REVIEW ESSAY

GLOBALIZATION AND THE FAILURE OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION: A REVIEW ESSAY[1]

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> But what are concepts save formulations and creations of thought, which, instead of giving us the true forms of objects, show us rather the forms of thought itself?
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> — Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*[2]

During the past decade, the examination of globalization, broadly conceived, has assumed a central position in the agenda of social science research and political commentary. As a keyword, a designator of a pivotal concept in contemporary discourse, globalization is however a relatively recent innovation. "Globalization," as one account has it, "is *the* buzzword of the late twentieth century" and is set to become "the biggest political issue of the next century."[3] In the preface to *The Cultures of Globalization*, Fredric Jameson writes "Globalization—even the term itself has been hotly contested—. . . is the modern or postmodern version of the proverbial elephant, described by its blind observers in so many diverse ways. Yet one can still posit the existence of the elephant in the absence of a single persuasive and dominant theory . . . " Jameson adds that "the concept of globalization reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as the horizon of a world market . . . Roland Robertson . . . has formulated the dynamics of globalization as the 'twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular.'" Jameson agrees, but still emphasizes, as do the works reviewed here, the antagonism and tension that obtains between these two poles.[4]

Coming to terms with globalization means that we must first and continually come to grips with "globalization," for the latter, from the viewpoint of cultural history, affords a window unto far-reaching developments in the former, or, more precisely, economy and society.[5] Recall, for instance, Tocqueville's almost apologetic acknowledgement in *Democracy*

in America that he could not do justice to his subject without coining the strange new term "individualism" (1990 [1840]); or take the case of Raymond Williams, who discovered in writing *Culture and Society* an intriguing interdependence in the relationship between concurrent changes in discourse and society. Williams' initial task was to analyze the transformation of culture coincident with the emergence and development of industrial capitalism in Britain. Williams discovered, however, that the word *culture* itself, as with other keywords, for example *class, industry*, and *democracy*, had assumed new meanings in response to the very changes he originally intended to explicate. It was not simply that the meaning of the word culture had been influenced by those changes (of course it had) but rather, the new meaning of culture was by turns entangled with, generated by, and supportive of those changes. In order to apprehend the meanings of globalization as an historical development and "globalization" as an historical marker, in addition to its various corollaries, such as the nation-state, culture, technology, market, and democracy, we do well to bear this recursive process in mind.

The works reviewed here each deploy "globalization" with a tacit view to accomplishing this ambitious analytic task and, no less, with a view to advancing its own distinctive political project of critique, which cannot and should not be uncoupled from its otherwise ostensibly disinterested discourse on the causes and consequences of globalization. I offer here a critical review of some recent influential arguments at once scholarly and political with a view of my own toward a more sophisticated understanding of "globalization" versus globalization, on the one hand, and the broader failure of the sociological imagination on the other.

In *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, John Gray claims that, in every country of the world, a new and increasingly volatile strain of global capitalism is transforming economic, political, and social life:

> Behind all . . . "meanings" of globalization is a single underlying idea, which can be called *de-localization*: the uprooting of activities and relationships from local origins and cultures. It means the displacement of activities that until recently were local into networks of relationships whose reach is distant and worldwide . . . Globalization means lifting social activities out of local knowledge and placing them in networks in which they are conditioned by, and condition, worldwide events (*FD*: p. 57, emphasis in original).

The principal positive contribution *False Dawn* makes to our understanding of globalization, in addition to the definition offered above, is its historical refutation of the natural status of the so-called free mar-

ket. The "free market," rather, is a social and political construction of centralized state power. "Free markets are creatures of strong government and cannot exist without them." This is the *first* argument of *False Dawn* (*FD*: p. 213, emphasis in original). Gray makes this point convincingly through an historical accounting of the rise and fall of nineteenth century *laissez-faire* in Victorian England. That the "market" is a social construction, a discursive phenomenon that serves particular vested interests, is a useful and timely antidote to an increasingly Darwinist and essentialist understanding of the institutions and practices of global capitalism.[6]

This, however, is precisely where Gray's argument goes awry. Gray's assertion that the free market was and remains *sui generis* Anglo-Saxon does not deter him from positing, however unoriginally, the growth of a global free-market economy: "A global free market economy will become a reality [elsewhere in the book, Gray describes it as our present reality, and, in still other places, Gray is ready to write global capitalism off as, variously, an anachronism, a badly formed idea, an unrealizable utopia, and self-destructive]. The manifold economic cultures and systems that the world has always contained will be redundant. They will be merged into a single universal free market" (*FD*: p. 2). Chief among those cultures and systems is the much-maligned nation-state, which Gray eulogizes thus: "The leverage of national governments over their economies is much weaker [than that of the nineteenth century English state]. If social markets are to survive or be rebuilt they will need to be embodied in *new* and more *flexible* institutions" (*FD*: p. 16, my emphasis).[7]

Gray's claims on this score are pregnant with both contradiction and irony. If the free market is the result of a strong, centralized state, whence originates the global free market which, *inter alia*, serves to weaken, if not rend entirely redundant, states themselves? Gray's own historical treatment of the English free market demonstrates the useless pedantry of adjudicating between the reality or artificiality of a "free market." Suffice it to conclude, for both nineteenth century England and our present global society, the "free market" is real in its consequences. Gray also rules out multinational corporations as the engine of globalism, concluding instead that "The reality of the late twentieth-century world market is that it is ungovernable by either sovereign states or multinational corporations" (*FD*: p. 70). This simply begs the question of agency and causality, to which I return below. More egregious still is the claim that, if social markets are to endure, as they arguably do in both Germany and Japan,[8] that *new* and *flexible* institutions will

need to be established. Novelty and, not least, flexibility are key tropes in the discourse of *laissez-faire* global capitalism typically invoked not to weaken the state but to *transform* its policies and practices vis-à-vis economic actors and institutions, which include both the corporations and state actors themselves.

