

Global Media and Culture

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The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country....In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes....And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. (Marx, Karl 1955 13)

Global Discourse in Question

Increasing global relations catalyze the question of culture: are the basic conditions of culture changed, diminished or supplemented as a result of intensified exchanges across national, ethnic and territorial borders? What are the major discursive regimes that have emerged in connection with the phenomenon of global culture? What models of analysis are best suited to examine these exchanges – translation, transcoding, mixing, hybridity, homogenization? Do they appear to pose the most productive questions in the present context? Do these concepts articulate the challenges and opportunities posed for culture by the rapid intensification of global exchanges? One might inquire as well, at another level, about the epistemological conditions for framing the problems of global culture. What discursive positions enable asking the question in the first place? What are the conditions of writing/speech/word processing that open a critical stance on the question of global culture? Is the subject, the “I think” of the Western Philosophical Tradition, an appropriate position of discourse in order to initialize questions about global culture? Does the fact that a large proportion of global exchanges occur only with the mediation of information machines incite a need to redefine the notion of the other?

Have we become Cosmopolitan?

Very often the figure that governs discourse about global culture is the cosmopolitan. ¹Since Immanuel Kant wrote “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” in 1784

¹ See for example the important volume by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Cheah, Pheng and Robbins, Bruce 1998)

the problem of global culture has been framed by the terms “universal” and “cosmopolitan.”² Especially in recent years, major publications have addressed the issue of the emergence of a sense of the planetary, by invoking the term “cosmopolitan.” (Derrida 1997; Cheah and Robbins 1998; Beck 2000; Featherstone 2002) This recent interest in the term very often returns to Kant and his formulation of the issue. For the eighteenth century philosopher, cosmopolitan is a determination of reason alone, requiring no practical effort of travel or acquaintance with or study of the societies of the world. By use of the term cosmopolitan it is as though the human species might question its fate only from a vantage point that is not local, not rooted in a somewhere, not tied to any specific space or place but somehow itself global, planetary, cosmopolitan. And this from Kant who is notorious for residing almost without absence in the eighteenth-century backwater of Königsberg in eastern Prussia. Kant deploys the term *Weltbürgerlicher ansicht* (viewpoint of a citizen of the world) in a special manner. The cosmopolitan point of view for him is achieved through reason alone as it confronts the question of world peace. He writes, “The greatest problem for the human race...is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men.” (Kant 1963 16) However well-intentioned, the problem of a global political institution is determined not by leaders of governments but by the philosopher himself. Because “universal civic society” is deemed so important, Kant finds it necessary to turn to and rely upon “a cosmopolitan point of view.”

Well before neo-liberal pundits proclaimed the Earth as a free-trade zone and instituted treaties to render this assertion a practical economic force, Enlightenment thinkers like Kant problematized the universal. Kant and the others easily moved from positing man as rational creature to the question of humanity as a universal species. Poststructuralists and post-colonial theorists since the 1970s have pointed out difficulties with the assumption of the universal in Enlightenment thought.³ The proclamation of the universality of mankind obviously failed to include non-whites, women, children, non-Christians, and so forth, detracting seriously from the aspiration to a community of peoples. Religions and cosmologies of all kinds, well before the European Enlightenment also contained elements of universality, elements that were even more limited and restricted than that of the *philosophes* since they included in the category those of other religions only if they converted or, even worse, designating the term humanity by the name of the tribe or ethnic grouping.

² David Held for example begins his discussion of cosmopolitan political theory by turning to Kant. (Held 1995 221)

³ For a recent example of theorizing the universal see (Butler, Laclau et al. 2000).

Today the question of humanity as a whole or universal takes on a new dimension: it is a practical fact that people, commodities and cultural objects circulate around the planet and do so in an ever-increasing intensity. Humans are cosmopolitan today through their everyday actions: they emigrate, they work on products used in other countries, they consume objects manufactured elsewhere, they create and use texts, images and sounds that are globally disseminated. One might well claim a cosmopolitan status today even if one has never left Königsberg.

But is “cosmopolitan” the best term to use in the context of present-day globalization? I think not. First, the term derives from European contexts and reflects its origins as *Weltbürgerlicher ansicht*. An adequate term for the phenomenon today must be determined through processes that are inclusive of heterogeneous planetary cultures. Second, the term is human, far too human. I shall argue that contemporary universality arises in practices that to a great extent rely upon information machines or media and these must be included in the formulation of the concept and the discourse of universality, just as earlier uses of the term needed to be revised to include non-Europeans, women and children. Humans become universal only through the mediation of these machines so they are an essential part of the picture.

