Globalization and the making of a global imaginary
Jonathan Friedman

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The ultimate aim of this chapter is to suggest if not demonstrate, first, that much of the current received understanding of globalization is the product of a larger cosmological transformation of Western modernity and second, that this transformation can only be properly understood from a global systemic perspective. This latter perspective has significant implications for the way anthropology is carried out, from the field to the production of theory. The argument begins with globalization as "reality" in its current historical context and contrasts this to an array of contemporary interpretations of the phenomenon. It covers both the economic, political and geographical, as well as the culturally oriented literatures on the subject. Following this, the cultural discourses are the principal focus of the discussion. While, it might be argued, anthropology ought to have a contribution to make to understanding this globality, it has, primarily in the U.S., been increasingly sucked into the globalization process itself, reconditioned and remodeled after discourses such as those to be found in post-colonial cultural studies. The global processes that are transforming the lives of peoples in all parts of the world are not simply a question of the diffusion of Coca-cola, sitcoms and internet, but of ethnic and religious warfare, slummification/yuppification, social disintegration, cultural movements, as well as the formation of globalizing hybridizing elites who produce transnationalist ideologies that are the subject of this discussion.

One day staying at home I was virtual witness to the second Gulf War. I witnessed it on two channels, CNN and Sky News. Switching back and forth I was surprised to see two different renditions of the same events broadcasted from the same aircraft carrier. Skynews told of planes taking off to bomb and of planes returning after a successful bombing raid. CNN was simultaneously waiting for the attack to begin. The difference in the versions was a product of the fact that CNN was getting its information from the Pentagon while Sky News was getting its from the British Admiralty. As it turned out the Admiralty was most accurate, but it didn’t matter very much since news disappears into oblivion in a short time. The news is not etched into social memory, but is merely a set of flashes that fade out quickly, to be replaced by new flashes. On the other hand these flashes are the only reality we have got, the only access or window on reality that we have if we cannot manage to get the actual scene. This is not a new phenomenon perhaps, but something is quite specific about it, the immediacy and non-reflexive nature of rapid media mediated reality.

What has this got to do with discussions of globalization? Globalization for many is about extension, the diffusion of culture, either as global homogenization or as global hybridization, which might be understood as the articulation of local and global cultural forms. Media today are global media and they are the media of globalization as well transporting CNN images of reality around the world where people are assimilated or acculturated into a single world of meaning. Metaphors of flow are central in this discourse. Culture in this way is substantialized and even liquified since how else can it flow?

I have argued that this is a skewed metaphor and thus a misrepresentation of what actually occurs in the realities referred to in such terms. The Gulf War virtualities are a case in point.
These are interpretations that are sent out as finished images ready for direct consumption but which are so fragile that any zapper can pick them up if he so desires. Virtual realities of the media are constructed as descriptions of realities, not subject to interpretation, but the differences in those realities immediately raises reflexive issues, issues of interpretation, issues that place representations in doubt, even in permanent doubt if recent surveys indicating a striking lack of belief in media images is anything to go on. The force of the media needs to be understood in the context of the relations of communication, of production and reception of images and information and their impinging on the way in which reality is imagined and interpreted. The same can be said of all forms of what are today included in the culture basket. We need a serious reconstruction of these realities if we are not to replicate what CNN and other global media already have told us.

*Globalization and global systems*

Let me begin by suggesting that globalization is not an evolutionary stage. We are not moving beyond something that was once more local into something much grander. The discourse of globalization itself needs to be analyzed more seriously. It has come over a couple of decades now, most emphatically from business consultants like K. Ohmae who argued quite a few years ago for the obsolescence of the nation state and for the evolution toward a new world of flexible regions and global capital. There are successive discussions from differing sources in the 80's and 90's, from geography, urban studies, international relations and sociology. These have been complemented by a rapidly growing culturalist literature from cultural studies in its postcolonial variants and anthropology. These various takes are often at odds with one another. Work by political economists and geographers (Dicken, Gill, Harvey) has stressed the globalization of capital, the relative growth of financial capital and speculative activity, the decline of welfare economics and the rise of neo-liberalism. Sociologists have often stressed the technological bases for a global economy, i.e. the IT revolution and its generation of network society (Castells). Much of this work is empirically based, dealing with real economic change, with urban reorganization in the formation of global cities (Sassen..), with industrial relocation, with the expansion of financial markets, with class polarization. Such is not the case with the great majority of the works on cultural globalization. Most of the latter work has consisted in opinions, views and prophecies about the direction of the world, and critiques of concepts assumed to be parochial, essentialist and racist.

All of this work tends to assume that something and sometimes very much is new. It has even been referred to in terms of millennium, as in “millenial capitalism” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000), implying that globalization is somehow the doorway to a new era. Our first argument here is to place this in a historical perspective.

