



## BOOK REVIEW

Lash, S., & Lury, C. (2007). *Global culture industry: The mediation of things* (p. 4). Cambridge: Polity.

Muhammad Arshad Bhatti<sup>1\*</sup>, Wu Minsu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Candidate, Institute of Communication Studies, Communication University of China, Beijing, China.

<sup>2</sup>Professor, School of Television Journalism, Communication University of China, Beijing, China

### Book Review

The book "*Global Cultural Industry: The Mediation of Things*" authored by Scott Lash and Celia Lury and published in 2007 by Polity Press, Cambridge, UK narrates the story that how things like sportswear, watches and movies etc. have taken over the culture and how this powerful culture has become globalized. According to the writers, these material objects have become powerful cultural symbols. They are of the view that the production of these symbols, in the form of globally recognized brands, has become a central goal of capitalism. They describe that culture is no more just a representation rather it has become "thingified" which means it has changed into things. The book is an important addition to the cultural studies and commodification of cultural objects. The authors of the review aim at explaining the core idea of the book and how the authors have developed this idea. Also, the authors have tried to find out whether the writers of the books successfully discussed the global cultural industry or it's a mere attempt to describe western cultural industry.

The writers took the idea from the classical text on culture industry by Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, however, they differentiate their work from the previous one. They argue that the objects are not determined and commodities but they are undetermined and brands. They claim that brands are virtual reality and alive. In their own words, the writers see the global culture industry following the biographies of culture objects from a number of aspects, in relation to different trajectories and at different speeds. This work of Lash and Lury follows these biographies by adopting different styles, genres, and registers at different moments.'

The methodology, "following the objects" is dubbed "Objectual" by the writers, has principally come from Appadurai as cited in the book (Chapter 2 p.19, p 28). Mapping seven objects in details including *Trainspotting*, *Toy Story*, *Wallace and Gromit*, Euro '96, the *Art Movement*, *Young British Art (YBA)*, *Swatch* and *Nike*, the authors describe the life story of these objects and analyze with great insight how culture comes to play an ever more central and intense role in economic production in the current global era. In their in-depth analyses, the authors have completely changed our traditional notions of the culture industry.

Opening the debate in the first chapter, the authors say, "the cultural objects are everywhere, as information, as communication, as branded products, as financial services as media projects as transport and leisure services, cultural entities are no longer the exception: they are the rule." "Culture is so ubiquitous that it, as it were, seeps out the superstructure and comes to infiltrate, and then take over, the infrastructure itself." "It comes to dominate both the economy and experience in everyday life," they are of the view (p.4). The book argues for "an opposition between "culture industry" as determined and determinate and global culture industry as indeterminate and reflexive (p.5)."

In order to track the movement of movie *Trainspotting*, the authors describe how it has been adapted. It was adapted from a short story to a novel, to a film, to the poster, marketing tie-in products, and stage performance etc. The writers trace the movement of the object by interviewing in theatre and literary scenes (p.21). They explain how the meaning of *Trainspotting* varies culture to culture. They tell that how "movie's features aided

its movement like a T-shirt style which the character played by Ewan McGregor has worn. This T-shirt style became fashion and was linked to this movie, however, the style long pre-existed the film.” “Wearing a T-shirt like this could be taken to show a participation in the film even it is meant of recalling the film.” In mapping this seemingly simple profile, it becomes clear that there were some complexities and at least two general principals of transition. The first can be described as “translation, an organizational process in which the project moves in a linear, sequential fashion as a short story to a book to a film to a video to television and so on.” “The second process in which object integration does not require artistic integrity may be described as one of the transpositions (p.25).”

Narrating the biography of YBA, the authors mention “significant alteration occurs in the process of transposition across media, including transformations in the object’s internal organization. The elements such as catch-phrases, gestures and graphic details circulate as intensities of sensation or effect. “Likewise, exploring the biography of Nike from production to consumption, Lash and Lury describe that it is a brand-oriented object that is dissimilar to the commodity of the classical text of the culture industry. They argue that brand bears feelings and feelings of consumers attached to it matter a lot (p.28).

Here comes the third chapter of the book which is all about Euro 96, the 1996 European Football Championship. The authors tell the story that how this football championship became the event and then turned into a brand. In this interesting biography, the writers also tell “the game of football is a ‘thing’ that has become mediated.” Football has for a long time been commodified, but recently it has more become especially mediated, through branding and association with brands like Nike and Addidas at first and secondly through broadcasting across the world. The writers, mapping this biography, concentrate on culture-industry practitioners in recorded music and sports marketing all of whom consistently referred to the tournament as a property. The chapter also includes the role of football magazines in the object event Euro 96 and again describes the attachment of popular music and popular culture in general to football. It

describes how the football event comes to be associated with pop music and changing sense of English national identity. It says “the footballing event was marketed through the music and the music was marketed through the footballing event.” “And, both were marketed through the media of the sponsors, the commercial brands. The commercial product brands for their part are marketed through both the footballing event and the music (p.45).”

