward in that we must necessarily use that very discourse in critiquing it. Our observations of distribution practices point to central issues of power, status, reputation, cultural capital, and sheer capriciousness that permeate the buying and selling process; that fundamentally reshape texts, audiences, fans, and nations; and that are largely obscured by terms such as *flow*, *journey*, and *traveling*. What would be a more workable discourse? To that end, we recommend that scholars develop conceptual approaches that directly engage the notion of process as a central analytic element. Established approaches to the study of viewers, fans, and texts typically situate observation and interpretation of phenomena as static and concrete. Although media texts and audience and fan activity are, indeed, tangible and observable, it is the dynamics of their distribution and consumption by individuals and social institutions that render them socially or culturally significant and personally meaningful. The imagery of traveling

captures movement, but we see the need to render and explicate the contribution of movement more clearly to the analysis and interpretation of media phenomena. This calls for theoretical attention to concepts that isolate and capture evidence of change that is constitutive and embedded and outcomes that are impermanent or unstable. We find, however, that to capture fully the dynamic complexity of media texts and media engagement, scholars too must be willing to migrate to lesser known terrain.

NOTES

1. The importance of trade fairs to the global TV industry rests as much in the nonselling activities that take place there as in sales transactions. Prior research on trade fairs identifies at least four major nonselling activities of relevance to global TV fairs, including “establishing and renewing relationships with buyers, gathering information about the industry and competitors, creating awareness of new products, and generating and maintaining corporate images” (Havens, 2003a, p. 21). Many global TV sales transactions actually take place outside the context of the annual fairs.

2. For example, the producer of the U.S. science fiction show *Babylon 5*

understood the fans to be central to the program’s success from the outset. [He] saw his fans as a group of opinion leaders to be courted through pre-broadcast publicity and convention appearances, as a group of niche marketers and activists whose support could keep the program on the air during rough times. (Jenkins, 2001, p. xvi)

The 1990s witnessed an increase in the conscious production of fan-friendly programs on U.S. television (Jenkins, 2001, p. xvii). This is a notable shift, of course, from the industry’s long-standing treatment of media fans as losers and/or lunatics to be held at arm’s bay (see Bacon-Smith, 1992; Brooker, 2002; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Jenkins, 1992; Jensen, 1992).

3. Earlier scholars understood fans as wholly separate from other types of consumers, whereas most scholars today conceptualize the consumer-fan relationship more like a continuum or a Venn diagram, with an area of overlap in which consumers “become” fans (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2003).

4. The impact of these practices on the original (primary) text can be significant because TV programs cannot be translated from one language to another with 100% accuracy through either dubbing or subtitling. Subtitling tends to condense language because subtitles appear on-screen for only about 6 seconds. For example, about 30% of the spoken text of an English-language program is necessarily omitted when the program is subtitled for viewers in Holland (Koolstra, Peeters, & Spinhof, 2002, pp. 327-328). In contrast, dubbing can either condense or stretch the original text. Some dubbing countries place high value on lip-synchronicity (which can sometimes result in “torturous” translations), whereas other countries have much looser standards and expectations. With dubbing, “When an original joke is untranslatable, a whole new substitute joke can be made up” (Koolstra et al., 2002, pp. 331, 337). How do these textual alterations affect reception in different markets? This question is especially important for fan studies in that close textual reading is a hallmark of media fandom.

5. For example, returning to our prior discussion of reputational identities, we note that altering textual elements functions to limit the ability of a producer, director, or writer’s identity to travel through the distribution process. In the U.S. domestic context, there are established policies that regulate how often and at what duration production credits roll on-screen. Credit rolls are not necessarily preserved in import markets, which might have very different regulations (or none at all). As such, an Aaron Spelling Production might not be presented as such to viewers in other countries (at least not on-screen), thus, restricting the ability of reputational identity to flow through distribution

practices. In another example, consider the fact that long-running serials such as ABC's *General Hospital* (currently in its 41st year on the air in the United States) are sold on the global market in 100- or 200-episode chunks, extracted quite randomly in the "middle" of the ongoing story. How does differential access to the primary text shape viewer/fan engagement in other cultures?

6. O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000) elaborated,

The image of other nations is first and foremost an image linked to that nation's people and culture. . . . This, in effect, means that the images of most nations will be vague because there is a general level of ignorance of countries other than one's own. . . . With around 20 to 30 percent of the people of Western democracies being functionally illiterate, we assume much too easily that people have strong beliefs and sharp images of other nations in the world. (pp. 57-58)

7. We realize that our discussion here implies that nation branding is a banal or uncontroversial practice. Obviously it is at times a point of violent contestation in ongoing debates about global media exchanges.

