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The Mythology of Globalization

Marjorie Ferguson*

This paper challenges certain everyday, widespread assumptions about the meaning, evidence and evaluation of 'globalization'. Both as a journey and a destination, of late this notion has taken on a life of its own. In this essay, seven myths about globalization — 'Big Is Better', 'More Is Better', 'Time and Space Have Disappeared', 'Global Cultural Homogeneity', 'Saving Planet Earth', 'Democracy for Export via American TV' and 'The New World Order' — are critically explored in the context of globalization as a historical process and a normative goal. Using myth as a way of classifying sets of ideas about world history, politics, economics, culture, communication and ecology, the argument is made that they serve ideological as well as explanatory ends.

From sound bites to learned texts, 'globalization' reverberates through the corridors of politics, commerce, industry, scholarship, communication, environmentalism and popular culture. In moving from prophecy to assumption about the world, globalization is invoked to signify sweeping social, cultural and institutional change, the end results of which are sometimes said to define our age. If for no other reason than pervasiveness, this notion raises interesting but problematic issues.

First, there is the problem of *meaning*. It is not clear whether the different parties invoking globalization mean the same thing or even if they are addressing the same issue. Second, there is the problem of evidence. Despite its frequent attribution, neither the indices, nor the extent, of its actual occurrence are always clear. Third, there is the problem of evaluation. To whatever extent globalization (however defined) actually is occurring (and to whom), its alleged positive benefits or negative costs are difficult to assess. The deeper questions are: 'cui bono?' and 'who is being globalized (or de-globalized), to what extent and by whom?'

This article attempts to come to grips with this problematic notion, first in a more general way, and later, more specifically,

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through a collection of myths that have gathered around it. Finally, it seeks to raise for discussion a larger concern: the ideological overtones of the historical inevitability which has been asserted by globalizationists.

The Problem of Meaning

Although proponents and critics may differ in their definitions, there is broad consensus that globalization denotes both a journey and a destination: it signifies an historical process of becoming, as well as an economic and cultural result; that is, arrival at the globalized state.

The idea is not new. Ever since Magellan's early sixteenth-century circumnavigation of the globe founded a material reality, this worldview has gathered substance and force. Current interpreters tend to focus on the key domains of economics, politics, culture and technology. Increased economic interdependence and worldwide corporate enterprise, decreased political sovereignty for nation states, common patterns of material and cultural consumption, with converging satellite, computer, cable, VCR, telephone, fax, television and radio technologies between them being assigned a causal role in achieving interconnectivity and interaction in all four domains.

For many social scientists, structural processes of institutional change are at the heart of this reordering. Thus, the topic of globalization provides a conceptual entry point to an evolving world order and a concept for evaluating 'a particular series of developments concerning *the concrete structuration of the world as a whole*' (Robertson, 1990: 20). More holistically and in terms of process, our incorporation into a one-world, global society is contingent on changing value orientations that propel us towards 'the whole earth as the physical environment, everyone living as world citizens, consumers and producers with a common interest in collective action to solve global problems' (Albrow, 1990: 8-10).

Postmodernist interpretations of globality, on the other hand, focus more on the emergence of a common culture of consumption and style (see, for example, Baudrillard, 1985; Jameson, 1984). Acknowledging that transsocietal processes of cultural integration and disintegration lie outside the bounds of the nation state, the revisionist model of postmodernist globalization is both relativist

and absolutist, allowing for cultural diversity in global unity (see, for example, Featherstone, 1990: 1, 1991: 144-7).¹

The divergences between the 'globalizationists' and their critics should not obscure the extent of agreement between the parties. All locate their concerns in the empirical reality of a more visible and powerful supranational order, a 'world system' in Wallerstein's (1990) terms, that shifts many former national concerns to the world geopolitical stage.

The Problem of Evidence

These changing contours of political and cultural economy may be located in space and, to a certain extent, in time. In the 1980s, the globalizing impetus manifested itself in science, politics and economics, in technology, deregulation and the Friedmanite free market, as new commercial imperatives oscillated between North America, Western Europe and Japan.

Typically, economic indicators are used as the yardstick of globality: multicontinental flows of capital, services, manufacture, goods, data, telecommunications; the large-scale privatization of publicly owned assets in countries as far flung as Britain, Australia and Mexico; the deregulation and reregulation of broadcasting systems, most notably in Europe; and the institutionalization of twenty-four-hour electronic world trading and money markets. But sociodemographic indicators also point to other forms of culture and value migration: for instance, the transborder passage of social movements, such as environmentalism; of antisocial artefacts, such as drugs and weapons; and of people, i.e. the massive movements of refugees, professionals, tourists and immigrants.

The centrality of media technology and artefacts to the globalizing process, as noted above, builds on pre-existing international production and distribution systems and markets. In the information industries, for example, Reuters Holdings plc is paradigmatic of global empire building on the back of new technologies and services. Between the 1960s and 1980s, the organization metamorphosed from being a respectably low-key, non-profit-making international news agency to high-profile market leadership. In 1990, the 'world's foremost electronic publisher' recorded revenues of £1396 million and profits of £287.9 million.² Similarly, in the entertainment field, Hollywood's film and

television producers have been global traders almost from their inception.³

These data also indicate an exploding world audience for television news, spurred in part by the spread of a genre here called 'television verité': that is, the live, raw video eye as recorder of instant history and shared video experiences of 'live' television news — protests in China, revolution in Eastern Europe, war in the Middle East. All serve to reinforce political, popular and scholarly perceptions of globalization as social and media-defined reality.

