

**Rüdiger Wischenbart**

## **The Capricious Audience. Culture and Consensus.**

### **Executive Abstract**

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The cultural life and the cultural industries are subject to a sweeping change as it occurred to the steel industry in the early 1970ies, or to musical entertainment in the early rock'n roll years after World War II.

Industries that until recently were synonymous not only to wealth, but to the cultural identity of nations, have been turned into global conglomerates. The audience certainly embraces the new and phenomenally rich variety in content and media channels available, but it became capricious and evasive, difficult to predict in its preferences and taste, and thereby it often makes havoc of costly marketing plans and other industry strategies.

Culture, once considered to be a "special good", protected by various legal measures, is pirated and traded for a bargain while those who commercially produce and package intellectual properties complain about diminished revenues.

Beneath the surface of the difficult economics of culture however, a much more serious issue is taking shape: The old glue between creation and the audience falls apart. The consensus that used to make culture an integrative force, a machine to produce identity, is gone. Or, in the phrase coined by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz: "*What is a Culture, if not a Consensus?*"

1. How much culture anyway? The economics of global culture. New patterns and paradoxes of exploitation. The winner takes it all. Globalisation vs. regionalisation.

Examples: The regional gaps of production, consumption and trade of cultural goods. The gaps of book translations. TV casting shows. The case of DVD and the privatisation of culture and entertainment.

2. How global is it? Paradoxes of Harry Potter. The new empires. Simon Fuller. Cultural cascades. The new and powerful middlemen. The making of global best sellers. World music: new old tunes everywhere. Independent publishers: The virtues of avoiding a planned global success. The stunning lesson taught by Stanley Kubrick's "Eyes Wide Shut". Ambiguities of creative production without a fee.

3. New social and new cultural groups. How print media miss young readers, and what and how young readers read and make up their judgements from instead. New elites – and new gaps. New values and communities in a web of trust. Richard Sennets insight into the culture of failure. The problem for traditional gatekeepers. It's the audience, stupid.

(Originally 1660 words)

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