The Advent of a Traditional Future: Global Imaginaries

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the modernist tradition of "the future" with its "presentist" bias in favor of the now and its propensity to favor the future over the past; it also contemplates the future of tradition and the neglect of the importance of tradition in the years to come. The ironies and contradictions of globalism are explored, where "modernization" enhances the comforts of world travel yet, in its destruction of local color, makes it less attractive to travel the world. The concept of "globalization" is advanced, where the global and the local are in equipoise, and the values of both regional histories and global technologies are appreciated in equal parts.

KEY WORDS

Tradition
future
global
imaginaries
economics of diversity
modernization
globalization
native
deterritorialization
geopolitics
naturalization
master narrative
unilinear
post-modernism
hegemonic thinking
local
national
regional
hegemony
concurrence
presentist

Introduction

As one enters a new era, indeed a new millennium, passing a threshold of technology and material progress, the world will undergo radical changes. The first lacuna that needs to be filled will be the invention or discovery of a term for what will be contemporary; clearly, our present vocabulary, proceeding from "pre-modern" to "modern" to "post-modern," while convenient, has obvious limitations. We are afflicted by a plague of "now-ism" particularly as the twentieth century has come to a close, because we tend to see ourselves as a, if not the, bookmark to reference every other period in history. At least in the West, there is a prevailing prejudice that favors "presentism"—an emphasis on the immediate moment as privileged over past and future.[1] Instant gratification; the famous Warholian dictum, "Everyone will have fifteen minutes of fame"; the overwhelming popularity of the modern period of history in academic and scholarly inquiry; the emphasis in television on "live" reports and twenty-four hour news coverage—all this reflects a world-wide emphasis on the "now." Even our terms for historical periods subsume a presentist bias of which students are often unaware: the Greeks and Romans believed in their own superiority, but were not aware that they were writing classic works; the people of the Dark Ages were hardly cognizant that they were benighted; and the Renaissance did not get its name until centuries after. Presentists remind me of the simpleton who is delighted at discovering a coin marked "200 B. C."

What I see is the "advent of a traditional future"—by which I mean, ambivalently, both what is generally recognized—that the future

will become "tradition"—and what may not be as generally acknowledged—that tradition will become part of the future.

The tradition of the future is easily illustrated, particularly since the nineteenth century, when utopias began to flourish, and in the twentieth century, which has been dominated by "dystopias" from *RUR* to *1984* we see it in the preoccupation with selling "tomorrow"—whether in successive technological improvements in such consumer products as detergents, razor blades, and computers; in the inverse invocations of the present through the depiction of the future in various films; in the widespread popularity of science fiction in books and film.

The future of tradition is, however, another matter. If globalization occurs, and the effects of cultural homogenization become palpable, there will be—dialectically—a greater emphasis on the heterogeneity of local culture. Or, to put it another way, the more one modernizes, the more traditional certain cultures can become. Consider as apposite and telling examples: the two most spectacular finds in China of the past generation, the terracotta soldiers in Xian and the 2,000-year-old woman in Changsha, were made within the last generation by accident. With a country as venerable as China, almost any digging—whether for a well or to establish foundations for a new building—is likely to become an excavation where precious ancient artifacts are found. The value of the ancient is being constantly pitted against the needs of the present.

The logic of globalization leads ultimately to an economics of diversity. A world standard for tourists is being established—which, in effect, means a Western standard, or the standard of the middle class in an industrialized Western country—so that all airports will tend to have the same equipment, all hotels will offer the same plumbing as well as comparable amenities and the same standard of sanitation. Yet this uniformity will be for nought if tourist sites throughout the world start to resemble each other. The motive for travel, facilitated by world-class air transportation and by world-class accommodations, will have been nullified if there is nothing different to see. If globalization tends toward uniformity, tourism flourishes only in diversity. Homogeneity does not make the world smaller, it only makes it duller. McLuhan's

notion of a "global village" is metaphorically attractive, suggesting as it does the intimacy and the closeness of a village available to anyone in the world who is connected to the new technology, but it also implies a prospect that is not so attractive: the likelihood that the whole world will become as provincial as most villages tend to be. The supreme provincialism for this planet would be, of course, a kind of globalism that assumes that one culture fits all.

The hegemonic character of this globalization is clear: at the very least it's a westernization, perhaps an Americanization, of the world. The universal pressure to modernize demands ubiquitous computers, omnipresent satellite dishes, Argus-eyed TVs all over the planet; this cannot be achieved without a minimum command of Western technology. Whether one likes it or not, the basis for modernization—at least for the near term—is westernization. The spread of the culture of modernity comes with the spread of technology. There is, at the moment, no "Eastern" technology—even if computers are manufactured in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, and cellular phones in Hong Kong, Thailand, and Indonesia. But what is hegemonically Western is not merely the phenomenon of globalization, it is the concept of globalization itself, which subsumes an essentialist and imperialist process, one that emerges out of an Occidental center and spreads over the rest of the world, now considered as marginal to the master narrative.