The pioneer of this 'let it run', unedited-footage school of electronic journalism is, of course, the Cable News Network (CNN). Indeed, for many, its twenty-four-hour satellite news service to over 150 countries typifies McLuhan's (1962) global village prophecy.⁴ For instance, even as the drama of the 'second Russian revolution' unfolded live on television screens around the world, the network claimed 'Once again while others showed you what *had* happened, CNN shows you what *is* happening'.⁵ Accordingly, television's part in shaping public perceptions, discourse and diplomacy cross-nationally cannot be entirely dismissed as techno-determinist rhetoric regarding the pro-active role of video images.⁶ Conversely, the role of CNN as instant world messenger (and of world CNN-Span, given its lengthy live coverage of the Supreme Soviet) might be cited as further evidence of American domination of the global information sphere (see, for example, Schiller, 1989).⁷

Nevertheless, despite this more visible world of 'the distant other' and a more interconnected world political and cultural economy, we cannot infer from this an homogenized global metaculture. To do so would be to ignore the historical role of stratification systems based on caste, class or party, on ethnic cultures defended by bloodshed or kinship traditions linked to religious proscriptions stronger than any claims that might be made for the reductionist power of global media.

Moreover, we need only recall long-standing debates about modernization and economic development, or political and cultural domination, to remind ourselves that applying the same industrial technologies or ingesting the same media artefacts do not always result in economic betterment or cultural assimilation.⁸ Rather, as recent history indicates, the reverse may occur:

national and federal structures may splinter, decentralize, repluralize or self-destruct with or without a shared taste for BMWs, Levis or Madonna.

A final point remains to be made about empirical evidence. The foregoing 'global' indicators should not obscure the demographic determinism of the planet's 5.3 billion inhabitants, nor the instability of a shifting, geopolitical power structure and a pecking order based on former first, second and third worlds. One of the more striking contradictions of the structural transformations associated with so-called globalization is the extent to which its linkages are confined to one-third of the planet's population and the nations of the OECD and G7 member countries.⁹ This is the extent to which globalization is a North-North, not a North-South dialogue.

The Problem of Evaluation

Notwithstanding the repertoire of meanings and material indicators noted above, there is a significant aspect of globalization that goes relatively unremarked: its rhetoric is as much concerned about what *should be* as what *is*. Globalization conflates the normative and descriptive, and consequently carries ideological as well as temporal, spatial, historical and geopolitical implications.

Thus, if powerful nation states and corporate interests promote globalization as a self-fulfilling prophecy for political or profit ends, it is incumbent on us to examine not only what is being hawked by whom, but who stands to lose or gain materially, politically, culturally or militarily.

As a conceptual notion, then, 'globalization' offers mixed messages. It sounds like a relatively value-neutral descriptor of a supranational universe of media interconnectivity and material and symbolic goods exchange. But on closer examination it reveals extensive causal assumptions, normative intentions and value judgements.

What is important here are the overtones of historical inevitability embedded in inferences of globalization as a unidirectional process or a *fait accompli*. Such rhetoric, far from being value-free, implies reification and carries ideological baggage whereby globalization becomes the new dynamic, the motor of world change. What this suggests, and what this article argues, is that this

concept has taken on a life of its own: as a *sine qua non* for our age, its status may be moving from that of mythology to ideology.

Globalization as Mythology

Myth, in the context of globalization, is not used here in the sense of an untruth, but rather as a way of classifying certain assumptions about the modern world found in sets of ideas (myths) about world history, politics, economics, culture, communication and ecology.

Myths, then, are stories we are told, tell to others and ourselves; tales that explain, adapt and evolve as their context changes.¹⁰ Typically, myth has a complex relationship to social reality. It builds on what is already at work. Combining the real with the ideal, it produces something of an ideal type that stretches beyond what the evidence will show. Being both '*real* and *sacred*, the myth becomes exemplar, and consequently *repeatable*, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as a justification, for all human actions' (Eliade, 1968: 23).

By guiding decisions and justifying events, myths help to structure our sense of belonging to a particular culture, to the 'our' world that is also the 'whole world'. It is the all-inclusive spatiality and explanatory aspects of myths that make them so appropriate for this study. These are not myths *of* globalization as such but myths *about* the objectives of and relationships between the disparate interests and institutions seeking to ride on the back of the globalizing momentum.¹¹

The mythology about globalization also reveals how old myths adapt and new ones arise. Some are familiar, others not. Some serve particular interests or groups. But taken together they explain and justify much about the topography of a shifting global political and cultural economy. Nothing is finite about this structuring of social reality. Like all the best mythologies, this too is fluid, as new myths emerge to explain a changing world so old ones adapt or fade away.

At this point in the globalization mythology's life history, seven myths are identified: 'Big is Better', 'More is Better', 'Time and Space Have Disappeared', 'Global Cultural Homogeneity', 'Saving Planet Earth', 'Democracy for Export via American TV' and 'The New World Order'. Individually and collectively they interact with one another; some emphasize the journey of becoming, while

others focus on the destination, the globalized state; and some represent both the process and the result.