This is possible on the basis of an older approach to the global, one that is systemic, macro-historical and non-evolutionary. This approach is very much an outgrowth of the work of Fernand Braudel and later work by Wallerstein, Arrighi and others at the Braudel Center in New York, but also in the global systemic anthropology with which I have been associated. More recently it has been supplemented by the work of a number of social scientists, historians and archaeologists who have sought to develop a research program to deal with world system history, and which includes researchers as different as A.G. Frank, G. Modelsiki and W. McNeill. Common to most of this research is an understanding of globalization as a phase phenomenon in already existing global systems rather than an evolutionary era which we have finally achieved today.
There is no doubt that the current period of world history is one of globalization. Capital accumulation has decentralized geographically at an accelerating rate since the 1970's. There is no need to repeat the well known statistics of this phenomenon. Capital has not, however, flowed equally to all corners of the globe. East Asia has been the major recipient along with a number of regions, albeit to a significantly lesser degree. These include, India, Brazil, Chile and Mexico. Thus a view once common in international circles, in the 60's and 70's that equated development with increasing underdevelopment in the Third World, has been largely abandoned, although the world’s poorest regions are still in “the South”. The world has indeed changed and I recall an interesting debate that we were engaged in at the time in this pre-globalization era. We had written a number of articles that attempted to understand the world system today in terms a long historical process of civilizational expansions and contractions regulated by similar dynamics for the past 3000 years. We suggested that the scenario was one in which the rise of centers of accumulation was not a static phenomenon but was followed by a de-centering via a decentralization of the accumulation process itself. This, we said, could occur within a global system and take on the form of shifting hegemony within a larger central region. It was followed by a more general decline of the central region as a whole and a large scale geographical shift. This kind of argument occurred in the past and can be described for the rise and fall of previous centers of wealth accumulation and even of civilizations. The rise of Europe itself was a process that can best be understood as in counterpoint with the decline of the Middle East at the end of the Middle Ages. Thus European capitalism did not simply evolve from feudalism. It was a product of the shift of accumulation from one world region to another. Europe was, in this argument, largely a dependent area in the previous Arab empires, a relation that was gradually reversed in the centuries following the Renaissance. The foremost mechanism in this process was and is the decentralization of capital within the larger system, a phenomenon that we refer to today as globalization. So the entire history of Europe understood in global terms can be seen in terms of a series of pulsations, expansions and contractions, from the growth of the Mediterranean and Flanders as the Middle East entered into its terminal economic crisis to the shifts from the Italian city states to Portugal and Spain, followed by Holland and then England. Each of these cycles were characterized by periods of centralized accumulation and expansive trade followed by decentralization (capital export or globalization) and a longer term shift in hegemony. In this Century, England became the world’s banker after being the worlds workshop and the United States took over the leading productive role. Periods of shift are also periods of increasing competition and conflict, even warfare. After WWII the United States was truly the workshop of the world but this changed rapidly throughout the 50's. The Marshall Plan and a generalized and massive export of capital from the U.S. led to the rise of post-war Europe as well as Japan. By the 70's the entire West had become a major exporter of capital to much of the rest of the world and this might be seen as a major shift of accumulation from West to East. The formation of the Pacific Rim economy from the 70's until the late 90's represents a substantial redistribution of economic power in the world system. This phase corresponds to the rise of the globalization idea and its institutionalization in the West. In fact it was a rather selective operation in geographical terms even if it changed the terms of competition in the world as a whole.

We have been hinting here at a cyclical perspective on the current phenomenon of globalization, calling it a phase rather than an era, an issue to which we shall return shortly. Before doing so it might be worth recalling that one of the most explosive developments in the world economy that has often been signaled as a novelty is the enormous expansion of financial markets. Their massive development is, of course, an important phenomenon to understand.
Since the beginning of the 1980's, financial assets have been increasing 250% faster than the "aggregate GDP of all the rich industrial economies" (Sassen 1996: 40.). The current global financial markets are estimated to be worth about 75 trillion dollars and it has risen to 83 trillion in 1999, i.e. three and a half times the OECD's aggregate GDP (op.cit. 41, Sassen 2000:3). The contrast with world cross-border trade, $6 trillion and foreign direct investment, $5.1 trillion is truly astonishing. While it is debatable to what extent this is the product of the successful struggle of capital against the nation state, it is not debatable that technological changes have made the movement of capital an instantaneous process in which sensitivity to conditions of accumulation have increased logarithmically. If this increase is related to the general model of the growth of fictitious capital in periods of declining profitability of industrial production, it might be suggested that the current growth of finance capital (generated in the West) combines such tendencies with a new information technology that raises the rate of speculative turnover exponentially thus accounting for the appearance of "global glut".

Globalization need not be an evolutionary stage of world history. There may indeed be tendencies to the establishment of world wide institutional arrangements, of which the UN is but one example. But such tendencies have occurred in the past only to be replaced by opposite tendencies.