Arjun Appadurai's notion of "deterritorialization," describing not only the exiles and expatriates of the world but also its natives who have, in a sense, adopted a foreign culture, is a more accurate description of the reciprocal phenomenon which is oversimplified by the notion of "globalization." The underlying assumption is that "globalization" will mean that a predominant culture—presumably Western or American culture—will reach to every corner of the earth. "Deterritorialization," on the other hand, makes no presumption of a specific culture that spreads globally, but focuses on the dialectical effects of the encounter between the local and the global. It also suggests more forcefully than "globalization" that one's identity—for an increasing number of the world's population—is not associated with a particular place. I once asked a young woman whose childhood included extend-

ed stays in several European cities, the United States, and Turkey, where "home" was. To which her reply was, "Wherever my books and my Teddy Bear are." The "deterritorialization" of home, which is now not a geographically fixed locus but a psychological "habitus" that can shift from place to place, is but one of the hallmarks of the modern cosmopolite.[2]

But is this "deterritorialization" only modern? Did wars and famines not instigate great migrations in the past? Was exile not a familiar punishment in the past for high officials in disgrace? Haven't there been populations in history which were constantly on the move? One need only recall the nomadic marauders of the past, the Romans, the Huns, the Ottoman Turks, and the Mongols, or more recently those displaced by the great potato famine in Ireland in the 1840's, or the refugees from Hitler's Third Reich, to realize that "deterritorialization" is not solely a modern phenomenon. What may be true about contemporary forms of "deterritorialization" is that it is more often voluntary as well as involuntary, and that it does not require actual physical displacement.

What distinguishes the modern experience is the virtually instantaneous nature of the interaction. Treks over land or across the sea in the past still reminded the sojourner how far from home a person was; but today, modern jet travel has reduced the travel time to days instead of months and years, and electronic communication, whether by telephone, fax, or e-mail, makes possible instantaneous or near-instantaneous discourse across vast distances. Space is no longer always proportional to units of time. When it comes to telecommunication, there is no appreciable difference in the amount of time that it takes for an e-mail message to traverse the globe or to arrive next door. The annihilation of geographical distance in modern hyperspace is the main characteristic of the "deterritorialization" that distinguishes the modern variant from the pre-modern.

That is why Heidegger's neologism "intraworldly" seems to me a better formulation of the "village" aspect of the world today. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of people and events throughout the world, and the integration of the world as an entity, the term does not

privilege, implicitly or explicitly, a center-periphery perspective. The trouble with "transnational," "international," and "multinational" is that they assume the inevitability of the nation-state. "We need to think ourselves," Appadurai reminds us, "beyond the nation" (158). Wallerstein has remarked that not only the concept of "nation-state" but the entire concept of a completely territorialized world need not be inevitable. It developed, according to Wallerstein, out of "the unfolding of the capitalist world-economy." "Not only did the nation-state have boundaries, but there was a very strong tendency to bound the states such that all their parts were contiguous to each other, in which case the outer boundaries of the state were constituted by a single contiguous line, hopefully not containing enclaves within it" (King 96).

One graphic way of re-examining history is to review the maps and boundaries between nations, and between provinces or states within nations. In Europe and Asia—Old World countries—there is not a straight line to be found in the borders between nation-states, or between sub-regions of individual countries. In North America and Australia, on the other hand, the borders between states and provinces are predominantly marked by straight lines rather than by the natural divisions of rivers and mountains and deserts. Northern Africa, judging by its straight-line borders, and some parts of southern Africa—Nambibia and Zambia—were demonstrably divided into nation-states by post-Cartesian westerners, with no regard for the local terrain or for the sites of individual tribes. South America, with its meandering boundaries, is clearly "Old World."

An interesting semiotic study of "straight-line" borders and their influence on modern history might reveal the extent to which categorical and pre-emptive thinking have created rather than solved problems. For efficiency and function, straight-line thinking is essential, but in the management of human affairs and the maintenance of sustainable boundaries straight lines might be counterproductive: one needs to think only of the east-west lines that divided North from South Korea and North from South Vietnam to be reminded of how unmanageable straight-line borders can be. Modern geopolitics is essentially the product of a Cartesian imaginary, which is why such borders succeed

when dividing cultures dominated by analytical thought (the United States and Canada) and why they fail in regions with more traditional imaginaries (Korea, Vietnam, Africa).[3] It is interesting that the partition of Pakistan, first into two parts and later into two separate entities—Bangladesh and Pakistan—followed traditional modes of marking borders.

Globalism as a "Master Narrative"

Globalization theory reflects—in more than one sense—a "master narrative," a term that is often encountered in discussions of the subject and—despite professed post-colonial sensibilities—used invariably without any sense of irony. This usage overlooks the fact that the dominant "plot" paradigms of globalization theories are from a predominantly Western point of view, a master narrative drawn from former masters. Even self-skeptical analyses seem unaware that the governing paradigm of explanation reflects hegemonic thinking, centrist power emanating outward toward marginal provinces. Far from opposing a "slave narrative" to the "master narrative"—which would only reify an implicit bias that one would wish to remove—I propose a deconstruction of the logic and rhetoric of these attempts to make sense of historical developments which will show that the discourse against hegemonic thinking is almost always itself hegemonic.

I think of the categories used in the post offices in Paris. They separate outgoing mail into two categories: "Paris/Banlieue" and "Province/Etranger" (Paris/Suburb; Provincial/Foreign). It is the collocation of "Province" and "Etranger" that interests me. Although certainly unintended, this categorization lumps together what is foreign and what is provincial—as if both the foreign and the provincial shared a parochialism that is absent in a metropolis or its suburbs. I am, of course, being deliberately willful in this interpretation: surely practical considerations of postal distribution inspired this compartmentalization of mail to be distributed, but I suggest that these center-periphery models—concentric circles of concentration—may be found subliminally anywhere, even in theories of globalization(s). Yet an "intra-

worldly" theory of globalization must be deictically transparent, i.e., the centers must be everywhere and nowhere, or else they undermine the very hegemonies they seek to transcend.