If machines are partners to humans in global exchanges, do they affect the parameters of culture? The event of global culture is then immediately two-sided: first, culture is put into question by the extent and quality of global exchanges; second, these exchanges require information machines or media. Each of these problems is difficult enough. Taken together they constitute a truly complex challenge for the humanities and social sciences, in particular for critical theory and cultural studies.

Global Media

Are there dangers of regarding information machines or media as a component of universality? The discourse on cosmopolitanism has not focused much on the media, much less global media.⁴ One exception is an essay by Martin Hand and Barry Sandywell on “cosmopolis” in the special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* mentioned above. Unfortunately it illustrates some of the limited directions that can be taken when confronting the question of global media. Hand and Sandywell argue that all global media are equally complicit with the forces of neo-liberal

⁴ The Robbins/Cheah collection contains not a single essay on media. Only the Gayatri Spivak essay mentions the question of media and does so briefly. Yet another collection of essays on “cosmopolitics” has no essay on media and does not mention media theorists or raise the question of media at all. (Archibugi 2003)

transnational capitalism. Their Marxist framework leads them to emphasize the control of all planetary media by capitalist corporations. Perhaps broadcast media like radio, film and television may be fruitfully examined exclusively from this perspective since, at least historically, these media are few-to-many systems of communication, requiring large capital investments available only to the few. Scholars committed to cultural studies especially of the Birmingham School variety might dispute the degree of control of media by the culture industry by pointing to the creative and resistive response of audiences to media programming. (Fiske, John and Hartley, John 1978; Jenkins, Henry 1992 180) Nonetheless, radio, film and television do present restrictions on positions of speech and enunciation that have been deeply shaped by advertisers, investors, and the other actors within the capitalist class.

One might argue differently for new media, digital technologies and networked computing. Some scholars such as Manuel Castells have done just that. (Castells 2001) But Hand and Sandywell will have none of it. For them “The Web is no more than a new culture industry elevated by corporate market powers into a position of global hegemony.” (Hand and Sandywell 2002 202) The fact that the Internet is architecturally different from broadcast media does not dissuade them from their critical position. Yet one may readily show that the Internet multiplies voices so that every node in the network is a position of speech, that digital formats of texts, images and sounds render cultural objects easy to alter, store, reproduce and disseminate, bringing to fruition the dream that all consumers might become at the same time producers, that national borders almost disappear in Internet exchanges, that the technology of networked computing when compared to producing and transmitting television and radio shows or making and distributing films in the analogue era is so affordable to the degree that by 2005 well over one billion people had regular access to it (imagine if all of them were producing television, film and radio shows). These indications that something new may be at hand in the field of media are summarily dismissed by Hand and Sandywell in favor of the old questions: “...the critical questions about the new digital capitalism remain: who *controls* the global media infrastructures of the information age? Who decides the form and content of the new media industries? Who will police the Net? Who, in short, will benefit in material terms from the information revolution?” (*Ibid.*) While it is certainly true that capitalists are eager to invest in successful Web ventures and that traditional owners of “content” strive to maintain control over their cultural wares, neither of these applications of capitalist principles has been even remotely successful in the arena of the Internet. The music and film industries are decisively at risk in the

digital environment, something that cannot be said about any other domain of capitalism. Web spaces like MySpace and YouTube have been purchased by media conglomerates but remain vital avenues for ordinary folk to share and distribute their modest but at times quite interesting creations. None of this causes any hesitation in our Marxist critics of cosmopolitanism. Yet it must be granted that the continuing concentration of media ownership is a fact exacerbated by globalization and threatens democracy. In the music industry a mere handful of firms control 80% of global CD production and similar trends are found in newspaper, periodical and book publications as well as radio, film and television. Some argue that the same tendency affects digital media, especially with the advent of convergence. (Warf 2007 95) The likely outcome in the near and far terms of networked computing media is by no means certain and its opening toward more democratic global communications is uncertain. The point however is that these are open political questions that call for active engagement rather than the paralyzing rhetoric that discovers capitalist machinations in every nook and cranny.

