Original Article

Media, Culture & Society
2015, Vol. 37(6) 887–903

DOI: 10.1177/0163443715584100
mcs.sagepub.com

Procter & Gamble, mass media, and the making of American life

Lee McGuigan
University of Pennsylvania, USA

Abstract

Owing to its unmatched sponsorship of commercial broadcasting and the ubiquity of its homemaking goods, Procter & Gamble (P&G) has had a profound impact on culture and society in the United States. From a critical political economy approach, this article documents P&G's historical contributions to the commercial system of broadcasting in the United States. At the nexus of entertainment, industry, and domesticity, P&G provides a unique case study for probing the political economy of capitalism in the United States, with particular emphasis on commodity consumption and the reproduction of labor power in the home. It is argued that the significance of P&G has less to do with direct message effects, and more to do with the institutional formation of broadcasting as both an advertiser-supported industry and a daily ritual commanding human resources of time and attention.

Keywords

advertising, broadcasting, history, mass marketing, political economy, Procter & Gamble

'Few companies have influenced American lifestyles as has The Procter & Gamble Company' (Tucker, 1991: 50). So begins an entry in a compendium of corporate histories. The following study presents the same argument, but unlike biographical portraits that revel in mythologies of executive acumen and product innovation (Lief, 1958; Schisgall, 1981), I claim that Procter & Gamble's (P&G) essential contribution has been to the maintenance of capitalist social relations under conditions of mass production, mass marketing, and mass consumption. P&G is of signal importance because of (1) its

Corresponding author:
Lee McGuigan, University of Pennsylvania, 3620 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA.
Email: lmcguigan@asc.upenn.edu

unrivaled investments in commercial broadcasting and (2) the ubiquity of its homemaking goods. Uniting industry, entertainment, and domesticity, the case of P&G is uniquely suited to an analysis of the reproduction of labor power during a formative period for consumer capitalism in the United States – the inter- and post-war years. This era coincides with the crystallization of media and marketing institutions which set the path of development, in television especially, for decades.

I use a critical political economy approach to interrogate P&G's involvement in the development of commercial broadcasting and the concomitant reorganization of domestic work and leisure. The analysis begins with an introduction to a critical political economy approach to media studies, followed by a brief review of the early history of broadcasting, with emphasis on its industrial formation. The bulk of the article details processes through which P&G shaped mass media and cultural life in America and became one of the country's largest companies. This history is further interpreted through critical perspectives on how commercial media and branded commodities relate to the economic and cultural necessities of capitalism, specifically by regenerating the capacity to work, accelerating the circulation of commodities, and inculcating a disposition amenable to alienated labor, often by promising consumerist satisfactions (Smythe, 1981). This portion of the argument proceeds through a meditation on how the daily rhythms of unpaid, domestic labor (imposed, almost without exception, on women) accommodated entertainment, prepackaged homemaking goods, and new occupations of time. I conclude with a discussion of the continued primacy of P&G as the world's foremost mass marketer.

The following analysis is not meant to argue that P&G solely engineered the American system of broadcasting or the modalities of consumer society during the period under investigation. It is also not designed to imply that P&G executives conspired with broadcasters to achieve necessary moments in the capital process. Broadcasting and consumer society emerged from a complex history of political, economic, cultural, and technological dynamics, none of which are reducible to conspiracy or the will of a single economic actor. Rather, P&G's relationship to mass media is scrutinized here because it provides an instructive case for thinking through the political economy of capitalism in the United States, particularly as it comprises the interconnections of mass production and consumption, advertising and marketing, entertainment, domestic labor, and everyday experiences both in markets (where labor power and other commodities are sold) and in the home (where labor power is reproduced and other commodities consumed). As much as that of any single corporation, the case of P&G illuminates Marx's (1973) conclusion that capital is a *process* in which production, distribution, exchange, and consumption are 'members of a totality, distinctions within a unity' (p. 99) – an idea foundational to the method of political economy (see Hall, 2003).

The political economy of media and culture

Critical approaches to studying the political economy of mediating institutions – including communication systems and cultural habits – are suited to ask and answer questions about how the organization of social life shapes and is shaped by structures and relations of power. Vincent Mosco (2009) defines political economy as 'the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources' (p. 25). A political economy approach to the study of media and culture demands special consideration of the symbolic resources through which people encounter and interpret social reality. 'The mass media', Murdock and Golding (1973) assert, '… play a key role in determining the forms of consciousness and the modes of expression and action which are made available to people' (p. 205). The circulation of signs and symbols cannot be appraised in isolation from an industrial system of commodification and exchange. Positioning the home as a nexus of meaning-making, industrial production, and social reproduction, this article is indebted to a definition of political economy attributed to Dallas Smythe: 'the study of control and survival in social life' (Mosco, 2009: 25). With this definition Smythe sought an entry point into the most urgent questions confronting economists and sociologists: what is to be produced, how, and for whom? From this perspective, an interrogation of P&G may yield insights into social relations of power that link domestic and industrial spheres.

Labor, reproduction, and the home

Marx's analysis of capital engages a labor theory of value. Commodities are commensurable because they are products of human labor. Marx (1976: 131–137) departs from classical political economy in distinguishing between abstract and concrete labor. Concrete labor is 'human labour exercised with a definite aim, to produce use-values (p. 283)'. Abstract labor 'forms the value of commodities' (p. 137). Value is treated as a social average: the 'socially necessary labor-time' required to produce commodities under standard conditions of machinery and skill. Labor power is a worker's capacity to work; capitalists buy it as a commodity. It has an exchange-value and a use-value. Its exchange-value is the cost of reproducing labor power at a conventional standard of living: workers are paid enough to make themselves capable of working again. In other words, labor power trades 'at its value', which 'like that of all commodities is determined by the labour-time necessary to produce it' (p. 340) – that is, the labor-time necessary for producing the goods and services needed to survive.