The recent history of globalization in the world system
We have suggested that globalization is a phase within the pulsation of the global system. We need only to return to the turn of this century to get an idea of the salience of this phenomenon as historical rather than world evolutionary. Globalization is not new at all, according to those who have actually researched the question. While there is much debate, there is also an emergent consensus that the world is no more globalized today than it was at the turn of the century. Harvey who has done much to analyze the material bases of globalization puts the information revolution in a continuum that includes a whole series of other technological time-space compressions. Hirst and Thompson (1996) go much further in trying to de-spectacularize the phenomenon.

"Submarine telegraphy cables from the 1860's onwards connected inter-continental markets. They made possible day-to-day trading and price-making across thousands of miles, a far greater innovation than the advent of electronic trading today. Chicago and London, Melbourne and Manchester were linked in close to real time. Bond markets also became closely interconnected and large-scale international lending- - both portfolio and direct investment--grew rapidly during this period. (Hirst and Thompson 1996:3)

Foreign direct investment which was a minor phenomenon relevant to portfolio investment reached 9% of world output in 1913, a proportion was not surpassed until the early 1990's (Bairoch and Kozul-Wright 1996: 10). Openness to foreign trade was not markedly different in 1993 than in 1913. In the 1890's the British were very taken with all the new world products that were inundating their markets (Briggs, A. in Fins de Siècle), cars, films, radio and x-rays and light bulbs).

"As in the late 20th Century trade was booming, driven upwards by falling
transport costs and by a flood of overseas investment. There was also migration on a vast scale from the Old World to the New.

Indeed, in some respects the world economy was more integrated n the late 19th Century than it is today. The most important force in the convergence of the 19th Century economies was mass migration mainly to America. In the 1890's, which in fact was not the busiest decade, emigration rates from Ireland, Italy, Spain and Scandinavia were all above 40 per thousand. The flow of people out of Europe, 300,000 people a year in mid-century, reached 1 million a year after 1900. On top of that, many people moved within Europe. True, there are large migrations today, but not on this scale. (Economist Dec. 20 - Jan 2: 73)

This was a period of instability, to be sure, of enormous capital flows, like today. It was also a period of declining British hegemony and increasing British cultural expansion. Britain had no enemies as such, except those that it was helping to create by its own export of capital. Arrighi argues on the basis of historical research that massive financial expansions have accompanied all the major hegemonic declines in the history of the European world system.

"To borrow an expression from Fernand Braudel (1984: 246)--the inspirer of the idea of systemic cycles of accumulation--these periods of intensifying competition, financial expansion and structural instability are nothing but the 'autumn' of a major capitalist development. It is the time when the leader of the preceding expansion of world trade reaps the fruits of its leadership by virtue of its commanding position over world-scale processes of capital accumulation. But it is also the time when that same leader is gradually displaced at the commanding heights of world capitalism by an emerging new leadership" (Arrighi 1997:2)

The period from 1880 to World War I was followed by a period of de-globalization and regionalization in the global system, one that was not reversed until the 1950's and which accelerated in the 70's until the present. There is already evidence today that the world is again beginning to regionalize strongly into three major zones, APEC, NAFTA and EU. Of course the system has historically increased in size. Of course there is technological speedup and increasing capacities for movement. But it is not at all clear that such changes have led us to the threshold of a new era in human history, even if it might well be argued that "time-space" compression in itself may ultimately transform the very conditions of operation of the global system. Instead of either celebrating or castigating globalization, we would do better to try and grasp the potential trajectories and tendencies in contemporary historical change.

**The Regional Shift**

Whether or not one conceives global process in terms of shifting accumulation or the formation of a new globalized economy, there is a defacto emergence of a new powerful economic region. And in spite of the current crisis, there is no doubt that there has been a redistribution of shares in the world economy in favor of the Asian Pacific.

The fact is that as nation states exist, the level of welfare is still a national phenomenon, i.e the degree to which capital investment tends to concentrate in one place or another. It is this clustering that makes it possible for Porter (1990) to argue for a comparative advantage of nations in an era of globalization. In 1956 the United States had 42 of the top 50 corporations,
a clear sign of hegemony over world production. In 1989 that number had dropped to 17. Europe as a whole has a larger number (21) of the 50 top firms today than the United States.

This would imply that the globalization of capital is a temporally delimited phenomenon or phase within a larger system rather than a general evolutionary phenomenon. It would in this case be related to the breakup of hegemonies, a process of fragmentation and decentralization of accumulation of wealth in the larger system. Now in the contemporary situation there are clear markers of this process. While production and export have increased unabated since the 60's, the developed market economies decreased their share of total world production from 72 to 64% while developing countries more than doubled. Between 1963 and 1987 the US has decreased its share of world manufacturing from 40.3% to 24%. Japan increased its portion from 5.5% to 19% in the same period. West Germany is stable around 9-10%, but the UK declines from 6-5% to 3.3%. France, Italy and Canada also decline somewhat in this period (Dicken 1992: 27), and while there are quite significant increases in Spain, Brazil and India, the Asian NIC countries have been the major benefactors of the decentralization of capital accumulation and especially of manufacturing (Dicken 1992:27).