But the most important point I would like to raise concerning global media is that networked computing places in the hands of the general population information machines that are linked to their existences in fundamental ways. Regardless of the efforts of the capitalist class (as well as those of the nation state), the assemblage of human and information machine must be accounted for as a phenomenon unprecedented in the array of media technologies, an innovation that is drastically changing the character of culture. For the human/information machine link introduces new configurations of the binaries of space and time, body and mind, subject and object, producer and consumer, indeed all the constituents that form cultures. While the economic questions raised by Hand and Sandywell are valid and exigent, they do not account for the potentials of change and resistance at stake in networked computing, they do not address the politics of culture in a manner that opens both sides of the question: the new aspects of surveillance and control by established political orders and economic interests but also the practices that fall outside these initiatives and portend great trouble for them.

Hand and Sandywell, along with so many other scholars who come to similar conclusions, are aware of these potential risks and affordances. They raise the specter of cosmopolitanism as global citizenship: "...digitalized capitalism promises a reconstruction of the polity as an electronic global village, inaugurating processes of civic renewal, raising us into the era of *global citizenship*." (Hand and Sandywell 2002 198) But they are too quick to dismiss such rosy outcomes as when they

write: “*Cyberculture* ... simply builds upon and further deepens the chronic social inequalities of class, gender and race created by the course of modern capitalism.” (*Ibid.* 202) If there is to be a global (or cosmopolitan) culture it will surely engage the Internet in crucial ways.

In addition to the Internet itself, there is another side to the question of the relation of globalization to media. Satellite technology – distinct from but connected with the Internet – takes the planet as its target of communications. This system of information machines, Lisa Parks informs us, significantly shapes “...the spheres of cultural and economic activity that constitute what we know as ‘the global’.” (Parks 2005 2) Like the Internet, communications satellites connect cultures across national and traditional boundaries but they lend themselves to different sorts of exchanges. These technologies easily transmit broadcasts (television and radio) over very wide footprints, promoting continuous connections say of migrants with their cultures of origin. They also enable geographic location devices to pinpoint relatively small objects and humans, a boon for surveillance practices of many kinds. Populating the skies with ever-increasing density, communications satellites lend themselves to global cultural dissemination but also to close control by extent powers. They are double-edged media allowing greater freedom for individuals and groups and greater control by dominant institutions. In this respect similar to the Internet as Wendy Chun discloses, satellite media are therefore open to vastly divergent political uses. (Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong 2006) They may solidify modern institutions but also may lead to new directions of global political culture.

Analogue and Digital Culture

Global media are now digital and this technological change significantly influences the development of global culture. The shift from analogue to digital technology alters the basic features of the production, storage, reproduction and dissemination of culture. Understanding these changes is essential to the future of culture especially in its global spread. Some view the changes are entirely progressive while others rue them as the end of civilization. Both of these positions are beside the point and lead down fruitless lines of inquiry. The fact is we are now faced with digital forms of culture and must attempt to develop them in the most beneficial and creative directions. Social institutions, especially the nation-state and the corporation, have begun to recognize the change in culture from analogue to digital and have mobilized to adapt the newer technologies to their own ends. It is incumbent upon university researchers and teachers, as well as cultural workers in all fields, to come to terms with the emergence of digital culture and attempt to shape its practical

forms in ways that best further the deepening of human freedom, ways that to a large extent are in conflict with the tendencies of the nation-state and the corporation. (Hall, Gary 2008) The fate of global culture is currently at a significant stage and the political alternatives are stark. If the nation-state has its way, American forms of copyright will prevail globally and if the transnational corporation succeeds in its aims, culture will be increasingly commodified. The introduction of digital technologies however facilitates alternative models of global culture and the university, a key developer of these technologies, must play a major role in resisting the other forces and offering less constraining cultural practices, ones that preserve the vital premise of the free exchange of all cultural forms.

