

THE AGENDA OF GLOBALISATION

John Tomlinson

In May of 1997 I spoke at a conference organised by the Geography Department of the University of Reading. The conference was given the provocative – but in retrospect, alas, rather presumptuous – title: ‘After Globalisation’. Rumours of its demise were, as the saying goes, somewhat exaggerated. But with the indulgence of hindsight encouraged by this issue’s theme, we can recognise a broader cultural and intellectual assumption at work. Globalisation was, indeed, the buzz-word of the 1990s, just as postmodernism was the intellectual vogue of the 1980s, and so it seemed not unreasonable to speculate, as the decade advanced, on what would follow. And however banal the historical assumptions involved, there is a dimension of cultural reality that corresponds to this sort of periodisation.

Academic publishing, for example, tracked the trajectory of the concept from its early stirrings – not much really before Mike Featherstone’s collection *Global Culture* and Anthony Giddens’s *Consequences of Modernity* both in 1990 – through a boom period in the mid-to-late decade – let’s just take Manuel Castells’s three volumes *The Information Age* (1996, 1997, 1998) as the example – to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s neo-Marxist intervention *Empire* (2000) seeming to some to mark a degree of critical ‘closure’ at the decade’s end.¹ Commissioning editors are skilled at riding a wave, and it seemed at one point that the word ‘globalisation’ in a title was both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the acceptance of a manuscript. But editors are also restless cultural entrepreneurs, constantly scanning the horizon for the next undulation to build and gather momentum. Like any other commodity, the literature of globalisation has its shelf-life.

Well, this is no doubt a rather shallow indicator of the cultural impact of globalisation. It does scant justice to the complex processes that intellectuals were beginning to perceive and conceptually to shape during the nineties. Nevertheless, academic publishing, as an aspect of the culture industry of our time, is an integral part of the globalisation process, and the wave-like rhythm of this mediatisation is something to which I will return. Indeed, I will suggest that the reflexive relationship between the ‘substance’ of globalisation and its mediatisation deserves our particular attention. This discussion will be the last of three approaches by which I will attempt to understand at least some aspects of the agenda that was established under the heading of globalisation in the final decade of the twentieth century.

1 EVENT, PROCESS, PERIOD

Unlike postmodernism, globalisation theory was, in essence, a direct

1. Mike Featherstone, *Global Culture*, London, Sage, 1990; Manuel Castells, *The Information Age*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, 1997, 1998; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard UP, 2000.

conceptual response to events. The iconoclasm of postmodern theory lay in its preoccupation with epistemological and ontological meta-propositions and its suspicion of the historical grand narrative. At heart, then, in its 'anti-foundationalism', it consisted of a set of self-denying ordinances. Subtle – even obsessively so – in its interrogation of discursive strategies, decisive in its critique of some of the more complacent attitudes of western modernity, postmodern theory was actually rather poor at describing contemporary social and cultural reality. Who now can point – except, perhaps, for one or two idiosyncratic buildings – to any convincing examples of postmodern cultural artefacts, events or experiences?

By contrast, globalisation theory – relatively indifferent to the scruples over subjectivity, discursive position, and the status of description that haunted postmodernism – was a much more robust, even rough and ready, project. Not that it failed to develop its own meta-theories: time-space distanciation, the structured articulation of the particular with the universal, the network society.² Nor did it lack iconoclasm: in its implications for the tacit equation between society and nation-state, or in the challenge of cultural hybridity to conventional notions of cultural boundaries, for obvious examples. But it was probably never either self-consciously theoretically ambitious nor deliberately bent on pulling the rug from under established positions. Globalisation theory simply confronted the rather obvious inadequacy – once you came to think about it – of some key intellectual assumptions about a social, economic and cultural world that was rapidly revealing its complicated and dynamic interconnectedness.

