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The Starbucks Brandscape and Consumers' (Anticorporate) Experiences of Glocalization

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Prior studies strongly suggest that the intersection of global brands and local cultures produces cultural heterogeneity. Little research has investigated the ways in which global brands structure these expressions of cultural heterogeneity and consumers' corresponding experiences of glocalization. To redress this gap, we develop the construct of the hegemonic brandscape. We use this theoretical lens to explicate the hegemonic influence that Starbucks exerts upon the sociocultural milieus of local coffee shops via its market-driving servicescape and a nexus of oppositional meanings (i.e., the anti-Starbucks discourse) that circulate in popular culture. This hegemonic brandscape supports two distinctive forms of local coffee shop experience through which consumers, respectively, forge aestheticized and politicized anticorporate identifications.

We changed the way people live their lives, what they do when they get up in the morning, how they reward themselves, and where they meet. (ORIN SMITH, Starbucks CEO)

The marketing success of Starbucks is legion. The Starbucks revolution transformed gourmet coffee from a yuppie status symbol into a mainstream consumer good, and it essentially created the American coffee shop market. In 1990, there were approximately 200 freestanding coffee houses in the United States; today there are over 14,000, with Starbucks owning about 30% of the total (Daniels 2003). Starbucks's model of café cool has proven readily exportable on a global scale, sweeping through Canada, China, Japan, Taiwan, Britain, and much of continental Europe, with bold plans to enter coffee mecca (Holmes 2002). Starbucks conquers Rome; grande or venti, Brute?

Starbucks's market dominance coupled with its hyper-aggressive expansion strategy—which leads to a significant rate of cannibalization among its own stores (Daniels 2003; Holmes 2002)—also make this brand a lightening rod for protest and criticism. Starbucks has become a cultural icon for all the rapacious excesses, predatory intentions, and cultural homogenization that social critics attribute to global-izing corporate capitalism (Falk 1999; Klein 1999). Anti-Starbucks slogans, culture-jamming satires of the Starbucks logo, and impassioned indictments of the company's business practices occupy many corners of the Internet, providing meeting points for myriad cybercommunities.

Academic researchers have also entered into this cultural conversation about the consequences of globalization. For proponents of the homogenization thesis, global brands are Trojan horses through which transnational corporations colonize local cultures (e.g., Falk 1999; Ritzer 1993). In recent years, anthropological studies have built a strong empirical case that, contrary to the homogenization thesis, consumers often appropriate the meanings of global brands to their own ends, creatively adding new cultural associations, dropping incompatible ones, and transforming others to fit into local cultural and lifestyle patterns (Hannerz 1996; Miller 1998a). From this perspective, the interjection of global brands into local cultures paradoxically produces heterogeneity as global brands take on a variety of localized meanings (Ger and Belk 1996; Miller 1998a). More generally, these theorists contend that local cultures and the forces of globalization are thoroughly interpenetrated and coshaping; hence, the effects of globalization on everyday cultural life—via global brands, fashion, and mass media—are more accurately described as a process of "glocalization" (Robertson 1995; Wilk 1995).

While these studies offer a needed corrective to the calamitous view of global capitalism as a culture-crushing juggernaut, they present two key theoretical oversights. First, global brands carry meanings that stand in sharp symbolic contrast to local alternatives, meanings that exist against a backdrop of societal anxieties about the power

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wielded by transnational corporations (see Holt 2002; Mazzarella 2003). Although the homogenization thesis may be flawed as an anthropological explanation of globalization's cultural effects (see Miller 1996), it can function as a folk theory that consumers use to interpret the meanings of global brands vis à vis local alternatives. Second, these studies underestimate the hegemonic (i.e., culture-shaping) influences that global brands can exert upon local markets, consumer tastes, and consumption practices (see Askegaard and Csaba 2000). This theoretical oversight is particularly glaring for market-driving experiential brands (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999), which, in conjunction with their corporate-sponsored symbols and products, offer consumers distinctively themed servicescapes, designed to facilitate certain kinds of hedonic/aesthetic experiences and social interactions.

To better theorize these aspects of glocalization, we develop the concept of the hegemonic brandscape. In the consumer research literature, the brandscape generally refers to consumers' active constructions of personal meanings and lifestyle orientations from the symbolic resources provided by an array of brands (Sherry 1998, p. 112). We reconfigure this consumercentric definition to encompass the hegemonic influences that global experiential brands exert on their local competitors and the meanings consumers derive from their experiences of these glocal servicescapes.

A hegemonic brandscape is a cultural system of servicescapes that are linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant (market-driving) experiential brand. The hegemonic brandscape not only structures an experience economy market (see Pine and Gilmore 1999) but also shapes consumer lifestyles and identities by functioning as a cultural model that consumers act, think, and feel through.

Roy D'Andrade (1990, p. 45) defines a cultural model as "a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a cultural group." However, cultural models are not just in-the-head entities. Cultural models are socially shared because they are objectified (see Miller 1998b) through public discourses, material objects, and the design of the physical environment (Shore 1996). A cultural model shapes individuals' actions through conventionalized social practices, interactions with its material objectifications, and internalization of its discourses via cognitive structures and embodied habits. Similarly, a hegemonic brandscape provides a constellation of objectified meanings (i.e., discourses, material goods, and servicescape atmospherics) that consumers can incorporate into their worldviews and put to a wide variety of interpretive and identity-constructive uses.

In the coffee shop market, small single-site establishments, regional chains, and national franchises like Seattle's Best all occupy competitive positions that are mapped in relation to Starbucks. The contours of this hegemonic brandscape are formed by Starbucks's iconic cultural status (see Holt 2003); its bold and expressive latte lingo; its international product offerings; its Euro-inspired modern decor; its upscale, corporate ambiance (see Schmitt and Simonson

1996); and last, but not least, a nexus of oppositional brand meanings (i.e., the anti-Starbucks discourse) that are largely beyond the immediate control of Starbucks's management. These oppositional meanings freely circulate in popular culture and, most particularly, in local coffee shops and their emplaced social networks.

