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*Crit Sociol* 2012 38: 281 originally published online 21 September 2011

DOI: 10.1177/0896920510398018

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# Globalization Theory, Media-Centrism and Neoliberalism: A Critique of Recent Intellectual Trends

Critical Sociology  
38(2) 281–301  
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DOI: 10.1177/0896920510398018  
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## Abstract

This article develops a critique of academic globalization theory from the viewpoint of media and communications. First, it discusses the overall importance of media and communications for the core argument of globalization theory, namely that the contemporary period has witnessed a dramatic shift in the spatio-temporal constitution of society. This is followed by a reconstruction and critique of such a line of reasoning in the work of two notable globalization theorists, Manuel Castells and Arjun Appadurai. It is argued that their positions are founded on an overtly media-centric and unhistorical treatment of globalization that lacks a critical materialist analysis of how the global media sphere has developed in the recent decades. It is further argued that such positions can be understood in the context of the rise of neoliberalism that overlaps with the development of globalization theory.

## Keywords

communications, globalization theory, media, neoliberalism, social theory, sociology

## Introduction

In the last couple of decades, a number of influential social theorists have been producing epochal diagnoses that posit the demise of what is called ‘first modernity’. They have written about the coming of a very different social form, so different that – as the argument goes – earlier models of social change, including Marxism and the classical sociological tradition as a whole, no longer provide the means by which we can understand the economic, political, social and cultural logics of our time. Globalization is the most important keyword of this intellectual movement, together with such catchwords as flows, networks, hybrids, cosmopolitanism, connectivity, speed, time-space compression, uncertainty and contingency. These concepts have become dominant in social

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and cultural analysis, to the point of establishing a new theoretical orthodoxy that we can define as globalization theory.

Despite its hold on the academic imagination, globalization theory has received its share of criticism. Several commentators have pointed to the indeterminacy and ambiguity of 'globalization', characterizing it, for example, as a concept that creates 'an accumulation of confusion rather than an accumulation of knowledge' (Van der Bly, 2005: 890–91). In light of such suspicions, a remarkable feature of globalization discourse in academia has been its resilience. An important reason why the concept of globalization has gained such a firm foothold in academia is due to the fact that it is not only used to describe a host of changes in social and cultural life, but that it has also been developed into a theory or explanation of their causes and consequences. The attempt to ascribe huge causal importance for globalization has been discussed and criticized on a general theoretical level – especially by Rosenberg (2000, 2005) – but the specific ways in which globalization theorists have centred on changes in media, especially media and communications technologies, in such efforts has received less attention. Yet, arguments about media and communications are of crucial importance for the claim that because of globalization, society is currently undergoing transformations of epochal proportions.

In this article, I will focus critically on the role played by media and communications in the works of sociological and cultural theorists of globalization. In the first section, I will elaborate on the core elements of globalization theory and specify the centrality of media and communications for them. Even though the strategy of concentrating on new means of communication has helped to make the concept of globalization analytically more precise, it is a highly problematic strategy in various ways. In the following two sections, I will bring forward difficulties in how two noted theorists of globalization (Manuel Castells and Arjun Appadurai) have approached media and communications in their analyses. I will call into question their excessive preoccupation with new media technologies and their assumption that recent technological developments in media and communication are historically so significant that they necessitate a complete overhaul of social and cultural theory.

A consequent point, developed in the concluding section of the article, is that at the same time as globalization theorists have diverted attention to new means of communication, they have shown a massive disinterest in powerful material forces that shape society. I argue that a shift away from the examination of material relations of power is dubious in light of the rise of neoliberalism and the intensification of capitalism which overlaps with the emergence of globalization theory. Together with analysing the contours of globalization theory, I will thus address its political implications, that is, the question of whether or to what extent neoliberalism, as a political ideology, has affected the focuses, rhetoric and ways of reasoning that are typical for globalization theory in general and its arguments about media and communications in particular.

## **Media and the 'Spatio-Temporal Reformulation of Social Theory'**

Academic discussion concerning globalization took off in the period between the late 1980s and mid-1990s. Advocates of the idea that globalization should take the centre stage in social theory stressed the importance of the increasing integration and interconnectedness of the world. What they claimed was that instead of conceiving the world as a system constituted by economic and political competition – and sometimes overt military conflict – between powerful nation-states, the proper way to capture the nature of the post-cold war era was to forget such 'territorialist' patterns of analysis. They had been made redundant by the realization that the most important development

of the new historical moment was 'the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990: 64).