The new reality we face today is one in which the dichotomies of state/corporation, government/business, even public/private, are dangerously false and misleading antinomies. Globalization and "globalization" are transforming the very meanings and lived realities of "state," "citizenship," and "democracy." Gray argues that the free-market and democracy are in reality foes, not the friends they are assumed to be in the new global vulgate issued daily from New York City and Washington. Gray writes:

> Nor, evidently, does a world economy that is organized as a global free market meet the universal human need for security. The *raison d'être* of governments everywhere is their ability to protect citizens from insecurity. A regime of global *laissez-faire* that prevents governments from discharging this protective role is creating the conditions for still greater political, and economic, instability (*FD*: p. 21, emphases in original).

Bracketing Gray's tenuous characterization of the state's *raison d'être*, even the most cursory examination of contemporary state policies and practices makes palpable the radical reordering of state ideals and functions, each of which is now cast in the discourse of efficient production and service. The same can be observed for the meaning and practice of contemporary citizenship and, by extension, democracy, each of which is similarly cast in terms of consumption. Weak citizenship, i.e. weak civil society and attenuated democracy, serves to stabilize, nay, strengthen both the state and the capitalist class, not vice versa. As Gray himself argues: "Transnational organizations [like the WTO] can get away with this [the spread of free markets] only insofar as they are immune from the pressures of democratic public life" (*FD*: p. 18). But this banal observation is moot in light of the semantic transformation of state, citizenship, and democracy, each of which is now subsumed under the aegis of consumer capitalism. Consumer democracy is to global capitalism neither friend nor foe; the former is the progeny of the latter.

Gray's failure to unpack the semantic shifts bound-up with "globalization" stems from a still larger failure to escape two common problems in macrohistorical theory: reification and its consequent teleology. Returning to the question of agency posed above, Gray leaves unexplained the historical *causes*, or, if you prefer, the *crucial preconditions*, of

the emergence of a volatile strain of capitalism, the consequences of which he enumerates thoroughly and by and large unproblematically. If neither nation-states nor multinational corporations are in charge (Gray argues that both institutional forms have been hollowed-out), just who is responsible for this mess? The question for Gray, however, seems rather more like "what is responsible?" Consider the following examples, selected more or less at random:

> *Laissez-faire* thinking was supplanted by the "New Liberal" thinkers such as Hobhouse, Hobson, Bosanquet, Green and Keynes who were ready to harness the powers of the state to moderate the effects of *market forces* . . . (*FD*: p. 15, emphasis mine).

This statement is all the more telling for its immanent juxtaposition of the actions of actual people and a collection thereof, to wit, the state, on the one hand, and the nebula of "market forces" on the other. Who, it must always be asked and answered, are the individuals and institutions that create "market forces"? And what actions do such "forces" entail? Again, Gray:

> However, the dislocations of social and economic life today are not caused solely by *free markets*. Ultimately they arise from the banalization of technology. Technological innovations made in advanced western countries are soon copied everywhere. Even without free-market policies the managed economies of the post-war period could not have survived—*technological advance would have made them unsustainable* (*FD*: pp. 19–20, emphasis mine).[9]

Here, we encounter two further reifications. First, the "free market," the entity responsible, one presumes, for "market forces." Nowhere does Gray define a market, be it free or regulated. And at no time does Gray delineate the sets of overlapping and embedded economic, political, and social relations that constitute a market, much less couch his analysis of globalization in the matrix of these relations. We must bear in mind that "globalization" is as much a reification as "the market," that they are, in fact, synonymous. To subsume, willy-nilly, under the singular, undifferentiated rubric of the "market" or "globalization" mystifies rather than illuminates our present condition.

Next is "technology," here dressed in its familiar hazardous garb. When invoked as an active verb, technology, otherwise a singular if far from semantically transparent noun, becomes an autonomous agent capable of creating effects in the world. This use of "technology" serves only to obscure the relations and practices that constitute technology and to further remove us from the empirical world for which we are in need of grounded explanations involving the actions of individuals

and groups. Consider the following passage, which is instructive insofar as it unites these heretofore disparate images:

> The world-historical *movement* we call globalization has *momentum* that is inexorable. *We are not the masters of the technologies that drive the global economy: they condition us in many ways we have not begun to understand* (*FD*: p. 206, emphasis mine).

So long as we continue to employ this form of causal imagery, we will never fully appreciate globalization. Worse still, we will never be in a position to resist and reform it, for the most pernicious consequence of reification is the tendency to jettison causality for teleology, which, like reification, discourages political action.[10] Gray is silent on the specific initiatives that might constitute efficacious resistance to and reform of the global economy. This, of course, is the predictable result of an analysis that relies on the reification of social relations which, in turn, relieves the reformer of her task. According to Gray,

> The free market cannot last in an age in which economic security for the majority of people is being reduced by the world economy. The regime of *laissez-faire* is *bound* to trigger counter-movements which reject its constraints (*FD*: p. 20, emphasis mine).