8. Chin and Gray (2001) used the term *previewers* to refer to members of organized fan discussion groups that formed online prior to the release of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy: "A curious situation therefore exists in which people are congregating to discuss, often in great detail, a text which does not yet truly exist. Or, to re-word, 'pre-viewers' are discussing a 'pre-text'" (Introduction, para. 1).

9. Hills (2001) intentionally referred to a *community of imagination* rather than a *community of the imagination*, arguing that the

syntax of the latter implies that imagination can be thought of as a definite article, and can therefore be located as an objective or subjective state. However, the implication of the phrase "community of imagination" is two-fold: first, that imagination is conceptualized as an *affective process* which underpins the formation and fragility of any such community, and second, that this process is conceptualized as belonging distinctively *between* "objective" and "subjective" spaces. (p. 158, Note 1)

10. Cult tourism seems to be exploding. A recent feature in *Time* described some of the media-related tours currently on the market, from a Japanese tour company offering *Lost in Translation* tours to Tokyo, at a cost of U.S.\$2,091 for airfare and five nights in a hotel, to *The Sopranos* bus tour in New Jersey, featuring various gangland murder sites, at a cost of U.S.\$40 for the 4-hour tour (Caplan, 2004, p. 22).

11. In immersive environments, "People no longer escape to fantasy in order to get away from actual life. When they enter fantasyland they end up escaping from an environment already embedded by the fantasy they are entering" (Lancaster, 2001, p. 154).

REFERENCES

- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences: A sociological theory of performance and imagination*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Aden, R. C. (1999). *Popular stories and promised lands: Fan cultures and symbolic pilgrimages*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Ang, I. (1990). Culture and communication: Towards an ethnographic critique of media consumption in the transnational media system. *European Journal of Communication*, 5, 239-260.
- Bacon-Smith, C. (1992). *Enterprising women*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Bielby, D. D., & Harrington, C. L. (2002). Markets and meanings: The global syndication of television programming. In D. Crane, N. Kawashima, & K. Kawasaki (Eds.), *Global culture: Media, arts, policy, and globalization* (pp. 215-232). New York: Routledge.
- Bielby, W. T., & Bielby, D. D. (1994). "All hits are flukes": Institutionalized decision-making and the rhetoric of network prime-time program development. *American Journal of Sociology*, 99, 1287-1313.
- Bird, S. E. (2003). *The audience in everyday life: Living a media world*. New York: Routledge.
- Brooker, W. (2002). *Using the force: Creativity, community and Star Wars fans*. New York: Continuum.
- Caldwell, J. T. (2004). Industrial geography lessons: Socio-professional rituals and the borderlands of production culture. In N. Couldry & A. McCarthy (Eds.), *MediaSpace: Place, scale and culture in a media age* (pp. 163-189). London: Routledge.
- Caplan, J. (2004, May 31). See Bill Murray's bed! *Time*, p. 22.
- Chin, B., & Gray, J. (2001, Autumn/Winter). "One ring to rule them all": Pre-viewers and pre-texts of the *Lord of the Rings* films. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, 2, Article 2. Retrieved August 10, 2004, from <http://www.cult-media.com>
- Couldry, N. (2003). *Media rituals: A critical approach*. London: Routledge.
- Dean, D., & Campbell, J. (2003). If women actors were working . . . *Media, Culture & Society*, 25, 527-541.
- du Gay, P. (2000). Markets and meanings: Re-imagining organizational life. In M. Schultz, M. J. Hatem, & M. H. Larsen (Eds.), *The expressive organization* (pp. 66-74). Oxford, UK: Oxford Press.
- du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (1997). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony Walkman*. London: Sage.
- Gray, J. (2003). New audiences, new textualities: Anti-fans and non-fans. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6, 64-81.
- Harrington, C. L., & Bielby, D. D. (1995). *Soap fans: Pursuing pleasure and making meaning in everyday life*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Havens, T. J. (2003a). Exhibiting global television: On the business and cultural functions of global television fairs. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47, 18-35.
- Havens, T. J. (2003b). African American television in an age of globalization. In L. Parks & S. Kumar (Eds.), *Planet TV: A global television reader* (pp. 423-438). New York: New York University Press.
- Hills, M. (2001). Virtually out there: Strategies, tactics and affective spaces in on-line fandom. In S. R. Munt (Ed.), *Technospaces: Inside the new media* (pp. 146-150). London: Continuum.
- Hills, M. (2002). *Fan cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Jancovich, M., & Lyons, J. (2003). Introduction. In M. Jancovich & J. Lyons (Eds.), *Quality popular television* (pp. 1-8). London: BFI.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2001). Foreword. In K. Lancaster, *Interacting with Babylon 5: Fan performances in a media universe* (pp. xv-xxi). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Jensen, J. (1992). Fandom as pathology: The consequences of characterization. In L. A. Lewis (Ed.), *The adoring audience* (pp. 9-29). New York: Routledge.
- Koolstra, C. M., Peeters, A. L., & Spinhof, H. (2002). The pros and cons of dubbing and subtitling. *European Journal of Communication*, 17, 325-354.
- Kuperman, B. (2001, January). *When the advertiser turns producer*. Educational Foundation Seminar conducted at the annual convention of the National Association of Television Program Executives, Las Vegas, NV.