Smythe (1977) is guided by Marx's (1973: 90–94) analysis of the dialectical relationship between production and consumption. Smythe (1977) concludes that under the material reality of 'monopoly capitalism', mediated by what he calls the Consciousness Industry, which comprises branding, product packaging, advertising, and entertainment, 'all non-sleeping time of most of the population is work time' (p. 3). The economic function of advertiser-supported mass media, Smythe argues, is to produce audiences of consumers who '(a) perform essential marketing functions for the producers of consumers' goods, and (b) work at the production and reproduction of labour power' (p. 3).

As mentioned, to fulfill the socially necessary labor-time to produce all the use-values that sustain society and to contribute surplus labor-time, exhausted workers must be made fit to work again. Reproduction of labor power – the peculiar and essential commodity for capital – unfolds mostly in the home. While a wide and fanciful range of things and experiences can regenerate labor power, two categories of products assume unique importance: homemaking goods (including food) and entertainment goods. The former are indispensable to the material recuperation of physical energy; the latter feed the spiritual appetite, helping maintain a disposition to accept work routines. Socializing people to 'the theory and practice of consumership' is, according to Smythe, the 'prime purpose of the mass media complex' (p. 20). Importantly, this cultivation of values and manners is not a matter of simple message effects, but a long-run result of experiences and habits; it has as much to do with how people relate to media and markets as it does with reactions to messages. Smythe (1981) immediately acknowledges that individuals, families, and other institutions are not powerless. Throughout his book, *Dependency Road*, he encounters the antagonism between commodity relations and the desire to realize free, creative lives. However, he suggests that in a mass-mediated instantiation of consumer society, 'the principal aspect of capitalist production has become the alienation of workers from the means of producing and reproducing themselves' (Smythe, 1977: 7). As historian Susan Strasser (1989) observes, with a culture of mass consumption, 'branded, standardized products came to represent and embody the new networks and systems of production and distribution, the social relationships that brought people the things they used' (p. 15).

Lynn Spigel (1991) arrives at similar conclusions. Like Smythe, Spigel appreciates the contradictions wrought by 'the labor-reducing technologies offered by big business': 'consumer products promised people the everyday experience of liberation in return for their increasing dependence on corporate production' (p. 21). Spigel points out that 'middle-class ideals of domesticity … predicated on divisions of leisure time and work time' had since the 19th century 'justified the exploitation of the housewife whose work at home simply does not count' (p. 73). Distilling the arguments of feminist critics and historians who have shown that 'the home is indeed a site of labor', Spigel makes a crucial point that resonates with Smythe's theory: 'Not only do women do physical chores, but also *the basic relations of our economy and society are reproduced at home*, including the literal reproduction of workers through childrearing labor' (pp. 73–74; emphasis added). 'Once the home is considered a workplace', she concludes, 'the divisions between public/work and domestic/leisure become less clear' (p. 74).

Feminist political economists, elaborating and critiquing Marx, have recognized domestic labor as integral to capitalism, with some arguing that 'every sphere of capitalist organization presupposes the home' (Dalla Costa and James, 1972: 38). For Leopoldina Fortunati (1995), 'the capitalist mode of production is based on the indissoluble connection that links reproduction with production' (p. 8). Absent the work of making a home – shopping, cooking, cleaning – 'labor power would not be ready for work each morning' (Dyer-Witheford, 1999: 67). Daytime programming pitched to homemakers, and technologies and commodities of convenience, became mutually constituted with a complex of activities and ideas that unfold in the home and yet are indispensable to social reproduction (Streeter, 1996). As Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999) puts it, corporate planning during the inter- and post-war period became attuned to the 'labor of the housewife, whose "consumerist" schedule is organized largely through new organs of mass communication, such as radio and television' (p. 74).

As a linchpin of both entertainment and homemaking, P&G is of special importance in considering the social, cultural, and economic history of the United States in the 20th century. More than any other advertiser, P&G contributed to a commercial system of broadcasting which became central not only to introducing consumers to products and services but also to how people spend time, relate as families, and share a public culture in daily life. The next sections provide the historical context for P&G's ascent into broadcasting.

Broadcasting: technology, industry, policy

Responding to anxieties of military and communication-intensive industries, the US government pursued federal control of radio transmission licenses in 1912. Commercial broadcasting began to be institutionalized after 1919 when Congress awarded a private monopoly to the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), a concern maintained through partnerships among General Electric, Westinghouse, AT&T, and United Fruit (Douglas, 1989). Within a year of the first radio advertisements in 1922, RCA's market power occasioned public opprobrium and an antitrust investigation, which precipitated the formation of the National Broadcasting Company in 1926. By 1927, when the Radio Act established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to oversee licensing, radio broadcasts had reached as many as 50 million listeners over the coast-to-coast broadcasting networks (Beniger, 1986: 366–367). The Communications Act of 1934 installed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to replace the FRC, and the new agency 'prepared for intensive study of an emerging medium: television' (p. 376).

While a popular reform movement agitated against commercial control of radio (McChesney, 1993), television broadcasters inherited the model of advertiser-support mostly as a matter of course (Boddy, 1990). Against proposals to mandate public service responsibilities for broadcast licensees (Pickard, 2011; Smythe, 1950), corporate libertarians and industry lobbyists marshaled a persuasive 'free market' rhetoric, avowing that regulation censored speech, hobbled efficient resource allocation, and smacked of socialism (Pickard, 2013). 'That the basic television structure and the programming provided the American home would be paid for by advertising revenue', the FCC reflected in 1965, was taken for granted from the outset of TV broadcasting (Boddy, 1990: 18).