Another way of putting this is to say that it is the empirical reality – as focused in certain emblematic events – which is the most interesting aspect of globalisation. If the theory of globalisation has been largely inductive, or else parasitic on other debates – most notably the debate over modernity – this is understandable. The events themselves have been driving the process, and theorists, chastened (perhaps with the exception of Hardt and Negri) by the failures of previous theoretical edifice building, have been in a responsive mode, feeling their way.

What may be interesting, then, is to explore the relationship of key 'globalisation events' to interpretations of the globalisation process within the period of the 1990s. This is not to pose the question of why (or whether) the nineties were the 'decade of globalisation'. (Though what this might mean beyond the historically banal game of decade labelling is something I will return to.) Rather, it is to try to tease out from within this artificial – though not arbitrary – time-frame, something of the way in which underlying dynamics of globalisation have been inferred from the interpretation of complex events.

Rather than being bound, slavishly, by precise calendrical detail, we can take as co-ordinates two events which lie just outside the nineties themselves: the fall of the Berlin wall and the associated collapse of the majority of the Eastern Bloc communist regimes in 1989, and the attack on the World Trade

2. See respectively Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity, 1990; R. Robertson, *Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London, Sage, 1992; and Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996.

Centre in New York in 2001. Let us say, so as not to seem too perverse in this choice, that these events roughly 'frame' the decade.

Both events were of course immense collapses: both real and symbolic capitulations of the historical givens of the twentieth century to huge, apparently unpredictable and irresistible forces. And to forces which, moreover, fanned out from their initial impact into further chains of events. How were these forces to be interpreted as the forces of globalisation?

There seem to me to be two main contending trajectories of interpretation involved. The first invokes a robust logic of global capitalist expansion. The second traces a rather more obscure dynamic of modernity attaching to the linked notions of spatial compression, social and technological mobility and deterritorialisation, and a consequent intensification of struggles over cultural identity.

According to the first interpretation, the collapse of communism was a reaction to a step change in the global advance of capitalism. The increasing power and integration of the global capitalist market made it impossible for the control economies of the Eastern bloc to survive outside of this indisputably dominant world system. The capitulation of these political regimes – in the most extraordinary wave of depositions: Hungary, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania – was, of course, most immediately due to internal pressures for liberalisation across both the political and the economic spheres. But the impetus towards this undoubtedly lay in a combination of the external economic forces which were rapidly undermining the economic bases of these countries, and the demonstration, via a globalising media, of the attractions of western consumer culture ineluctably associated with both capitalism and democratic liberalism. Traced back, then, the heroic popular politics of this year of revolutions revealed structural sources, which rather ironically, confirmed the Marxian thesis of economic determination 'in the final instance'. The subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the mass privatisation of state-run industry in Russia that followed, seemed to confirm this interpretation. And the case of China was no real exception. True, Tiananmen in 1989 had demonstrated that this regime's massive bureaucratic and military bulk was not so easily to be toppled. But the rapid economic liberalisation that followed in China throughout the nineties confirmed – not least in the official epithets that sanctioned the introduction of the free market, the 'Open-Door Policy' and 'Chinese Characteristic Socialism' – the de facto triumph even here of globalised capitalism.

None of these examples, of course, lend unambiguous support for the *benefits* of the capitalist way. But this was never the key issue, and the subsidiary thesis of the 'uneven impact' of the spread of globalising capitalism could account for the contrast between, say, the disastrous instabilities of Russian capitalism and the (thus far) relatively controlled transition of China. The point is that, for good or ill, it was the globalisation of capitalism that was judged, on this interpretation, the overwhelming transformative force. The

vulnerability of even well-established capitalist economies like that of the UK to 'massive turbulence on the international currency markets' – to quote Chancellor Norman Lamont's resonant description of 'Black Wednesday' 1994 – seemed to confirm that the only globalisation that really counts is economic globalisation.