Globalization and the Study of Literature

In the last decade, globalization has become one of the most popular topics for research, attracting analyses from political scientists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, ecologists, folklorists. Among the most active in this area of inquiry have been students and scholars of literature—particularly of English literature. Arjun Appadurai, an anthropologist, has observed that "the high ground has been seized by English literature (as a discipline) in particular and by literary studies in general." His observation is obviously tinged with at least a modicum of disapproval; in explaining this phenomenon, Apparudai writes:

> This is the nexus where the word *theory*, a rather prosaic term in many fields for many centuries, suddenly took on the sexy ring of a trend. For an anthropologist in the United States today, what is most striking about the past decade in the academy is the hijack of culture by literary studies—although we no longer have a one-sided Arnoldian gaze, but a many-sided hijack (where a hundred Blooms flower) . . . Social scientists look on with bewilderment as their colleagues in English and comparative literature talk (and fight) about matters that, until as recently as fifteen years ago, would have seemed about as relevant to English departments as say, quantum mechanics. (51)

This is more than a little ambivalent. Coupled with Appadurai's amazement, bordering on admiration ("the high ground has been seized . . ."), is a sense of indignation at the intellectual opportunism of literary scholars ("the hijack of culture by literary studies . . ."), to say nothing of a productivity that might be suspect ("a many-sided hijack

[where a hundred Blooms flower]").

One would not have thought that culture was the private enclave of anthropologists. There was a time—when the field was divided between physical and cultural anthropologists—when culture wasn't even the exclusive emphasis of all anthropologists. And as for literary studies "high-jacking" anthropological concerns, the actual situation is, if anything, the reverse. For almost twenty years, Clifford Geertz has argued for an essential hermeneutics of anthropology: from his *Interpretation of Culture* (1977), which "reads" culture as a text (in a way that Bakhtin would have approved), to his *Local Knowledge* (1985), which parallels Percy Lubbock's concern with "point of view" in *The Craft of Fiction*; to *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (1988), in which he develops the Barthian thesis of a "writerly" subjectivity in the work of such anthropologists as Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard. Geertz's *Myth, Symbol, and Culture* (1974) already adumbrated a distinctly literary approach to anthropology. Anyone trained in the discipline of literary studies will find Geertz's analyses strikingly familiar, except that he is talking about cultural texts rather than literary ones, and about anthropologists instead of novelists, poets, or dramatists.

Far from being "hijacked" by students of literature, anthropology has followed Geertz in adopting many of the analytical techniques of literary study: the concern with the "fictiveness" of experience, the awareness of narrative subjectivity, and the semiotic richness of reading fieldwork accounts which reflect as much about the observer as about what is being observed.

There is another reason that literary studies are an appropriate "high ground" from which to contemplate globalization. From chaos theory to history to psychology, literary tropes and literary theory have stimulated fecund insights: the "virtualness" of metaphor—its status as conditional, provisional truth; the importance of conceptual paradigms in determining thought and ideology; the fundamental notion of *poeisis*, of imaginary constructions relating to real experience—all these insights, familiar enough in literary study, are apposite in discussions of globalization and of culture as constructed imaginaries. Even the

phrase "global village" is a literary trope one which embodies at the same time a metaphor—"a village as large as the world"—and a chiasmus if not an oxymoron—"a village, by definition small, as comprehensive as the entire planet."

We have, to recall Jakobsen's useful distinctions, seen disciplines like political science and anthropology and folklore move from a metonymous consideration of the subject to a metaphoric one. "Things are not," Wallace Stevens reminded us, "what they appear on the blue guitar," and more of reality is the product if not the affect of illusion. Reality appears more illusional than actual experience, and actual experience seems more surreal than real. One needs only mention the O. J. Simpson trial, the Unabomber saga, the Timothy McVeigh attack on the Federal Building, and the Lewinsky affair to indicate how much of modern life (at least in the United States) resembles the Kafka of *Der Prozess*, the Herman Hesse of *Steppenwolf*, and the *Santa Barbara* of popular soap opera. More and more a proper understanding of what's happening in the world today requires an understanding of the rhetoric of illusion—so copiously reproduced in the media today that reputable journals like *The New Republic* and the *Washington Post* have published, even admired award-winning, journalism in which the "facts" have been fabricated. Even political scientists have to be familiar with Hollywood B-movies which, as the television newsmagazine *Sixty Minutes* demonstrated some years ago, formed the script for many of Ronald Reagan's "impromptu" speeches as President.

No, it is not that literary studies have hijacked globalization studies, but rather that events around the globe have come to resemble, more and more, literary texts. Analyses of global events are no longer convincing without the insights that literary studies have traditionally explored. Take, for example, the 1989 international symposium in upstate New York on globalization, subsequently published in a collection entitled *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System*. In her concluding reflections on the symposium Janet Wolff, an art historian and a feminist critic, praises the speakers for their civility and their openness, but she doesn't shy away from chiding them for failing to absorb the insights readily available in literary studies:

> For where they are all enthusiastic about the crossing of discipline boundaries within the social sciences, none of them has taken on the challenge of recent work in the humanities which provide a far more sophisticated analysis of cultural processes, texts and institutions. (King 166)

Whether the world is an illusion (as the Buddhists believe), merely illusory (as Hollywood, with its special effects, and the media with its phony "live" broadcasts would have us believe), or illusional (as in the case of sociopaths like Russel Eugene Weston, Jr. and John Hickman, Jr., or paranoiacs like Theodore Kaczynski and the teenagers who have taken to acting out their resentments by killing their classmates—like Stephen King's *Carrie*—by shooting their schoolmates), then clearly reality as a *ding an sich* does not make much sense anymore. When so much of reality is illusion, and virtual realities (from TV to video games to movies) occupy more and more of our time, the distinction between reality and unreality is no longer tenable. Sanity can no longer be defined as being "in touch with reality"—when so much of reality, at least in the United States, consists of "dreams coming true" or nightmares being played out in life, when being out of touch with reality can be a fulltime occupation, onanistic and destructive in the case of Theodore Kaczynski, imaginative and constructive in the case of Stephen Spielberg and his movies. So much of reality these days relates to the productive (and, alas, unproductive) use of illusion—*vide* Hollywood, Dreamworks productions, MTV, Disneyland, and a culture of hype that recommends that we "fake it until we make it."