Analogue technologies of culture have served well the development of modern society. First book production, then film and radio, then the telephone and television have all extended cultural forms to most levels of society. For Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, this phenomenon has massified society, undoing the dialectic of class struggle and distracted the critical attention of the oppressed. (Adorno, Theodor 1972) For others, such as Walter Benjamin, analogue technologies like film have brought the masses closer to critical thinking and opened new forms of political opposition. (Benjamin, Walter 1969) Many have argued that even the most benighted of analogue cultural technologies, television, has enabled national cultures to subsist even in highly populated and dispersed nations like the United States. Benedict Anderson's important contribution, in this context, was to articulate the salient role of the analogue technology of print in the formation of the nation. (Anderson, Benedict 1983) And Michael Warner pointed to the importance of print newspapers in opening the cultural space for democracy by positioning ordinary individuals as contributors to public thinking. (Warner, Michael 1992)

These analogue techno-cultures formed practices of reading, writing, viewing and listening that are specific and far from amorphous. As Marshall McLuhan urged, the medium is the message. (McLuhan, Marshall 1964) In the case of analogue technologies of culture, the medium creates what I call fixed cultural objects: texts, images and sounds that may be widely disseminated and effectively stored (books, celluloid films, long-playing records, books, etc.) but are not easily altered by the consumer of culture. What you see on the printed page is what everyone else with a copy also sees. If you scribble on your page, only your copy is affected. Analogue media resist alteration once they are reproduced. They encourage the value of the original, the privileged position of the author or creator, the remunerated role of the reproducer since material costs are not negligible, and a sharp

distinction between the producer and the consumer of culture. In fact, practices of consuming analogue culture promote celebrity of authors and fan appreciation among consumers, two vastly different positions and practices. In the modern period of analogue cultural production, theorists have rebelled at such constraints (Barthes, Roland 1974) and authors from Lawrence Sterne to the Oulipo group and more recently Mark Danielewski (Hayles, Katherine 2002) have wrestled with loosening the limits of analogue texts. Cultural Studies scholars have disputed the tyranny of analogue authors arguing for the creativity of readers. (Fiske, John and Hartley, John 1978) And finally historians of print, like Adrian Johns, have shown how the vaunted stability and fixity of the analogue book is often overstated. Johns admits however that intellectuals from John Locke, to Denis Diderot, Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, Immanuel Kant, and Johann Herder imagined print as essential to human progress because it materialized writing in a relatively permanent form. (Johns, Adrian forthcoming 2007)

And yet there are significant differences with digital cultural production. Digital cultural objects have a material support that unifies them. (Manovich, Lev 2001) Instead of paper, vinyl and celluloid, texts, sounds, and images are embedded in computer machine code and even further in a binary logic of on/off or zero and one, or pulse and lack of pulse. This means and the medium plays a more leading role than in analogue culture in defining the material nature of the cultural object. All cultural objects now may be produced, reproduced, stored and disseminated in networked computers, in the same information machine. Compare the material resources required for printing presses, movie production, television transmissions to that of the networked computer and it is apparent that a vast dissemination of cultural production is well under way, with fully one sixth of the human population in a position to do what it took armies of cultural creators and producers to do in the modern period of analogue culture.

Most crucially, instead of fixity digital technology gives us fluidity of text, image and sound. These cultural objects are opened on a PC by programs that almost always enable the user to alter them, store the altered file, copy it and distribute it. Digital texts, images and sounds differ from analogue in this respect. Perhaps hypertext was the earliest instance of this. New cultural practices have developed and continue to be developed that start with the changeability of the computer file to create new cultural objects and then to distribute them in new ways. The consumer has become a user, maker or creator. Examples of such practices are YouTube, MySpace, Second Life, and so forth. In each case the provider of content, the old cultural industry, is now the ordinary individual

coupled with a networked computer. In the case of YouTube some sixty five thousand cultural objects are uploaded for sharing every day. Cultural production has clearly shifted from an elite system with major capital resources and heavy editing or gate-keeping functions to a bottom-up, mass movement. We cannot argue that the result is equal in quality to the analogue system – whatever that might mean --- but we can say that some very different set of practices has emerged and continues to develop, a non-exclusive system that encourages anyone who wants to participate. In this sense, the new cultural practices are oriented to a global media culture.

Digital culture is not by any means a free for all, however. Older politics remain and inhibit the new cultural forms: Germans don't want Nazi propaganda on the Web; the Chinese government prohibits criticism; Muslim fundamentalists deplore satires of Muhammed, and so forth. Older economic forms also enter the digital arena: if a Web site becomes popular, capitalists see a money maker and buy it up, as happened with YouTube. Even worse, if particular pages receive numerous "hits", the new owners promise to pay the creators, turning what was a completely free digital space into a commodity form. But the consequences of such integration of the new into the old is not as clear as one might think.

