Chapter 1
Super–Sized Fandom:
Globalization, Popular Culture, and the Peculiar Case of "Miss McDonald"

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at "A Day in the Life of Miss McDonald"—a photography exhibit produced in the Philippines and disseminated online—to discuss how globalization, coupled with advances in Internet technologies, has transformed the manner in which popular culture acquires meaning. In sum, these advances have allowed fans to wrangle control of the meanings bestowed to popular culture artifacts back from dominant producers, regardless of national origin. This chapter begins by examining traditional conceptualizations of popular culture before discussing how globalization and consumers like Miss McDonald have helped fans become original meaning makers rather than the meaning re-makers, always necessarily limited by the control of the producers. The case of Miss McDonald offers a useful point of entry for understanding popular culture's past as well as its global future.

INTRODUCTION

As a testament to Ronald McDonald's enduring appeal, a young woman in the Philippines known only as "Miss McDonald" decided to dress up as the beloved clown for Halloween in 2004, and that idea blossomed into a wildly popular, weekly, year-long photography project that she ultimately posted to the World Wide Web ("A Day in the Life", 2004). Given her demonstrated passion and commitment alone, it would certainly seem that Miss McDonald is an enormous fan of the McDonald's corporation. As illustrated by a number of scholars, fandom is characterized by a wildly diverse set of practices where "identification, both with the object of fandom (e.g., a celebrity) and the community of fans, is central" (Soukup, 2006, p. 322). However, while engaging in fan practices, consumers oftentimes "actively produce [their own] cultural meanings through creative appropriations and recontextualizations of mass cultural commodities" (Coombe & Her-

man, 2001, p. 926). This trend frequently results in oppositional interpretations of popular culture texts, thus highlighting the "the agency and inventiveness of subordinated cultures" (Rogers, 2006, p. 484) that have submitted to the pleasures of fandom.

In mapping out the primary contours of this trend, John Fiske (1989) suggests a model of popular culture that revolves around acts of excorporation and incorporation. First, consumers will "make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system" (p. 15), thus establishing their own subversive meanings for those products, i.e., excorporation. However, in order to manage such reappropriations, thereby maintaining some semblance of control over their consumers, corporations often try to reintegrate those ideas, at least when possible. This re-integration is referred to as incorporation, and it allows a dominant producer to absorb "the signs of resistance…[back] into the dominant system" (p. 18), thus reclaiming any oppositional meanings from subordinated groups.

While audiences the world over are free to actively construct meanings for texts they consume based on their own experiences and frames of knowledge (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997, p. 45), their rejection and reappropriation of old meanings coupled with their ability to publicly disseminate new meanings on the Internet problematize Fiske's original conceptualizations about the incorporation and excorporation of popular culture. As illustrated through the case of Miss McDonald, the advent and availability of Internet technologies across the globe enables a truly international body of fans to become *new* meaning makers rather than meaning *re*-makers, with the latter serving as the common conclusion in traditional audience analyses. Ultimately, fans are able to use the Internet to sidestep the original producers entirely, bestowing contemporary consumers with the power to communicate directly with other consumers who can then re-appropriate

and re-disseminate texts like Miss McDonald's as *they* see fit.

In this chapter, I ruminate on "A Day in the Life of Miss McDonald" to problematize Fiske's arguably dated (yet still foundational) model of popular culture production and consumption to illustrate the meaning-making that can occur when Western popular culture meets Eastern audiences (and vice versa). I begin by providing an overview of globalization and fandom, including the ways that Internet technologies have helped shape contemporary fan practices throughout the world, before reviewing Fiske's model of popular culture production and consumption. With dramatic increases in Internet usage and availability, as well as the onslaught of globalization, I ultimately use the peculiar case of Miss McDonald as a way to demonstrate the need for revisions to Fiske's model in order to reflect our current global reality.

BACKGROUND

Globalization and the Golden Arches

While the term is increasingly utilized in academic, economic, and social circles, discourses abound as to what exactly "globalization" entails (Koh, 2005; Pieterse, 2004). It has been addressed politically, economically, historically, and through myriad other foci, and this multidimensional accessibility has resulted in numerous "textbooks on globalization…[with] no textbook consensus" (Pieterse, 2004, p. 15) about what, if anything, globalization actually is. My goal with this section is not to arrive at a definitive characterization, but to explore how global consumerism has, in part, shaped contemporary popular culture.

Despite its complexities, a cursory overview of how scholars have conceptualized globalization is both necessary and useful. Belay (1996) argues that globalization is a process that reshapes the world "into a single interactional space," one that "does not eliminate the role of place or time…

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