And this view was, pretty much, that of the 'anti-globalisation movement' which emerged in the mid-decade and helped to define the phenomenon in the media's imagination. What gave form to this diverse collection of eco-political, human rights, anti-corporate, developmental and other activists was, particularly, the focus on opposition to the establishment of the World Trade Organisation in 1995. The famous anti-globalisation protests of the late nineties – set-piece media events staged against WTO, G8 and other summits in Seattle, Prague, Genoa and elsewhere – seemed to connect seamlessly with the May-day anti-capitalist demonstrations in financial centres like London. Globalisation as a force to be resisted became indistinguishable from global corporate capitalism.

However, even as these different events were unfolding, this forceful one-dimensional story began to show signs of inadequacy. The repercussions of the fall of Eastern European communism, most obvious in the former Yugoslavia, clearly demonstrated that forces other than global capitalism were in play. The bloody conflicts in Croatia (1991-2), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-5) and Kosova (1998-9) could not, even on the narrowest of interpretations, be judged as the fall-out from an exclusively political-economic process. What the 'opening up' of globalisation meant in this context was the unleashing of violent cultural forces – ethnic/nationalist factionalism – which had been, apparently, artificially contained under the communist federal regime. The rapid disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation revealed deep divisions in cultural and religious identities – Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, ethnic Albanians, Christians and Muslims – which became inflamed into what Mary Kaldor has aptly called the 'new wars' of the era of globalisation.

These new conflicts – what Kaldor describes as 'a mixture of war, crime and human rights violations'³ – are to be distinguished from the 'old wars' which modern nation-states periodically fight over territorial, geopolitical and economic goals. Kaldor's analysis relates 'new wars' to the process of globalisation in a number of ways. For example, they occur in the context of the erosion of nation-state structures and the monopoly of legitimate violence associated with them; they involve a whole range of international agencies beyond the contending parties – from the UN and a range of NGOs to mercenary troops, military advisers and the international media. But most significantly, these 'globalisation wars' are fought around a vicious, particularistic form of 'identity politics' in which, 'movements ... mobilize around ethnic, racial or religious identity for the purpose of claiming state power'.⁴

The assertion of, and the struggle over, cultural identity, then, is at the

3. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, Cambridge, Polity, 1999, p11.

4. *Ibid.*, p76.

core of the second dynamic of globalising modernity. The world at the end of the second millennium seemed, on this view, much less one of uniform capitalist ascendancy than of 'pressed-together dissimilarities variously arranged'.⁵ This trajectory of interpretation gathers in a different catalogue of events: most particularly the rise of Islam on the international agenda. From the Gulf War, through the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to the Muslim-Christian dimension of the war in Kosova, the so-called cultural clash between the Islamic and Western 'worlds' became a familiar backdrop to events. Within this context, the seemingly 'anti-modern' proclivities of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan also attracted sporadic attention: their illiberal and regressive policies towards women, the banning of various forms of media and communications technologies, the destruction, on apparently fundamentalist-dogmatic grounds, of the 'world treasure' of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. And there was, from time to time, a passing reference to Osama Bin Laden and the Al Quaida network.

The shock of September 11, then, might be understood as the result of an underestimation of this second dynamic of globalising modernity – the (literally) explosive power of identity politics. Of course there is some plausibility in an interpretation of the attack in terms of the symbolic equation between America and global capitalism: the actual target was, after all, the World Trade Centre. But what wrong-footed the anti-globalisation movement – what made it impossible for them to regard this as instructive – was something apart from the sheer, awful, scale of the destructive violence. It was the inescapable association of the perpetrators with an ideology that, though it may have been (spectacularly) anti-capitalist, was in no other way compatible with the liberal, universalising tendency of the broad spectrum of anti-globalisationists. The globalisation that Al Quaida was pledged to destroy, it rather uncomfortably emerged, was not the neatly delineated institutional framework of the capitalist market: indeed, its resources were, apparently, dependent on financial dealings within this very market. The attack – no way to dodge the issue – was aimed at a cultural totality which included a whole cluster of liberal, secular practices and values close to the core of the western-modern imagination. Here was one universalism – one story of the right, the good, the one way to live – violently asserting itself against another.