Television was welcomed into a majority of American homes from 1948 to 1955 (Spigel, 1991), and it became a properly national medium in the early 1960s when the infrastructure for signal switching and amplification could effectively transmit to the almost 90% of households with a receiver (Sterne, 1999). But the familiar system of commercial television was germinating earlier. By 1928, RCA had petitioned the FRC for a commercial television license, on the claim that the company's expertise would be necessary to establish adequate standards of service. In 1939, the same year advertising expenditures on radio surpassed those for magazines, commercial TV broadcasting began on a limited basis. The first broadcast of a Major League Baseball game that year was a landmark achievement, and P&G's Ivory soap was a sponsor (Advertising Age, 1988: 18). In 1940, the FCC sanctioned a limited expansion of commercial licensing, and in the following year, it approved technical standards which remained largely unchanged into the 21st century (Boddy, 1990: 32–34).

Despite demonstrable deficiencies, a system engineered around RCA's very high frequency (VHF) receivers held pride of place in the spectrum allocation hearings of 1943–1944 because a transition to broadcasting on the abundant ultra high frequency (UHF) band would render RCA's units obsolete, undermine its lucrative patents and manufacturing interests, and reduce the immediate industrial capacity to produce large audiences across a compatible infrastructure (Herzel, 1951: 803–805; Smythe, 1952). Approval of a 13-station VHF system in 1945, and further expansion after 1947, invited an overwhelming volume of license applications and aggravated problems of congestion on the spectrum – a resource of intentionally managed scarcity. The FCC responded with a licensing ‘freeze’, from September 1948 to April 1952, during which the networks exploited their early-mover advantage and television matured as a consumer technology and a commercial industry. Homes with televisions rose from 0.4% to 34%, and television’s share of broadcasting revenue went from 3% to 70% (Boddy, 1990: 51). This period also witnessed P&G’s proper initiation as one of TV’s most invested sponsors.

Broadcasting: consumer technology

Consumers adopted radios rapidly in the period under scrutiny. A total of 60,000 households owned radios when commercial broadcasting began in 1922; just 2 years later, more than 1 million homes had sets (Beniger, 1986: 364–365). Even amidst the Great Depression, radio proliferated, from 10.25 million households in 1929 to 13.75 million in 1930. At the end of the 1930s, 27.5 million homes had a radio, and by 1951 penetration of US households exceeded 95% (pp. 365–367). In Smythe’s formulation, this amounts to a consumer-subsidized project of capacity building for audience production. As viewers became accessible, investment followed from sponsors. Radio ripened as annual advertising expenditures on all media approached a then-historic high of US$3.43 billion in 1929. While overall spending declined after the stock market crash, spending on radio continued apace, reaching US$113 million in 1935 and more than doubling to US$247 million in 1941. In 1945, radio achieved its highest share of overall spending, before being largely abandoned for TV (Beniger, 1986: 366).

Television’s ascendency as a consumer technology was even more abrupt. The number of TV homes in the United States rose from 700,000 in 1949 to 26.1 million in 1954 and then doubled by 1964 (*Broadcasting*, 1964). Household viewing increased steadily over this period, from 4 hours and 25 minutes per day in 1949 to 5 hours and 25 minutes in 1964. Along with the increase in ownership, reported television usage in the United States is staggering: in 1954, 134.3 million hours per day were spent watching television; by 1963, total daily viewing hours reached 259.9 million (p. 50). For 1 week in February 1959, people over 12 years of age collectively spent 2.1 billion hours watching TV and 1.1 billion listening to radio (*Broadcasting*, 1959a). Daily viewing was especially concentrated in homes where the ‘head of the house’ had finished high school (6 hours 33 minutes) and/or earned more than US$10,000 annually (7 hours 21 minutes) (*Broadcasting*, 1957). Boasting that houses with at least five people tune in for more than 8 hours, a station executive concluded that ‘any activity which occupies the American people six and seven hours a day cannot be by-passed by advertisers interested in selling the American people’ (p. 40).

Television became a substantial occupation at a time when post-war prosperity demanded systemic control to absorb industrial outputs (Ewen, 1976). As engines of mass production surged, through revolutions in industrial manufacturing, power generation, transport, and communications (Beniger, 1986), the United States was burdened not by the conditions of privation that daunted virtually all prior societies but by the challenges of affluence (Galbraith, 1969). Relatively early in its commercial development, when it remained uncertain just what ‘television’ would mean to ordinary people, manufacturers and sponsors recognized the medium’s superior marketing charms. An RCA executive in 1944 proselytized television through an appeal to its economic importance:

> We believe that television is the only tool that can increase consumer purchasing of all products to a point that is sufficient to produce a satisfactory national income … Television has the power to create in the minds of the people a greater desire for merchandise than they have for their hoarded cash. (Boddy, 1990: 45)

As National Broadcasting Company (NBC) President Pat Weaver described it, ‘Advertising is to mass production what individual selling was to craft production’ (p. 156). In response to charges of economic profligacy, P&G defended its media spending on the claim that broadcasting actually defrayed costs to consumers: ‘Mass selling spreads the cost of advertising … and broadcast advertising is as essential in mass production as costly machinery and high-speed packaging’ (Beatty, 1957).

Commercial television was initiated as a sales agent amidst ‘the changing nature of the postwar American consumer economy’ (Boddy, 1990: 154). With expanded access to credit, and stabilized interest rates spurring Americans to buy and furnish homes, consumer spending rose by 60% in the 5 years following World War II (Spigel, 1991: 32). Faith in the marketing efficacy of television was reflected in total TV billings. In 1949, advertisers spent US$57.8 million; 5 years later, they registered US$809.2 million (*Broadcasting*, 1964). Spending on TV approached US$1 billion by 1958 (*Broadcasting*, 1958) and exceeded US$2 billion by 1964 (*Broadcasting*, 1964). By 1952, television had overtaken radio in spending, and in 1955 it surpassed newspapers for national advertising revenue (Boddy, 1990: 155). Television has since reigned as the leading national marketing medium.