An effectively similar, though more differentiated proposition was offered by Held et al. (1999), who defined globalization as 'a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating trans-continental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power'. Such a definition gave globalization a truly extensive scope. Synchronically, Held and his associates analysed globalization in a way that could, in principle, include all imaginable material and non-material processes, provided that they could be demonstrated to be about 'interregional flows' that give rise to ever more complex political, economic, social and cultural interactions that permeate national boundaries. Diachronically, it transpires that globalization, thus understood, has a broad time frame, stretching far back in human history, although the authors emphasized the intensity and velocity of contemporary 'thick' patterns of globalization against their previous forms (Held et al., 1999: 429–31).

Advocates of globalization as new reality and concept have been producing a distinctive type of social theory, namely *Zeitdiagnose*. This is a mode of analysis that is interested in answering the question of how is our era different from the earlier one, typically with the help of dualistic concepts that aim at understanding the passage from modernity to another kind of modernity (whether it be 'late', 'high', 'second', 'liquid', etc.). Following this mode, another mainstream theorist of globalization, Martin Albrow (1996) argues that 'globalization' or 'globality' are terms that offer a way of speaking about radically new things that should not be reduced back to *modern* experiences. For him, globalization is a 'marker for a profound social and cultural transition' which, like 'Renaissance', refers 'to the aggregate of historical changes over a determinate period of history' (Albrow, 1996: 85, 95). Gesturing polemically towards Marxism, Albrow maintains that the new problematic of globalization or globality 'can never be as precise as that of capital'. This is so because old certainties have given way to new ambiguities and today, 'we are aiming to depict the character of an epoch without deriving it from any single principle, or indeed from any set of principles' (Albrow, 1996: 109).

Here we arrive at one of the key difficulties of mainstream sociology of globalization: a lack of analytic precision. In Albrow's hands, the concept of globalization does not explain anything. What it does is make us think of connections between a host of recent phenomena, such as increased trade between nations, satellite news delivery, global protest movements, pandemics, mass exoduses or other developments that are said to exemplify the 'global age'. Furthermore, on a closer look the newness of global age seems to be less of a novelty. Albrow (1996: 135) concedes that 'many of the forces of modernity, especially scientific activity and technology, continue to expand'. This is typical for sociology of globalization in general: the declaration of the new is regularly followed by a qualification declaring the fixity of the old. Consequently, in more than one academic treatise on globalization, one is led to believe in the radical newness of globalization on the basis of assertion, rather than due to careful argumentation (see e.g. McLennan, 2003: 558–62).

There have been other kinds of attempts to give globalization a more rigorous theoretical form, precisely because of the imprecision of definitions like the one offered by Albrow. When the concept of globalization is stripped off of multiple layers of academic verbiage that have accumulated over the years, it basically refers to intensified worldwide interconnectedness. However, those who emphasize the importance of globalization aim to go further. They maintain that the world-wide flows, interconnections and networks are today so intensive and speeded up that we have entered a qualitatively different kind of world. As a result, they also claim that we are in need of new kinds of analytical framework that will make these qualitative changes comprehensible.

Yet such efforts are complicated by an obvious question: what is or what are the driving forces behind the intensification of global interconnectedness and flows? This question refers to the problem of causation that is central to globalization debates. Mainstream globalization theorists are typically very circumspect in their answers. Held et al. (1999: 12) state that their view is in line with significant attempts by other sociologists of globalization 'which [highlight] the complex intersection between a multiplicity of driving forces, embracing economic, technological, cultural and political change'. This, again, increases the level of complexity in globalization theory that is not easy to reduce because of the ways in which globalization arguments are commonly structured. Due to the difficulties involved in the attempt to establish 'prime forces' behind globalization, many researchers avoid the question altogether or note that it is difficult to separate causes from effects in order to concentrate on the latter.

Scholte (2000: 89ff.) is wary of the difficulties to which such a 'loose treatment of a key question' may lead and wants to conduct 'a careful analysis of the forces that generate the trend'. He argues that globalization is caused, mainly, by four factors:

- (1) the spread of rationalism as a dominant knowledge framework;
- (2) capitalist development (market expansion combined with decentralized production and consumption);
- (3) technological innovations (jets, computers, etc.); and
- (4) changes in international regulatory frameworks such as governance mechanisms.