Countries such as Hongkong, Taiwan, Korea and China have moved up rapidly on the rank list of manufacturing export nations at the same time as the leading advanced economies lost ground in this arena, some of them by significant amounts, such as the U.K. and the United States.

And it is the center that is the target market for this new production. Between 1978 and 89 manufacturing exports to the US increased from 17.4% to 31.8%. The process here is one where exported capital produces products that are re-imported to the center. The trend here is to increasing competition, decentralization and a clear shift of capital accumulation to the East (Bergesen and Fernandez 1995:24). The model for this argument, stated above, is that rapid multinationalization of capital is a general process in periods of hegemonic decline.

The view that we are heading toward an increasingly integrated world, a globalized economy, is certainly a tendency in economic terms, but it does not necessarily mean that we are entering a new kind of world. The world of transnational capital and accompanying transnational institutions, clubs, classes and elites is certainly an part of the globalization process, but this does not account for the changes in regional distribution of accumulation and power in the world. Globalization, in other words, does not mean unification or even integration in any other way than coordination of world markets. TNC's are, in important respects, the agents of decentralization of wealth rather than its geographical concentration.

The redistribution of manufacturing in the world system has led to a more or less three way division of the world, with the developed Asian countries becoming the leading region while the U.S. and Europe have declined. So while there is clearly the emergence of a global structure of capital accumulation, the very rationality of the accumulation process is predicated on geographical shifts of capital. While transnational capital represents a truly global force, the geographical decentralization of accumulation still leads to declining hegemony in some areas and increasing hegemony, however short-lived, in others. The ultimate question, suggested earlier, is to what degree a threshold of qualitative change is achieved in which entirely new structures establish themselves, in this case an institutionalization of global order via political re-organization. The emergence of global cities may be a sign of this kind of restructuring, but it is far from complete.

On the other hand there is clearly an increase in the regionalization of capital, the formation of three great blocks of investment. The major investors in China have been Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and the Chinese overseas communities. According to some estimates
the Chinese diaspora which constitutes only 4% of the total population is an enormous economy in its own right (equivalent to 2/3 of China's GDP and is an important investor in China (3/4 of China's 28,000 firms) (Camilleri 1997:22).

Another process that should be noted is the internal differentiation within the region itself. There are countries like Japan that have quickly moved from exporters of goods to exporters of capital and importers of goods, often of their own exported capital, a pattern linked to the decline of other major economic powers. Hong Kong has become a major investor in Shanghai real estate and in Guangdong industries, displacing a significant portion of its own home investment to the mainland.

Globalization as localization

If we accept all of the above then we can suggest that there are such things as global systems, the latter being the systemic properties of open global processes. A global system in other words is simply the structure of such processes. Globalization is something quite different. It is, as we have suggested, a process that occurs within already established global systemic fields. The globalization of capital, of commodities or brands, of media technologies and representations, all refer to movement within an already existent global arena. From another point of view, however, globalization is the localization of the world, packing it all into a computer, a living room, that is, a restricted social space. Globalization as human experience is always a question of localization, the reduction of the world to the experience space of the subject. Globalization can only be conceived by such reduction. It is in this sense the real compression of time-space, the contraction of the world. But it is represented as the extension of the subject rather than the reduction of the world. This is as true of the person who stays home and does it all virtually as of the cosmopolitan traveler, who never leaves his home away from home except to consume local difference-as-commodity. Cosmopolitans, like other travelers tend to stick together. They don’t do what they claim to do. They do not become connoisseurs of the multiple realities of the world. On the contrary they reduce real difference to their own worlds of appropriation. They meet in the same bars and restaurants with other like minded people. They most often marry into the same class and espouse values that accentuate their distinctive character as opposed to the lower orders of social reality. I do not attempt here to demonstrate these propositions but signal the reader that there is an growing literature on the issue. Transnationals are only border crossers with respect to the national borders that define them, but they are most often quite fixed in their transnational worlds as well, endosocial as any diehard local. That is, they are also local, only that their locality is defined transversely with respect to the territorial state. But boundaries are still boundaries.

And yet the elite representations of transnationals, whether workers or cultural elites, is a complete inversion of this reality, one that is generated by a repression of the existence of all boundaries other than the national. This produces in its turn the image of hybridity, which is nothing more than extension of the metaphor of container and contained...i.e. the nation state contains a jumble of transnational populations as well as the national population. The container is thus hybridized, but the populations that inhabit it, may not be hybridized at all. The container is multicultural, but the social experiences of its inhabitants may well be entirely monocultural in the sense that there are a number of separate worlds united only by juxtaposition in space. Of course things and images and even interpretations penetrate the separate worlds of the larger arena, but the important question is what kind of results this produces. Why should the introduction of national foods, books and images into a transnational group turn it into something entirely or even partially new for its inhabitants? And conversely, one might ask whether
Chinese and Thai restaurants have changed the Western way of life. This is a very serious issue for anthropology, not least because it expressed two very different views of culture. For one view culture refers to a particular organization of social life and social experience. It refers thus to a mode of being that has to be discerned beneath the surface of particular acts and interactions. For the other view which has become increasingly popular among globalizing anthropologists, culture is just a bunch of things, acts, rituals, rules, i.e. texts for us. The distinction between emic and etic, however problematic, disappears entirely here and the experience of the observer is simply equated with that of those whom he observes. The latter view implies that any addition in the sum of cultural things implies a new culture. This latter understanding dovetails with the real experience of cosmopolitan appropriation.