The basic structure of YouTube and the other sites mentioned above is peer-to-peer file-sharing. Anyone can upload content and anyone can download it. Each user is in that sense a peer. This digital technology is embedded in the architecture of the Internet and is difficult to eliminate. It's most notorious and celebrated use has been sharing of content that falls under existing copyright laws. Billions of texts, images and sounds have been shared in direct transgression of the statute. Neither the corporation nor the state has been able to prevent such "infringement." File-sharing has confounded the culture industry, especially the RIAA and the MPAA. The way it works is this: indexing cites inform sharers of what is available and client programs search the hard disks of other users to obtain copies. The information goes from peer to peer. Only the abrogation of the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution would allow corporations to stop this from happening. Thus far, a good deal of digital culture has remained outside the commodity system.

Peer-to-peer architecture is fundamental to and inseparable from the Internet. (Galloway, Alexander 2004) It facilitates a structure of communication that is as difficult to monitor as face-to-face speech, although it relies upon a highly complex technological infrastructure. What is more, it promotes the user's invention of new applications of the technology so that much of what we find on the net is not the product of large industry but of inventive individuals and groups often with few

resources beyond their programming skills and their imaginations. The history of technology, especially media technology, is strewn with examples of promising innovations that are soon domesticated by corporations and turned into popular but by no means resistant uses. It remains to be seen if the same fate will befall the Internet. One of the reasons for hope is the very global nature of the medium, with the resulting difficulty of any nation, even a behemoth like the United States, to determine its nature. One does not have to be a futurist or a zealous technophile to realize the potentials for deepening global freedom intimately associated with networked computing. (Morley, David 2003)

The U.S. government has attempted to end peer-to-peer file-sharing by including U.S. copyright law in trade agreements of the World Trade Organization. It wants to globalize American law. Yet in China and much of Asia, DVDs of better quality than those sold in U.S. markets are available for fifty cents. And when the U.S. government attempted to get the Swedish government to close down an indexing site (The Pirate Bay) in 2006, they were met with resistance and failed. The only result of their action was to increase the popularity of the site, the same outcome that met the recording industry when it sued Napster and threatened lawsuits against file sharers. Digital cultural distribution obviously requires a complete revamping of copyright law, a change that no doubt will have dire consequences for the relation of culture to the economy. But for our purposes, the following conclusion is likely: digital production and distribution of texts, images and sounds promotes a world-wide process of culture to a degree far in excess of the analogue. The technological architecture of networked computing, as Manuel Castells argues, promotes a global media culture to an extent impossible before. (Castells, Manuel 1996) Cultural practice is becoming planetary and the shape it may take can only be imagined.

Global Culture

Anticipations of global culture are no doubt contemporary with culture itself. But as the twentieth century wore on, more and more cultural works, at the time embedded in analogue media, began to be distributed globally and to mix art practices from cultures around the planet. As the flow of texts, images and sounds around the world increases exponentially, the question of global culture becomes more and more exigent. Perhaps the leading polemic about it remains the (usually) unwanted prospect of homogenization: looming on the horizon is a world with one culture, one type of voice, one vision of reality. But this position ignores several factors: that diversity of

languages persists and new languages (global English) arise; that “foreign” cultures are integrated with local cultures in inventive hybrids; that new local cultures arise among sub-groups, increasing diversity not homogeneity; that the homogeneity thesis ignores problems of translation and transcoding; the mixtures of cultures at the global level are infinitely varied. (Yúdice, George 1992)

The issue of translation and transcoding itself is highly complex. Clearly a translation is not isomorphic with the original. Languages do not overlap one-to-one. If that were the case, translation software would already have developed perfect algorithms for the task. Anyone who has either attempted a translation or used one of these programs knows all too well the difficulties entailed in the work. Walter Benjamin’s argument must also be taken into account: on whom does the brunt of the translation fall – the language translated or the language into which the translation is made? (Benjamin, Walter 1996) This seemingly paradoxical question is developed by Rey Chow into a fascinating analysis of the export of Chinese films to the United States (Chow, Rey 1996) and Asian literature translations in the West. (Chow, Rey 1993) The translator is illuminated about his or her own language by the translation and this “original” is altered in the process. As Chinese cinema develops, Chow argues, it looks at itself in new ways, incorporating the position of the foreigner who will view the film and thereby practicing ethnography upon itself. (Chow, Rey 1996 180) The original – the Chinese culture that is the subject of the film – is produced anew in the process. The problem of translation in the context of global culture then, she concludes, implies “a thorough dismantling of *both* the notion of origin and the notion of alterity as we know them today.” (p. 194) [emphasis in original] The development of global culture then must be seen not as the negotiation between fixed cultures in competition for hegemony (which language will become the new *lingua franca*?) but an entirely new scene of cultural configurations whose outlines can certainly not be discerned today. Global culture is a new project for humanity. It will mix relations of forces with creativity before anything like a temporary stasis emerges.