Seven Myths about Globalization

The Myth of 'Big is Better'

As political ideology, public policy or corporate strategy, 'Big is Better' serves the doctrine of market liberalism. Considered together with the 'More is Better' myth (discussed below), 'Big' is invoked to present the classic Adam Smith case for expansionist, competitive capitalism. Its spatial-economic logic has driven international trade and transnational corporate expansion ever since, and in the easy credit, deregulatory 1980s, 'Big' spurred the worldwide migration of capital, mergers and takeovers.

The business of 'going global' was notable in the media industries as print, film, broadcast, cable, satellite, music, marketing and advertising organizations made the more interrelated universe a commercial reality and a technological fact. Although less remarked upon outside communication circles (see, for example, Bagdikian, 1989; Murdock, 1990), there has also been an escalation of ownership concentration and overlordship in the media global village (e.g. Time-Warner Inc., Bertelsmann AG, News Corporation Ltd) with all their consequences for public discourse and diversity.¹²

While the Japanese presence in Hollywood — Sony (formerly Columbia) Entertainment Industries and Matsushita MCA/Universal — provides further evidence of media globalism, it also testifies to widely shared corporate strategies of cross-national synergy, vertical integration and economies of scale (in this case, aligning video hardware and software ownership for future HDTV profit). Thus, 'Big is Better' in the media and culture industries provides further ammunition for critiques claiming that globalization represents nothing more than corporate transnationalization at a higher level of magnitude (see, for example, Schiller, 1991).

However, what that categorical imperative overlooks is the extent of personal hubris behind corporate media expansion as the image of the global mogul took hold (e.g. Robert Maxwell, Rupert Murdoch, the Saatchi brothers). As free marketers pursued ever wider horizons of hyperbole and investment, a symbiosis developed: the selling of globalization to the market became a part

of the phenomenon itself. Thus, the myth-makers came to believe their own overextended metaphors, until their financial bubbles burst.¹³ Now as agencies and media groups juggle their debt rescheduling in the 1990s, 'Big is Better' on a global scale may be losing some of its hold on the corporate mind.

This myth is cautionary and raises questions about the preordination of 'Big' as the foundation for economic globalization. It may be that corporate expansion on a world scale is riskier for some cultural (or material) industries than for others, just as it is clearly riskier in destabilized or rapidly changing national or regional contexts.

The Myth of 'More is Better'

This myth firmly places a central tenet of free market economics, the universal benefits of competition, in the context of the 1980s' ethos of excess — excessive deregulation, investment and consumption. Thus, 'More is Better' provides the cornucopia or utilitarian justification that makes 'more' a public good in and of itself: the perfect rationale for the public policies, private practices and corruptive vanities of the 'greed decade' documented in legislation, factual and fictional accounts, television and film. 'More', then, revolves around the market forces' proposition that increased competition, unfettered by ownership or trading restrictions (e.g. in airlines, telecommunications, media or finance), equals increased benefits for all; QED, increased profits, consumer choice and satisfaction.

In the wider media policy arena this myth favoured privatization and proliferation of off-air, cable and satellite television channels (and to a lesser extent, radio) and transnational programme trade (and transcultural migration of values) to fill expanding schedules. We need only to recall how 'More' served an expansionist, deregulating broadcast industry on both sides of the Atlantic — television providers in Western Europe and cablecasters in the US.¹⁴

The doctrinal impact of 'more choice' on British broadcasting policy was especially notable. Unlike Italy, where a decade of de facto non-regulation and competitive chaos preceded the de jure regulation of providers and programmes (see, for example, Mazzolini, 1990), in Britain the Thatcher government set out to dismantle the 'cosy duopoly' of BBC and ITV public service broadcasting via legislation to ensure more and different providers

with scant regard for prior policies of universal provision, quality and diversity. It remains to be seen if the consequences of the recent television franchise auction will mirror those of cable deregulation in the US: more channels, ownership concentration, subscription fees and programme duplication.

In other Western European countries, where less is more has long been the received wisdom of public broadcasting, the prospect of increased foreign (mainly American) imports to fill the gap between programme hours on the new services and Euro-production has fuelled national, EC and US debate over quotas in the EC Television Directive of 1989.¹⁵ In the event, the new channels, such as Spain's Telecino and Antena 3, the Netherlands' RTL-4 and Greece's Mega and Antenna, have brought more US films, soaps and game show formats to Europe (*Married... With Children* is very popular in Greece); but they have also increased opportunities (by as much as 50 percent) for local programming.¹⁶

However, the equation 'more providers equals more channels equals programme diversity' is a half truth that ignores the extent to which broadcasters' own choices are constrained by programming and production economics, questions about the extent of audience demand for 'more choice' and increased subscription costs for pay-per-view or cable services. (Conversely, the opponents of 'More' often overlook the apparently universal thirst for escapist visual entertainment.)

Nevertheless, the matter of audience response to the experience of more television choice is infrequently addressed or tested. As an experiment, Granada Television wired up an English village for multiple channel, Euro-choice TV: the end of this strange tale (as recounted by CBS's *Sixty Minutes*) was that these British viewers were prepared to settle for less.¹⁷ After a period of extended Euro-programming, more news, sports, old films and soft porn, the villagers discounted the satellite largesse, expressing contentment with the cultural proximity of their familiar BBC and ITV channels.