Cosmopolitan appropriation can be represented as an encompassment of the world. As a cultural phenomenon it is the consumption of difference, but this difference needs to be palatable, and the root, palate, is significant here. What is it that transforms exotic cuisine into food-for-me. The latter must be refashioned as a consumable object, an object that is basically of the same kind, if not the same form, as the other objects in my life. This is a process of cultural assimilation. It might best be compared to the anthropological experience, at least, as an ideal type. Ethnography attempt to gain an understanding of other worlds from the inside, to grasp the way other people orient themselves in the worlds that they inhabit. In phenomenological terms this is the comprehension of the varieties of being-in-the-world, and these may be radically different from one another. Constituted and lived worlds are powerful force fields that tend to reconfigure everything that enters into them. This can even be applied to cuisine. The latter is not just a jumble of differences, but has a coherence ruled by the structures of taste. Pasta is not, thus, Chinese (if it was in fact originally an import), it is integrated into the way Italians construct their cuisine. In several interesting studies of consumption, Wilks, has suggested that globalization is about the reduction of real differences in this phenomenological sense, to “structures of common difference”. While I do not agree that globalization has any such effect, the notion itself is very important in understanding the way we go about assimilating the world. The structuring of plural worlds is achieved by a powerful practice of reducing difference to common difference. This is a process of objectification of difference and its recontextualization as predictable, expected and thus without its radical otherness. Cultural neutralization is a typical form of cultural assimilation, and while it may be ubiquitous in real life, it would be absurd to assume that our particular reductionism is the same as everyone else’s.

If globalization is a kind of localization, it represents itself as global because the latter represents a higher order of encompassment. It conflates the geographical with the social notions of space. Living in a small world can occur over vast expanses of territory. What is geographically extended can be socially closed and limited in scope. All the acts of reductive assimilation of the world of radical differences to the status of common differences are the fundamental way in which such worlds are fashioned. There is a difference between living within an ethnic transnational world and a cosmopolitan world, and this difference has to do with the nature of self-identification and the practices of world making. Cosmopolitans may not live in explicitly kinship or even ethnically organized spaces. And they identify with the variety of the larger world, its places, objects and customs. But the variety is nevertheless integrated into a single world. The cosmopolitan can function as a lone individual in principle and individualism is a defining characteristic of this identity. But insofar as cosmopolitans live in social worlds they practice closure, one of whose aspects is the domestication of difference.
The function of media in transforming the world

The media, especially the global media, broadcast their identity as a kind of doxa, an implicit or self-evident truth about the state of the world. This can be found in the way in which CNN advertises itself. For quite a few years there were continuous takes in which images of Australian Aborigines, Bedouins, Northern and Southern Europeans stared at the viewer, happy stares all a theme that might seem to express a certain nostalgia but might better be interpreted as encompassing an image of the world’s diversity, and all united under one roof, the family of Man under CNN. This is an image of connectedness, of simultaneity, the simultaneous juxtaposition of extreme cultural differences, all difference being understood as cultural text, cultural image. The images were repeated many times each day and certainly broadcast the image of unity in diversity. CNN also sports a diverse staff of people speaking either American or British English, sometimes Australian. These are differences that are integrated into the principle project of the company. There are from this vantage point an entire agenda of projects that can be interpreted as sub-projects of the media. These include a certain understanding of political realities. The breakup of Yugoslavia was very much an issue in the CNN broadcasts, just as the war against Saddam Hussein. The issues that arise are related to democracy, diversity and globalization, all understood as the current morally correct goals of the world community. And these are indeed the expressed goals in the rhetoric of the world community. More so the goals are semantically linked. They form a single logic so that diversity, democracy and globalization are equivalent. We are to become cosmopolitan democrats, open to all forms of difference. All those who disagree are potentially dangerous figures who can be charged as enemies of democracy itself, or racist opponents of diversity. This is the argument proposed by certain neo-liberal defenders of globalization as the next stage of world evolution. The break up of former Yugoslavia was very much championed by European heads of state and the aggressions of the Serbs were stamped as attempted genocide which is very different from ethnic cleansing, an activity to which all parties were apparently guilty. The bombing of Serbia and Kosovo were part of a world peace keeping mission, a bombing to civilization, to democracy. Now that the Kosovo Albanians appear to be waging their own war of expansion there is much embarrassment and much silence surrounding the current events. This is not a mere European scuffle. It is the expression of a global transformation of Europe into the status of an empire whose leaders are the newly morally promoted heads of nation states. Blair need not think of himself as an elected official, but as the incarnation of democratic principles themselves. Thus “non-democratic” governments and even individuals can be punished by the respectable elites, by means ranging from ostracism to military (humanist) intervention. The same kind of politics reigns supreme in the envisioning of the Gulf Wars. The power of the media consists in their mediating control over reality, the reduction of what is in fact highly interpreted and selected to the status of immediate happening. What is not controlled is the relation of the viewer to the media itself. The latter can always be shut off, ignored and even belittled, by viewers-consumers. And it is well known that the media in general have lost a great deal of their status in the past decade. One might ask whether this matters when the situation is one of monopoly i.e. whether one trusts the media or not they are the only access available to the non-immediate world.