We need a different understanding of the relationship between reality and illusion in a world now full of imaginaries. Reality and unreality are no longer mutually exclusive since one impinges, welcome or not, on the other. The "unreality" of a landing on the moon in the late sixties became the history event of subsequent decades, just as the "unreality" of the Holocaust must be revivified, made "real," through the "dreamwork" fabrication of *Schindler's List* to a generation of movie viewers otherwise ignorant about the annihilation of 6 million Jews. To deny the dialectical relationship between reality and unreality

in the former case is to ignore empirical fact. To deny that relationship in the case of the Holocaust—as skinheads and neo-Nazis do—is to border on the psychotic. Sanity cannot be defined any more as the mere ability to deal with the real, since so much reality is now constructed as an imaginary.

No discipline is better equipped than literary studies to analyze not only "lies like truth" (vicarious experiences), but also "truth like lies" ("life experiences stranger than fiction"), and to derive from them their real meaning as well as their subliminal significance. For in the study of fictive forms, which are true in their general meaning and false in their details, one learns to "read" the texts of different cultures duly sensitive to their compromised "objectivity." For globalization, properly approached from a global perspective, will always be compromised when addressed in a single language, even if and especially when one uses English, the language of world-wide business and (up to now) the dominant language on the Internet. As Stuart Hall has said: " . . . the driving powerhouse of . . . global mass culture . . . is centered in the West and it always speaks English" (King 28).

Terminology

Leaving aside the not inconsiderable difficulties of translation, one might begin with a consideration of certain familiar words that have undergone significant shifts in meaning, and embody often outmoded if not downright incorrect semantemes.

Let me begin with a real-life anecdote. Some years ago, a white Caucasian student who was born in Africa applied to Georgetown University Law Center for admission. On the application form, he checked the box marked "Black/African American." Georgetown admitted him; then, when he arrived on campus and they discovered that he was not a *black* African, they tried to rescind the acceptance. (His admission was subsequently reinstated, but understandably the applicant's interest in Georgetown had diminished and he enrolled at Notre Dame.)[4]

What this story indicates is the pernicious effect not only of

prejudice, or even of affirmative action, but of terminology which fails to capture the ambiguities and ambivalences of reality. A more personal example involves a newspaper article about me in connection with an intensive summer language institute I established at Indiana University which offered instruction in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. For the purposes of the article, it was appropriates that my origins as a Chinese be cited but I took issue with the reporter's identifying me as "a native of Hong Kong,"[5] because while I was born in Hong Kong and was a native in that sense, I was not raised in Hong Kong and was *not* native in the second sense. (By the same token, Alexander Hamilton was a West Indian, having been born in Jamaica—which is why he was ineligible to become President of the United States, the Constitution favoring citizenship by birth rather than upbringing.)

The question of what is "native" must be re-examined. There is an assumption of infinite indigenousness in the word "native" that simply does not apply to the growing proportion of the world's population which is deterritorialized. Even the concept of "native language" has been cast in doubt, certainly inapplicable in multilingual societies such as India where there is more than one "official language" or in Singapore, where the national language, English, coexists in the preponderant proportion of the population which learns Chinese as well. The notion of native is at the core of the visceral antipathy against immigrants worldwide—whether against the Chinese in Australia (Pauline Hanson), or against the Turkish *arbeiters* in Germany, or against the Koreans in Harlem. There is a pride of place in the native, who claims a priority over territory by virtue of long residence. But this argument can be stretched beyond what may be considered reasonable: if Israel can be assigned to the Jews because of their earlier centuries of residence, why are the Hispanics not equally justified in reclaiming the American Southwest, which they occupied before that territory became part of the United States? Language is often at the fulcrum of these anti-immigrant movements: the English-Only Movement in the U.S. is a reflection of an Anglo-first bias, as if the WASPS, by virtue of their descendancy from the Mayflower settlers, had the foremost claim to the country. Appadurai is right when he says: "The intense battles over

the English language and immigrant rights now heating up (again) in the United States are not just one more variant on the politics of pluralism: they are about the capability of American politics to contain the diasporic politics of Mexicans in Southern California, Haitians in Miami, Colombians in New York, and Koreans in Los Angeles" (11). Indeed, the notion of "the native" is primordial and pre-modern: "it is the widespread appearance of various kinds of diasporic public spheres," Appadurai insists, "that constitute one special diacritic of the global modern."

At the other end of the etymological spectrum is the word "naturalization"—surely the most illogical yet familiar modern bureaucratic invention. "Naturalization," if taken literally as "returning to a state of nature by effort" represents an obvious oxymoron. In its figurative meaning, "naturalization" describes a process by which a nation-state inducts foreigners into its citizenry. What it signifies is a process of ideological indoctrination, allegiance to a country not by birth or merely by long residence but by political apprenticeship. More and more people are being "naturalized" (which is why, among other factors, the resistance to immigration is hardening).