As an object of the global culture industry, football extends its network through media outreach, translation, and transposition, through the recruitment of other objects. Perhaps most apposite is not so much “the ‘message is the medium’ but the ‘medium is the medium’, or better, ‘the medium is on the medium (p.55).”

In authors’ own words, chapter four of the book talks about “the art in the background of the global culture industry, narrating parallel two discontinuous temporalities with it: one internal to ‘art history’, the other opening out onto local places and global flows.” “A second trajectory in the biography mapped in this chapter is the meltdown of London’s institutions of art in the aftermath of the Second World War.” It also describes how British art was based more or less on a set of institutions structured around the British Empire. “The tradition of Cork Street, the British Museum and the National Gallery, on the one hand, and the social-political institutions of the industrial working class, radical proletarian local councils and the classical welfare state, on the other.”

The authors are of the view that time has gone when the art was just a material object. They describe how the art transformed into to concept and the concept of media. ‘In first wave conceptualism, there was a shift from the materials to the concept. This was the transformation of sculpture’s volumetric shapes and flatness of the picture plane into a reconstituted art object as the idea.’ ‘With second wave conceptualism—including the YBAs—there is a recasting of the concept, which is simultaneously a recasting of the ontology of the art-object. The concept or idea is no longer a proposition or a rule or a sentence. It is instead a communication. The concept now becomes informational (p. 73, 74)’.

The fifth chapter of the book describes the central idea of the book that how media content

has become a 'thing'. The authors term it "thingification of media". The authors explain the phenomenon during identifying "the processes of movement of the objects in the global culture industry; thingification of media and mediation of things (p.85)."

The chapter maps the profiles of Wallace and Gromit's three animated films and Toy Story. There is something especial thing-like in both Toy Story and Nick Park's shorts films compare to other cartoons. "Historically most animated cartoons used drawing, whereas Toy Story and Wallace and Gromit use computer digitalization. In both cases, things – digital objects and clay models – rather than drawing are at center stage." "Whereas Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny were the hand-drawn animations that subsequently become merchandising, in Wallace and Gromit, but especially in Toy Story, it is as if the toys were already there in the film. It is as if they never needed to be converted."

Likewise, the chapter six describes and outlines the same "two processes: one in which media that were formerly representations—become things and another in which things that formerly were more exclusively material objects become media." It narrates the story of two consumer brands Nike and Swatch and how they transformed and moved globally. They suggest that brands like Nike and Swatch move ahead because of serial loops and regular process of product differentiation and brand integration. The attachment of consumers with these brands is emotional and they buy them not only to satisfy their apparent needs but also to gratify their sentiments. This attachment of consumer with these brands boosts their sale globally. Lash and Lury explaining the techniques of the brands to increase the sale tell how the producers hire the services of some sportsman to advertise their brand to attract potential buyers.

Chapter seven describes that how companies use public relations techniques to keep good relations with consumers and maintain their goodwill in the market worldwide. For instance, they organize sports events, sponsor sports matches and arrange festivals for promoting their brand and attract the attention of their publics.

The writers in chapter eight of the book narrate the history of cultural industry in

Brazil. They differentiate the culture industry of Latin America from the Anglo-Saxon and also how the media industry in Brazil is different than in Europe. They explain, in detail, the evolution of Brazilian media industry. Furthermore, they tell that in 1960 American Broadcasting Company began to invest in the media industry in Latin America. However, they say that Latin American media industry was state-owned at first however later, they say, how the politician and ex-politicians owned the good chunk of this industry. The authors are of the view that in Brazil music was the real culture. "If there is a democracy in Brazil it is in music (p.164)." As the media industry of Brazil is concerned, the authors are of the view that it had been under the influence of the US and European media industry.

Concluding the debate in last chapter, the authors state "with globalization, culture becomes fully industrial. Culture and culture industry shifts from logic of representation to logic of things (p.181)." Distancing from classical text on the cultural industry, they argue that the global culture industry is at the same time deeper and more superficial than classical culture and the classical commodity. (p. 182). They further argue that the culture was primarily representational while, in large part, it is not. The older representational paradigm of culture incorporated much more than just realism.

The book in hand is well researched and theoretically sophisticated. It is a wonderful addition to cultural studies. Through mapping the biographies of seven cultural objects, the authors narrated the story that how objects transformed into global culture industry. It was interesting to know that how they discover meaning-making at the center of production and consumption. However, I wonder why only Brazil rather than any other country and why the book with the title of Global Culture Industry has no account on heavily populated and culturally rich countries like China and India. Furthermore, among the cultural objects described in the book, some are merely known in the east which. The writers ignored the importance the countries like China, India and Russia while describing the "thingification" of cultural objects. But, this deficiency does not undermine the importance of the book, which can enrich the knowledge social science researchers.