Later, however, Gray acknowledges that:

> A vital condition of reform of the international economy is that it be supported by the world's single most important power. Without active and continuing American endorsement there can be no workable institutions of global governance. But so long as the United States remains committed to a global free market it will veto any such reform. So long as American policy is based on the *laissez-faire* ideology that informs the Washington consensus there is no prospect of reforming the world economy (*FD*: p. 200).[11]

Which may appear not a little bit pessimistic, until, that is, it is more widely recognized that:

> The Washington consensus will not last forever. It will undoubtedly be shaken by economic *shocks* and geopolitical *shifts* (*FD*: p. 205, emphasis mine).

The question of economic and political reform, then, goes the way of historical agency and causality.

Lukacs' lucid definition of reification is instructive here. Reification occurs when "a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom-objectivity,' an autonomy that seems

so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people" (Lukacs 1971: pp. 83–87). The problem of reification, it turns out, plagues all of the works under review here and most of the discourse, analytic and political alike, regarding globalization. Throughout this review I try to theorize this misapprehension of "globalization" and its corollary reifications as the result of ideological predilections and otherwise untenable methodological choices, each of which can ultimately be largely explained as consequences of the actions and events bound-up in globalization itself.

Reification rears its ugly head too in Anthony Giddens' *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives*—the title itself suggests as much. Giddens is, however, an eminently more agile social theorist than Gray, indeed more agile than most. Originally given as the 1999 Reith lectures, broadcast globally by the BBC via both radio and the Internet, Giddens offers the following salvo regarding the character of globalization:

> Globalisation is political, technological and cultural, as well as economic. It has been influenced above all by development in systems of communications, dating back only to the late 1960s . . . The changes [encompassed by globalization] are being propelled by a range of factors, some structural, others more specific and historical. Economic influences are certainly among the driving forces, especially the global financial system. Yet they aren't forces of nature. They have been shaped by technology and cultural diffusion, as well as by the decisions of governments to liberalise and deregulate their national economies (*RW*: p. 8).

Globalization, it seems, affects everything and everything, in turn, affects globalization. Here the absence of clarity in the definition of globalization manifests itself in a corresponding lack of clarity governing its explanation. Giddens' argument is much like the above definition: it tries to be all things to all people. Case in point is Giddens' ambivalence regarding the role of the state vis-à-vis globalization. On the one hand, Giddens acknowledges the decisions made by the state. This is sure to please sociologists who argue for the analytic importance of state actions and, not least, those critical of the state's strategic retreat from public life. Giddens is cognizant too of the way in which the nature of the state has been transformed. Giddens, however, subtly elides the next (specious, I think) question, namely, has the state reconciled itself to its new role or is the state a hapless victim powerless in the face of transnational forces? A theorist as agile as Giddens would doubtless argue, if forced, "both!" but the spirit of his presentation suggests, if somewhat

equivocally, that the state's autonomy has been and continues to be whittled away by the myriad "forces" at work in the world today.

Giddens goes on to rehearse familiar topics and arguments concerning the relationship between globalization (however one takes it) and risk, tradition and fundamentalism, the family and feminism, and finally, the prospects for democracy. Democracy, argues Giddens, is good and, as such, worth fighting for. Overall, this captures the tenor of Giddens' slim little book.[12] Giddens asks: "Is globalisation a force promoting the general good?" (*RW*: p. 10). That question, in addition to whether we can gain more control over our "runaway world," is important, "For globalisation is not incidental to our lives today. It is a shift in our very life circumstances. It is the way we now live" (*RW*: pp. 11–12). Giddens raises few compelling questions and still fewer answers. The rapid publication of these BBC lectures with virtually no modification or expansion arguably has more to say about the power and force of "globalization" than does Giddens.

"Culture follows money . . . we will be the Romans in the next generations as the English are now," wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald with considerable prescience in 1921 while sojourning in France.[13] Sixty years later and culture still seemed to follow capital. In 1982, French cultural officials warned of "American cultural imperialism." Soon after a cartoon appeared portraying the noble European continent defended by the likes of d'Artagnan, Don Quixote, and Shakespeare against an American attack from the skies lead by Mickey Mouse flanked by E.T., Marilyn Monroe, and a hamburger.[14] Walter LaFeber's *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* can be read as an elaboration of Fitzgerald's prediction and France's, nay, the world's predicament. Namely, globalization as the apotheosis of American popular culture.