But it is the use of the word "traditional" as a static marker of periodization, creating an ontological gap that foregrounds the modern, that most misleads. The invention of "presentists" with a simplistic view of history which ignores the dialectical relationship between past and future, even the "modern" can be conceived of as traditional. There is, indeed, nothing that is not traditional, if one defines the term as a "continuing development of culture over time." Harold Rosenberg's *Tradition of the New* touched, in part, on modernism's special claim on, and its particular concern with, the novel. But even preferences for the new are tainted by obsolescence, and what was once considered new becomes dated: nothing escapes the ravages of time. The freshness and immediacy of a photograph wanes very quickly, even if the paper does not yellow. The contextualization of the *tout neuf* is poignantly doomed to datedness. The best one can say about what was once thought new, and is now not so objectionably old, is to call it a "classic," by which one means that what was for one time is also for yet another time.

There is a difference between being against something outdated and being against something traditional; both the outdated and the continually fresh are traditional. That which is long-standing and which persists is as traditional as customs and styles long abandoned. Perdurability is as much a part of tradition as ephemerality. It is the peculiar myopia of modernists—deriving often from historical ignorance—to overlook the reminder of *Ecclesiastes* that "there is nothing new under the sun." The *fauves* were thought to be radically modern, but not, presumably, to the Africans whose traditional art-forms were exploited. Christians refer unblinkingly to the Old and New Testament, but the Jews do not characterize the Torah as Old. The *Pont Neuf* (New Bridge) dates from 1604—one of the oldest bridges in Paris; and the "New-style regulated poetry" in Chinese dates from at least the seventh century. And how old "New Criticism" looks now—barely fifty years after. When, on the rare occasion when something old is preferred to the new, as with Coke, the Coca Cola Company reversed its decision to abandon the product: it simply christened the old Coke as "Classic Coke."

Part of the difficulty, as we shall see, is the western penchant to see time as unidirectional—Time's arrow is irreversible. The model of the past as being behind and of the future as being ahead is not always inevitable as a metaphor for past and future; some cultures reverse the directions and see the past as an open book that sits before one's eyes and the future as unseeable and therefore reasonably imagined as being behind. Indeed, the implicit paradigm behind the-past-is-behind-the-future-is-ahead view of things makes no sense if one imagines a stationary point-of-view, but it is logical if one assumes a vantage point that proceeds forward. Only in that sense can the past, which one has seen, be imagined as behind, and the future, which one can't as yet see, as ahead. But even this model impends toward the future because it assumes the future lies before one's eyes, in full view, and that what is in full view, presumably the present, is implicitly already past. This metaphor that we live by is a constructed fiction which "naturalizes" an impossibility—that we can see into the future.

Science fiction has increased its audience ever since Jules Verne

invented the genre. But in the last two decades it seems to be everywhere, marked by key episodes in the television serial "Star Trek" in its various transmogrifications in film as well, in the landmark "2001" (which now must suffer the same fate as 1984 and be considered passé) and in the two *Back to the Future* films and countless imitations. These fictions pose metaphysical problem: how much freedom can one have in the present if the future is predictable, and is already predetermined? (This is the modernist version of an age-old philosophical conundrum between free-will and determinism.)

But these notions of time as unilinear presuppose that the past cannot influence the future and the future cannot influence the past. If one talks not about dispassionate events but about willed ambitions, anticipatory precautions, imaginaries of past and of the future, nothing, of course, can be further from the truth. Insurance companies have made, and continue to make, money out of the notion that one can act in the present in such a way as to influence the future. The problem with these essentialisms of the past and of the future is, at bottom, the same problematic we find in modern notions of tradition as discrete, identifiable entifiable. If one compares tradition to a river then the modern use of the word, defining it as something that can be routinely rejected or destroyed, is tantamount to calling the waters upriver traditional and the waters downriver modern. To the post-modernist it has already become clear that modernism is already part of the tradition, and it will soon become clear, if it hasn't already, that post-modernism is merely the most recent development to become *passé*. In both the neutral, literal sense of the word and in the pejorative of slang, post-modernism is already "becoming history."

"Globalization" as a concept has a similar slipperiness. Initially, it referred to extending beyond national or continental domains into arenas that encompassed the world, whether in commercial markets, financial transactions, political interactions or cultural diffusions. Of late, however, this concept has been modified to refer to a more complex phenomenon, whereby the global and the local are not so much juxtaposed as polar opposites, mutually exclusive factors, as they are intermelded to become co-present: Albrow, in a felicitous phrase,

refers to them as "paradoxical dualities." "Globalization is a contradictory process," Ronald Axtmann writes; it "is fostering manifestations of a global consciousness that conceives of the world as one place," but at the same time "there are strong pressures toward the assertion of regional autonomy, localism, and local identities" (50). Stuart Hall maintains that " . . . what we usually call the global, far from being something which, in a systematic fashion, rolls over everything, creating similarity, in fact works through particularity, negotiates particular spaces, particular ethnicities, works through mobilizing particular identities" (62). "So there is always a dialectic, a continuous dialectic," Hall concludes, "between the local and the global."

This second form of "globalization," one that implicates both the global and the local, I should like to nominalize as "globalization" and the ideology that perceives the dialectical relationship between the global and the local as "glocalism." Emphasizing the global to the exclusion of the local and the local to the exclusion of the global misprizes the dialectical realities involved. When realities outstrip the vocabulary used to describe them, it is time to develop new terms: if the shoe does not fit, the logical course is to change the shoe rather than "shoe-horn" the foot. "I recognize the barrenness of the binary opposition 'global/local,'" Amitava Kumar admits, adding that "The strict divisions between global and local collapse: To see the two terms calling each other into crisis . . . only calls for a persistent critique of practices that would exclude either term from discussion" (223, 224). The discussions of globalization will be forever making something chimerical of something concrete, creating false entifications of an essentialist notion of "global" and of "local."