METHOD

The data for this study were collected over a 2-yr. period. A team of graduate students who had been trained in phenomenological interviewing (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989) by the senior author conducted the initial wave of interviews. The second author then conducted another round of interviews and also undertook extensive participant observation at several local coffee shops.

The interviews and fieldwork gathered insights from regular patrons of local coffee shops in one large metropolitan city and one quintessential "latte town" (see Brooks 2000, pp. 103–9). Our sample drew from regular patrons of six specific coffee shops whose market positions ranged from an adamantly anti-Starbucks stance—fashioned around countercultural symbols and bohemian atmospherics—to those exhibiting a more polished, bourgeois ambiance. Photographs and fieldnotes from the six coffee shops supplemented our interview texts. The names of the local coffee shops, their owners, employees, and patrons are pseudonyms.

To avoid imposing local-global polarizations, participants were told that the study concerned their experiences and perceptions of coffee shops. Each interview session began with general questions about participants' personal backgrounds, interests, and life goals and then focused upon their experiences of local coffee shops. Our participants hailed from a range of backgrounds—rural, working class, and middle class—but with one exception, all had attended college. The vast majority worked in professional occupations (see table 1). This educational and occupational mix is consistent with the demographic profile of typical coffee shop patrons (see Dawidowska 2002).

We interpreted this qualitative data using a hermeneutic approach (Thompson 1997). In this process, provisional understandings are formed, challenged, revised, and further developed through an iterative movement between individual transcripts and the emerging understanding of the entire set of textual data. Our analysis induced two distinctive types of local coffee shop consumption. In presenting these findings, we first discuss the structural aspects of the Starbucks brandscape. Next, we explicate the defining experiences and underlying cultural meanings, ideals, and anticorporate identifications that *café flâneurs* and oppositional localists, respectively, enact in this hegemonic brandscape.

THE CULTURAL STRUCTURE OF THE STARBUCKS BRANDSCAPE

Global Structures of Common Difference

Richard Wilk's (1995) concept of global structures of common difference follows quite directly from the glocal-

TABLE 1

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Education	Family status
Alan	70	Writer-publisher	BS	Married, empty nester
Anne	42	College professor	PhD	Divorced with kids
Beth	21	Student	BS (in progress)	Single
Bob	40	Massage therapist	BS	Single
Brian	39	Mental health nurse	MS	Single
Carie	43	Teacher/track coach	MS	Single
Cooper	33	Private investigator	BS	Single
David	37	Librarian	BS	Married
Debbie	26	Marketing researcher	BA	Married
Dennis	Early 70s	Retired police officer	BS	Married, empty nester
Ella	28	Graduate student	PhD (in progress)	Single
Fatima	22	Student	BS (in progress)	Single
Frank	34	Production manager	BS	Single
George	31	Graduate student	PhD (in progress)	Single
Greg	36	Sales consultant	MBA	Divorced with kids
Janet	21	Student	BS (in progress)	Single
John	34	Graduate student	PhD (in progress)	Single
Joy	34	Social worker	BS	Married
Kate	35	Freelance writer/yoga instructor	High school	Single
Kevin	Mid-30s	Teacher	MS	Single
Kumar	30	Graduate student	PhD (in progress)	Single
Laura	27	Social worker	BS	Married
Martha	60	Retired social worker/student	BS (in progress)	Single with kids
Mary	Mid-20s	Student	BS (in progress)	Single
Matthew	32	Engineer/consultant	PhD	Single
Molly	30	Student	MS (in progress)	Single
Patricia	52	Small business owner	Some college	Married with kids
Patrick	31	Small business owner	MS	Married
Paul	30	Unemployed	BS	Single
Rebecca	21	Student	BS (in progress)	Single
Rosie	26	Teacher	BS	Single
Sandra	33	Graduate student	PhD (in progress)	Single
Scott	26	Graduate student/business analyst	MBA (in progress)	Married
Stephen	40	Taxi driver/union organizer	BS	Single
Tori	32	Graduate student	PhD (in progress)	Married

ization thesis. However, it suggests that the interpenetrations of the global and the local do not occur in a strictly symmetrical fashion. The cultural game is slanted toward transnational corporations because they wield considerable economic, political, and cultural clout. Global structures of common difference organize and even promote cultural differences along specific dimensions. Thus, globalization is "a hegemony of form not content, which celebrates particular kinds of diversity while submerging, deflating, or suppressing others" (Wilk 1995, p. 118). In other words, glocalized cultural diversity equates to variations on underlying hegemonic themes.

The global structures of common difference that emanate from Starbucks's market dominance correspond to the quintessential qualities of "third-places" detailed by sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989). Third-places (e.g., diners, taverns, pubs, cafés, coffee shops) exist between the formality and seriousness of the work sphere and the privacy and familial intimacy of the domestic sphere. Third-places are conducive to informal conversations and casual friendships, where patrons imbibe a comforting sense of community, camaraderie, and social engagement. Oldenburg (1989) argues that cor-

porate chains are inherently antithetical to third-place experiences. However, Starbucks's staggering success is due in large part to its skill at creating, standardizing, and implementing an upscale third-place ambiance on a global scale (Schmitt 1999).

In American metropolitan settings, a coffee shop is more or less like Starbucks in much the same way that a fast-food restaurant is more or less like McDonald's or a theme park is more or less like Disney World. Metropolitan coffee shops are organized around several readily discernible global structures of common difference that dialectically link Starbucks to its local competitors. These structures include prominent displays of visual art; background music that can be classified as either sophisticated (in the high culture sense), hip, or in some way countercultural, but certainly not Top 40 mainstream; and a hedonically rich menu featuring oversized gourmet muffins, oversized cookies, focaccias, bagels, and epicurean sandwiches. The interior décor should convey a sense of warmth coupled with a distinctive aesthetic flair. Coffee shops have also been historically linked to intellectual engagement and cultural enrichment (Sherry 1995). Accordingly, a selection of arts-oriented media and newspapers, in-

cluding prestigious dailies such as the *New York Times*, are standard coffee shop accoutrements. These edifying reading materials connect coffee shop patrons to the broader worlds of art, politics, and community events and hence can stimulate third-place conversations. A sense of worldliness is also conveyed through signifiers of the international coffee trade—such as maps of the major coffee-growing regions, images of indigenous coffee farmers, and bulk coffee displays, often in archaic burlap bags.