The outcome of the Granada experiment, suggesting that audiences do not necessarily want more television, accords with cross-cultural findings that show similar patterns of preference for domestic over imported programmes — where that option exists (see, for example, Becker and Shoenbeck, 1989; Katz and Wedell, 1977; Larsen, 1990). This pattern can be interpreted variously as evidence of cultural asymmetry and proximity (Straubhaar, 1991),

of 'mutual cannibalization' of cultures (Appadurai, 1990) or as further confirmation of transnational corporate cultural domination, since many local programmes imitate familiar US formats (see, for example, Schiller, 1991).

The 'More' myth, then, sounds plausible. It fits with the globalization worldview of material and symbolic goods interdependence and with the technology of distribution, but fits less well with the cultural logic of particular media markets (e.g. where mixed economy public service broadcasting has flourished and defined itself as a service rather than a product).

The Myth of 'Time and Space Have Disappeared'

'Time and Space Have Disappeared' recalls nineteenth- as well as twentieth-century prophecy, hyperbole and inflated expectations about, respectively, the wonders of electricity and electronic media uniting the world. But the early oracles were not alone in linking communication technology to globalization.

Much 'information revolution' rhetoric from the 1970s onwards has dwelt on the facts and fantasies of communication abundance from converging computer, fibre optic, cellular, digital and satellite technology. This myth assumes their consequences are those of rendering distance in space and variance in time irrelevant: i.e. they have 'disappeared' as constraints on business or personal life. Thus, industrial policy based on information technology (IT) as the key to economic competitiveness has rationalized technology as the key to future national and corporate prosperity.¹⁸

While it is true that the structural transformation of capital, information and goods markets would not have happened as it has *without* modern telecommunications and computing, the potential of IT as a force for public and private good is inflated to say the least. Especially, much 'wired societies' euphoria overlooks problems of differential access, principally North-South, to the alleged benefits and the complexity of differential impact on time-space perceptions and social experience.

The postmodernist attention paid to temporal and spatial categories as emblematic of a more globalized, transnational culture, differentiates their meaning from an earlier modernity. Claiming that classic theorists such as Weber and Marx favoured time over space, where the road to modernization was one of becoming rather than of being, Harvey (1989: 205) sees conflict:

'beneath the veneer of common-sense and seemingly "natural" ideas about space and time lie hidden areas of ambiguity, contradiction and struggle'.

Such contradictions are based on subjective as well as objective material factors. Thus, redefinitions of time and space provide a material connection between the processes of a more global cultural and political economy and the postmodern condition. But the unknown frontiers of a postmodern world create a crisis of uncertainty for Jameson (1984) wherein the 'hyperspace' of a global culture requires new 'cognitive maps' to negotiate.

Uncertainty about where and when we are in the world is at odds with the idea that technology can confer benefits of time-distance compression for all. The mobility of commerce, organizations, information and people does *not* make time and space irrelevant, rather, it highlights the extent to which these areas of experience have become more, not less, multilayered, interrelated and complex. For the uprooted, the restless or the peripatetic, the business of 'living life' (family, friends, work) in three or four time zones requires new negotiating skills in a perceptual world of spatial indeterminacy and temporal recalculation, a world of 'time without time' and 'space without space' (Ferguson, 1990).

Neither do we know much about how shared broadcast media experience alters time-space perceptions by bringing the faraway near. Speculation, for example, as to how television may foster reproduction of political action or replication of iconic protest images from one part of the world to another, overlooks the fact that the mechanisms by which any such effects might occur remain something of a black hole in communications research.¹⁹ To a greater extent than other myths about globalization, 'Time and Space' typifies the extension of our horizons and problematics in the communications field.

The Myth of 'Global Cultural Homogeneity'

This myth relates to McLuhan's notions of global village shared experience and to aspects of postmodernist and media imperialist interpretations of a more culturally (and economically) intertwined world. More specifically, it relates to the interconnectivity of the transnational organization of cultural production, distribution and consumption in the broadest sense, and, in the context of this article, to the export and import of media artefacts from the print, music, graphic, audiovisual and information industries.

Simply stated, then, 'Global Cultural Homogeneity' infers that the consumption of the same popular material and media products, be they Swarzenegger, *Cheers*, Pepsi, Big Macs, Disney Worlds, clothes, cars or architectural fashions, creates a metaculture whose collective identity is based on shared patterns of consumption, be these built on choice, emulation or manipulation.

Moreover, this myth has its nation-state and regional variants. Claims of 'national cultural integrity' or of 'regional cultural authenticity' (as manifest in, respectively, Canadian broadcasting policy goals or the EC Television Directive) typify attempts to protect or promote a national or regional collective identity based on notions of shared citizenship or sovereignty. (This notion, in the case of the EC, is under threat of extinction before it is ever realized owing to the rising pressure for wider membership.)

In fact, neither 'Global Cultural Homogeneity' nor its national or regional variants, fit the emerging conflict models of the nation state, or the exclusionary imperatives of ethnic or regional entities. The first evokes a seamless web of artefact and tradition that does less than justice to the rich, global patchwork that exists, while the goals of the latter two fly in the face of dramatic, and sometimes bloody, evidence of repluralization. Paradoxically, we witness an antifederalist ethos competing with a resurgent regional economic protectionism in the EC, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the proposed South-East Asia trading bloc.

Consequently, either this myth presumes that it is possible to argue the existence of a global cultural economy that ignores the counter pull of localism and the rich traditions of variance, or it assumes, wrongly, that cultural identities are contained within political borders or are conferred on a transhistorical world society basis by an ethic of consumption (or exploitation).