LaFeber begins his thin historical account in the 1890s, the time period in which the American economy rose to preeminence and the game of basketball was invented. For LaFeber, "The history of basketball, especially in the era of Michael Jordan, helps us understand this era known as 'the American Century,'" (*NGC*: p. 22). The 1890s were also witness to the rise of the first multinational corporations, including Standard Oil, Eastman Kodak, Singer, and McCormick. According to LaFeber, these companies differ from their late-twentieth century counterparts in at least four respects: (1) 1890s firms largely employed American workers whereas 1990s firms rely on cheap foreign labor; (2) While late-nineteenth century concerns traded in natural resources and industrial goods, corporations nowadays increasingly produce "knowledge" and "information." Here LaFeber, like Barber (1992), signals his

move away from the analysis of hard political power toward soft economic and symbolic power; (3) Today's transnationals, unlike their ancestors, increasingly depend upon "world markets" for their profits (*e.g.*, in 1996, four out of every five bottles of coke were sold outside of the United States); and (4) Consequently, late-twentieth century transnationals depend for their continued success on massive global advertising campaigns "*to make people want their products*" (*NGC*: p. 56). The advertising employed by transnationals like Nike is argued to be "revolutionary" because it can be seen on as many as thirty to five hundred television channels in many countries thanks to the new technology of communication satellites and fiber-optic cable. For LaFeber, the medium and the message collude to make the products of transnationals irresistible to the denizens of the new global village. Consider LaFeber's take on the fall of Communism:

> During these decades [1970–1990], such new global technologies as computers, communication satellites, and fiber optics transformed the globe's economy. It should be pointed out that this new era in world history began not with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1989–1991, but with the appearance of the post-industrial technology nearly a generation earlier. For this technology changed the lives of peoples around the world and, in so doing, brought down the Communist system, which could not adjust to this revolution (*NGC*: p. 58).

In addition to the problem of the reification of technology, LaFeber similarly reifies "the world market" on which transnationals depend but over which the same transnationals wield considerable influence via their marketing campaigns. By presuming the perlocutionary power of media messages and, indeed, of the media themselves, LaFeber effectively rends invisible the relations between foreign consumers and the popular culture and other fare produced by transnational corporations. What do Nike shoes, or the images of Michael Jordan, *do* for people in and out of America? How are American products and symbols experienced *in situ*?[15] LaFeber, like most globalization theorists, emphasizes global push factors at the expense of the local pull factors felt, articulated, and instantiated by real people in real places who constitute the real power of "world markets." The result is a top-down, externalist perspective bereft of the global consumer's *Lebenswelt*. Consumption is explained away as a passive act of reception rather than an indefinite series of microscopic acts of appropriation of the social world. In this way LaFeber reproduces, indeed globalizes, the causal assumptions of the Frankfurt School's critique of mass culture. The *positive moment* of consumerism,

insofar as it is defined as such by variously situated individuals, is left utterly untheorized. Methodologically, a hermeneutic reconstruction of the consumer's point of view is attainable only through ethnographic engagement across a number of cultural sites.[16] Sociologically, the "armchair" approach employed by LaFeber and the other authors under review here is methodologically and theoretically untenable. Ideologically, however, it is quite useful insofar as it allows for a political critique that assigns culpability to only the global cultural "pushers" and effectively absolves the rest of the world of any responsibility whatsoever, rendering them so many dupes under the sway of expensive, irresistible images. Ironically, the reification of powerful world markets has the effect of stripping the consumers embedded within them of any potential for agency, much less influence. For LaFeber, then, culture does in fact follow the money.

The foregoing should not, however, be read as an affirmation of the intellectualist romance with and tendentious presumption of subaltern resistance, commonplace as it is in the discipline of cultural studies. It is, after all, no more tenable to assume "ordinary people" to be preternaturally counter-hegemonic in their quotidien lives than it is to dismiss them as cultural dopes. Recalling Gray's call for "new" and "more flexible" institutions to rescue social markets, cultural critics must reflexively account for their own role in the larger field of cultural production. As Thomas Frank (1999: p. 84) perspicuously notes, many cultural critics miss entirely the fatal irony of an academic radicalism that is increasingly coterminous with much management theory at precisely the same moment when capitalist consultants and managers have decided to brand themselves as radicals, equating democracy and dissent with consumerism. The point, rather, is a simple one. An understanding of globalization as a field of relations encompassing both power and resistance is impossible absent ethnographic engagement in this field with all the variously situated actors involved (*e.g.*, managers, politicians, citizens, consumers, workers, sub-proletariat, intellectuals).

An ethnographic case makes the point. American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) demonstrates in her ethnographic analysis of Bedouin women the intersection of power and resistance in global perspective. Bedouin women, it turns out, are avid consumers of Western pop music. Their consumptive behavior has little to do, however, with the billions spent annually on advertising by American firms. Bedouin women actively use the lyrics of Western pop songs, particularly romantic ones, to subvert the regime of patriarchy they confront in their own local culture, wherein the oral poetics of love and romance are severely restricted so as to reproduce male privilege. Western music, then, offers a partial

escape from and critical commentary on patriarchal Bedouin culture. At the same time, Bedouin culture is brought into the web of power relations involving the Egyptian nation-state and the larger international political economy. This instance of resistance exemplifies Bourdieu's point about relations of power: "Resistance can be alienating and submission can be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated and there is no way out of it."[17] The chief limitation of *New Global Capitalism* is its exaggeration of the power of the dominant and its wholesale inattention to the agency of the dominated.[18]

Ditto for Zygmunt Bauman's *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Bauman's point of departure into the global is Foucault's instrumental metaphor of the Panopticon. In the modern exercise of power, the spectacle was replaced by surveillance. In pre-modern times, power was impressed upon the public via displays of wealth, splendor, and, not least, violence. Modern power concentrated in the nation-state, by contrast, preferred instead to linger in the shadows, closely but discreetly monitoring its subjects. A case of the few regarding the many. What Foucault overlooked, however, was the parallel modern development of new techniques of power consisting, in contradistinction to surveillance, of the various mass media, especially television. A case of the many watching the few.[19]