P&G and mass marketing

P&G has not gone wanting of praise, especially from *Advertising Age*, the journal of record for Madison Avenue. A former Editor-in-Chief writes in a book-length tribute to P&G, ‘for my money, the company represents the best example of the American spirit of free enterprise’. *Advertising Age* counted P&G first among ‘Marketers of the Century’, lauding the company for playing ‘a pivotal role in developing four generations of media carrying its ads – from radio to broadcast TV to cable to the Internet’ (Neff, 1999). ‘By most accounts’, the magazine’s editors claim, ‘P&G is the world’s preeminent marketer’ (Advertising Age, 1988).

Before surveying P&G’s history, it is worth mentioning the importance of branding and advertising to consumer packaged goods that are largely indistinguishable and consumed as a matter of routine. Douglas Holt (2006), discussing ‘iconic brands’, lists P&G within a category he calls ‘heuristic frames’. Holt explains,

> In consumer psychology, a dominant paradigm in marketing, brands are understood as devices that simplify consumer decision making and lower search costs. Brands that readily fit this

model are low-involvement products that have enough technical complexity to make them difficult to assess – soaps, toothpaste, over-the-counter medicine. (p. 357)

Smythe raised this issue as well, suggesting that faith in recognizable brands is the logical response to bewilderment in the marketplace: 'There is an ever-increasing number of decisions forced on audience members by new commodities and their related advertising … Literally millions of possible comparative choices face the audience member who goes shopping'. He continues, 'the consumer is totally unable to know either the craftsman's sense of quality or the "scientific" basis of quality as built into consumers goods by modern mass production techniques' (Smythe, 1981: 41). Smythe punctuates his point by describing a situation in the toiletries section of a store, where products bear only scientific ingredients: 'Lacking the product brand name, the shape and symbolic decoration of the package, you would be helpless' (p. 41). Into this void of understanding, P&G has poured unmatched money and marketing messages.

Foundations of modern advertising

In October 1837, William Procter and James Gamble founded a partnership to benefit from the shared ingredients required for their respective products – candles and soaps (Lief, 1958: 15). P&G began in Cincinnati, OH, with a capitalization of US$7,192 (p. 20). The company grew steadily. By 1870, P&G was spending up to US$1,500 on local advertisements. In 1882, a mythologized moment in its corporate narrative, the firm budgeted US$11,000 to advertise its flagship brand, Ivory soap, at the national level (p. 9; Schisgall, 1981: 29). Management was convinced that new national magazines, brought into profitable existence by railway expansion, rural free delivery, and relaxed commercial post rates, would capture the attention of homemakers. In 1893, the advertising budget was goosed to US$125,000, and by 1897 P&G was spending up to US$300,000 annually to 'post the public', as Harley Procter put it, in daily and weekly newspapers as well as periodicals such as *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* (Lief, 1958: 88). Less than 25 years removed from the 'unprecedented' allocation of US$11,000, P&G was budgeting US$400,000 for advertising in 1905 (p. 89). In 1912, P&G introduced Crisco cooking oil, which it hailed as 'a scientific discovery which will affect every kitchen in America' (Schisgall, 1981: 72; Strasser, 1989: 3–4). On the strength of its soaps, oils, and shortenings, P&G's sales soared, from US$20 million in 1907 to over US$200 million in 1930 (Schisgall, 1981: 118). Through extensive product design and a coordinated strategy that combined national advertising and direct marketing to grocers, P&G products became 'staples' in American life, as consumer markets and domestic routines were being reformed around standardized, branded commodities (Strasser, 1989).

P&G came to appreciate the utility of emotionally evocative advertisements. Ads after the turn of the century pivoted from product claims about purity and the differentiating feature of Ivory's buoyancy (achieved through industrial accident, the story goes), toward portrayals of domestic situations (Lief, 1958: 93). Children and infants were fixtures of the iconography, and a full-page spread in *The Saturday Evening Post* even issued extensive advice on childrearing (p. 94). Rolland Marchand (1985: 10) identifies the period between 1916 and 1926 as decisive in P&G's shift from 'reason-why' appeals toward more personal, 'slice of life' advertisements (Schisgall, 1981: 125). In the 1920s, P&G introduced serialized print advertisements, resembling comic strips, which followed the 'Jollyco' family. Readers are said to have been so moved by the chronicles as to believe the family to be real (Lief, 1958: 150). Based on a test of the campaign in New York, the company determined that the 'Jollyco' series increased sales by 25% in the first 6 months. Another series, 'Actual Visits to P&G Homes', achieved similar attachment in the popular imagination (Marchand, 1985: 352). Advancing its reputation as a symbolic pillar of commercial media through the custom of contracting annually for the page facing the first editorial feature in each issue of a litany of periodicals (Lief, 1958: 149), P&G signaled that its subsidies would be reliable and indispensable.

Selling over the air

With commercial radio broadcasting in its infancy, P&G introduced programs to instruct women about using its products, including *Crisco Cooking Talks* in 1923, *Radio Homemaker's Club* a short time later, and *Sisters of the Skillet* by 1930 (Schisgall, 1981: 122). P&G continued to program along this tack into the 1930s, with *Ruth Turner's Washing Talks* and *George, the Lava Soap Man* in the evening (Lief, 1958: 173). However, market research soon convinced the firm that radio listeners were moved more by drama and entertainment than instruction (p. 174). As the author of one corporate biography writes, 'It became clear that the most important ingredient of daytime serials was emotion' (Schisgall, 1981: 124). This epiphany catalyzed P&G's most famous contribution to broadcasting lore: the soap opera (Allen, 1985: 107–115).