One prominent example of the new cultural mix concerns an argument not about translation but about a change in the nature of culture itself as a consequence of global transformations. I refer to the phenomenon of what is called “creative industries,” and intended not at all as an oxymoron. The concept of creative industries emerged out of the cultural studies movement, most notably from the work of John Hartley. Cultural studies, dating back from the Birmingham School of the 1960s first as a tendency in literary criticism especially the writings of Richard Hoggart and Frank Raymond Leavis, but then, and most importantly, with Stuart Hall. Having its greatest impact on

British sociology, cultural studies, paralleling the work of Michel de Certeau in France, insisted on the creative aspect of practices of everyday life, including consumption, carried out by ordinary people. The privilege given to production in modern social theory, from Marx on, gave way to an appreciation of small resistance practices in the routine behavior or ordinary folk.

Hartley took this interest in cultural creativity and expanded it to include elements of postmodern theory as well as new interpretations of economic organization in the digital economy. (Florida, Richard 2002) For Hartley, everyday practice was not simply creative but reflected the complex nature of the postmodern self -- multiple, dispersed, inventive and active. Such an understanding of the individual was more adaptive not only to contemporary economic systems but to the world-wide spread of those systems. (Hartley, John 2005) A new, arguably postmodern understanding of everyday life lent itself more easily than the Enlightenment tradition of the rational self to a global vision of culture. No longer an elite practice of European derivation, culture, seen as the self-creation of the individual in all aspects of life, could fairly be attributed to all parts of the world where the knowledge economy was in bloom or in formation. This highly controversial position asserted the merger of artistic creativity on the one hand, with the lowly realms of the economy, in both productive and consumption aspects, on the other hand. In his tribute to Richard Hoggart, Hartley proclaimed, "...artists became the template for *enterpreneurs*, and creative enterprise the model for the new economy. Culture shifts from its position as a sphere of opposition to the modernizing fury of commercial enterprise, to become a vital component in a country's competitiveness." (Hartley, John 2007 140) Here was a formula for upgrading the sphere of the economy and for spreading the upgrade globally.

For Hartley, the Western separation of art and economics no longer made sense. In fact, the two realms were now, with the knowledge economy, subject to the same categorical analysis: "The rhetoric that is used ... to describe the innovative entrepreneur is exactly that which has been used throughout modernity to describe the creative artist. Artists have long been habituated to working with risk, intuition and constant change." (*Ibid.*) Hartley, as Dean, went to work at his university to merge the arts, the humanities and the business departments, on the model of "creative industries." His colleagues travelled the world to new centers of advanced industrial societies, like China, to spread the word of creativity as the key to economic success. At a panel on global media at the Beijing Forum of 2006, for example, a colleague of Hartley, Stuart Cunningham, was off to meet with mayors and industrial leaders of several large Chinese cities to advocate the adoption of creative

industries policies in these places. Interest in creative industries is becoming world-wide as economic elites compete feverishly in a global market.

Many have seen this trend as nothing more than the selling out of art and humanities to global capitalism. (Liu, Catherine 2006) The dangers of creative industries are clear enough: with so many resources on the side of industry, “creativity” is subject to buy-outs, co-optations and others means of making the arts subservient to global capital. It is true that economic organization has been changing drastically especially since the introduction of computer technology: the hippy engineer culture of high technology spilled over into the mainstream economy as firms relied more and more on knowledge workers who tended toward intransigence when faced with the disciplinary practices normal for the industrial working class. The top down, bureaucratic corporation was giving way to a loosely-organized (Tapscott, Don 1996) and not spatially localizable economic unit. (Castells, Manuel 1996) Critics quickly pointed out that workers, in this brave new world, had lost numerous benefits, including especially security of work. (Schiller, Dan 1999)