The western – let us be precise, the American – response to this was a predictably crude reassertion of its military-technological superiority which effortlessly, with ridiculously disproportionate force, flattened the Taliban regime, but which failed entirely to address, let alone find a resolution to, the underlying cultural issues. And to say that these *are* fundamentally cultural issues is not to endorse anything like Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996).⁶ Clearly the sources of anti-Western and anti-American sentiment that exist in many parts of the world – and not just the Islamic world – have to be understood in terms of the material – the political and economic – inequalities of globalisation. That is, of the experience of life

5. Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2000, p226.

6. Samuel Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, Free Press, 1996.

lived as one of the 'globalisation losers' in actual or mediated proximity with – and sharply aware of lines of culpability traceable to – the 'globalisation winners'. But the point is that such sentiments tend to be framed within complex life narratives which also constitute cultural identities.

The young Muslim men who are schooled in a particular, narrow interpretation of Islam in the religious schools of Afghanistan or Pakistan, or who are growing up to see the West as their enemy in the siege territories of Gaza and the West Bank, are not somehow *essentially* fundamentalist in their makeup. Their beliefs are not inexplicable cultural anachronisms – bizarre survivals of medievalism in a modern world. They are intelligible in terms of a certain – I would argue entirely global-modern – experience of that world framed within a powerful story of belonging. So we surely need to ask questions about the context of everyday life – its miseries, its injustices – that makes such a worldview so compelling and so dangerous. And, moreover, if we are to understand this, we have to struggle against our own assured, taken-for-granted worldviews: the sort of Western universalism that cannot conceive of the possibility that large sections of the world – whilst being entirely rational – fail to share our secular vision of the good life of liberal-individualist capitalist consumption.

One dimension of globalisation, then, that deserves attention is its relationship with the generation and, as I shall argue in the following section, the *proliferation* of cultural identities, and the expression of these identities in terms of contending universalisms.

2 MOVEMENT, IDENTITY, UNIVERSAL

It is fair to say that the impact of globalisation in the cultural sphere has, most generally, been associated with the *loss* of identity. This view tends to interpret globalisation as a seamless extension of – indeed as a euphemism for – western cultural imperialism. Globalisation, so this story goes, has swept like a flood tide through the world's manifold and discrete cultures, destroying stable localities, displacing peoples, bringing a market-driven, 'branded' homogenisation of cultural experience, thus obliterating the differences between locality-defined cultures which had constituted our identities.

Without rehearsing all the problems with this position,⁷ it is worth noting the implicit conception of 'cultural identity' – a vexed notion to begin with – that it entails. Cultural identity, when conceived as something that is fragile and vulnerable to social and economic forces – that requires policies of 'protection' – appears as a peculiarly reified entity. Identity under this description is something a community enjoys as a sort of undisturbed existential possession, an inheritance, a benefit of traditional long dwelling, of continuity with the past. It is conceived of less as an actively constructed relationship of belonging than as a sort of collective treasure of local communities.

7. See John Tomlinson, 'Internationalism, Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism', in K. Thompson (ed), *Media and Cultural Regulation*, London, Sage/Open University, 1997, pp117-162; and John Tomlinson, *Globalisation and Culture*, Cambridge, Polity, 1999.

This view of identity as possession rather than process – and the cultural protectionist policies it has underwritten – have of course been pretty thoroughly interrogated in the critical literature on cultural imperialism. But what is interesting is how these assumptions have tended to colour the reception of the idea of globalisation, leading to the broadly distributed opinion – as much amongst some sections of the academy as amongst anti-globalisation activists – that globalisation must always be simply destructive of identities. The deterritorialising character of the globalisation process – its property of diminishing the significance of actual geographical location to the mundane flow of cultural experience⁸ – often tends to be seen as a ‘loss’ of a possession, rather than as a transformation in the mode of cultural experience. And from here, the familiar implications of cultural homogenisation, ‘Americanisation’ and so on seem naturally to follow.