Either way, when advocates of cultural nationalism invoke collective identity, they often fail to deal with problems of whose identity is being defined, in which way and by whom. We are reminded by Schlesinger (1991a, 1991b) of the historical specificity, spatial boundedness, shared images and cultural symbols that comprise such identities, and that they are constituted and reconstituted in action over time and space by the 'selective reconstitution of "traditions" and of social memory' (Schlesinger, 1991a: 174). In contrast, those who flirt with or embrace a global 'identity' appear to infer the existence of shared values and a collective worldview based on primitive consumption ethics,

media reductionism, neo-technological determinism or corporatist conspiracy.²⁰

Furthermore, the knowledge we possess tells us more about the extent, circulation and economics of telefiction for global audiences than it tells us about its political, cultural or social impact.²¹ Thus, a recent UNESCO report (Larsen, 1990), reaffirms continued US dominance of the international television market where economic factors outweigh questions of cultural proximity, but it adds little to our knowledge of the 'how' and 'which' of transcultural value migration.

The corollary of the ethic of identity preservation embedded in 'national integrity' and 'regional authenticity' is cultural protection, evident in defensive policy strategies towards media invasion and debates about import quotas or subsidies to further the public interest via indigenous production. But whether the policy is to promote globalism of consumption or to protect localism of production, cultures are almost never 'pure'. Such views take liberties with history, ignoring the impact of cross-cultural influences via trade, war, tourism and communication over the ages.

Canada demonstrates the hazards of media policy attempts to nurture a national identity, complicated in this case by bilingualism and multiculturalism (see, for example, Ferguson, 1991b). Being neighbour to the world's most prolific provider of audiovisual entertainment, Canadians have never enjoyed cultural sovereignty and have developed a broadcasting system that is materially American. With over 90 percent of Anglophone television drama being imported, there is minimal evidence that programme quotas and production subsidies are changing Canadian audience tastes for US primetime. But, equally, there is considerable evidence that Canada continues to maintain a value system and way of life distinctive from the US.

Nor, in the 1990s, is the notion of American cultural identity the unifying norm it once was. The once dominant cultural myth of the 'melting pot', that promised unity out of diversity, is increasingly called into question. In the post-Columbus quinquennial United States, powerful forces of cultural redefinition are at work. Rapid demographic change and the largest immigrant influx since the First World War (consisting primarily of Hispanics, Asians and Africans), cultural and minority divisions exacerbated by debates about politically correct (and incorrect) stances on gender,

ethnicity, sexual orientation, art and history, all contribute to this process. Increasingly, as campus posters proclaim 'Africa is the Mother of all Civilization' and extremists denigrate DWMs (Dead White Males), those outside the academy also confront questions about what or who is 'American'.

Questions of collective identity, then, whether defined by cultural globalists, regionalists or nationalists, are increasingly problematic. As cartographers struggle to keep pace with history, redrawing maps of sovereignty across vast regions of the world, the ideas surrounding this myth will either adapt or lose credibility, turning to fable in the face of an increasingly, not decreasingly, pluralist world.

The Myth of 'Saving Planet Earth'

If globalization as an historical process only emerged fully formed in the 1980s, now, in the 1990s, ideas about planetary interdependence embrace an ecological dimension. The one-world, Gaia, philosophy at the heart of 'Saving Planet Earth' links culture and economy to perceptions of a world ecosystem and its protection. Not only are we enjoined to 'think globally and act locally', but also to realize that eco-crises such as 'global warming require the rise of the global politician, buttressed by a global citizenry, whose vision extends for decades' (O'Riordan, 1990).

The utopian ideas embedded in this myth are transcultural and synchronic, displaying the power of myth to reinvent itself across space and time. In fact 'Saving Planet Earth' combines ancient (and sometimes sacred) beliefs about man's intimate relation to nature with modern ideas of eco-activism. Narratives about the environmentalist project to rescue the planet from self-destruction, echo archaic myths of the 'eternal return', and such sentiments, according to Eliade (1968), appeal to our primitive longings for cyclical regeneration and new beginnings.²²

What is noteworthy about 'Saving Planet Earth' is the remarkably broad coalition of interests that espouse it: ecological activists, scientists, politicians, officials, journalists, manufacturers, marketing opportunists, recyclers and whistle blowers. Moreover, the staging of media events, the massaging of the message, the reporting of real-life disasters that issue from this assembly are mediated widely via print, radio, television and VCR. Through this 'greening' of the press, popular culture, the market and, perhaps most importantly, the public sphere (politi-

cians, officials, non-governmental and international agencies), ecological consciousness is being raised worldwide.²³

Accordingly, environmentalists see media/issue-visibility as a necessary condition for value change and collective action. Given the movement's visibility imperative, Earth Day 1990 saw 'mediasuasion' coming to the fore. In the US it became a two-week media 'overkill' event as local and national print, broadcast and cable outlets gave environmental stories saturation coverage. Hollywood joined in with a Time-Warner Inc television 'special' that featured a roster of ecologically correct stars acting out a kind of Mother Earth pantomime sandwiched between Time-Warner's product placements and advertisements for itself.²⁴ Somehow, in true mythic fashion, this programme combined actuality, illusion and idealization by uniting the sanctity of the planet with that of the market. What the Time-Warner show also dramatized is the greening of the corporate sphere. In the 1990s, marketing ecological consciousness and environmentally 'safe' products has become good, and big, business.