There are, of course, differences that are quite noteworthy. Euronews as opposed to both CNN and BBC world, makes an effort to integrate national broadcasts into its emissions and very often carries stories that are not available on the more globalized networks. The weekly, Courier International, is an extremely interesting publication that is essentially a collection of newspaper and magazine articles from a worldwide selection of local publications. Here there is still
selection but it is not of the same order since the selection itself is geared to the provision of regional and national information. There are oppositional newspapers and journals that are quite respectable although not to all. Le Monde Diplomatique has become something of an organ for criticism of globalizing capitalism. It is in some respects an outlet for organizations such as Attac, but it has in general encouraged the publication of work by intellectuals such as Bourdieu and others who have been critical of current political developments in Europe and elsewhere. There are, however, very few examples of this kind of media and the mainstream media have by and large done an excellent job in marginalizing them. The free space which still exists for alternative voices fractures the homogenous vision of the world that is increasingly the product of mainstream media. Such spaces widen the cracks in everyday assumptions that the media themselves help to produce. Several people who recently witnessed a program that suggested forcefully that Americans never landed a man on the moon and that the entire venture was done in a studio were convinced of the message and even began to wonder why they accepted what now appears to them to be absurdly false evidence. The inscription of images into the real occurs by way of the collusion of the immediacy of portrayal that is part of the very structure of media representation. This is all an issue of the reality effect of the virtual in conditions where there are no alternative takes on the real. It is this situation that produces the shock of suddenly realizing that what was considered an event was in effect a staged phenomenon. Whether or not the argument is true is less important than the question it raises as to the assumption of reality in virtuality. The representation of Kosovo is an excellent example of the power of the virtual. The media’s depiction of Kosovo has certainly played at least a temporary role in creating a political reality. After several years there are still a number of assumptions built into public opinion that are, in spite of recent critical analysis, more or less stable; that it is Serbia that is the problem, that the problem with Serbia is nationalism and that it has thus waged a war, not in order to maintain territorial control and integrity, but to destroy certain dissident minorities, not any minorities but ethnic minorities. And all of this is waged autocratically, by war mongers and dictators. This is thus an aspect of an anti-democratic tendency that must be stopped. The logic involved in this representation of reality is one in which interpretation replaces that which is interpreted so that it becomes self-evident. This is only possible because of the practical monopoly on representation that the media have maintained. The anthropologist Roy Rappaport in his later writings took up the issue of the way in which ritual creates social reality. The logic of his argument is as follows: ritual works with propositions about the world that are unfalsifiable, such as “god exists”, or (perhaps, in terms of access to reality) “the Gulf War happened”. Such metaphysical statements can only become significant in the construction of reality if they can be made to work, and here the function of ritual experience is crucial. If I meet God in a ritual, in a highly charged numinous situation, then I cannot deny his existence. The reality of the god becomes thus undeniable. The effect of ritual is then to combine undeniability with unfalsifiability, producing the unquestionable. This can be taken to be the truth effect of ritual, its socializing power. The significant factor in Rappaport’s discussion is the necessary experience of the unfalsifiable, the numinous, as he calls it. But one might suggest that all experience can become unquestionable if it its unfalsifiable elements are experienced as numinous, immediate and undeniable. If this is the case then ritual would appear superfluous, or is it the progress of virtual reality that has obviated the need for formal ritual.