Other scholars are not so critical of creative industries. For if one recognizes that the traditional notion of elite culture, with its notion of excellence and its elaborate screening systems and canon maintenance institutions, is now in good part a relic of the past. Postmodern blurring of the line separating high and low culture is only the discursive side of what is a much more extensive sea change in practices. The roles of the arts and humanities in the contemporary context are by no means clear and much less assured in their legitimacy. In Blogs and social computing sites, network culture enables positions of speech for the non-tenured, even the non-college educated. Similar venues are ample in the arts with YouTube as only the best known of sites that promote the display of cultural productivity in video and audio media. The damns are broken on the control of cultural production and its tutelage by universities, art schools, publishing houses, broadcast media – all the gatekeepers and facilitators of Western modernity. In this context, the fate of the arts and humanities might well lie in a new relation to the economic system, or so at least is the defensive argument of many. As Toby Miller argues, “the humanities must change to survive by showing their relevance to ordinary peoples’ concerns.” (Miller, Toby forthcoming) And creative industries makes just such an argument.

With the question of global culture in mind, we must ask if a new cultural politics is possible, required, or emerging. Kevin Robbins argues that migrants at least in Europe no longer accept the assimilationist model of identity whereby the nation remains a homogeneous cultural unity.

(Robbins, Kevin 2007) Contemporary migrants maintain multiple, partial commitments to their adopted location but also to the land of their origins. They are able to sustain this complex of attachments in part through cheap transport systems and also through new media: the Internet for email and web sites, communication satellites for television shows from back home. The European Union has, as a result, changed its policy from insisting on the dominance of the main culture to a positive value for diversity in culture. Global culture thus surpasses postcolonial hybridity in recognizing the heterogeneity of migrant identities instead of insisting on the relative unity even of hybrid selves. Global cultural politics, in a similar tendency to creative industries, loosens the grip of the nation as a cultural center toward a more individualizing, multiple figure of the self. Similar tendencies are evident in the United States with Latino/Latina migrants sustaining deep relations with their Latin American place of origin and many Asian migrants engaging in similar connections back home. (Ong, Aihwa 1999; Garcia Canclini, Nestor 2001) This emerging global culture has by no means eliminated older forms of nationality but has become an increasingly common part of the current landscape of cultural politics. Predictions about future global cultures are not appropriate or even possible today. Yet the trend of a new direction is clear. After all, national cultures themselves are historical formations, won at the cost of thousands of local cultures that were actively destroyed in the process. It is hardly impossible to imagine new connections between culture and location as globalism becomes more and more dominant. In Robbins' words, "... the old and assumed isomorphism between culture, polity, and territory is no longer to be taken as given. The fundamental principle upon which national cultures and communities have been predicated has been called into question." (Robbins, Kevin 2007 158)

With the rise of creative industries and the intensification of migration, global processes are emerging whose outcome is murky. In each case, however, modern cultural configurations are put in doubt. It appears that a new politics of culture and a new cultural politics are on the horizon. None of this has elicited or given rise to corresponding political and cultural organizations and practices. (Tomlinson, John 1999) One finds no global imagined communities, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, in current discursive regimes. Instead, for Hartley and Robbins, there are adaptations of the capitalist corporation and nation state to the new phenomena, alterations that at bottom are attempts to preserve modern institutions in an increasingly hostile or antagonistic environment. What is called for then are cognitive experiments or imaginary flights that attempt to outline new directions for institutional and practical reorganization in order to make the most of a future in

which global culture is not grudgingly recognized but celebrated and embraced. The key to such discursive innovations, I believe, is the full acknowledgment of the assemblage of humans and information machines.

Global Media Culture

For global culture can only be global media culture. From underwater telephone cables to communications satellites and the Internet, human beings across the planet are able, with exponentially increasing frequency, to send, to receive, to store and to distribute texts, images and sounds. One may argue that culture is always already mediated (by language). But the increasing sophistication, multiplication and dissemination of information machines changes the experience of all culture. Every cultural object now exists in a (potentially) global context.