However, there is quite a contrary, and rather more interesting, available interpretation of the impact of globalisation: that, far from destroying it, globalisation has been perhaps the most significant force in *creating and proliferating* cultural identity.⁹

This interpretation hangs on the (relatively uncontroversial) premise that globalisation is the globalisation not just of capitalism, but of a social-economic-political-cultural complex that we can call modernity. Modernity is a complex and contested idea, but at a certain level of generalisation it can be understood as involving the *abstraction* of social and cultural practices from contexts of local particularity, and their *institutionalisation and regulation* across time and space.¹⁰ It is here, of course, that its affinity with the globalisation process is most evident.

The most remarked examples of such institutionalisation are the organisation and policing of social territory (most obviously in the nation-state), or of production and consumption practices (industrialisation, the capitalist economy). But modernity also institutionalises and regulates cultural practices, including those by which we imagine our existential condition, our personal relations, and our attachment and belonging to a place or a community. The *mode* of such imagination it promotes is captured in the notion of ‘cultural identity’ – a prime example if ever there was one of the reflexive intercourse between social-scientific and everyday vocabularies. The essentially modern, ‘organisational’ category of cultural identity, then, consists in self and communal definitions based around specific, usually politically-inflected, differentiations: gender, sexuality, class, religion, race and ethnicity, nationality. Some of these differentiations of course existed before the coming of modernity, some – like nationality – are specifically modern imaginings. However, modernity has its impact not so much in the nature and substance of these differentiations, as in *the very fact of their institutionalisation and regulation*. Modern societies orchestrate existential experience according to well-policed boundaries. We ‘live’ our gender, our sexuality, our nationality and so forth within institutional regimes of discursively-organised belongings. What could be a much more

8. See N. Garcia-Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995; and Tomlinson, *Globalisation and Culture*, op. cit.

9. For a more detailed discussion see my ‘Globalisation and Cultural Identity’ in David Held (ed), *The Global Transformations Reader*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge, Polity, 2003.

10. See Giddens, op. cit.

amorphous, contingent, particular and tacit sense of belonging becomes structured into an array – a portfolio – of identities, each with implications for our material and psychological well-being, each, thus, with a ‘politics’.

Thus, as globalisation distributes the institutional features of modernity across all cultures, it produces ‘identity’ where none existed – where before there were perhaps more particular, more inchoate, less socially-policed belongings. One mistake of those who regard globalisation as a threat to cultural identity is, thus, to suppose this western-modern form of cultural imagination to be a universal feature of human experience. All cultures construct meaning via practices of collective symbolisation: this is universal. But not all cultures ‘construct identity’ in the institutional form that is now dominant in the modern West.¹¹ Though most, as I shall presently argue, are coming to do so: this is the somewhat ironic homogenising force of globalisation.

It is no simple coincidence, then, that the nineties were the decade not just of globalisation but of identity politics – for the two are intrinsically linked. One rather basic example of this linkage is in the constitution of the western-based anti-globalisation movement itself. As Shepard and Hayduk claim, the anti-WTO protestors in Seattle comprised ‘a radical coalition of students, youth, feminists, environmental, labour, anarchist, queer and human rights activists’.¹² It is pretty obvious – from the symbolic content of the trashing of McDonalds or Starbuck’s outlets for example – that the protests were as much against the available, branded, gendered, identity positions of consumer capitalism as against global inequality or environmental damage. Accounts by activists, moreover, typically stress the ‘identity affirming’ nature of these congregations of ‘tribus’.¹³

The other most obvious link between globalisation and identity politics, of course, can be seen in various projects of ‘re-territorialisation’, in the claiming and reclaiming of localities. This can be seen, not just in the egregious examples of the ethnic conflicts over territory discussed earlier, but in less violent assertions of rights based around ethnic identity – for example, the land rights movements of aboriginal groups in Australia, the US and elsewhere. Of course, in such examples the claims of identity are inextricably mixed with issues of political and economic justice. And in some instances, notably in the famous case of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, it might be misleading to think of identity, rather than simple social justice, as being the defining issue.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the very notion of a juridical contestation of rights linked to identity – be this ethnic, gender, religious, sexual – seems understandable only within the sort of global-modern institutional form of identity which we have identified.