These Starbuckified structures of common difference can accommodate an array of variations. In our sample of coffee shops, the countercultural expressions are characterized by risqué or politically challenging art; musical selections distributed by indie (i.e., small independent) labels of the techno, hardcore, or alt-country variety; furnishings exuding a seemingly unplanned, secondhand-shop aura; and a bohemian staff brandishing tattoos, body piercing, avant hair styles, and other subversive sartorial statements. Other coffee shops appeal to an upscale new class sensibility (e.g., Brooks 2000). Their servicescapes are designed to display aesthetic refinement rather than challenge mainstream sensibilities. Light jazz, tasteful art—black and white stills and classical landscapes, perhaps spiced with some abstract impressionism—and a staff whose sartorial styles would be at home in a J. Crew or Abercrombie & Fitch catalog constitute their atmospheric mix.

The Anti-Starbucks Discourse

Starbucks's stratospheric growth and market dominance has also given rise to a multifaceted oppositional discourse that permeates local coffee shop culture and the virtual plebiscite of the World Wide Web. Starbucks is condemned for propagating a soul-numbing aesthetic homogeneity and sanitized versions of the creative arts. Activists groups assail Starbucks for predatory business practices and a plethora of deleterious effects on the local coffee trade, the environment, and the economic well-being of coffee growers. In recent years, Starbucks has also come under fire for using dairy products containing rBGH,[1] thereby linking the brand to consumer anxieties over genetic engineering and giving rise to yet another culture-jamming play on the brand name: Frankenbucks. Starbucks is also widely berated on coffee connoisseur Web sites for overroasting its beans (e.g., Charbucks) and for debasing the espresso experience (see Kozinets 2002b).

Starbucks directs considerable marketing effort toward countering these charges and has even altered its product line, offering selections of fair trade coffees and organic milk in some markets. This maneuver has had little effect on the tenor of the anti-Starbucks discourse. Starbucks's critics dismiss these changes as cynical marketing ploys that

are relatively inconsequential in the grand scheme of Starbucks's global operations, for example, noting that fair trade coffees make up less than 1% of its wholesale purchases (see http://ww.organicconsumers.org).

For our analytic purposes, the factual merits of these charges and corporate rebuttals are not the relevant consideration. The anti-Starbucks discourse has become as much a part of local coffee shop culture as an espresso served in a demitasse with biscotti on the side. As we will show, the anti-Starbucks discourse provides an interpretive frame that our participants use to understand the meanings of their local coffee shop patronage. Instead of generating a uniform response, however, the anti-Starbucks discourse gives rise to two distinctive ways of consuming local coffee shops and two distinctive responses to the specter of corporate hegemony.

CONSUMER EXPERIENCES OF THE (G)LOCAL IN THE STARBUCKS BRANDSCAPE

Café Flâneurs/The Social and Creative Buzz

> I don't really talk to too many people when I'm here. I'll read the papers and just kind of watch people. You're not trying to listen but you can't help it. And, some of the stories, you just feel so bad. Or you feel like, hey, you kind of deserved it. I mean, what did you expect, you didn't show up for work, and you got caught smoking pot the day you came back. You deserve to be fired. You know, or whatever. The sad stories, like people dying and people feeling bad. You know, you could write a story, you really could. (SCOTT)

The image of the *urban flâneur* has been intimately linked to the experiences of metropolitan life ever since nineteenth-century writer Charles Baudelaire's reflections on the Parisian urban landscape (see Featherstone 1991). The *urban flâneur* (and *flâneuse*) is a pleasure seeker who becomes immersed in the hyperkinetic, sensory-saturated world of the large metropolis, with little regard for time, schedules, or instrumental outcomes (Benjamin 1973). The *urban flâneur* thrives on the perpetual motion of the crowd and the continual buzz of conversations, but he or she does so in a voyeuristic manner, observing rather than directly participating in the unfolding drama of the street.

Through the *café flâneur*ship, local coffee shop patrons also create a space where they can linger in the moment, at least temporarily suspending the press to squeeze more productivity out of their day and where they can act upon the paradoxical consumer desire to be out in public while retaining a detached anonymity. Rather than seeking an experience of communal solidarity, *café flâneurs* revel in the social spectacle of the coffee shop crowd. For some in our sample, striking up casual conversations enhances this experience. However, their aim is not to build an enduring relationship

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[1] Recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (rBST), more commonly known as recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH), is a genetically modified hormone. Injecting cows with rBGH generates substantial increases in their milk production. Although approved by the FDA in 1994, environmental groups and organic food activists contend that rBGH poses significant health risks to both humans and dairy cattle.

or to become part of a community; rather, they are seeking a more intimate, but transient, social encounter that offers a brief glimpse into the life of another. Several of our *café flâneurs* also engage in explicit forms of identity play—such as being a novelist, poet, or performer (on open mike nights)—that stand apart from their work-a-day and family lives and that draw energy from the buzz of local coffee shops.

Our emic theme—the social and creative buzz—profiles a range of meanings that are enacted through *café flâneur*-ship. The buzz theme is constituted by two intertwined and mutually supportive experiential dimensions, which are nonetheless analytically distinguishable. The social buzz refers to the feelings of invigoration that *café flâneurs* gain from being in this dynamic public space, observing others, and eavesdropping on conversations. The creative buzz refers to the feeling of artistic inspiration that they gain from being in a social space exhibiting a stimulating and interesting décor, music, and visual art.

The social aspect of the buzz theme is nicely illustrated in the following quote from Patrick, who, like many of our *café flâneurs*, seldom makes coffee at home, despite the convenience and cost savings offered by home brewing:

> *Interviewer:* Do you make coffee at home?
>
> *Patrick:* No. Never. Isn't that odd? I don't even own a coffee machine. Because, I mean, that's the whole thing. I drink coffee because I want to be out among people. Like my mom bought me an espresso machine 3, 4, 5 years ago. I don't even remember. I gave it away the day she left [after a visit]. I don't drink coffee. I meet people. That's the whole fuckin' point. The draw for me is the people there, contact with other people.