These information machines are also changing so rapidly that modern institutions have difficulty keeping pace with their development. The culture industries have clearly been unable to integrate new media entirely within their commodity forms. The music industry has globalized through mergers and acquisitions reducing to a handful the number of major players (80% of CD sales are controlled by four or five companies).⁵ But new media technologies enable anyone to start their own “culture industry” and this has become an emerging trend in music production. While the RIAA, after it belatedly awakened to peer-to-peer file-sharing, has made great efforts to curtail what they call “piracy,” every new attempt (lawsuits against down-loaders and related software companies) is met with increased awareness of file-sharing and expanded ranks of “pirates.” Efforts to extend American copyright law to all nations have been at best only partially successful. Since President Clinton, every U.S. administration has pressured other nations to conform to outdated copyright law, disregarding the benefits to innovation new media promote. (Coombe, Rosemary 1998; Lessig, Lawrence 2001) The Clinton administration also attempted to control the flow of information on the Internet, recognizing that national boundaries are out of synchronization with its basic architecture. (Gurak, Laura 1997) Nations are less and less able to monitor and to control the global flow of cultural objects. (Castells, Manuel 1997) There is less and less of a match or overlap between territorial demarcations of the nation and exchanges between individuals and groups.

⁵ For an excellent discussion of media concentration from its inception see (Herman, Edward and McChesney, Robert 2003).

Are we then at the point of emergence of a new cosmopolitan culture? (Turner, Graeme 2007) Is global media culture “cosmopolitan”? Certainly scholars like Robbins are discovering far more extensive global cultural practices than one might expect. Lisa Parks reported on the Australian Aboriginal use of satellite technology to broadcast television across the large southern continent. The culture they transmitted was selected by the Aboriginals and most often produced by them as well. Parks’ argument is that Aboriginals’ use of Western technology was not another case of imperialism but an adaptation of the media that promoted the interests of the non-Western group. The Aboriginal uses of satellite media, she writes, “challenge critical assumptions that satellite television works *only* as an agent of Western cultural imperialism and neocolonial control.” (Parks, Lisa 2005 73) The Inuit, like the Aboriginals, successfully adapt satellite technology to enhance their culture with global knowledge and to preserve their own practices and beliefs. (Srinivasan, Ramesh 2006) Similar findings are widely evident in the literature of global media culture. There exists a myriad of local adaptations of new media that promote combinations of cultural parts in infinite varieties. Ien Ang warns however that the spread of popular cultures between and across ethnic identities might have more to do with corporate control of culture than with free dissemination of images and sounds. (Ang, Ien 2003) If the figure of the cosmopolitan suggests an upper or middle class liberal persona, then the recent articulations of global culture are well beyond those relatively restricted limits, extending the imagined community of participants quite broadly across the planet and throughout all social strata.

The subject who, like myself, writes and thinks about global media culture does not resemble the cosmopolitan of the past. For the epistemological position of contemporary students of global media are linked to different information machines from the cosmopolitans of earlier epochs. Not analogue print and perhaps photograph culture, but digital networked computing alters the relation of the writer to his native land, ethnicity, and gender. Writers like myself are connected to the world immediately, through the fiber optic cables and communication satellites that cross and envelop the earth. This deterritorialization of the critic changes his or her position of speech and relation to cultures everywhere. Peer-to-peer media technologies (file-sharing, Wikipedia, MySpace, YouTube, massively multiple online gaming and the rest) partially detach the body from its location in space, loosening the binds to the local and connect the writer with global culture. This shift involves an “intimacy” with information machines that cannot be ignored. Everyone now potentially participates

in the cyborg experience which can be interpreted as the basis for a new species with its own commonalities and conflicts.

What today might be called “global culture” is quite distinct from the planetary borrowings of earlier centuries, even granting their extent and importance. One new aspect of the current configuration of global culture is the heavy reliance it entails on highly complex media technologies. As we begin to study and to learn about contemporary global culture we need to pay close attention to its dependence on information machines, to the intricate, heterogeneous, and varied assemblages that are invented and practiced by users across the globe. This is perhaps one of the great challenges for scholars and intellectuals in the present. The current global media culture is multi-centered; its voices, practitioners and inventors deriving from all corners of the earth, violating assumptions about center and periphery, North and South, First and Third Worlds, Western and non-Western, imperial and subaltern, colonizer and colonized. This perhaps fragile global culture is not endorsed, backed or promoted by the great powers-that-be. It requires a new political theory and new political practices that might promote its expansion. Twenty-first century global culture might or might not conflict with national and ethnic cultures of the past but it is certainly different from them. It might constitute a counter-force against the major powers that quite naturally seek nothing more than their persistence. If the tendency of neo-liberal, transnational corporations has been and continues to be to globalize the planet with their habits and ways of doing things, then the task confronting global culture is to promote something different, something that might extend democracy in unforeseen and unforeseeable directions.

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