Serving, as its narratives do, a disparate group of interests from subsistence economy agrarian reformers to oil industry image builders, this myth is singularly action oriented. By explaining and justifying eco-protectionism at the supranational level 'Saving Planet Earth' also addresses national and local agendas on contentious issues such as climactic change, population control and consumption reduction. The extent to which its stories constitute an effective guide for decision and action remains an open question. The future of this myth as a guide for decision or action is still uncertain, however, and therefore awaits further critique.

The Myth of 'Democracy for Export via American TV'

'Democracy for Export' is an old myth that displays uniformity over space, time and sacred belief. That is to say, 'Democracy for Export via American TV' is a recycled version of seasoned ideas about the power of the mass media to influence public opinion with respect to political ends. Accordingly, it updates the technology but not the premise about direct media 'effects'.²⁵

These ideas resurfaced in a US Department of Commerce inquiry into the globalization of mass media firms (Obuchowski, 1990); the document, whose economic aims are to expand US audiovisual trade competitiveness and dominance, also envisages a

politico-cultural agenda. The latter surfaces in assumptions about the effectiveness of US film and television products as exporters of US values and 'democratic ideals', notions premised on assumptions that global media can play 'an increasingly significant role in promoting free speech and fostering demands for democratic reforms internationally' (Obuchowski, 1990: 7). (A view that gains popular credence everytime CNN is cited as the lingua franca of the video era by political leaders on the world stage and their media watchers.)

What this conflation of politics and economy presents, then, is 'Democracy for Export via American TV', a highly functional set of ideas for the US film and television industries (and the US President's own personal worldview, see next section). Moreover, the benign view of media products as vehicles of political enlightenment stresses their potential for political persuasion (e.g. abandoning communism for democracy) over their potential for cultural dislocation (e.g. emphasizing individualism over collectivism).

The revival of politico-media determinism as public policy also revives a familiar theme for the Hollywood entertainment industry. The social history of early US cinema reveals how the medium was seen as a forum for the depiction of democratic values and democracy in action. During the Second World War, the government recognized the movie's importance as a 'subtle and powerful weapon to spread the story of democracy and make friends for this country' (Jowett, 1976: 322). After the war, the export trade imperative rather than the ideological value of Hollywood's entertainment industry reasserted itself in US economic policy. Like all good myths, this one has replicated itself in new versions over time. An unacknowledged problem with the 1990s version, however, is that its promoters assume the perfection of the political model being sold, overlooking the form of participatory democracy where freedoms are set by money, not 'free speech'. Thus, politicians, officials and the Motion Picture Association of America might all reflect upon the realities rather than the rhetoric of democracy as practised on Capitol Hill. Apart from the huge financial cost of running for office (and political paybacks for monetary support), there is also a symbiosis between the 'new media' and the 'new politics' that hinges on the cash nexus.²⁶

Nevertheless, the core ideas behind 'Democracy for Export', including their ideology of economic expansionism, link up to an

associated cluster of positive (but premature) assumptions about globalization as democracy and capitalism triumphant, some aspects of which are explored in the following section.

The Myth of 'The New World Order'

This, the most recent addition to globalization's mythology, demonstrates how new myths arise and old ones reappear or adapt in response to changing conditions. From the US President's first call for a 'New World Order' (NWO) during the Gulf War, this myth's core ideas have offered mixed messages, few of them clear. Therefore, we may usefully distinguish between 'world order' as the creation of order *in* the world and as an ordering *of* the world (according to a particular set of ideological conditions or economic practices). Both meanings are conflated in this myth and its ongoing revision.

Also evident from the outset was that even if the purported purposes were global, the authorship was American, and that here was an unclear vision of a New Jerusalem of world political power premised on the demise of communism and the triumph of capitalism. Before the mirage was fully formed, however, a 'new' NWO unfolded with dramatic swiftness: the Moscow 'coup' of August 1991 and the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union that followed.

Both the old and new versions mesh with an earlier triumphalism about the end of history (Fukuyama, 1989). This thesis is essayed on the premise that 'Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an "end of ideology" or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism' (Fukuyama, 1989: 3).

The notion of history having ended is connected to the end of the Enlightenment in postmodernism and to our having fallen over the edge of modernity into an uncertain void (see, for example, Harvey, 1989; Gitlin, 1989), one characterized by shifting lines of political sovereignty that exceed the bounds of the nation state (see, for example, Bauman, 1990).

The indeterminacy and inconsistency of recent history points to the NWO's connection (and dis-connection) with the rapidly changing social reality surrounding so-called globalization. Given the NWO's recent rhetorical prominence on the world stage (and the US domestic and political one), as a justification for 'global'

power brokering and military intervention, its aetiological origins merit closer attention.

First, it is of more than just etymological interest that the words *novus ordo seclorum* on the reverse of an American dollar bill translate loosely as 'new world order'. Second, the US President's (frequent) invocation of an NWO sounds more like a call for a return to the status quo ante: the 1990s 'new' world order, like the 1950s 'old' world order, is a US invention.