Paradigm Shifts

Even more serious because less noticed are the inherent presumptions entailed by most discussions of globalization. For the moment let me describe these presumptions as paradigmatic axioms, which have the character of being persuasive even when they are unproven. The first such presumption I call "serial thinking," the as-

sumption of a linear sequence in the development of events. This logic, exacerbated by chronological terms like "pre-modern," "modern" and "postmodern," demonstrates a theory of history that is premised but never proven. Its persuasiveness, however, is so subtle that one rarely, if ever, challenges the model of history it offers. By building in temporal markers such as "pre-" and "post-" a historical sequence is automatically posited, and all that remains is to fill in what follows each temporal prefix, and what is to stand, mediately, between them. There is a "narcissism of modernity" (Albrow 2) in these formulations, as if previous ages had no teleological motive other than preparing for the modern, and subsequent periods will have nothing to do but to feel nostalgia about the demise of the modern. This neatly compartmentalizes history, and makes all periods indexically relevant in proportion to their proximity to the now. It is an attitude that is particularly apposite for a solipsistic era. Albrow puts it well: "If everything new is by definition modern then it cannot grasp its own end as the beginning of a new epoch. Far from modernity giving history its full dignity, it deprives the past of any meaning except as its own continuation, or else chaos" (9).

There are two possible fallacies inherent in these positions: one, that historical sequence is a meaningful reality, and two, that the present moment is always more important than the moment before or the moment after. At the end and the beginning of a new millennium these notions of an emphatic present are inescapable, despite the fact that the end of the first millennium and the beginning of the second millennium after Christ (995-1005) do not rank in history as among the most crucial years of that era.

The pre-/post-way of looking at history implants a sense of causality that may mirror the mind's pattern of comprehension, but which is not always warranted by the historical facts. It is a way to make a story out of history for a reader who is placed at the center of the story. However widespread and generally accepted it might be it is, nevertheless, a representation. The model offers what I would consider pseudo-explanations that, in some ways, beg more than one question. To the question, "How did the modern come about?" the implicit an-

swer is, "The modern was created by the pre-modern." And if one should wonder how the modern period concluded, the answer would be that it was finished off by the post-modern. These are, needless to say, pseudo-explanations. I'm reminded of an insight that Gilbert Highet offered many years ago in his critique of the Romantic period as a rejection of the Neo-classic period in English literature: he showed that Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Byron did not reject the classics; they were, in fact, as "neo-classical" as the writers of the previous generation, which they had presumably overthrown, except that it was the Greeks and not the Romans who inspired the Romantics. This vision of events may not be as conveniently categorical as the usual mantras about the revolutionary character of the Romantics, but its insights accord more accurately with the evidence of history and with the testimony of the texts themselves.

A case could be made that each era in history thought itself modern, considers itself—quite understandably—as "the latest thing": what characterizes "modernity" is that, unlike other generations, it deluded itself into thinking that its "modernity" was unique and cataclysmic. Part of this stems from an impatience with, as well as an ignorance of, history. Part also derives, as we suggested earlier, from its identification with the new and the novel. Not all eras have denigrated the past as much as the so-called modern period.

A case in point is the oft-cited Hegelian postulate: thesis-antithesis-synthesis. That simple logical triumvirate is perhaps the most powerful explanatory syllogism of modern times. But this formulation presupposes a causal sequence and promotes a logic which embodies opposition as the only heuristic, and compromise the only solution. By etymological sleight of hand, since synthesis must presuppose the entifications to be amalgamated, Hegel's mode of thinking inures those who use it into assuming that entifications must first appear before oppositions or syncretisms can emerge. But supposing that congeries, conglomerations and concatenations—in a word, syntheses—pre-exist, and that they are followed by dissolutions, dismantlements, and disaggregations—in a phrase, by theses and antitheses—then one can reverse Hegel's dialectic. Indeed, the scenarios of Yugo-

slavia and its Bosnian separatisms; of Northern Ireland, all Christian but fanatically sectarian; of the Soviet Union and its now independent republics—not to mention at a domestic level the breakup in the United States of the nuclear family—would seem to suggest that, if Hegel's dialectic applies at all these days, it is more applicable in reverse.

Still, it is the seriality of the syllogism that is suspect, because it assumes linear causes rather than concurrent enabling factors. Cancer research, it appears, has recognized that finding the cause of the disease poses the wrong question: there is no single cause. What research has shown is that the co-presence of various agents and conditions can lead to, or inhibit, malignancies, that there is no billiard-ball causality in the development of pathogens. Similarly, chaos theory has abandoned classical causal explanations of phenomena for more probabilistic scenarios: it is only by recognizing co-presence, contingency and concurrency that events can be explained.

Hegel's dialectic was a dialectic of causality, a determinism which attracted Marx; the inevitability of dialectical materialism was undeniable to any Marxist in good faith.[7]But the events of 1989, and the collapse of Communism and of Marxist states throughout the world (except for Cuba and China), would seem to offer empirical proof of the falsity of the serial dialectic that Hegel assumed. (Even Cuba and China cannot be offered as convincing counterexamples affirming Marx's theory of dialectical materialism.)

What may be emerging as a more persuasive heuristic model is a dialectic of concurrency. Consider the following expositions.

In discussing the politics of the assimilation of "minorities," Immanuel Wallerstein writes:

> So just as there is a dialectic of creating simultaneously a homogenous world and distinctive national cultures within this world, so there is a dialectic of creating simultaneously homogeneous national cultures and distinctive ethnic groups or "minorities" within these nation-states . . . the states have played opposite roles in the two contradictions. In the one case, they have used their force to create cultural

> diversity, and in the other case to create cultural uniformity. This has made the states the most powerful cultural force in the modern world and the most schizophrenic. (King 99)

This exposition, in its emphasis on simultaneity and on schizophrenia (used not as a pejorative but as an ontological principle: cf. *Anti-Oedipus* by Deleuze and Guattari), exemplifies the heuristic of a dialectic of concurrence.