Here we are returned to the issue of universalism which re-emerged with globalisation during the nineties, energetically surviving the wholesale theoretical assault of post-modernism. The contexts for this are various: political-ethical debates over ‘global governance’; concerns over the conflicting claims of cultural sovereignty and human rights; the rise of

11. See David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, London, Routledge, 2000.

12. B. Shepard and R. Hayduk (eds), *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the era of Globalisation*, London, Verso, 2002, p1.

13. See A. Boyd, ‘Irony, Meme Warfare, and the Extreme Costume Ball’ in Shepard and Hayduk *From ACT UP to the WTO*; and M. Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes*, London, Sage, 1996.

14. See Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997.

15. See P Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Minnesota, Minnesota Press, 1998; Mike Featherstone, H. Patomäki, John Tomlinson, C. Venn (eds) *Theory, Culture and Society: Special Issue on 'Cosmopolis'*, 19, 1-2 (Feb-April 2002); and Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, London, Routledge, 2001.

16. Derrida, *ibid.*, p31.

interest in cosmopolitanism.¹⁵ And, not least, the challenge from Islam of a robust competing universe of belief underpinning national societies – and clearly not dismissible, the Taliban aside, as a relic of pre-modernity.

One, slightly oblique, way into these issues is to be found in Jacques Derrida's short essay 'On Forgiveness'. Within this essay, Derrida poses the question of how a cluster of quasi-religious concepts – forgiveness, repentance, confession, apology – belonging, he says, to the 'Abrahamic' tradition, find a certain universal application in acts of public, institutionalised, 'theatrical' contrition. He asks:

If ... such a language combines and accumulates powerful traditions within it ('Abrahamic' culture and that of a philosophical humanism, and more precisely a cosmopolitanism born from a graft of stoicism with Pauline Christianity), why does it impose itself on cultures which do not have European or 'biblical' origins? I am thinking of those scenes where a Japanese Prime Minister 'asked forgiveness' of the Koreans and the Chinese for past violence.¹⁶

Part of his answer to this invokes the (rather awkward) neologism 'Globalatinisation', 'to take into account the effect of Roman Christianity which today overdetermines all language of law, of politics, and even of what is called the "return of religion"' (p32).

For Derrida, then, the juridical apparatuses of national and international tribunals – he cites particularly the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa – embody a universalising discourse in concepts like 'crimes against humanity' and 'universal human rights'. But like all universal claims, the ethic that informs the discourse is a particular one – in which the universal status of 'humanity' derives from its 'sacredness' within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Derrida insists on the significance of this religious discourse (as against the secular rationalism of enlightenment modernity): 'No alleged disenchantment comes to interrupt it. On the contrary' (p32).

However true this may be, the more significant point here seems to me to be the institutionalising drive of globalisation. Whatever the composition, or the provenance, of the discourse of modern humanism, its deeply impressive international distribution – for the most part encompassing, rather than contesting, other universalisms – owes most to its institutional form. 'Humanity' – in its juridical form as an owner of rights or a victim – is, in effect, a specific modern identity position which is universal by definition, but compatible with a huge range of cultural variation, by dint of its precise context of invocation: for instance in the International Court of Justice or other UN agencies. To be, without contradiction, 'human' in its rich pluralist acceptance, and 'human' in juridical-universalising terms is a trick brought off precisely by the institutionalised framing of *repertoires* of identity typical of modernity. In the midst of the proliferation of localisms and sharpened identity discriminations, globalisation also – formally, adroitly

– globalises universality.