But this rhetoric ignores the exclusionary, as well as inclusionary, aspects of the NWO, which, although encompassing the US, Europe, Japan, Canada, the (former) Soviet Union and much of the Middle East, excludes most of Latin America, Africa and Asia. Second, such rhetoric also ignores the intransigence of history in forcing overnight revision of the NWO's own revisionist assumptions of a Pax Americana, because of the collapse of a bipolar superpower structure and the demonology of the 'Red Menace' (see, for example, Rosenthal, 1991).

The original NWO, then, mixed actuality, idealization and illusion in the time-honoured manner of myth, but in a hubristic equation of globalization with Americanization that echoes the 'Democracy' myth's assumptions about the exportability of the US free market model of democracy.²⁷ The second NWO has yet to reveal its adaptability to a world characterized more by inconsistency, dissent and conflict than by any ordering of, or order in, it. It still, for that matter, has to demonstrate how it will play against the reconfiguration of the former Soviet empire — the one that came after the end of the end of history. As decentralization and repluralization unfolds, what is evident is that they will continue to do so on a worldwide video and telecommunications stage.²⁸ For communication scholars, even more than for Ted Turner of CNN, these are interesting times indeed.

Mythology, Ideology and Television Verité — Towards Further Discussion

This article attempts to address the problematic notion of globalization by examining the mythology within its discourse and associated problems of meaning, evidence and evaluation. Important as it is to recognize these myths, it is also important to acknowledge the empirical reality of a more interconnected world political and cultural economy.

However, this does not infer any consequences of a hegemonic

global metaculture or a supranational boardgame controlled by powerful states or transnational corporations. Throughout I have stressed the importance of scepticism towards ideas that a 'global ecumene' is emerging on the basis of any media reductionist or technological determinist assumptions. Globalization, defined either as a journey or a destination, demands a critical approach.

Nor are any lines of cultural causality clear as to who is globalizing whom: British media barons buy New York newspapers, Hong Kong billionaires buy Vancouver's waterfront, Germans buy RCA Records and Japanese buy Radio City Music Hall. Moreover, similar kinds of questions can be posed as to who is *deglobalizing* whom, given the inconsistencies and hostilities of ethnic, religious and other forms of localism within developed and lesser developed countries alike, e.g. Spain, Canada, the former Soviet empire, Sri Lanka, India. The list is long and growing.

A more fruitful area for debate, I suggest, is examination of the resurgent economic determinism at the heart of the globalization rhetoric emanating from postmodernists, media imperialists and corporate publicists alike. Are we witnessing not only an historical process and phenomenon but also the emergence of a new determinist philosophy of world history and social change?

Although these are ultimately empirical questions, the ideological overtones are heavy with normative, determinist implications of historical inevitability. The result is that globalization is being promoted both as a means and an end. Two propositions follow from this. First, it is clear that whether the context is political, cultural or economic, this notion and its attendant myths function as a gospel of the global market. Second, and relatedly, when we explore the global worldview (as manifest in, for example, 'Big', 'More', 'Democracy' and 'NWO') we find that it is refashioning an ideological mantle of historical materialism in its own image.

What is clear is that globalization is a teleological doctrine that promotes, explains and justifies an interlocking system of world trade. What is *not* clear is the future evolutionary path of this form of market economy determinism. The new Marx has yet to arrive who will periodize the globalizing phase into a stage model of human history. Given its problematic and contingent nature, therefore, globalization either as mythology or as ideology is being shaped both by the unpredictability of world events and by the tendency of economic and political theologians to revise (and re-revise) their dogmas.²⁹

What is clear, also, is that the old centre-periphery models of economic and cultural imperialism no longer fit a volatile geopolitical structure that deconstructs and reconstructs 'before our very eyes', any more than they fit the criss-crossing migration of investment, jobs, people, products, communication and consumption that characterizes the late twentieth century.

It may be that lacking as we do any single (or bipolar) vantage point of observation or control, the kaleidoscope is a more apt metaphor than the panopticon for the postmodern world. It may also be as Tylor (1891: 282) averred that 'even as "truth is stranger than fiction", so myth may be more uniform than history'. Thus, the myths about globalization may prove more consistent than their future as history or ideology. On present evidence, neither the gospel of the market nor globalization as the planet's manifest destiny seem particularly uniform or universal.

Notes

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1. Postmodernist emphasis on culture (defined to include theme parks and fast food restaurants as well as media artefacts) and patterns of common cultural consumption cross-nationally also features in media imperialist/cultural dominationist critiques, most notably Schiller's (1991).

2. Financial data source: University of Maryland on-line company report (Barton, 1991).

3. As early as 1925, one-third of Hollywood's gross film earnings came from foreign sales (Jowett, 1976: 125). In the 1980s exports soared as demand rose for audiovisual products from proliferating VCRs, broadcast and cable channels; by 1990 US film and television export trade reached a surplus of \$3.5 billion (US Department of Commerce, Assistant Secretary Obuchowski).

4. The full quotation is: 'We can now live, not just amphibiously in divided and distinguished worlds, but pluralistically in many worlds and cultures simultaneously . . . so that the human family now exists under conditions of a "global village"' (McLuhan, 1962: 31); see also Ferguson (1991a).

5. As shown on DC Cable, Channel 13, 7 a.m. newscast, 20 August 1991. For a recent analysis of the 'global newsroom' phenomenon, see Gurevitch and Levy (1990).

6. For example, the unequivocal claim that 'boundaries between cultures have been lowered, if not indeed obliterated, by television' (Yardley, 1991: C2).