In 1932, P&G introduced Cincinnati to *The Puddle Family*. The show foundered, but the format was perceived to have intrinsic appeal. The next year, *Ma Perkins* aired and became an enduring symbol of the 'first' soap opera. By 1934, P&G ranked among the top spenders on radio (*The Billboard*, 1934). Alfred Lief (1958), in the official company history, writes, 'P&G virtually built day-time radio for the networks, and became the leading radio advertiser by the yardstick of number of periods of time on the air' (p. 178). Spending on network radio escalated swiftly, from US$2,000,000 in 1935, to US$4,500,000 in 1937, to US$8,800,000 in 1939 (pp. 179–180). *Variety* reported that by 1948, when the top 10 spenders on television were paying close to US$4,000,000 to reach 3,000,000 potential viewers, 'Procter & Gamble alone spends some $20,000,000 yearly to shove its message across to AM listeners' (*Variety*, 1948: 23). Relaying findings from Robert Hutchins' Commission on Freedom of the Press, *Variety* later reported that in 1944, near the pinnacle of radio sponsorship, P&G spent US$22,000,000 on radio advertising, buying 'approximately 2,000 hours a week of station time, equivalent to the entire weekly time of 18 stations' (*Variety*, 1950: 22). Characterizing the firm's historical influence on broadcasting and American life, a recent CEO of P&G boasted, 'We created programming. We molded the environment to fit our needs … We made listening to radio every Sunday night a family institution' (Schiller, 1999: 117).[1]

Command of the airwaves afforded P&G a large market on which to test the effectiveness of advertisements. Before 1936, when the A.C. Nielsen Company acquired the 'Audimeter' and began to assume institutional supremacy in audience ratings, broadcast audiences were measured by relatively clumsy survey methods and postal feedback

(Beville, 1988). Audience measurement was systematized with input from P&G; the firm's research director chaired the governing board of the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting, a venture supported by the Association of National Advertisers, which refined audience research to assure sponsors that their messages would reach a buying public (pp. 4–8). In the early 1930s, P&G used merchandising offers to gauge the size and attentiveness of the audience, awarding a package of flower seeds in exchange for 10 cents and a box-top from Oxydol soap (the brand sponsoring *Ma Perkins*). By Lief's (1958) account, 'This was the first precise information ever obtained on radio coverage; the first evidence that radio advertising by itself was selling goods' (p. 177). This claim is almost certainly false (see Beniger, 1986: 383–384), but P&G management was convinced of the selling power of mass media. From 1933 to 1939, shipments nearly doubled for Ivory, almost tripled for Crisco, and increased close to sevenfold for Oxydol, then the nation's best-selling packaged soap (Schisgall, 1981: 125). A total of US$230 million in sales in 1937, the company's centennial year, seemed to confirm that mass media spending begot sales (Advertising Age, 1988: 21).

As indicated above, P&G's Ivory brand was promoted on the first broadcast of a Major League Baseball game in 1939. For most of the next decade, however, P&G was an eager observer, but not a dedicated sponsor of television – perhaps satisfied to remain radio's biggest spender (Bailey, 1945; *Variety*, 1948). In 1948, sponsoring *Fashions on Parade* on the Du Mont network, P&G began its patronage of the most significant mass medium of the 20th century (Beatty, 1957). Although networks and stations reported losses of US$24.5 million in 1949 (Smythe, 1950: 470), national advertisers supported a continuously expanding number of shows on network television (Stahl, 1949). By 1950, P&G found suitable selling vehicles in family entertainment like *Musical Comedy Time* and the *Steve Allen Show*. In 1949, its *Fireside Theater* was among the earliest programs recorded on film in Hollywood (Lief, 1958: 270), and 'within a few years' P&G was purported to be 'producing more footage of filmed entertainment than any major movie studio' (Schisgall, 1981: 190). After 1950, efforts shifted to daytime television: *Search for Tomorrow* was introduced in 1951, and 1 year later *The Guiding Light* was adapted from radio. The latter became the longest-running daytime drama, ending only in 2009. By 1955, 'the three most popular actresses on TV', Lucille Ball, Jane Wyman, and Loretta Young, 'were starring for Procter & Gamble' (Lief, 1958: 275).

Records of P&G's support of commercial television in the 1950s are stunning. From the 24th ranked advertiser in 1950, it took only 4 years to become the largest advertiser on network television in the United States (Boddy, 1990: 275). By 1957, 'Procter and Gamble alone was responsible for $1 of each $11 spent on network television' (p. 158). From network television billings of US$570,000 in 1950, P&G was spending more than US$60 million in combined network and spot advertising in 1956 (Beatty, 1957). In 1955, it was the top spender on both network television and radio (*Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 1955c), and in both media, it outspent its closest competitor by at least 63% (*Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 1955b). Just from 1956 to 1960, it tripled its budget for spot advertising, to over US$54 million (*Broadcasting*, 1960a, 1961c). P&G contributed more than any other advertiser to making national gross television time worth more than US$1 billion in 1959 (*Broadcasting*, 1959b). Its US$50.6 million in network billings eclipsed the combined spending of the two next biggest advertisers, Colgate-Palmolive and Lever Brothers – a feat it repeated in subsequent years (*Broadcasting*, 1962). By 1960, P&G was 'far and away the biggest spender in television' (*Broadcasting*, 1961b); expenditures topped US$101 million (*Broadcasting*, 1961a), and five of the top 25 brand advertisers in the United States were owned by P&G (*Broadcasting*, 1960b). In 1961, a spokesperson for the Television Bureau of Advertising told *Broadcasting* magazine, 'No one else comes even close to [the] 1960 pace of *television's top client*' (*Broadcasting*, 1961a; emphasis added).

A 1957 census of 42 million television homes found that 'P&G daytime programs alone delivered 79,000,000 daily selling messages' (Lief, 1958: 277). This exposure correlated with sales, which continued to climb: from US$346 million in 1946, to more than US$720 million in 1948, then US$860 million in 1951, and more than US$900 million in 1954. Sales broke the billion-dollar threshold in 1956 and reached almost US$1.2 billion in 1957 (p. 178). Its operating profit exceeded US$100 million in 1948 and reached US$120 million by 1955. A feature article in a 1957 issue of *Broadcasting-Telecasting* remarked, 'The story of the way P&G uses advertising media to move its merchandise into 46 million homes is predominantly a broadcast story. Once it was radio; now it's television' (Beatty, 1957). That P&G, 'considered by many as the most penny-conscious advertiser in the world', committed such massive subsidies reinforced consensus within the industry that television was the most powerful marketing medium (*Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 1955a). In *Eyes on Tomorrow*, a corporate biographer writes,

> Any appraisal of the company's history shows that as advertising budgets have been increased, sales and earnings have risen … And if television has become the principal recipient of the company's advertising expenditures, it is because television, according to all surveys, has yielded the highest results in sales. (Schisgall, 1981: 277)

Just as television was a window to the world for viewers, for advertisers it was a portal into the home.