3 COMMUNICATION, RHYTHM, IMMEDIACY

In this final section I want to bring together two themes which seem to have a connection, but one that is, to me at any rate, still quite obscure. These are the question of the precise role of media technologies in the globalisation process, and the intuition that globalisation seems intrinsically tied to an acceleration of events, or at least the experience of events. Globalisation's historical period, though much disputed, is probably at least co-extensive with that of modernity. Yet it seemed to gather pace, rather dramatically, during the nineties, and this suggests a connection with the rapid development and diffusion of 'accelerating' communication technologies at this time.

To try to bring these issues into a little more focus, we can again draw on an insight from Derrida, though this time not one worked through in the form of an essay, but as a more spontaneous aperçu occurring, and recurring, in the context of interviews. Derrida begins with a very simple observation about the unpredictability of events:

[W]e had known since the 1950s what discredited and doomed the totalitarianism of Europe and the east to failure. This was the daily bread of my generation ... What remained unpredictable, was the rhythm, the speed, the date: for example, the date of the fall of the Berlin wall. In 1987-8 no one *in the world* could have even an approximate idea of this date.¹⁷

Of course, he says, it is always possible, after the fact, to detect causal factors and processes not evident at the time which make intelligible the 'rhythm' of the unfolding of events.¹⁸ And amongst these he singles out 'the geopolitical effect of telecommunications in general' (p16).

Derrida takes this idea up again in a later interview, and here he discusses the same and other examples – 'the Rabin-Arafat handshake, the end of apartheid in South Africa' – in terms of an intrinsic 'rhythm':

For it is breaking, it is rolling up on itself like a wave, which accumulates strength and mass as it accelerates ... I think this acceleration in process is tied in an essential way and, in any case, to a large extent, to telematic, teletechnical transformation ... the crossing of borders by images, models etc. I believe that this technical transformation – of the telephone, of the fax machine, of television, email and the Internet – will have done more for what is called 'democratization' even in countries of the East, than all the discourses on behalf of human rights, more than all the

17. Jacques Derrida, and B. Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, Cambridge, Polity, 2002, p16.

18. In a wider theoretical application, Derrida says: 'Between the most general logics (the greatest predictability) and the most unpredictable singularities comes the intermediate schema of the *rhythm*'; *Echographies of Television*, *ibid.*, p16.

presentations of models in whose name this democratization was able to get started ... The acceleration of all political, or economic processes thus seems indissociable from a new temporality of technics, from another rhythmic (pp71-2).

I very much like the idea of a wave breaking: of the culmination of a process – its gathering momentum, its accumulation of ‘speed’ – being a function of its telematization. The physical metaphor is in every way to be preferred to the chemical one – telematization as ‘catalyst’ – in which the media as a (re)agent exists as an element outside of the process itself. Of course, the metaphor is limited to certain orders of political-institutional process. It is less compelling when applied to the single, stark catastrophic event. Thus the quintessential example of ‘breaking news’ – the event the phrase, flashing under the scenes of collapse of the WTC towers, seemed almost to be invented for – does not obviously conform to this, or any, rhythm.

Nonetheless, September 11 can be understood – without in any way diminishing its awful material facticity – as in its essence a global ‘media event’: conceived, without doubt, in anticipation of its televisual ‘impact’; duly, inevitably, presented in coverage dominated by the visual; interpreted by many commentators as the spectacular delivery of a ‘message’.¹⁹ Understood in this way, it conforms to some general features of the relationship between global-modern events and their representation and communication in which we can perhaps glimpse ‘a new temporality of technics’. In conclusion, and very briefly, we can speculate on some of the emergent features of this temporality.