Café flâneurs view local coffee shops as presenting a more distinctive ambiance and hence as providing a more engaging and stimulating buzz. Their preferences for local coffee shops over Starbucks hinge upon voyeuristic, hedonic, and identity play considerations. One of the study's participants, Laura, reports:

> I try to avoid Starbucks. If I'm staying somewhere for a while, I'll try to look for the other places. There was a coffee shop that was directly across the street from my house that I was staying at, visiting some friends in San Francisco, and it was called Simple Pleasures. It was a real café. They served Guinness beer and different sandwiches and coffees. They had some regulars. There was some guy, he would sit there every day. My friend and I we're like this "guy is there again," like for a week. "What is he doing? He's got to be on unemployed!" He was totally loving life, just sitting back, with his shirt open usually, just having his coffee. Long blonde hair, kind of stringy, sitting there. He was so funny, because it was like him and his buddies, three other guys, just hanging out. We would go there and they were there, you know. We enjoyed it.

Café flâneurs view Starbucks as a conservative, relatively banal cultural space, catering to an equally bland corporate clientele. Yet, their aesthetic censures of Starbucks are often tempered by an appreciation for Starbucks's high level of quality of service and the comfort offered by its familiar settings:

> *Carie:* I'm not a Starbucks fan, just because I'm not like "corporate Starbucks world." Although I have, like, I was in New Zealand at Christmas time and, you know, I found a Starbucks in Auckland, and that was *the* place, you know. More because it was kind of a more comfortable setting, you know, you're comfortable with Starbucks. But in a place like [city name], you have, you know, Magic Bean and Java Jive that I love. At times, Magic Bean's coffee [her primary coffee shop], it's so strong, it's so intense that I need a little break, and I'll do like, Java Jive for a little bit of a pace changer.
>
> *Interviewer:* How would you compare Magic Bean to Starbucks?
>
> *Carie:* Obviously, you don't have the corporate world behind Magic Bean and how big they [Starbucks] are. I mean, when you see a Starbucks, like in Auckland, you're going, Starbucks, what are they doing here? But it looks exactly the same. I mean, you might as well be in New York, you might as well be in Chicago, or wherever, you know, Rockford. I do think they do an amazing job of having great quality for as big as they are.

All of our *café flâneurs* express some variation on the idea that Starbucks is a comfortable place whose primary shortcomings are dullness and uniformity. They do not divide the world into stark Manichean terms, where Starbucks represents a diabolical force and where local coffee shops symbolize all that is noble and good. They are not rigidly opposed to frequenting Starbucks and periodically do so owing to convenience or social considerations (e.g., Starbucks is a good place to have a casual business meeting). They interpret Starbucks's marketplace dominance as a consequence of its customer service acumen and quality products rather than predatory practices. Moreover, they tend to ascribe a caring capitalist good intent to Starbucks's management, assuming that profit goals are balanced by ethical concerns for the environment and its workforce.

However, our *café flâneurs* are aware that Starbucks is commonly vilified as an icon of globalization's worst excesses and that frequenting Starbucks is a taboo practice within many quarters of the local coffee shop culture. In the case of Sandra, her dispassionate comprehension of the anti-Starbucks discourse (coupled with social pressure to boycott the chain) leads to a half-hearted renunciation of the brand, even though she surreptitiously frequents one of its nearby stores:

> The shop I feel most connected to probably will be Java Jive, and a lot of it has to do with just the fact that it is not a big chain like the Starbucks. For a long time I wouldn't go to Starbucks because in my circle of friends it's not socially acceptable to go to Starbucks because it is just a big corporate and that it destroys all the local coffee shops. It's not necessary that I feel that strongly but it's that my friends feel that strongly. It's peer pressure for not going to Starbucks to the point that

if I want to go to Starbucks and carry something out, I will bring my own cup so I can walk around without having a Starbucks cup in my hand in public. I know that's ridiculous. I don't personally feel that I can't frequent Starbucks based not on my own beliefs. There's a Starbucks that's right by my house. For a long time, I didn't go because my boyfriend is really opposed to Starbucks, but it's so convenient and so comfortable. So I go there anyway and hope that nobody sees me walking out of there who will think less of me for being there. So I guess I would never be attached to Starbucks because it is corporate. There is nothing that's special or charming about it as far as I am concerned.

Strikingly, Sandra voices one of the most damning accusations from the anti-Starbucks discourse—it destroys all the local coffee shops—and then she immediately notes that she does not feel very strongly about it. Much like our other *café flâneurs*, Sandra has an intellectual awareness of the anti-Starbucks discourse, but she has little emotional investment in these beliefs, and she does not attribute any overriding sociopolitical significance to her choice of coffee shops. She is primarily concerned about the perceptions and reactions of others who do make such moral ascriptions. Emotional attachment and loyalty, rather than patronage, are where she draws the moral line; she may go to Starbucks, but it will never be a favorite establishment. Yet, this symbolic boundary is ultimately justified on aesthetic rather than political grounds; the perceived lack of distinctive charm once again emerges as Starbucks's Achilles heel.

The following reflection from Patrick further illustrates the cultural logic of this aesthetic privileging. In diametric contrast to his idealized view of European cafes, which he sees as possessing tradition and a genuine artistic flare, Starbucks's atmospherics are viewed as highly calculated and corporatized affectations:

> Starbucks is so calculated as to be unappealing. I mean, it's really calculated. Remember the movie *Beetlejuice*? Remember the sets of that, where like, the furniture all was kind of curvy and brightly colored? And there was like zig-zaggy polka-dots and things like that, you know. That's what their [Starbucks] décor is. There's a theory, decadence in art is when craftsmanship replaces creativity. That's the difference between art and graphic design. And that's exactly what's happened at Starbucks. Like the ambiance there is GRAPHIC DESIGN! Punch in the numbers and get curvy furniture and a broad palette of pleasing pastels. And you know that it's one design team centered in San Francisco, New York, or Los Angeles. Some major metropolitan area design team has come in and "okay, here's how we're going to design the café of the, then, '90s," right? I'm sorry, that just doesn't work for me. I'd rather have tradition, you know.