The making of American homes: consumption, entertainment, and reproduction

From its earliest dedicated advertising efforts to its 2012 claim as a 'Proud Sponsor of Moms', P&G has been addressing female consumers. Soaps, detergents, cooking oils, and shortenings; later coffee, bathroom tissues, toothpastes, shampoos, and disposable diapers – these P&G products were institutionalized as the domain of women tasked with buying them and maintaining the home. By the early 20th century, advertisements and entertainment content sponsored by P&G depicted domestic arrangements and expectations wedded to mass consumption. These images were circulated in popular periodicals, such as *Good Homemaking* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, and later dramatized on radio and television. Commercial broadcasting coalesced, in part, around an industrially constructed paradigm of homemakers using branded packaged goods (Streeter, 1996). Daytime radio programmers 'treated female audiences as the normal, naturally occurring listenership' (Meehan, 2002: 216). Television advertisers actively sought 'Mrs. Daytime Consumer'. The manager of NBC research in the 1950s described the desired viewer as an 'active modern woman' in command of a kitchen outfitted with an array of 'labor-saving devices'. Essentially, 'she's a good customer' (Spigel, 1991: 82).

With reinforcement from gendered portrayals in advertisements and program content, women were interpellated as shoppers amidst a new regime of domestic labor: 'Household routines involved making fewer things and purchasing more; consumption became a major part of the work of the household' (Strasser, 1989: 15). To women handling household purchasing, and especially those also committing time to waged employment outside the home, the contrivances of mass marketing offered relief from the exertions required for more attentive consumership (Strasser, 1982). Advertisements helped curate shopping lists and familiar brand labels assured reliable quality; attending to mass media substituted for some of the work of managing family consumption. As commercial broadcasting itself occupied time and attention, it promised time-saving advice, labor-reducing products, and even reinvigorating leisure. It both allowed and required that women be more economical with production and consumption time.

Marketing domesticity: science, art, and commerce

P&G's management was acutely aware of domestic labor. In 1922, P&G established a laboratory dedicated to systematically studying the art and science of homemaking. After trying to replicate industrial uses of its products, P&G took to 'hiring housewives to wash clothes and dishes exactly as they did at home' (Lief, 1958: 153). By 1924, an experimental kitchen and bakery were integrated into this market research apparatus. This practice imitates the time-motion studies of factory labor conducted in preceding decades by industrial engineers. Lilian Gilbreth, in particular, applied scientific management techniques to domestic labor and home economics, observing an action to isolate its component parts and render efficiencies by culling unnecessary movements (Spigel, 1991: 21). These mark early examples of efforts to rationalize the production of labor power and the consumption of mass-produced commodities. Investigations of this nature have continued. To conduct 'Habits & Practices' studies in the 1970s, for example, field researchers in P&G's employ traveled the country to observe women working in their homes, scrutinizing ordinary chores to generate ideas for new products or novel marketing strategies (Advertising Age, 1988: 149).

Mass marketing and commercial broadcasting coincided with normative and practical negotiations of the meaning and organization of families and households. P&G recognized the changing nature of domestic life in America after World War I. Alfred Lief (1958) rhapsodizes, 'It was a woman's world as well as a man's … Suffrage was shared, women's participation broadened in every realm, and emancipation exalted freedom from household drudgery. The current keynote of advertising was leisure, luxury, greater convenience in homemaking' (p. 143). Even as time devoted housework increased in the early 20th century, since middle-class homes employed fewer domestic servants and suffered fiercer standards of cleanliness and order (Strasser, 1982), popular media vaunted the putative liberation of homemakers won by adoption of convenience technologies, including consumer packaged goods (Spigel, 1991: 21–26). A 1921 print advertisement celebrated Crisco as the antidote to 'a smoky kitchen', and the key to being 'Out of the kitchen by noon!' (Lief, 1958: 143). A radio ad for Oxydol animated the situation with a social tableaux in which a husband expresses surprise that his wife prepared 'a big meal like this on a wash day'. For the homemaker, 'finding a new soap called Oxydol' not only meant 'No more backaches', it also afforded a night at the movies (Advertising Age, 1988: 18). Furthermore, claims of productivity were not confined to soaps and cooking oils; television programs became equated with the reproduction of a woman's capacity to work in the home. A P&G official is quoted in a 1956 issue of *Variety* (1956): 'Soap operas give housewives a refreshment of mind and spirit they so often need'. However, the balance between television and domestic labor was uneasy.

Television and the mode of reproduction

Television was invited into American homes through a complex cultural negotiation. It was marketed within a discourse on family that was pervasive in the post–World War II period. As Spigel documents through careful analysis of women's magazines, the television simultaneously galvanized and disrupted family ideals and gender roles. On one hand, television became like 'household cement', orienting the family's time, attention, and even furniture (Spigel, 1991: 38–40). On the other hand, it divided the family's interests, 'feminized' fathers, and corrupted children (pp. 50–65). The utmost concern was how television would affect 'women's work'.