In trying to explain incendiary ethnic outbursts, Arjun Appadurai offers this prescription, in which he recommends that we:

> resist the inner-outer dialectic imposed on us by the primordialist way of thinking and think instead in terms of the dialectics of implosion and explosion over time as the key to the peculiar dynamics of modern ethnicity. (157)

Appadurai's reference to a "primordialist way of thinking" refers to the pseudo-explanation of attributing ethnic violence to a reversion to tribalism, a regression in the progress of cultures from communities to civilizations—yet another form of one-way serial logic which cannot help but patronize the "less developed" cultures in the world.

The dialectics of concurrence can also be found in the following analysis of new congeries of music by Janet Abu-Lughod:

> From an ethnocentric point of view, what *we* tend to see is the westernization of oriental music, but I would like to propose an alternative diagnosis. What we are seeing is the orientalization of western music . . . it is a two-way street. (King 133)

The emphasis here is not on the identification of mutually exclusive entities but on the interaction of different cultural contents. The dialectics are not serial but multiplex: both simultaneous and multiple.

The trouble with the research that stems from traditional area studies programs in the United States, especially with regard to Asia,

lies precisely in similarly narrow one-way conceptions of historical phenomena. "China's Response to the West," "Japanese Influences on French Painting," "The Westernization of the Asian Economy"—these rather familiar concerns are typical of the serial paradigm implicit in the "stimulus-response" conceptualizations of reality, as if whole cultures were, like Pavlov's dog, responding by reflex to historical impulses. They clearly reflect the process(es) of history as a series of billiard-ball chain reactions and thus manifest in scientistic form Edward Said's "orientalism."

The "inevitability" of hegemony and the means of avoiding it derive from the same problematic: the serial and unidirectional paradigm behind our analyses of power. The master-slave, male-female, abuser-abused models seem to validate the conception of power as a single force directed always from source to target. But surely power relations are more complex than that, and if one can speak of the hidden hegemonies of power one can also recognize the devious designs in self-victimization. In the United States, the blame put on hegemonies is so complete that no one accepts responsibility any more for one's own actions. Personal failure is always attributed not to personal shortcomings but to the irresistible hegemonies of one's circumstances. Power and its exercise can also be analyzed as a "two-way" street, a lesson particularly important in the tutorials in democracy that the West, particularly the United States, is offering the rest of the world. Power may be seized, but it can also just as well be ceded. The dynamics of power involves not merely seizures but also concessions, or else notions of "empowerment"—to say nothing of the pragmatics of democracy—become a romantic fiction.

The notion of concurrency, of simultaneous rather than serial processing, has now become familiar enough even in the analytical digital world with the advent of parallel processing for the computer programmer, and multitasking for the computer user. Doing one thing at a time, given the pressures on our schedules and the multiplicity of tasks to be undertaken, is very rarely possible nowadays, and concentration is no longer defined as focus on a single task. Stock, currency, and futures traders process an enormous amount of information con-

currently, but this ability to juggle more than one job at a time has long been familiar to the traditional housewife, who performed several tasks at once. (For modern women, who try to handle a career and a family, the demands are even more exigent.) The problem with the concept of "hegemony" is that it is simplistic and ultimately deterministic: there is an inherent fallacy in its logic. If one can be empowered by recognizing and exposing hidden hegemonies, then are these hegemonies as incredibly devious as they are purported to be?

To cite but one instance of the "dialectics of concurrency" from literature, would be assumed that Shakespeare, one of the indisputable treasures of the English language, would contribute much to any culture that performed his plays, but it isn't as often recognized that the value of Shakespeare has been enhanced by the translation (and mistranslation) of his plays into other cultures. The now famous article by Laura Bohannon, entitled "Milching Mallecho," is merely one instance of a culturally re-contextualized reading of *Hamlet*; Akira Kurosawa's uncanny adaptation of *Macbeth* changed the setting from medieval Scotland to medieval Japan in *Throne of Blood*; and *The Tempest* has recently been performed with remarkable vitality in the actual precincts only imagined in the text—an island in the new world, in Cuba. In 1981, I saw a production of *Measure for Measure* in Beijing (called *Qin Jun Ru Weng*), directed by a Western director, with a Chinese cast garbed in Elizabethan rather than Italian costumes. The crux of the plot—whether to barter one's chastity for one's principles—is hardly imaginable any more in the United States, where chastity is not always jealously guarded. Yet, in the China after the Cultural Revolution, the play was an apt parable for hypocrisy and political piety that rang only too true to the Chinese audience. As I watched this bizarre but fascinating performance, it occurred to me that China—with its puritanical mores—may be one of the few places on earth today where *Measure for Measure* could be performed in earnest, without snickering. James Ivory's early film, *Shakespeare Wallah,* also deserves mention as another significant derivative of Shakespeare, capturing the culture of a troupe of expatriate actors in India.

These ethnographic legacies are, in their way, important testimo-

ny the continuing value of the Bard as a world author. It would be unfortunate if Shakespearean scholarship were confined only to historical textual studies and took no notice of his enormous influence throughout the world. To follow Janet Abu-Lughod's lead, what is involved here is not merely a "Shakespearianization" of indigenous cultures but a sinicization, a Japanification, a Cubanization, and an Indianization of Shakespeare. Cultural artifacts have this reciprocal dynamism and are not inert billiard balls bouncing off each other unchanged; they are malleable and organic constructs that take their shape and their meaning from interactions with other cultural artifacts.