Whereas oppositional localists vilify Starbucks as a global goliath bent on world domination, *café flâneurs*, in a rather odd way, humanize Starbucks; they construct it in terms akin to a geeky friend who is self-consciously trying to act sophisticated in hopes of reaping social approval. This endearing anthropomorphism aside, *café flâneurs* also view Starbucks's ambiance as an inauthentic, profit-driven marketing fabrication that will change whenever customer preferences shift. In contrast, local coffee shops are deemed to be authentic expressions of their proprietors' aesthetic tastes and the local color of the neighborhoods they serve.

Café flâneurs further privilege local coffee shops over Starbucks through a labor-of-love/gift economy attribution. Their narratives emphasize that the proprietors of their preferred coffee shop are motivated by higher ideals and goals than profit considerations. Carie reports:

> Here [Magic Bean] it's comfortable, I don't know if it's the flow of how you move from the coffee pot. I like this place because you can pour your own coffee. I think Tina (the proprietor) does an incredible thing, sort of an all-you-can-drink, bottomless cup, which I think is great. So many places you buy a cup of coffee, and I like really hot coffee, so I'll typically start with a cup like this, I'll fill it up halfway and do like a couple half cups, so it's really hot. If you're paying each time, that's like, you know, an expensive endeavor, I'm not sure Tina will get rich doing that, but I don't think it's about getting rich. I think it's about serving a really—she really wants to serve a good cup of coffee—a really fresh, great cup of coffee. And teach people about good beans.

Historically, the bottomless coffee cup has symbolized a gift from the proprietors of third-place establishments to their clientele (Oldenburg 1989; Sherry 1995). As illustrated by Carie's passage, *café flâneurs* interpret the most beloved aspects of their favorite local coffee shops as expressions of this atavistic practice. Their feelings of customer loyalty are grounded in the reciprocal obligations of the gift economy.

Oppositional Localists/Communal Grounds

Debbie told us:

> I prefer coffee shops like this. Like I feel, especially in Chicago, our theory was the reason we weren't able to find a really good coffee shop there is because a Starbucks is on almost every corner. Starbucks is awful. There is even a Simpsons episode where Bart Simpson walks into the mall, and then you see a Starbucks and you see next door, "Coming Soon—Starbucks." Then he leaves and you see the whole mall from the inside, and it's wall-to-wall Starbucks. It's funny, but in a way it's true.

The "wall-to-wall Starbucks" narrative is quite prevalent among oppositional localists, a metaphor that is further elaborated through bleak images of plagues, cancers, and invading forces. Whereas *café flâneurs* view Starbucks's marketplace ubiquity as a testament to its well-earned popularity, oppositional localists take it as a galling affirmation that local

competitors have been crowded out. Several of our oppositional localists (many of whom view coffee as a life necessity) describe situations where they were traveling and had little practical choice but to frequent a Starbucks. Rather than viewing Starbucks as a comfortable standby, in the manner of *café flâneurs*, they rail against the lack of convenient, locally owned alternatives (presumably casualties of Starbucks's rapacious expansion), and they express disdain toward the Starbucks experience:

> *Laura:* You're going to run into definitely an element of individuals who are avoiding it [Starbucks], and they're here because they like to support local businesses, and I agree. I mean, it's kind of hard, I try to do my part, supporting local businesses. But if I am in a different community, it's hard to find local businesses sometimes, because Starbucks are pervasive, and they're everywhere, and they're kind of like at all these convenient places that you find yourself. Like in the airports or if you get off a subway, they're right there. It's just that convenience. So, I think when I'm traveling, and I really need something right away, I'll go, I won't say, "no, I refuse." But locally, here at home, I don't go there.

> *Interviewer:* So, how do you feel when you have to go there?

> *Laura:* I feel like, oh, man. Like, oh, well. I just need this. And I think that's why I feel so upset because it's just like my necessities are so basic. I just need a coffee. I just need some caffeine. I just need a place to rest and drink my coffee for an hour. I don't like these ridiculous names of coffees. They're just like these crazy made-up names, and they can be really long. . . . Is it truly a name or just something that the branding guru made up because it sounds cool and Italian?

When occasionally frequenting a Starbucks, oppositional localists feel exploited by a Machiavellian marketing machine. The following passage from Kate gives voice to this sentiment, and it also illustrates a key symbolic distinction that ensues from oppositional localists' wholehearted embrace of the anti-Starbucks discourse. Their preferences for local coffee shops are anchored by a steadfast conviction that they possess insight into the devious and diabolical workings of global corporate capitalism that is lacking among the general population and most particularly the typical Starbucks customer. Kate reports:

> Well, it's not like there are bad people who work there [Starbucks]. I mean, the people who work there are just like working everywhere else. They were very polite, and they gave me water, too. But, I feel like I'm in an experiment. I walk in and get this feeling that this is how they think people want a coffee shop to be. They're doing marketing research. They probably interviewed a thousand people. And one woman will say,"I like a good couch." And another person will say "I'd like to see a little fireplace." So, they put together this idea of a universally accepted coffee shop, but I have a feeling the average Starbucks customer is more like in their thirties, like they're an older professional crowd. They're not so concerned socially or politically, maybe. Like they're not really concerned about supporting a big corporation. I don't know

if you saw the Austin Powers movie, but I think Dr. Evil had his headquarters up in a Starbucks building in Seattle.