Firstly, a feature of the connectivity of globalisation is quite clearly – so clear in fact as to be transparent, to escape examination – the convention of the immediate delivery of ‘news’. This quintessentially modern cultural assumption, that ‘the news’ – indeed all sorts of communication – should be delivered as fast as possible, defines the trajectory of increasing acceleration in media technologies that Derrida mentions, and reaches back to the telegraph and onwards to current CMC convergences, particularly those linking mobile phones with the Internet and televisual communication. Add to these technological developments innovations in media institutions themselves – for instance 24-hour television or online news services – and we get a sense of a broader cultural principle which we could call ‘immediacy’. And it doesn’t stretch the imagination too much to extend this principle of ‘instant access’ to include access to business, to consumption (for instance on-line shopping), to entertainment, or simply to each other (mobile phone chat as a defining feature of contemporary youth culture). Assemble all this, and we begin to see contemporary Western culture as dominated by a technology-driven obsession with speed, ubiquitous availability and instant gratification – along with decreasing attention spans, the so-called ‘three minute culture’ and so forth.

Well, yes. But to conclude with a caution about binding immediacy too

19. See for instance S. Sassen, ‘A Message from the Global South’, *Guardian*, 12 September 2001, p21.

closely to the (early) modern temporality of 'speed'. It may be that in terms of, let us say, cultural sensibility, what we are witnessing in the emergence of immediacy is something quite new. Maybe not specifically a sensibility born in the nineties, but then, not that much in evidence before. For whereas 'speed' seems to connote some of the informing values of industrial modernity, in particular the 'heroic' nature of machine power and human labour – of effort – in the overcoming of distance, immediacy grasps a much more insouciant attitude to technology, something of the lightness of what Zygmunt Bauman elegantly calls 'liquid modernity'.²⁰ The technologies of communication with and through which we routinely interact create the *impression* of a general effortlessness and ubiquity of contact which seems to be distinct from the purposiveness of mechanically accomplished speed. It is as if the gap between departure and arrival, here and elsewhere, now and later, a certain order of desire and its fulfilment, has been closed by a technological *legerdemain*. As Paul Virilio observes, the transport revolution of the nineteenth century – the unimaginable speed of rail travel – reduced the significance of a journey to two points: departure and arrival. By contrast, the coming of new communications technologies means that 'departure now gets wiped out and "arrival" gets promoted, the *generalized arrival of data*'.²¹

A phenomenology of globalisation, then, ought to include analysis of this mediated lifeworld of which the sensibility of immediacy is a central feature. Such an analysis might reveal something beyond the implication of a general acceleration in interactions, or the closing of distance rather inadequately grasped in the idea of 'virtuality'. It might, for example, illuminate the eclipse of certain cultural values like patience or forbearance. It might make sense of the self-abolishing drive of televisual journalism towards 'immediate presence' and transparency. But most significantly, it might illuminate the profound penetration of mediated experience into everyday life, such that an imagined intimacy with distant others, under certain conditions of orchestration, becomes a commonplace.

In one of the plethora of responses to September 11, Slavoj Žižek wrote: 'When, after the bombings, even the Taliban foreign minister said that he can "feel the pain" of the American children, did he not thereby confirm the hegemonic ideological role of this, Bill Clinton's trademark phrase?'²² But a slightly less mordant view might attribute this remark not to hegemony in its cruder form, but to the extraordinary distribution of an almost exclusively media-constructed vocabulary of identification and personalisation which may prove to be one of the more interesting cultural implications of globalisation.

Disclosing the processes by which this vocabulary becomes 'globalised', and how these processes relate to other aspects of immediacy, should take us some way towards an understanding of the cultural agenda of globalisation.

20. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity, 2000. For more discussion, see my chapter, 'Culture, Modernity, Immediacy' in Ulrich Beck and R. Winter, *Global America*, Liverpool, University of Liverpool Press, 2003.

21. Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, London, Verso, 1997, p56.

22. Slavoj Žižek, 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real', available at <<http://alt.venus.co.uk/weed/current/zizek.htm>>