The Panopticon, even when universal in application, was essentially a local institution. The *Synopticon*, i.e. the mass media, is increasingly global. The nature of the power each wields is different, too. While the Panopticon *forced* people into the position where they could be watched, the *Synopticon* requires little in the way of coercion. By contrast, the Synopticon *seduces* people into watching (*THC*: p. 52, emphasis in original). The many now watch the few. And the few who are watched are the celebrities. No matter whence they originate, all celebrities put on display the world of celebrities, a world whose distinctive feature is precisely the quality of being watched by the many in all corners of the world. Whatever they speak about when on air, they convey the message of a total way of life. "*Their* life, their *way of life*" (*THC*: p. 52, emphasis in original). To question the impact of that message on the many who watch is, to Bauman,

> less like asking about preconceived fears and hopes and more like asking about the "effects" of Christianity on one's view of the world, or—as the Chinese *had* asked—of Confucianism on public morality.[20]

For Bauman as for LaFeber, the world watches the fare produced by the globals, i.e. the multinational corporations, and the rest is history. The billions expended (for LaFeber) and the lofty, other-worldly

character (for Bauman) of the globals renders otherwise legitimate, nay pressing, questions of reception and interpretation entirely irrelevant.

For all the power contained in the messages and, presumably, conferred upon the messengers, Bauman, much like Gray and Giddens, is still not entirely sure just who is in charge:

> To put it in a nutshell: *no one seems now to be in control*. Worse still, it is not clear what "being in control" could, under the circumstances, be like . . . The deepest meaning conveyed by the idea of globalization is that of the indeterminate, unruly, and *self-propelled character of world affairs*; the absence of a centre, of a controlling desk, of a board of directors, of a managerial office. Globalization is Jowitt's "new world disorder" under another name (*THC:* pp. 58–59, first emphasis in original, second emphasis mine).

Note the now familiar tell-tale signs of reification: the obfuscation of social relations and human agency tightly coupled with the attribution of *telos* to "world affairs." The world may be disorderly, but for Bauman at least one thing *is* for sure. Wherever the new seat of power resides, if it resides anywhere, if it even exists at all, it is certainly not within the nation-state:

> In the words of G.H. von Wright, the "nation-state, it seems, is eroding or perhaps 'withering away.' The *eroding forces* are *transnational*." Since nation-states remain the sole frame for book-balancing and the sole sources of effective political initiative, the 'transnationality' or eroding forces puts them outside the realm of deliberate, purposeful and potentially rational action. As everything that elides such action, such forces, their shapes and actions are blurred in the mist of mystery; they are objects of guesses rather than reliable analysis (*THC*: pp. 56–57, first emphasis mine, second emphasis in original).

Having thus ruled out both nations and transnationals as the source of the "eroding forces" at work in the world, Bauman asks:

> How has it come about that this vast expanse of *man-made* wilderness (not the "natural" wilderness which modernity set out to conquer and tame; but, to paraphrase Anthony Giddens' felicitous phrase, a "*manufactured* jungle"—the post-domestication wilderness, one that emerged *after* the conquest, and as a result) has sprung into vision? And why did it acquire the formidable power of obstinacy and resilience which since Durkheim is taken to be the defining mark of "hard reality"? (*THC*: p. 69, first emphasis mine, second emphasis in original).

This indeed is *the* question that should orient our analyses of "globalization."[21] As an analytic tool, however, it is instructive only inasmuch as we apply it equally to the putative "causes" of "globalization," for

example the withering away of the nation-state at the hands of those punitive and unforgiving "financial markets" (*THC*: p. 69), each of which has assumed of late the marks of "hard reality." Bauman poses the initial question but fails to similarly question the ontological reality of what are actually epistemological heuristics. The use of terms such as "markets" and "finances" and "technological forces" are potentially useful when they serve as a kind of analytic shorthand for sets of social relations that have already been enumerated and explicated *explicitly and exhaustively*. When, however, they substitute for explanations, when they stand in as explanations in and of themselves, they serve not only to complicate our thinking but, more egregious still, to insidiously reproduce those discourses and practices of domination against which critical scholars are aligned. Bauman himself anticipates this problem when he acknowledges, with an approving nod to Cornelius Castoriadis, that

> . . . the trouble with the contemporary condition of modern civilization is that it stopped questioning itself. Not asking certain questions is pregnant with more dangers than failing to answer the questions already on the official agenda; while asking the wrong kind of questions all too often helps to avert eyes from the truly important issues. The price of silence is paid in the hard currency of human suffering. Asking the right questions makes, after all, all the difference between fate and destination, drifting and travelling. Questioning the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life is arguably the most urgent of the services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves (*THC*: p. 5).

Like Gray and LaFeber, Bauman offers us an impassioned threnody devoted to the deleterious effects borne by globalization but, in so doing, unwittingly disarms us intellectually and consequently renders us incapable of intervention and resistance, much less understanding. We should therefore welcome Pierre Bourdieu's *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, for Bourdieu, perhaps more than any other living scholar and public intellectual, deftly combines scholarly and political analysis.