Oppositional localists construct their preferred coffee shops as a locus of communal solidarity. They sanctify local coffee shops as outposts of *real politik* actions where like-minded individuals can collectively challenge prevailing corporate power structures, enact a progressive vision of a just and sustainable economy, and defy the alienating forces of commercialization. Bob says:

> I think the main feature that appeals to me is that they [owners] are trying to build a sense of community here. Their goal isn't necessarily financial. They want to be able to, you know, afford their house payments and to eat, but they pay their employees very well, much better than most jobs of this sort would pay. They're very active about doing independent art shows and promoting independent artists. They're both musicians and have a band. They do music shows on the weekends, every Friday and Saturday, and they promote the most independent artists you can imagine and folk singers. They're very politically active. I think that's the community they're trying to build around, people who are politically active and committed to social change. I think that may be the number one appeal. All their food is vegan, including their bakery. It's that sense of social activism about these two people in particular that I love.

Like *café flâneurs*, oppositional localists celebrate the proprietors of local coffee shops for pursuing higher ideals rather than profits. Whereas *café flâneurs* assume that these ideals are aesthetically motivated and exist in the gift economy, oppositional localists place them squarely in the political economy. Among those in our sample familiar with Revolution House, there is a clear consensus that this establishment is the paragon of a "real" coffee shop.

In every single aspect of its operation, Revolution House is perceived to be the antithesis of Starbucks. From its second-hand décor, to its leftist political artwork and murals, to its Greenpeace fliers, to its steady stream of politically oriented folk singers and poets, Revolution House's atmospherics fully embody the anti-Starbucks discourse. Other coffee shops in our sample with a strong oppositional localists following do not exude such an overtly political milieu. They do, however, hit the right anti-Starbucks notes by offering fair trade coffees, providing a venue for politically oriented local artists, and supporting alternative local media and fundraising activities for activist groups, such as the AIDS support network.

This left-of-the-dial political sensibility—which invokes the specter of 1960s radicalism—is closely aligned with the market (and social) positioning of these local coffee shops as countercultural havens. A recurrent sentiment expressed by oppositional localists is that their preferred coffee shops are open to diversity. However, this sense of diversity is defined through a diametric contrast to middle-class lifestyle norms, fashion mores, aesthetic tastes, and, more generally,

centrist-to-conservative political values. For individuals who often feel out of place in mainstream society and politically marginalized, the antiestablishment trappings of bohemian coffee shops communicate an inviting tolerance of alternative lifestyles and support of their political ideologies. These experiences of being at home in the company of kindred spirits can generate a powerful emotional resonance and a sense of devout loyalty to the shop, its owners, and community of patrons. Rosie reports:

> I love this place [Revolution House]. When I was 16, a friend brought me here. I was just like, "oh, yeah, this is a cool coffee shop." So, I really loved it here. I just felt so at home knowing that, well, first of all, I knew I was different. I'm gay. These people accept diversity, everything from the color of the wall and the paintings to all the murals by the [outside] door. It was so fascinating. And the people that worked here, the owners, Ken and Gina, are so cool. The people that they hire are so friendly overall. You can't always go to a business establishment and have like a philosophical conversation with the person working there. But here it always seemed like that was possible. It's just like I love it here. So, it's the atmosphere. I mean, it really is a wonderful atmosphere. I like the art here. See these lamps? I love how they always are open to like weird new art. They play good music. I come to the music shows on Fridays and Saturdays. You don't have to have a ton of money to go to see a good show. A lot of times, it's local music. They're so open to a diversity of music and experimentalism and originality, with pretty political leanings as well, and I like that, too.

A strong preference for unconventional décors, art, and diverse (e.g., countercultural) clientele can be readily seen in the reflections of both *café flâneurs* and oppositional localists. Whereas the former group experiences these atmospherics as a spectacle to be enjoyed, oppositional localists regard them as the salutary objectification of societal values and political persuasions that bond together a diverse community of socially conscious citizens. Accordingly, oppositional localists voice displeasure toward any changes that move their favorite local coffee shops in the direction of Starbucks's upscale ambiance. Rebecca reports:

> I don't like Java Jive after they rehabbed it. They fixed it up real fancy. It just seemed colder for some reason. I just think they tried to fix it up to compete with Starbucks, to make it look nicer inside. When they did that, it lost some of its charm. I don't know. Maybe there were structural things, and they figured they might as well try to clean it up while they were at it. But Java Jive doesn't have as warm of an atmosphere, which is one reason why I don't like it that much. It's kind of sterile in there. All the chairs and tables are the same.

When oppositional localists encounter a Starbucks clone, they tend to interpret these local establishments through the frame of the anti-Starbucks discourse. Hence, they assume that Starbuck-emulating proprietors are driven by the profit motives and corporate ethos that they regard as anathema to preserving local diversity and community-enhancing businesses. Rebecca states the following:

> I don't go to Anchors Away. It's more sterile. Everybody has to look a certain way to work there, and it is always kept very clean and professional. It seems like it is geared more toward the business-type people, which is just not a crowd that I really mesh with very well. Also, I was walking past there a week or two ago, and they had this sign outside their door that had some compliment from *USA Today,* like it said a great place for friends, warmth, and coffee, something along those lines. But the thing is that all of the coffee shops that I want to patronize would never, ever make a sandwich board out of some review that *USA Today* gave them. *USA Today* is like this big corporate newspaper, and you just don't go around running off your tongue that *USA Today* says you're great.

Oppositional localists are quite astute at deconstructing the artifice of Starbucks's design, and they are quick to castigate local coffee shops that emulate its corporate look. However, they are not inclined to turn a critical eye toward their favorite bohemian establishments, preferring to see these atmospherics as spontaneous expressions of communally shared social and political values. Owing to this reflexive blindspot, they do not confront a number of potentially disconcerting ambiguities raised by glocalization. A local coffee shop that exudes an antiestablishment aura may still run its business in a manner that diverges from the social values lauded by oppositional localists; conversely, a local coffee shop owner who emulates Starbucks's upscale ambiance as a competitive strategy may still support socially responsible business practices. Furthermore, an avowedly anti-Starbucks ambiance may be no less calculated than an explicitly Starbuckified one, particularly when a proprietor realizes that this market positioning strategy provides a very viable competitive niche for local coffee shops (Helliker and Leung 2002). Acknowledging these dialectical complexities, however, would also undermine the sharp moral distinctions that enliven oppositional localists' politicized anticorporate identifications.