There is certainly a skeletal similarity between what ritual does and what televised media can be said to do. If we assume with a great many researchers, from Chomsky to traditional media studies, that the latter are a kind of socialization machine, whose goal is to produce adequate subjects for modern capitalist society, then there is truly a similarity. But there is, I would argue,
a basic difference between ritual socialization and the media in a modernist context. In the first case there is no alterity, no other interpretation that is readily available, while in capitalist modernity, alterity is a basic principle. So that even where there are no opportunities to reinterpret the news, there is always the option of exit which accounts for the currently low status of journalists. This is perhaps what Baudrillard means in his interpretation of the masses as a black hole in which all information is simply destroyed. It certainly creates a real gap between the producers and consumers of news media and those who simply ignore the news. It reinforces the polarization process in which the elites become more elitist and the masses more mass-like. Of course many are taken in and it is difficult to deny a reality that is presented in the form of immediate happening, uninterpreted or mediated by the machinery of the industry. Yet there are plenty of negative reactions and there is plenty of disbelief, always available in the space of modernity in which suspicion is a foundational strategy of existence. Thus while social scientists express fear of total mind control, the world is overrun by conspiracy theories, so many dissenting opinions. What may have changed is the self-assuredness of the elites who are beholden to a single model of reality and this might be temporary as well.

Castells’ excellent analysis of what he calls the “culture of real virtuality” (Castells 1996: 372-375) captures the problem. He argues that technology is determinant, that the ubiquitous virtuality of social life based as it is on symbolic communication was the normal state of affairs until modern communication created real virtuality, “in which reality itself (that is people’s material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting” (op.cit 373). He takes the well known example of vice presidential nominee Dan Quayle versus the tv program Murphy Brown. The former condemned the latter for deciding to have a child out of wedlock. Brown responded in the next show by staging the interview with Quayle and retaliating that politicians had no right to interfere in women’s lives. This proved disastrous for Quayle of course, but Castells interprets the episode as the virtualizing of reality.

“In this case, virtuality (that is Murphy Brown being in practice what many women were, without being so in the name of any woman) had become real in the sense that it actually interacted, with some significant impact, with the process of the election to the most powerful political office on earth.” (op.cit 374)

What is assumed here is that Murphy Brown was experienced as a real living person, a participant in the social life of Quayle and millions of others. But one might also assume that she is in fact simply a symbol of a kind of person, an ideal for some a horror for others. In this latter interpretation, the struggle is about the meaning of what she said, not about her person as such. What is closer to the virtual is that she took Quayle into her fictionalized show and answered him in virtual reality. People may smile at this... it was a smart move, a way to make a political point to an enormous captive audience. But is anyone taken in by the reality of Brown? Is Candice Bergen identical to the role she plays. Some may indeed be taken in and the boundary between the play and reality may be erased, but this boundary still exists as a structure of modern subjectivity. But how much of this is simply assumptions about the rest of us, the poor slobs who are the victims of the manipulation of reality that researchers seem to have no trouble in escaping. We need only compare this situation to the way the media function in some other parts of the world, where soap operas, for example in India, are very much part of the same reality as immediate social relations (Das....). This is not, of course, an absolute difference but it is worth noting that virtuality is both a universal component of social existence and a variable construct in both space and time.
Globalizing elites and globalized media: the transnational imaginary

I have discussed two different themes here. The first concerns the nature of globalization within global systems and the formation of globalized elites whose representation of the world takes the form of a particular discourse that is present in UNESCO, the WEC, the WTO and other global institutions, but also among cultural elites or would-be cultural elites from the media to the university who are the major elaborators of this discourse.\(^1\) The second concerns the production of a potentially dominant discourse and raises important questions concerning the relation between class/social position and interpretations of the world. I have argued that the reason for the homogeneity of this discourse is that it is elaborated from an experience of the world that is quite similar for certain intellectuals, media elite, and politicians. This is a position which in the imagination is located above the goings on of the world. It is a position from whence cultural diversity is evident as the mixing of differences in territorial space, a position where the differences of the world are reduced to objects that can be appropriated by direct consumption. This creates worlds, living rooms, filled with such objects and which identify their possessors as culturally diverse as global connoisseurs. Yet they are quite homogeneous in their diversity. The consumptive mode is the major form of this appropriation of otherness, one that is not a direct engagement with real live differences in all their frightening incommensurability but with the domesticated products-for-us of their existences. It is also a world that is hierarchical, one where democracy is also an inherent property of people and not a particular kind of political arena. When anti-globalization demonstrators are described as dangerously violent, as nationalists, as fundamentally undemocratic the globalized elite discourse is clearly revealed. When the people of Ireland voted against the expansion of the European Union towards the East, the reactions were intensive and frightening. It was said that they would have to vote again and again, until they got it right, and all of this in the name of democracy. Democracy means then to vote for the correct goal. During the violence at the protest against the EU meeting in Gothenburg in May 2001, one politician who was forced to call off her meeting exclaimed that she was insulted, “in the name of democracy”. The police who were ill prepared for the outbreaks of violence and who became contributors to the violence were not at all happy about the situation. One police chief said to a journalist, ‘the politicians are inside drinking champagne while we stand here guarding them.’ The issue here is not one of whose argument is right. It is one of a clearly polarizing social field. The elites are ready to define these mostly middle class rebels as equivalent to skinheads and neo-nazis. Their perspective on the world is one of center versus margins. This is major shift from a formerly left-right opposition.\(^2\) Now it is a question of the respectable and true representatives of democracy, multiculturalism and globalization against the “dangerous classes”. There is a certain amount of ambivalence concerning these kids, not least, because they are in part the children of the elites themselves. This perspective is not cynical, but quite spontaneous. The Third Way and the Neue Mitte capture perfectly the concentric dualism of this political ideology. Even more interesting is the notion of necessity linked to these positions. There are no more choices it is said. We are all globalized now, “whether we like it or not” (Blair). The voie unique

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1. The wanabe(want to be) cosmopolitans are always major elaborators of discourse since the latter is their ticket to upward mobility, the legitimation of their claims to elite status.