Spigel describes the understanding that the ideal audience was comprised of women working in the home as 'a truism for broadcasting and advertising executives' (p. 75). Amidst doubts that homemakers would disrupt their chores to attend to television, which distracted the senses more than radio, soap operas internalized the rhythms of domestic labor. Early soaps, like P&G-sponsored *Search For Tomorrow* and *The Guiding Light*, minimized visual interest and reiterated storylines to allow 'women to divide their attention between viewing and household work' (p. 78). Other daytime formats sought to educate women about being good consumers, on the assumption that a woman would be willing to interrupt her 'obligations' if, as one TV production handbook put it, 'she feels that her television viewing will make her household duties more efficient and help her provide more gracious living for her family' (p. 83). Programming was tailored to 'Mrs. Daytime Consumer', balancing the responsibilities of laborer and shopper. To perform this selling function and to generate audiences that would be larger, more predictable, and more attentive, broadcasters sought to make television viewing habitual, part of the daily routine of housework. By the mid-1950s, TV networks were using magazines to promote the idea that their programs provided anesthetic comfort – women would hardly notice that they had been working all day. Through novel spatial arrangements, recommended in the magazines, household labor and television viewing could even be accommodated simultaneously.

But the threat of dividing the homemaker's attention stimulated moral panic (pp. 86–90). Television-addicted housewives, derelict of their duties, became a trope in sitcoms and reactionary cultural criticism. While men, by their 'productive' labor, earned the right to tune in and zone out, women were policed by customs (both in culture and economic orthodoxy) that discounted domestic labor and homemakers' need for replenishment. Marshaling the scarce time of women to both regenerate the home and enjoy televisual leisure required exploitation of the full affordances of labor-saving technologies. Beyond the direct reliance on subsidies from advertisers, broadcasters had an interest in women conforming to the conveniences of consumer culture. The less time spent cleaning and cooking, the more time available for viewing. The relationship holds logically in reverse as well: the more time spent viewing television, the less time available for housework and so the greater the reliance on mass-produced soaps and ready-made cooking products.

I am not imputing this rationale onto the marketing strategy of P&G; however, it is reasonable to claim that the company's prosperity hinges not only on people being moved to purchase its products as an effect of advertising messages but also on a lifestyle of time scarcity which increases reliance on standardized commodities that streamline housework and shopping decision-making. Without accusing P&G executives of deliberate planning or even awareness of this possibility, we can say logically that the importance of P&G to broadcasting (and vice versa) is less about message effects than about the organization of social life and the allocation of human resources of time and attention.

Conclusion

P&G has entered the 21st century with full force. In 1987, its 150 year anniversary, P&G spent US$1.386 billion in global ad expenses, just over 8% of its US$17 billion in sales. By 2000, it spent US$3.828 billion, and in 2012 it spent US$9.3 billion, more than 11% of sales (Johnson, 2012). According to recent financial reports, 25 of the firm's brands have annual net sales of US$1 billion, and its total revenue in 2013 exceeded US$84 billion (P&G, 2013). More than 60% of homes worldwide, and up to 99% in North America, use at least one P&G product (P&G, 2010), and the firm remains the biggest contributor to the US$500 billion in global ad spending (Johnson, 2013).

P&G continues to invest in nascent media. It has been a crucial patron to cable networks. Particularly famous is the firm's support of interactive media. In 1994, fearing that interactive media might develop without advertiser involvement, Edwin Artzt, then-CEO of P&G, exhorted his colleagues at the American Association of Advertising Agencies and the Association of National Advertisers to exert control over the direction of media: 'We may not get another opportunity like this in our lifetime. Let's grab all this new technology in our teeth once again and turn it into a bonanza for advertising' (Turow, 1997: 162; see also Schiller, 1999: 116–118). It would be hard to script a more apposite expression of P&G's interventions in the development of commercial media.

The firm's commitment to shaping the digital media environment invites further analysis of the type attempted here. We can interrogate P&G's contributions to the cultural and economic emergence of digital capitalism, just as we have explored its involvement in mass-mediated consumer capitalism during the broadcast era. A host of questions confront us about how the ascendancy of niche media over broadcasting alters experiences of domestic leisure and labor and the nature of shared cultural resources, and scholars continue to debate the merits of applying Smythe's constructs to interactive media (Caraway, 2011; Hughes, 2014; Napoli, 2010). At least two complementary lines of inquiry seem to warrant further attention. First, following Artzt's plea, we could systematically investigate P&G's financial and symbolic investments in the commercial internet. Second, by considering its global expansion, we might discover how P&G and other firms have helped to establish media systems in other countries and intervened in the daily realities of people living as workers and consumers, both domestically and industrially.

Funding

The author received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Note

1. P&G was notorious for policing the content surrounding its advertisements. Its editorial policy stipulated that broadcasters conform to 21 rules, which generally demanded political neutrality and discouraged treatment of controversial subjects and anything maligning orthodox American cultural forms (Broadcasting, 1961b).

References

Advertising Age (1988) *Procter & Gamble: The House that Ivory Built*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books.

Allen RC (1985) *Speaking of Soap Operas*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Bailey B (1945) P&G hears as well as buys radio. *Broadcasting*, 11 June, pp. 18, 79.

Beatty JF (1957) How P&G cleans up with television. *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 3 June, pp. 106–108.

Beniger JR (1986) *The Control Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Beville HM (1988) *Audience Ratings: Radio, Television, Cable*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Boddy W (1990) *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Broadcasting (1957) TV: medium too good not to use. *Broadcasting*, 9 December, pp. 40–41.

Broadcasting (1958) TV sales rise, near $1 billion in 1957, TVB's cash announces. *Broadcasting*, 3 March, p. 43.

Broadcasting (1959a) How people spend their time. *Broadcasting*, 16 March, p. 76.

Broadcasting (1959b) National TV cracks billion. *Broadcasting*, 16 March, pp. 74, 76.

Broadcasting (1960a) Spot TV's top advertisers. *Broadcasting*, 4 April, p. 56.

Broadcasting (1960b) TV's top 100 advertisers in '59. *Broadcasting*, 23 May, p. 42.

Broadcasting (1961a) P&G's $101 million in TV. *Broadcasting*, 1 May, p. 42.