DISCUSSION

Our study supports the broader theoretical claim that global brands do exert a systematic influence on the cultural heterohybridization engendered by glocalization. We have developed the analytic concept of the hegemonic brandscape to explicate the cultural discourses, consumption practices, and symbolic identifications through which consumers experience these glocalized servicescapes and articulate personal and collective relationships to them.

Starbucks's cultural influence extends well beyond the confines of its corporate Web site, catalogues, and 6,500 retail outlets. The Starbucks revolution has crystallized and propagated a particular kind of third-place experience (coffee shop

patronage); it has shaped cultural expectations and ideals about what coffee shops should be. Despite recurrent charges of destroying local competition, in the United States at least, local coffee shops are riding on Starbucks's caffeinated wake. Not only are these local Davids doing fairly well; many rely upon an anti-Starbucks positioning (i.e., support your local coffee shop) and specifically design their servicescapes to offer an alternative to Starbucks's trademark ambiance (Fonda 2002; Helliker and Leung 2002).

Brands that attain a significant portion of culture share are inevitably pulled into the politics of consumption debates (see Holt 2002, 2003). Along with Starbucks, Microsoft, Disney, Nike, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, and Wal-Mart are transnational brands that enjoy considerable success while simultaneously being the recurrent targets of antibrand activism and grass roots efforts to block their expansion. Furthermore, consumers who wish to take a stand on globalization debates via consumption choices may gravitate toward David-like brands that can be interpreted as fighting a heroic battle against the corporate Goliaths of global capitalism. Smaller competitors have ample opportunity to profit from an explicitly anticorporate brand image, such as Snapple's positioning (prior to its purchase by Quaker Oats) as the rebellious alternative to the soft drink behemoths Coke and Pepsi (see Holt 2003).

Patronage of local coffee shops affords similar anticorporate (and antihegemonic) identifications through symbolic contrasts to Starbucks. Our local coffee shop aficionados bear some resemblance to the phenomenon of oppositional brand loyalty described by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 420): "through opposition to competing brands, brand community members derive an important aspect of their community experience, as well as an important component of the meaning of the brand." In the case of *café flâneurs* and oppositional localists, their loyalties are grounded in a culturally diffused oppositional narrative—emanating from antiglobalization activism—that has become an integral cultural feature of this hegemonic brandscape and that engenders strong affinities for local coffee shops in general (excluding those that appear to be Starbucks clones). They differentially leverage this multifaceted anti-Starbucks discourse to experience local coffee shops as corporate-free bastions of authenticity, aesthetic diversity, communal solidarity, and progressive sociopolitical values.

Café flâneurs are acting upon a cosmopolitan desire to experience authentic local cultures, where authenticity is understood through a symbolic contrast to the commercialized experiences offered by conventional tourist sites and McDonaldized servicescapes (see Thompson and Tambyah 1999). Rather than viewing Starbucks as a corporate colossus destroying local competition, they regard it as a boring, standardized, and mass-marketed meeting place, catering to the prosaic tastes of the corporate world. They valorize local coffee shops as noncommercial environments where they can experience aesthetic and social stimulation, and enjoy, as a kind of gift from the establishments' proprietors, an authentic expression of local culture.

Oppositional localists are acting upon an emancipatory desire to create communal spaces and exchange systems that offer an alternative to the profit-driven, commodity logic of corporate capitalism (see Holt 2002; Kozinets 2002a). They take the anti-Starbucks discourse as a sociopolitical gospel and regard the support of local coffee shops as a consequential rebuke to corporate power. Oppositional localists are fairly militant in their views about what constitutes a legitimate local coffee shop, questioning the social consciousness and motivations of any proprietor whose establishment does not display a strident anti-Starbucks's political sensibility.

The Starbucks brandscape is embedded and embroiled in broader cultural anxieties over the so-called branding of culture by transnational corporations (Holt 2002; Klein 1999). Through their anticorporate identifications, consumers can experience the glocalized servicescapes of local coffee shops as aesthetic, social, and political alternatives to corporate hegemony. In this way, the patronage of local coffee shops provides a symbolic anodyne for the feelings of cynicism, alienation, disenchantment, and disempowerment that could result from the increasingly ubiquitous presence of corporate influence in everyday life.

Neatly situated within this hegemonic brandscape, local coffee shops would seem to exemplify Oldenburg's (1989) conception of the "third-place" that exists between public and private life and that sustains a delicate balance between the moral economy and the exchange economy. In third-places, the ever-besieged vestiges of traditional communal relationships and collective identifications are said to be cultivated and nourished. In contrast to this laudatory reading of contemporary third-places, Aries (1978) concludes that coffee shops and other like third-places have been stripped of their once consequential role in the body politic by the socioeconomic changes linked to suburbanization and the related cultural privileging of the family over community as the dominant sphere for emotional investments and personal identification. From this view, contemporary cafes are little more than postmodern simulations of a by-gone communal ethos that emerged in the formative period of modernity when individuals were citizens rather than consumers and when communities functioned as loci of political and civic engagement rather than as lifestyle enclaves.[2] Accordingly, local coffee shops and national chains, like Starbucks, are both akin to retro brands (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003) that have repackaged a nostalgic, Disneyfied vision of nineteenth-century Gemeinschaft solidarity and sociopolitical affinity into consumable and commodifiable servicescapes.

In the fragmented and individuated age of postmodern consumer culture, a nostalgic view of community has become a highly commercialized trope through which consumers are able to forge an ephemeral sense of interpersonal connection via common consumption interests (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn

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[2]Nineteeth-century urban third-places, be it the café or the pub, were political spaces, used to form alliances and to undertake consensus building. According to Burnham (1993), e.g., the pub played a significant role in the rising political fortunes of Irish immigrant communities in the latter half of the nineteeth century. Hence, the prohibition movement, which effectively dismantled these circuits of political organization, had a decided political and reactionary subtext.

