



title: Global Modernities Theory, Culture & Society (Unnumbered)
author: Featherstone, Mike.
publisher: Sage Publications, Inc.
isbn10 | asin: 0803979487
print isbn13: 9780803979482
ebook isbn13: 9780585345307
language: English
subject Culture, Cultural relations, International relations.
publication date: 1995
lcc: HM101.G565 1995eb
ddc: 301/.01
subject: Culture, Cultural relations, International relations.

Global Modernities

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Global Modernities

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SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

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First published 1995. Reprinted 1997

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 SAGE Publications Ltd
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California
91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt
Ltd
32, M-Block Market
Greater Kailash I
New Delhi 110 048

Published in association with *Theory, Culture & Society*, School of Human Studies, University of Teesside

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-8039-7947-9

ISBN 0-8039-7948-7 (pbk)

Typeset by Type Study, Scarborough

Printed in Great Britain by Redwood Books, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

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Preface

Earlier versions of the papers in this volume were presented at the 10th Anniversary *Theory, Culture & Society* Conference held in August 1992 at the Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Champion, Pennsylvania. Special thanks are due to the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh and the Centre for the Study of Adult Life at the University of Teesside for their generous support for the conference. In particular the conference would not have taken place without the tremendous organizational ability and hard work of Kathleen White. In addition we would like to thank Julie Roat (Pittsburgh) and Barbara Cox and Julie Chapman (Teesside) for their administrative expertise and support, as well as the assistance of Victor Roudometof and Joe Roidt (Pittsburgh). Amongst the many friends and colleagues who helped with the planning and organization of the conference and the long process of selecting and reviewing papers for this volume, those who deserve a special mention include: Stephen Barr, Josef Bleicher, Roy Boyne, Norman Denzin, Mike Hepworth, Mica Nava, Bryan S. Turner.

We would also like to thank all who attended for making the conference such an enjoyable and stimulating occasion. The success of the conference can also be gauged by the fact that we have been persuaded to hold a second conference on 'Culture and Identity: City/Nation/World', in Berlin in August 1995.

MIKE FEATHERSTONE
SCOTT LASH
ROLAND ROBERTSON

1

Globalization, Modernity and the Spatialization of Social Theory: An Introduction

Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash

'Globalization' has become an increasingly influential paradigm in the human sciences since the beginning of the 1990s. It has in fact in a very important sense been the successor to the debates on modernity and postmodernity in the understanding of sociocultural change and as the central thematic for social theory. The collective weight of the papers in this book suggest that globalization should be seen as now no longer emergent, but as a more fully 'emerged' theory in the social sciences. Our organizing frame of reference in this book is constructed around two major thematics. In the first the emphasis will be on social theory. Here we shall explore throughout the book the extent to which the rise of the globalization *problématique* represents the *spatialization* of social theory. This resonates with the general thrust of postmodern theory which has been to privilege the spatial over the temporal mode of analysis (Featherstone, 1991; Lash, 1990). Yet for some the postmodern is to be seen as not the end of temporal analysis, in the sense that Vattimo (1988) announced 'the end of history', but a new stage of historical development. Some postmodern theories, therefore, while emphasizing the crisis of the metanarratives, have never been sufficiently self-reflexive in recognizing their own paradigmatic and chronic foregrounding of the temporal. If their Marxist predecessors focused on a temporal metanarrative about the various transitions from feudalism to capitalism to socialism, then, for some theorists of the postmodern, history is to be conceived as a parallel set of temporal transitions from tradition to modernity to postmodernity. Here postmodernity is in effect accorded the status of being the latest stage in a master logic of historical development, notwithstanding all the obligatory homilies paid to the critique of development. In this context the concept of globalization represents an important shift in transmuted this temporality into a spatial framework. This theme is, explicitly or implicitly, addressed in many of the chapters in this book, even in those not specifically about globalization.

The second organizing theme of the book is the concern with social change.

Here the question revolves around the sociocultural processes and forms of life which are emerging as the global begins to replace the

nation-state as the decisive framework for social life. This is a framework in which global *flows* in mediascapes, ethnoscapes, finanscapes and technoscapes are coming to assume as much, or greater, centrality than *national institutions* (Appadurai, 1990; Lash and Urry, 1994). International social, political and cultural (for example the media) organizations are standing alongside and beginning to replace their national counterparts.

This process is proving difficult to theorize, for the new global framework cannot be conceived as merely that of the nation-state writ large. Only in the most minimalist sense can one speak of a 'global society' or a 'global culture', as our conceptions of both society and culture draw heavily on a tradition which was strongly influenced by the process of nation-state formation. A central implication of the concept of globalization is that we must now embark on the project of understanding social life without the comforting term 'society'. The view that the concept of 'society' should be the basic generic unit for sociology, did not of course meet with universal approval, in particular the tradition stemming from Max Weber sought to focus upon inter- and trans-societal influences such as wars, conquest and colonialism (Tenbruck, 1994). If we move away from social change conceived as the internal development of societies to focusing on change as the outcome of struggles between the members of a figuration of interdependent and competing nation-states, then we have made an important step towards a trans-societal perspective. If we then seek to add to this an understanding of the intensification of trans-societal flows which are pushing towards a 'borderless global economy' (Ohmae, 1987) and undermining the capacity of nation-states to act, then we have moved towards the globalization perspective. One way to attempt to simplify the level of complexity which the intensification of global flows is introducing in the figuration of competing nation-states and blocs, is to regard globalization as an outcome of the universal logic of modernity. From this perspective, globalization as the triumph of the universal will introduce, on the face of it, substantial measures of abstraction, of 'disembedding', and the hollowing out of meaning in everyday life.

Such abstraction is exacerbated when the transition from the national to the global is superimposed on the change from an industrial manufacturing order to a post-industrial and informational order. In this shift from 'industrial society' to 'informational world' even the concrete labour process involves the abstraction of informationalized products and means of production that would

seem further to de-situate, to hollow out meaning from forms of life. A number of authors in this book consider whether this unhappy scenario of the negation of identity will be the upshot of such change, both in the periphery of developing countries brought into the informationalized world system, and in the core itself. Others argue instead that a number of positive possibilities can be opened up. They contend that the seemingly empty and universalist signs circulating in the world informational system can be recast into different configurations of meaning. That these transformed social semantics can in the context of traditional