Such instances of reciprocal influence exemplify a dialectics of concurrence rather than a dialectics of causality, the assumptions of which are what restricted earlier influence studies. They show that earlier conceptions of the disseminations of literature into other cultures, partially compromised by a dubious ontology of translation, embodied erroneously a one-way Time's Arrow conception of literary activity. From Marius-François Guyard to Anna Balakian to Claudio Guillen, literary influence has been viewed as diachronically transitive rather than understood as synchronically copulative.

The Dialectics of a Global Reality

How are we to establish a non-hegemonic model of globalism and globalization? What might be the augurs for a non-ethnocentric perspective on the world? How do we puzzle out what Appadurai calls "a bewildering palimpsest of highly local and highly translocal considerations" (198)? There are many who would agree with Martin Albrow when he says, "We are at one of those moments when we have to recognize that our ideas have stayed still too long and we need a new beginning" (2). "These processes of globalization," Ronald Axtmann insists, "challenge us to reconceptualize the social world in which we live" (Cvetkovich 51).

The answers come from different sources: " . . . we need a theory of culture at the level of the international," Janet Wolff says, "which is sensitive to the ways in which identity is constructed and represented in

culture and in social relations" (King 172). "The only strategy which makes any sense for progressive forces worldwide," Samir Amin tells us, "must be incorporated into the building of a 'polycentric' world. . . ." (Golding 22); Roland Axtmann (paraphrasing Cerny) reminds us that "we move into a plurilateral world of diffused and decentralized power, into a world characterized by a variety of different loci of power and cross-cutting and intersecting power networks" (Cvetkovich 51).

In addition, we need to revisit our vocabulary as well as our attitude to ward otherwise familiar words. In the "modern" era, particularly as exemplified by the United States, "new" is preferred over "old," yet the "old" continues to be relevant. In China, the most spectacular discoveries have been of things that are millennia old. We need to explore different modalities of thought, not merely the Cartesian mindset that has brought us new technology. There is a concern, expressed by "third world" specialists like Richard Vincent, that the management of the news and the control of the technology of communication preponderantly in the hands of the West will inevitably produce a western bias globally (Golding 178ff). There is also a danger that a Western education, so zealously sought after in many developing countries, may have the net effect of implanting western paradigms of thought (Golding 192). We need to develop a concurrently dialectical mindset, neither blithely asserting western prejudices as universal nor insouciantly reinforcing those prejudices by merely attacking them—as if westerners were the only people with prejudices.

As I am writing these lines in France, I cannot resist a "presentist" indulgence, and recall a recent World Cup soccer competition. In some ways the competition, like the Olympics, is a simulacrum of armed conflicts between nations. That there were some fans—German and English—who behaved like hooligans reminds us forcibly that Samuel Johnson's aphorism is as true in sports as it is in politics: "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." There are loyal citizens and there are national socialists. But there were two outcomes that stuck out. The first was the game between the U.S. and Iran, which Iran won. What was dreaded as an ugly confrontation turned out to be a happy recon-

ciliation between the players, representing the people of the two countries and refusing to enact the hostilities of their governments. The United States team, by losing graciously, gained much more than if they had won. And the Iranian team, by winning graciously, won far more than a game: they won the respect and admiration of the rest of the world. The game was not about hegemonies—force, superiority, domination—but about harmonies—balance, perspective, mutual respect.

The second outcome was the final game between France and Brazil. Of these two most successful teams, one, represented the most multicultural country in the world and the other fielded a team with citizens from different parts of the globe. There was no question which team had the better individual talent, but Brazil lost to the better *team*. Perhaps there is a significance in the fact—all too implausible if it occurred in fiction—that the team that most resembled the world won the World Cup. "Teamwork," incidentally, is yet another example, perhaps the most useful, of a dialectics of concurrency, where outstanding individuals abnegate themselves in favor of a collective cause.

Perhaps these outcomes are auguries of the future; certainly there can be no better parables with which to end the twentieth century and to begin the twenty-first.

NOTES

[1] A particularly noteworthy instance of this "presentism" is the failure of computer programmers to foresee even twenty years into the future which is why, as the millennium came to an end, there was a Y2K problem of epidemic proportions. (What is surprising is how little attention has been paid to the Macintosh computers for which there was no Y2K problem: at least the designers of the chips used in the Macintosh were—blessedly—not "presentists"!)

[2] That this notion is hardly new can be seen in the citation of Hugh of St. Victor, which I have treated in my essay, "Tianya—The Ends of the Earth or the Edge of Heaven: Comparative Literature at the *Fin de sièle*," forthcoming in *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in*

Chinese Comparative Literature, edited by Yingjin Zhang (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 218-32.

[3] The recurrent famines in Sudan may stem, in part, precisely from its inappropriate borders: Jim Hoagland, in the *International Herald-Tribune* for July 29, 1998 (p. 8) writes, "Could famine exist in Sudan on a regular basis because Sudan exists in the geographic and political form created by colonial authorities . . . ?" "What if Sudan as it exists today is a historical mistake? . . . " Hoagland asks, "What if there was suddenly a meaningful recognition that in Sudan and elsewhere colonial authorities shoe-horned together for their own reasons peoples who do not have a common national destiny or even an interest in living together peacefully?"

[4] *The Washington Times*, July 13, 1994.

[5] *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 35 (48): A27-A28, Aug 9, 1989.

[6] For reasons of euphony, I prefer "glocalization" and "glocalism" to their alternatives, "lobalization" and "lobalism."

[7] Martin Albrow writes, "Historical materialism, as Marx and Engels developed it, contained at its heart a theory of historical epochs or periods. It depicted the succession from the ancient world to the medieval, from medieval to modern. It made no attempt to challenge what were by then the generally accepted periods of European history" (15).

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