2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Through these postmodern forms of community, consumers seek a palliative for the distressing feelings of isolation, inauthenticity, and depersonalization that can be precipitated by the conditions of postmodern consumer culture. Absent from these consumerist and therapeutic communal retreats are the sociopolitical agendas and goals that formerly animated urban third-places and their constituent forms of social capital.

In this study, the consumption practices of *café flâneurs* correspond to this pessimistic argument about simulated third-place experiences. While seeking an experience of public life and participation in a broader social spectacle, *café flâneurs'* third-place consumption practices are motivated by an apolitical quest for enjoyable and edifying forms of identity-play, and they express little desire for communal relationships steeped in shared political and civic aims (and their concomitant nexus of reciprocal obligations). However, the third-place practices of oppositional localists manifest a more pronounced political and civic orientation. Oppositional localists use local coffee shops as one means to enact a "think globally, act locally" ethos, to engage in discussions and organizational activities related to both local and national politics, and to forge connections with consumer activist communities such as the environmental movement and the fair trade movement. Accordingly, oppositional localists' respective identity goals intersect with ideals of civic responsibility and cohere around a broader collective project of supporting socially responsible (local) enterprise and contesting corporate hegemony.

In the age of global corporate capitalism, implicit and explicit resistance to transnational economic power is driving new and diffuse forms of political organization grounded in the realpolitik objectives of the antiglobalization movement. The narratives and practices of oppositional localists demonstrate that an anachronistic, politicized, and, in some key respects, more civically minded (and morally committed) form of third-place experience can be reconstituted through the resistant identity positions engendered by the dynamics of glocalization.

SITUATED THEORY TO GO

From a conventional standpoint, our analysis suffers from a number of research limitations. First, our study lacks longitudinal data tracking how consumers become socialized into the cultural milieus of local coffee shops and the corresponding transformations in their outlooks and self-conceptions. Second, *café flâneur*ship and oppositional localism certainly do not exhaust the different ways in which coffee shops can be experienced. Furthermore, avid Starbucks customers are quite likely to attribute different meanings to this hegemonic brandscape than our local coffee shop patrons. More generally still, the Starbucks brand will inevitably assume different meanings in different cultural contexts: Seattle coffee shop patrons may feel a sense of local pride in Starbucks's success; in lower-income urban neighborhoods, Starbucks's outlets may be viewed as a locus of economic development and a needed magnet for attracting other retail trade (Yue 2003); in Japan, young adults may view Starbucks as a symbol of an

exciting, fashionable, contemporary lifestyle that breaks free from constraining local traditions (Belson 2001).

All these contextual qualifications are noteworthy. However, they would only constitute research limitations in the conventional sense of the term if our research goal had been to generalize the thematic findings to the universe of all coffee shop patrons or to develop a universal theory of branding. Although commonly viewed as a methodological issue, statements of research limitations harbor significant philosophy of science complexities.

Yet the epistemological rationales underlying conventional statements of research limitations are seldom questioned or made explicit. As Wells (1993, p. 43) aptly notes, they have become a ritualized aspect of journal articles that "if taken seriously, the limitations would invalidate the findings." However, these ritualistic statements are in fact taken quite seriously because they serve a very serious disciplinary function. They rhetorically assuage the most threatening implications of the problem of induction that plagues universalizing theory claims: no number of positive empirical confirmations can prove a theory universally true because there will always exist unexplored contexts, populations, or times where the theory may not hold (Anderson 1986). Accordingly, universalizing theory claims and the related logic of confirmatory theory testing are always epistemologically suspect (see Sternthal, Tybout, and Calder 1987).

Our analysis follows in the logic of the interpretive case method, which offers a means to advance theoretical arguments without making universalizing claims (see Geertz 1983).[3] In the interpretive case method, the research goal is to provide a cultural analysis of the meanings and actions that emerge in a given social context. Empiricist questions are simply not germane to the analytic goals of a cultural analysis (e.g., Do all coffee shops patrons view Starbucks in the same manner as this sample of consumers? Do all coffee shop patrons fit the *café flâneur* and oppositional localist classifications?) Questions that do concern a cultural analysis include, What are the cultural conditions that enable these consumers in this setting to attribute these particular meanings to their patronage of local coffee shops? What do these contextualized meanings, ideals, and experiences say about the broader cultural currents and tensions that are shaping consumer culture? Do existing theories account for these revealed cultural relationships? What novel theoretical linkages and concepts are suggested by this analysis?

Most fundamentally, interpretive case analyses are used to enrich existing theories and to develop new theoretical concepts that can inform subsequent research. Importantly, these emergent concepts are treated as tools for conducing analytic work rather than as candidates for universal truth claims. For example, consider the concept of brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). This empirically grounded theoretical construct has proven to be a useful analytic tool for under-

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[3]The extended case method offers another epistemological approach to theory development that is not contingent upon generalizing empirical findings to a broader universe of settings or populations (see Burawoy 1991; Holt 2002b).

standing how brand meanings are embedded in social networks and become integrated into consumers' social worlds (see McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002). Yet, one should not expect the meanings, rituals, and values that characterize one brand community, such as Jeep owners, to transfer to another, say devoted users of Apple computers or Tony Hawk skateboard enthusiasts, nor do all brands have to engender active brand communities for the construct to have theoretical utility in a variety of consumption contexts.

We developed the construct of the hegemonic brandscape to cast theoretical light upon relationships between the cultural influences exerted by culturally iconic experiential brands and consumers' experiences of glocalization (and their anticorporate identifications) that prior studies had not interrogated. The consumption issues manifest in our research context provide a fertile ground for developing theoretical linkages between prior conceptualizations of glocalization (Wilk 1995), consumer-brand relationships (Fournier 1998), brand communities and oppositional brand loyalty (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), the construction of countercultural identities through brand discourses (Holt 2004), and finally, the consumption practices motivated by emancipatory desires (Kozinets 2002a). In this way, our cultural analysis of the Starbucks brandscape contributes to an emerging disciplinary project that explores how brand meanings generate consumer identities, social networks, and marketplace cultures; and, reciprocally, how brand meanings are individually and collectively appropriated, reconstructed, and, in some cases, contested by consumers.

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