2. See Lévi-Strauss’ interesting argument on the shift from “diametrical” to “concentric” dualism as an expression of hierarchization
is the new definition of political strategy, one that obliterates oppositional politics. This makes it possible to proceed with a strategy of deregulation, privatization and the dismantling of welfare politics in the name of progress. It may well be true that the nation state can no longer afford its former heavy load, but this is not really a question of development, not unless anything that is destined for the future can be called progress. The image of the world broadcast in the mainstream media may well be diffused far and wide, but the reception of the image cannot be ascertained from the point of emission. Thus while the image of a world ecumene may make sense to certain people it because they participate themselves in a particular interpretation of the world. And it is their own error to confuse their own immediate experience of the world with that of all others.

“Si’il peut y avoir mondialisatio de l’information du côté de la production et de la diffusion, il ne peut pas y en avoir du côté de la réception. Un citoyen universel n’existe pas, tout comme il n’existe pas un village planétaire, sauf, encore une fois au niveau technique.” (Wolton 1992: 111)

Thus while we are fed horrifying examples of the absorption of subjectivity of the masses in the global media system, all evidence points to something quite different. Those who are most absorbed by the images are those who are already most receptive to it, the elites and would-be elites who are most engaged in the globalizing perspective itself. The experiences are produced in parallel and resonate among the different registers that emerge in the media, in international consultancy and equivalent organizations and in globalized intellectual circles. They produce remarkably similar representations of the world. Thus in a remarkable French study of the life of an international consultancy some of the most common expressions are

« J’avais 30 ans et j’aspirais à m’ouvrir sur le monde » « Je suis pour l’évolution : le décloisonnement est très enrichissant. On s’apporte mutuellement beaucoup. (Chemin 2001: 22)

or

Nous sommes dans l’ère de la connectivité. Il faut travailler plus vite, plus loin, être plus centré sur le client. La seule question, c’est comment la gérer. Vous aussi vous êtes connecté. En amont, an aval. C’est l’ère du knowledge et de la vitesse… et qu’est-ce que le knowledge et la vitesse sinon l’intelligence. Nous ne sommes plus dans l’avantage compétitif mais dans le coopératif, dans une logique de ligne d’offres mais dans les réseau. Les paradigmes changent !» (Ibid)

The theme of globalization as transcending boundaries and enriching, of creativity and of human interconnectedness as constituting the real world are strikingly similar to the discourse of postcolonial cultural studies. The onslaught on the nation state as an old fashioned limitation on the liberation of capital and therefore of welfare (Ohmae) is translated into the postcolonial onslaught on the nation state as essentialist, racist and a limitation on the cosmopolitanization of humankind. This confluence of global capital and a self-designated left defines the “new respectability” hinted at above. This is part of a major ideological shift from issues of class to that of culture in the political sphere. As Juilliard has put it,
“C’est donc à cette époque que remonte la conjugaison de la question sociale et de la question raciale.” (Juillard 1997: 105)

And his account of the this transformation is simple,


And this in its turn transform the “people” into a former category, the dangerous classes, the embodiment of reaction itself,

“Fallait-il aller plus loin et se demander....si le peuple n’est pas un ennemi naturel de la démocratie, séduit par l’autoritarisme, complice des tyrans et enclin à la violence.” (op.cit. 204)

An interesting investigation of CNN as a projection of the “global imaginary” by Andreas Semprini (2000) analyzes the construction of the foundational ideological message of the network, the image of a global ecumene of differences, all equal because all part of the same global communications network, all individualized, yet culturally specific in their diversity of identities. But these identities must not be serious enough to lead to conflict. No these are common differences, differences that are objectified and neutralized as objects of consumption, like the exotica of a global museum. And it is not uninteresting that we witness today the invention of museums of world culture whose goal is apparently to stress the commonalities rather than the differences in the world. Semprini argues that while universalism is hardly possible in this kind of a world, unanimity is a suitable replacement. It conveys the message that we may all be different at one level, but that we all want the same things; democracy, diversity, human rights, hamburgers and a free market (Semprini 2000: 168-179). This may well resonate with a certain elite, but, as Slavoj Zizek, has put it in a title of a well known chapter, since, in spite of the goading of peace loving and humanist interventionist elites, locals will be locals, even if the respectable few would bomb them into civilization,

“Love thy neighbor? No thanks!” (Zizek 1997:45)