Bourdieu's approach is to read "globalization" as a neo-liberal discourse, a mythology that poses as reality:

> I've used the word "globalization." It is a myth in the strong sense of the word, a powerful discourse, and *idée force*, an idea which has social force, which obtains belief. It is the main weapon in the battles against the gains of the welfare state (*AOR*: p. 34).

Bourdieu goes on to dissect this discourse, pointing out the way it evokes and ratifies the "so-called law of the market" (*AOR*: p. 35). By so impugning the natural and inevitable ontological character of "global-

ization" and the "supposed iron laws of the financial markets," Bourdieu is poised to make the theoretical contribution Gray flirted with but failed to realize, to wit, an analysis of the social construction of the global economy (*AOR*: pp. 26–27). Yet, Bourdieu soon after does an about-face on this issue, writing,

> While globalization is above all a justificatory myth, *there is one case where it is quite real, that of the financial markets*. Thanks to the removal of a number of legal restrictions and the development of electronic communications which lead to lower communication costs, *we are moving towards a unified financial market* (*AOR*: p. 38, emphasis mine).

Bourdieu's account is rife with contradictions and illogical, unsubstantiated assertions of fact. Particularly disabling is his myopia regarding the role of the nation-state. While "globalization" is a myth (well yes, it is) the power of the "financial markets" and the "international capital market" is quite real indeed.[22] The latter, according to Bourdieu, prevents individual nation-states from manipulating their exchange and interest rates, which in turn are increasingly determined by a power concentrated in the hands of a small number of countries, whose identities are never revealed, and although one presumes that Bourdieu has in mind the United States, it is not at all clear which other nations might be controlling the rest of the world's finances (Germany's social market? Japan's? Certainly neither the French nor the English register here). So, nations are powerless, a familiar refrain. Unless, that is, they are a part of the small, exclusive cabal of nations that rules the world, in which case they have considerable power after all.

Bourdieu calls for the creation of a class of collective intellectuals who can, among other things, analyze the production and circulation of neo-liberal discourse to expose the ideological work of journalists, managers, and, not least, the cunning reason of intellectuals.[23] This analysis is to be carried out, presumably, in a manner consistent with his project of reflexive sociology.[24] That would mean mapping the full field of cultural production and symbolic power that now obtains on a global level, specifying the key actors and the objective structure of their relationships, and analyzing the habitus of the agents that finds its trajectory within the specific field(s) in question.[25] That Bourdieu fails to attempt, much less accomplish, this admittedly bold project is a major shortcoming of *Acts of Resistance*, which amounts to little more than a steady stream of breathless bromides forever interrupted by conceptual and logical inconsistencies.

Worse still is the manner in which Bourdieu—like Gray, Giddens,

and Bauman—unwittingly buttresses the discourse of neo-liberalism by utterly ignoring the active role played by the state in ushering in an ostensible new world disorder in which the state appears as a shadow of its former self, at best a hapless and unwilling conspirator accorded little responsibility. Bourdieu's *Acts of Resistance*, as with the other titles under review here, quickly establishes its liberal credentials through its lament for a safer, more secure and certain world (*sicherheit*) in which the state and the citizen and, one suspects, the progressive intellectual, each mattered. Those nominal credentials, however, mask and insidiously support the state in its new, corporatist guise.[26] Take, for instance, the manifesto co-authored by prime ministers Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder entitled "The Third Way/*Die Neue Mitte*."[27] Therein, the ministers declare:

> In a world of ever more rapid globalization and scientific changes we need to *create the conditions* in which existing businesses can prosper and adapt, and new businesses can be set up and grow . . . Our aim is to modernize the welfare state, *not dismantle it* . . . *Flexible markets* must be combined *with a newly defined role for an active state*. The state must become an *active agent* for employment, not merely the passive recipient of the casualties of economic failure (emphasis mine).[28]

If "globalization" did not exist, the state would have invented it.

Or consider, to choose another recent example, the passing of a new bill in Britain which redefines terrorism as "The use of serious violence against persons or property, or the threat to use such violence, to intimidate or coerce a government, the public, or any section of the public for political, religious or ideological ends."[29] Borrowed verbatim from the American FBI, this new bill was passed in British parliament in March, 2000 by 210 votes to one. Among other purposes, the bill will serve as a deterrent to activists who would campaign publicly against globalization and multinational corporations, as thousands recently did on "May Day" in Britain. According to a British GM food activist, "The government is creating a private security service for transnational corporations."[30] To Bourdieu *et al.*, this is simply another example of the puppet that is the new nation-state orchestrated from above and afar by those indomitable financial markets.

To the sociologist Saskia Sassen, however, it is a case in point of the state's active and voluntary complicity in the construction and, not least, strategic invocation of "globalization." Sassen contends that far from being passive and merely reactive under the sway of globalization, "national firms and national institutions have participated in the process."