Broadcasting (1961b) Sponsors spell out do's, don't's. *Broadcasting*, 2 October, pp. 23–26, 28, 30, 32, 35.

Broadcasting (1961c) The boilers in the television spot pot. *Broadcasting*, 3 April, pp. 48–49.

Broadcasting (1962) P&G No. 1 TV advertiser in '61. *Broadcasting*, 14 May, p. 34.

Broadcasting (1964) TV at peak, with new gains ahead. *Broadcasting*, 7 September, p. 50.

Broadcasting-Telecasting (1955a) More firms spend more on TV yearly. *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 11 July, p. 32.

Broadcasting-Telecasting (1955b) The facts and figures of network advertising. *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 13 July, pp. 30–32.

Broadcasting-Telecasting (1955c) The top 100 advertisers of the radio-TV networks. *Broadcasting-Telecasting*, 3 October, pp. 28–29.

Caraway B (2011) Audience labor in the new media environment. *Media, Culture & Society* 33(5): 693–708.

Dalla Costa M and James S (1972) *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. Bristol: Falling Wall Press.

Douglas S (1989) *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dyer-Witheford N (1999) *Cyber-Marx*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Ewen S (1976) *Captains of Consciousness*. New York: Basic Books.

Fortunati L (1995) *The Arcane of Reproduction*. New York: Autonomedia.

Galbraith JK (1969) *The Affluent Society*. 2nd edn. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Hall S (2003) Marx's notes on method. *Cultural Studies* 17(2): 113–149.

Herzel L (1951) Public interest' and the market in color television regulation. *The University of Chicago Law Review* 18(4): 802–816.

Holt DB (2006) Jack Daniel's America: iconic brands as ideological parasites and proselytizers. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6(3): 355–377.

Hughes K (2014) 'Work/place' media: locating laboring audiences. *Media, Culture & Society* 36(5): 644–660.

Johnson B (2012) Procter & Gamble Co's advertising spending, 1987 to 2012. *Advertising Age*, 29 October. Available at: http://adage.com/article/special-report-pg-at-175/procter-gamble-s-advertising-spending-1987-2012/237974/ (accessed 25 November 2013).

Johnson B (2013) 10 things you should know about the global ad market. *Advertising Age*, 8 December. Available at: http://adage.com/article/global-news/10-things-global-ad-market/245572/ (accessed 12 December 2013).

Lief A (1958) *'It floats': The story of Procter & Gamble*. New York; Toronto, ON, Canada: Reinhart & Company.

McChesney RW (1993) *Telecommunications, Mass Media and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Marchand R (1985) *Advertising the American Dream*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Marx K (1973) *Grundrisse*. London: Penguin.

Marx K (1976) *Capital Volume I*. London: Penguin.

Meehan ER (2002) Gendering the commodity audience: critical media research, feminism, and political economy. In: Meehan ER and Riordan E (eds) *Sex and Money: Feminism and Political Economy in the Media*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 209–222.

Mosco V (2009) *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Murdock G and Golding P (1973) For a political economy of mass communications. *The Socialist Register* 10: 205–234.

Napoli PM (2010) Revisiting 'mass communication' and the 'work' of the audience in the new media environment. *Media, Culture & Society* 32(3): 505–516.

Neff J (1999) Creating a brand management system was only the start. *Advertising Age*, 13 December. Available at: http://adage.com/article/news/creating-a-brand-management-system-start-a-legacy-devoted-nurturing-brands-leaders-understood-consumers/60032/ (accessed 25 November 2013).

Pickard V (2011) The battle over the FCC Blue Book: determining the role of broadcast media in a democratic society, 1945–8. *Media, Culture & Society* 33(2): 171–191.

Pickard V (2013) Social democracy or corporate libertarianism? Conflicting media policy narratives in the wake of market failure. *Communication Theory* 23(4): 336–355.

Procter & Gamble (P&G) (2010) Annual report. Available at: http://www.pg.com/en_US/downloads/investors/annual_reports/2010/PG_2010_AnnualReport.pdf (accessed 24 November 2013).

Procter & Gamble (P&G) (2013) Annual report. Available at: http://www.pg.com/en_US/downloads/investors/annual_reports/2013/2013_AnnualReport.pdf (accessed 24 November 2013).

Schiller D (1999) *Digital Capitalism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Schisgall O (1981) *Eyes on Tomorrow: The Evolution of Procter & Gamble*. Chicago, IL: J.G. Ferguson Publishing.

Smythe DW (1950) A national policy on television? *Public Opinion Quarterly* 14(3): 461–474.

Smythe DW (1952) Facing facts about the broadcast business. *The University of Chicago Law Review* 20(1): 96–106.

Smythe DW (1977) Communications: blindspot of western Marxism. *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1(3): 1–27.

Smythe DW (1981) *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*. Norwood, MA: Ablex.

Spigel L (1991) *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Stahl B (1949) National advertisers now backing total of 63 shows on network. *Variety*, 20 April, pp. 1, 26.

Sterne J (1999) Television under construction: American television and the problem of distribution, 1926-1962. *Media, Culture & Society* 21: (3): 503–530.

Strasser S (1982) *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. New York: Pantheon.

Strasser S (1989) *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*. New York: Pantheon.

Streeter T (1996) *Selling the Air*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

The Billboard (1934) Procter & Gamble lump air budgets; plug all products. *The Billboard*, 28 July, p. 7.

Tucker TM (1991) The Procter & Gamble company. In: Hast A (ed.) *International Directory of Company Histories*, vol. 3. Chicago, IL: St. James Press, pp. 50–53.

Turow J (1997) *Breaking up America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Variety (1948) Tele's top 10 bankrollers. *Variety*, 7 October, p. 23.

Variety (1950) U.S. radio 'disgrace'. *Variety*, 10 May, pp. 22, 24.

Variety (1956) Advertising marries entertainment. *Variety*, 4 January, pp. 149–151.