7. Interestingly, an old technology, short-wave radio, and an old public service broadcaster, the BBC World Service, kept Mikhail Gorbachev abreast of Moscow and world reactions during his Crimean incarceration.

8. The literature here is compendious. Over the last thirty years it includes: a 'classic' statement of the Marxist centre-periphery model of exploitative modernization (Frank, 1971) and its polar opposite (Rostow, 1960). The 'classic' American media imperialism thesis is Schiller's (1969), revised to a wider critique of transnational corporate cultural domination (Schiller, 1989, 1991); see also Mattelart (1979). The complex issues of intercultural penetration and the multiplicity of factors involved are well examined by Boyd-Barrett (1982) and Golding (1977).

9. For a discussion of globalism and localism vis-à-vis centre-periphery cultural relations and prospects for a 'global ecumene', see Hannerz (1990); see also Friedman (1990).

10. Following Eliade (1968: 18), myth becomes fictive only when it 'becomes "decadent", obscured; it turns into tale or a legend'.

11. As such their stories continue a tradition, recurrent across two-and-a-half millennia from classical Greece to contemporary popular culture. Work on myth and communications has drawn upon early cultural anthropology and sociology (e.g. Durkheim, 1976; Malinowski, 1974), French structuralism, semiology and sociology of religion (e.g. Levi-Strauss, 1969; Barthes, 1973; Eliade, 1968), and McLuhan's (1968) global vision of electronic media. For recent work that builds on notions of television's mythic role in shaping cultural form and symbolic content, see, for example, Bird and Dardenne (1988), Carey (1988) and Silverstone (1988).

12. Many have a dual agenda: to maintain their press oligopolies by maintaining their power leverage over political and corporate allies whose public media images they control (Bagdikian, 1989: 811).

13. See 'The Flight of Icarus', in *The Economist* (16 March 1991: 65) with respect to the struggles of the Saatchis and WPP to extricate themselves from the global marketing debacles.

14. Legislation enshrining the doctrine of 'more choice' includes Britain's 1990 Broadcasting Act and the US 1984 Cable Communications Policy Act.

15. For the outraged response of the US government and audiovisual industry to the threat of EC television quotas, see Brown (1991). As McQuail (1991: 54) affirms, the real import-export battle is between the old public service broadcasters with strong domestic production bases in place, e.g. Britain's BBC (85 percent) and ITV (90 percent), Italy's RAI (75 percent) and ZDF's (80 percent), and the new commercial broadcasters, e.g. SAT 1, BSkyB, RTL plus, 'with ratios of home-made to imported product usually reversed'.

16. See *Variety* (15 April 1991: 228-9) article, 'Local Fare Fattens Upstart European Webs', for profiles of these and other markets.

17. The experiment, conducted in the English village of Waddington, was reported by CBS on 17 February 1991.

18. A typical keystone policy document of this genre was *Instant World* (Information Canada, 1971), but similar reports reside in many trade and technology policy archives of the advanced economies.

19. Zolberg (1987: 45), for example, ponders McLuhan's global village and whether the 'prevalence of television makes it possible for an event taking place in

one part of the world to have an instantaneous effect elsewhere', a notion that extends itself to investigation of the role of audiovisual media in the political deconstruction of Eastern Europe and the former USSR (aka 'Democracy for Export via American TV').

20. Conversely, Smith (1990) argues that a global collective identity is unlikely or problematic; it is 'essentially memoryless' or has only negative collective memories (e.g. war).

21. On the economics of telefiction, low cost overcomes the 'cultural discount' of imported programmes whose context or values may differ from those of their viewing publics (Hoskins and Mirus, 1988).

22. For example, re-enacted when we celebrate a new year, a new house, a new child; in this way myths are both historical and psychological, capturing our desire 'to enter a new History, in a world reborn' (Eliade, 1968: 33).

23. A truly global event was the two-hour live satellite broadcast of environmental success stories from thirty-eight nations seen by viewers in eighty nations, coproduced by the non-profit-making Foundation for Global Broadcasting and SOVRADIO, anchored from Moscow on 22 January 1990.

24. Transmitted on 22 April 1990, the programme hosted by actor Robin Williams featured appearances by stars such as Kevin Costner, Meryl Streep and Bette Midler.

25. For an evaluative critique of media effects and manipulative intent, see all the entries under the latter in McQuail (1987).

26. Members of Congress gate-keep their own media messages by renting and making direct satellite feeds to local television stations to keep the folks back home abreast of their efforts (see, for example, Collins, 1990). This also accords with the Machiavellian view of the American political system as one where the formation of public opinion is not left to chance (Blumler, 1990).

27. Satirized as 'an epic made possible by Mikhail Gorbachev, realized by Saddam Hussein, starring the United States and shortly to be showing in a conflict near you' (*The Economist*, 22 June 1991: 13).

28. For example, even three weeks beforehand it would have been a bold scholar indeed who could have forecast the Gorbachev-Yeltsin live 'townmeeting' with American citizens broadcast by ABC via satellite uplinks and downlinks on 5 September 1991.

29. As to the ideological status of globalization as a new form of politico-economic determinism, replacing historical materialism as the engine of world history, we may look to earlier critiques of philosophies of history or ladders of progress (see, for example, Gellner, 1964) and to cautions against forcing social reality into 'transhistorical straight jackets' from whence come prophetic visions of a promised land (Mills, 1970).

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