Sassen, moreover, rejects the notion that the global economy is "somehow 'out there,'" forcing a nation and its corporations to change their practices. Rather, Sassen argues forcefully that the global economy has been created by national industries with the assistance of their own nation's legislative and regulatory bodies. In so doing Sassen pushes the definition of the global economy beyond the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services to encompass a worldwide system of governance and power within a "new frontier zone," which

> . . . is not merely a dividing line between the national economy and the global economy. It is a zone of politico-economic interactions that produce *new institutional forms and alter some of the old ones. Nor is this encounter between the global and the national just a matter of reducing regulations or the role of government generally* . . . simply to posit, *as is so often done*, that economic globalization has brought with it declining significance of the national state, *tout court*, misses some of the finer points of this *transformation* (emphasis mine).[31]

Pace Sassen and others who argue convincingly for the need to "bring the state back in"[32] to our analyses, the failure to recognize the transformation of the nonetheless active role of the nation-state is a symptom of a much broader failure of the sociological imagination; bear in mind that the works discussed above are by some of the field's most prominent figures. Despite their admirably meliorist intentions, these works each serve to invest "globalization" and its corollaries, i.e. market and technological "forces," with a "thingness" and an efficacy it does not, cannot, possess. This tendency stems, I think, from the no longer tenable theoretical assumption that modernity consists of the compartmentalization of reality into three distinct domains: (1) Market (economy); (2) State (polity); and (3) Civil Society (culture/public sphere). It is arguable whether this tripartite heuristic was ever analytically useful, but the problem it poses for sociologists now is a different one, for this heuristic has assumed the status of a dead metaphor, that of hard reality. According to Wallerstein, this theorem of separateness and mutual exclusivity, a mere two hundred years old, is now so deeply rooted in our consciousness and linguistic tools that we find it almost impossible to formulate sentences, much less cogent analytic arguments, free of this threefold monster.[33] Thus reified, these epistemologic tools no longer serve us. They instead predispose us to see each sphere in terms only of expansion (as in the case of the market) or retraction (as in the roles of the state and the public sphere) rather than the simultaneous semantic and ontological *transformation* of all three.[34] Returning to Cassirer,

> But this problem itself appears spurious as soon as we realize that the distinctions which here are taken for granted, the analysis of reality in terms of things and processes, permanent and transitory aspects, objects and actions, do not precede language as a substratum of given fact, but that language itself is what initiates such articulations, and develops them in its own sphere.[35]

As Wallerstein adroitly notes, these unconscious reifications obscure much of reality from the scholars who unreflexively deploy them.[36] There is, however, still more at work than this. For all the attention I have devoted to disentangling the discourse of "globalization" we must not lose sight of the many decisions, actions, and consequences, intentional or not, that loosely comprise the ever-shifting reality of globalization within which our analytic discourse is developed and deployed. Chief among these in this context are the sense and the reality of profound dislocation, displacement, and disengagement that affect sociologists as much as anyone else.[37] Our theories and methods bear the indelible imprint of the world we seek to comprehend.

A renovated sociological imagination of globalization must steer clear of the grand theorizing rehearsed by the works reviewed here without simultaneously lapsing into the abstracted empiricism that infects most of the technical work on globalization.[38] To avoid these twin pitfalls we will need to develop an entirely new vocabulary grounded in direct empirical engagement with our new, globalizing reality. Examples of this new approach are already under way. They include, so far, Marcus' call for multi-sited ethnography, Sassen's work toward cultivating an ethnographic approach to studying the way the global is instantiated within local urban spaces, and Duneier's "extended place method."[39] The considerable potential of these approaches notwithstanding, the sociological apprehension of globalization will require first and foremost a collective effort on the part of variously situated scholars, to wit, a global network consisting of several local nodes in which substantive conflict and cooperation may freely occur. What the late Bill Readings called a community of "dissensus."[40] Absent these efforts our meliorist intentions have little chance of ever becoming efficacious interventions.

Notes

1. Thanks to Denis Wall for editorial assistance and to Julie Custeau for her ever-astute guidance and unfailing support of everything that I do. The works reviewed here include Bauman, Zygmunt, 1998, *Globalization: the human consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press), hereafter *THC*; Bourdieu, Pierre, 1998, *Acts of resistance: against the tyranny*

of the market (New York: The New Press), hereafter *AOR*; Gray, John, 1998, *False dawn: the delusions of global capitalism* (London: Granta Books), hereafter *FD*; Giddens, Anthony, 2000, *Runaway World* (New York: Routledge), hereafter *RW*; and LaFeber, Walter, 1999, *Michael Jordan and the new global capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), hereafter *NGC*.

2. 1946: p. 7.

3. See Cassidy (1997). The recent highly organized public protests in Davos, Seattle, and Washington lend support to this prediction.

4. For an historical perspective on the semantic polyvalence, if not polysemy, of "globalization" over the *Longue Durée*, see Moore (1997).

5. As Giddens puts it: "The global spread of the term [globalization] is evidence of the very developments to which it refers" (*RW*: p. 3).

6. See Bourdieu's *AOR*, p. 42.

7. Gray later asserts, however, that "The leverage of sovereign states over business may actually be greater in some respects today than it has been in the past" (*FD*: p. 67). In which respects Gray does not say. Nor does he offer any evidence to buttress what must be classified as, like so many of the statements comprising *FD*, pure speculation (or what might be euphemized as "arm-chair economics").

8. See the intriguing, if tentative, results of an international project comparing the future of nationally embedded capitalism in the global economy in Streeck and Yamamura (2000).