- Lancaster, K. (2001). *Interacting with Babylon 5: Fan performances in a media universe*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- McCarthy, A. (2001). *Ambient television: Visual culture and public space*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Milikowski, M. (2000). Exploring a model of de-ethnicization: The case of Turkish television in the Netherlands. *European Journal of Communication*, 15, 443-468.
- Morley, D. (2000). *Home territories: Media, mobility and identity*. London: Routledge.
- Morley, D. (2001). Belongings: Place, space and identity in a mediated world. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4, 425-448.
- Naficy, H. (1999). The making of exile cultures: Iranian television in Los Angeles. In S. During (Ed.), *The cultural studies reader* (pp. 537-563). London: Routledge.
- National Association of Television Program Executives. (2000, February 28). *NATPE facts: The numbers are in for NATPE 2000!* Santa Monica, CA: Author.
- Nordenstreng, K., & Varis, T. (1974). Television and traffic—A one way street? A survey and analysis of the international flow of television programme material. *Reports and Papers on Mass Communication* (No. 70). Paris: UNESCO.
- O'Shaughnessy, J., & O'Shaughnessy, N. J. (2000). Treating the nation as a brand: Some neglected issues. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 20, 56-64.
- Parks, L. (2004). Kinetic screens: Epistemologies of movement at the interface. In N. Couldry & A. McCarthy (Eds.), *MediaSpace: Place, scale and culture in a media age* (pp. 37-57). London: Routledge.
- Peñaloza, L. (2001). Consuming the American West: Animating cultural meaning and memory at a stock show and rodeo. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28, 369-398.
- Sampedro, V. (1998). Grounding the displaced: Local media reception in a transnational context. *Journal of Communication*, 48, 125-143.
- Sandvoss, C. (2003). *A game of two halves: Football, television and globalization*. London: Routledge.
- Seiter, E. (1999). *Television and new media audiences*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Silverman, B. (1998, January). *How to turn a homegrown idea into an international success*. Educational Foundation Seminar conducted at the annual convention of the National Association of Television Program Executives, New Orleans, LA.
- Sinclair, J., & Cunningham, S. (2000). Go with the flow: Diasporas and the media. *Television & New Media*, 1, 11-31.
- Strelitz, L. N. (2002). Media consumption and identity formation: The case of the "Homeland" viewers. *Media, Culture & Society*, 24, 459-480.
- Tapert, R. (1998, January). *Xena Warrior Princess: Warrior princess and worldwide phenomenon*. Educational Foundation Seminar conducted at the annual convention of the National Association of Television Program Executives, New Orleans, LA.
- White, M. (2003). Flows and other close encounters with television. In L. Parks & S. Kumar (Eds.), *Planet TV: A global television reader* (pp. 94-110). New York: New York University Press.
- Wildman, S., & Siwek, S. E. (1988). *International trade in films and television programs*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Williams, R. (1992). *Television: Technology and cultural form*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press. (Original work published 1974)
- Willis, A. (2003). Martial law and the changing face of martial arts on US television. In M. Jancovich & J. Lyons (Eds.), *Quality popular television: Cult TV, the industry and fans* (pp. 137-148). London: British Film Institute.

***C. LEE HARRINGTON** is a professor of sociology and an affiliate of the Women's Studies Program at Miami University. She is the coauthor, with Denise D. Bielby, of *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Temple University Press, 1995). She has published other articles on television and its audiences in journals such as *Media, Culture & Society*, *Feminist Media Studies*, and *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*.*

***DENISE D. BIELBY** is a professor of sociology and an affiliate of the Center for Film, Television, and New Media at the University of California–Santa Barbara. Her research focuses on the culture industries of film and television. She is the author of numerous scholarly articles that have appeared in journals including *American Sociological Review*, *Poetics*, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, and *Journal of Popular Culture*.*