9. For an illuminating historical treatment of the reification of technology see Marx (1997).

10. Gray argues further that the effects of these forces are irrevocable and irreversible. The regrettable and wrong-headed policy choices made by the Thatcher administration now constitute the ineluctable reality of the Blair government. Gray goes on to argue the same for the neo-liberal turn taken by New Zealand. Gray's argument is contradicted, however, by, first, the palpably intentional adoption of neo-liberal tenets on the part of the Blair government (not least its elimination of Article Four, hitherto the cornerstone of Labour politics), and second, by the recent election of a Labour government in New Zealand, whose popularity in the polls in 1990 was just 2 percent, a Labour government that is, moreover, authentically committed to rebuilding and underwriting its social institutions. See the *Guardian Weekly*, May 11–17, 2000, p. 11. Even the *Economist* admitted, no doubt plaintively, that "globalization is not irreversible" (see Smith and Moran [2000: p. 70]).

11. Gray is confused about the power of the American model. Of "hyperglobalization: a corporate utopia," Gray writes "It represents an historical transformation that has no end-state, and which is subverting American capitalism as well as its rivals, as a process leading to the universal acceptance of American free markets" (*FD*: p. 67).

12. In contradistinction to Giddens' slim but instructive *A Brief but Critical Introduction to Sociology*.

13. Fitzgerald made this prediction in a personal letter to the novelist and critic Edmund (Bunny) Wilson.

14. de Medici and de Medici (1986: pp. 17–20).

15. For an empirically rich and theoretically supple analysis of the local experience of *McDonald's* throughout east Asia, refer to Watson *et al.* (1997). This volume of ethnographic accounts makes particularly plain the ways in which *McDonald's*, as a transnational corporation, has allowed itself, via a local ownership structure, to adapt to the exigencies and idiosyncrasies of local cultures. Even while *McDonald's* market share reclined in the United States during the 1990s it continued to grow in foreign markets, including but not limited to east Asia.

16. See Marcus (1995) on the advantages of conducting multi-site ethnography in/of the world system.

17. Bourdieu (1987: p. 184).

18. One final word of warning regarding *NGC*: the strength and weakness of this book are one in the same. *NGC* is unique in that it tries to marry the history of basketball with the history of the American economy. A short book, it sufficiently covers neither task. Basketball fans in particular should look elsewhere for a treatment of both the NBA and the career of Michael Jordan. See instead the eminently readable and informative Halberstam (1999) and, in keeping with the line of argument pursued above, Jordan (1998).

19. This is what Mathiesen (1997) aptly coined the *Synopticon*.

20. Gerbner and Gross (1976) quoted in *THC*, p. 53.

21. This question, if broadened in scope, is arguably the most important question sociologists can pose. Period. Substitute "society" for "globalization" and the analytic potential of the question comes into bold relief.

22. Compare the putative reality of the financial market with the following breathless declaration: "In short, against all the prophets of misery who want to convince you that your destiny is in the hands of transcendent, independent, indifferent powers, such as the 'financial markets' or the mechanisms if 'globalization,' I want to declare, with the hope of convincing you, that the future, your future, which is also our future, that of all Europeans, depends a great deal on you, as Germans and trade unionists" (*AOR*: p. 69).

23. For his own analysis cum criticism of the "journalistic field," see Bourdieu (1998); for Bourdieu's take on the role of intellectuals in diffusing the new global vulgate, see Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999a, 1999b).

24. I say presumably because Bourdieu at no point in *AOR* elaborates this program. For an original and compelling criticism of Bourdieu's sociological theory and method, see Griller (1996).

25. See Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: pp. 104–5). Whether or not the global field is coterminous with what Bourdieu calls the field of power (a kind of meta-field) is an interesting question.

26. If I am harder on Bourdieu than the other authors under review (which is arguable) it is due, first, to the inconsistency that obtains between his previous scholarly work and his present political critique and, second and most important, because his ostensibly liberal critique unwittingly and insidiously reproduces the neo-liberal discourse he seeks to subvert.

27. Not coincidentally, the so-called "third way," also advocated by Bill Clinton, is largely inspired by Anthony Giddens' book of the same name. Space does not permit an analysis of Giddens' contribution to practical politics here. Blair and Schroeder's manifesto is reprinted in the spring, 2000 edition of *Dissent*, pp. 51–65.

28. Small wonder Gray, who makes the same recommendation, demonizes the Thatcher administration, on the one (left?) hand, while he serves as an apologist for the present Blair government on the other (right?) hand.

29. See the *Guardian Weekly*, May 11–17, 2000, p. 20.

30. *Ibid.*

31. See Sassen (2000: pp. 164–65).

32. For example, the entire corpus of Theda Skocpal.

33. Wallerstein (2000: p. 307).

34. An apt example of the compartmentalist way of thinking about the state is Daniel Bell's famous remark that the nation-state is at once too small and too large to adequately address most of the problems it faces.

35. 1946: p. 12.

36. Which, in the case of Bourdieu in particular, is all the more ironic for its theoretical inconsistency with his overall sociological-epistemological project.

37. Why, after all, is "globalization" now on everyone's lips in academe? Might it have something to do, as a colleague of mine astutely theorizes, because the educated and professional middle-classes, including university professors, of Western nations are

beginning to bear the brunt of its "force"? Giddens remarks about the scope of globalization suggest as much: "Its effects [of globalization] are felt just as much in western countries as elsewhere . . . Many of us feel in the grip of forces over which we have no control" (*RW*: p. 12).

38. For example Chase-Dunn *et al.* (2000) or, for that matter, well-nigh any article on globalization published in the *American Sociological Review*.

39. Marcus (1995); Duneier (2000: pp. 344–45).

40. Readings (1996).

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