With this, Scholte gives a more concrete picture of what drives globalization than Held et al. (1999), for whom the question remains buried under thick descriptions of contingent historical conjunctures. However, in a manner that resembles their presentation, Scholte (2000: 106) maintains that the four causal factors are 'thoroughly interrelated' and that none of them have primacy over the others.

The problem is that this assertion is not followed by an analysis of how these dynamics are connected. This would lead to a theoretical discussion of, say, what kind of relationship there exists between technological development and capitalism, or between recent changes in political regulation and neoliberalism. Without this kind of theoretical discussion – which is not attempted in order to avoid the charge of this or that form of determinism or politics – even the kind of causal framework that Scholte offers is bound to remain more or less indeterminate and vague, which is a recurrent and, indeed, intentional feature of mainstream sociological globalization analysis.

Is there something wrong here? Many academic globalization experts would answer in the negative: globalization is a 'multicausal' and indeterminate affair and it should be analysed as such. Period. But here is the core issue: the main argument of the kind of globalization literature that has been reviewed above does not really analyse in great detail the causal forces *behind* globalization. At the least, it is not on this terrain that the most prominent intellectual battles are being fought. More important analytically has been the attempt to turn globalization *itself* into a causal force.

This is a significant distinction, on which Marxist political scientist Justin Rosenberg has focused. Rosenberg notes that any attempt to involve globalization in the explanation of social change has two alternatives: either it must rely on pre-established social theories (i.e. classical sociological theories of modernity or capitalism) in order to provide an answer to the question of what globalization is, how it is being caused and with what consequences; or it must try to claim that the concept of globalization *itself* denotes a new kind of social theory that will make these changes comprehensible. Rosenberg (2005: 12) notes that in the first strategy, 'globalization' remains a descriptive term, something to be explained by other means; only in the latter it becomes

'the *explanans* of the argument', and it 'can legitimately function as such only insofar as a spatio-temporal reformulation of social theory succeeds'.

The reference to 'spatio-temporal reformulation' here is crucial. A basic definition of globalization as 'interconnectedness' could not suffice alone to make globalization the central category of social theory. Instead, globalization theorists needed to elevate the status of time and space as tools for sociological analysis. Already quite a while back, Giddens (1979: 54) lamented that their importance was neglected in social theory and demanded that it 'must acknowledge, as it has not done previously, time-space intersections as essentially involved in social existence'. He did not have to wait for long, as the rise of globalization as an academic topic in the 1990s answered to his call perfectly. In the burgeoning globalization literature, references to 'the annulment of temporal/spatial distances' (Bauman, 1998: 18) became frequent.

After reading through many influential globalization analyses, we can reconstruct the contours of a recurrent intellectual procedure that consists of four arguments. First, globalization is defined as a process of intensification of world-wide interconnections and flows; second, in order to raise the stakes, it is claimed that this phenomenon has huge causal significance in that it enforces overall social and cultural transformation (e.g. Held et al., 1999: 31); third, the elaboration of the significance of globalization is transmuted into a spatio-temporal framework that purportedly transcends previous sociological perspectives; and fourth, claims concerning the novelty of new media and communication technologies are presented in support of this framework, so as to convince the reader once and for all that we live today in a different kind of global era.

Although media and communications is only one ingredient of the argument, it should not be seen merely as a rhetorical ornament of little significance. Declarations concerning qualitative differences caused by new means of communication to social relations are organically present in globalization theory. Thus Giddens (2002: 11–12), for example, argues that especially with the advent of satellites and other types of advanced electronic communications, 'For the first time ever, instantaneous communication is possible from one side of the world to the other', and that this 'alters the very texture of our lives'.

The salience of media-based arguments for globalization theory is further shown by Scholte. He claims that ever since the birth of printing, advancements in media technology – continuous acceleration of communication by the succession of one type of electronic means with another – has led to a continuous reduction of the significance of location and distance as limiting factors in human connectivity, without overturning them. Yet especially with the invention and expansion of new media and communications technologies and applications such as the internet, territorial distance is suddenly of little significance as 'distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial boundaries present no particular impediment' (Scholte, 2000: 48). Thus we live in societies whose spatial logic is no longer what it used to be and we have to develop wholly new concepts such as 'suprateritoriality', and bid 'farewell to methodological territorialism' (Scholte, 2000: 56; see also Beck, 2000: 64–8; Rosenberg, 2000: 24).

Because of such reasoning, an interesting contradiction emerges in the logical structure of globalization theory argumentation. Scholte, Beck, Giddens and Held et al. all present themselves as theorists who support a multicausal framework of analysis. For example, when Scholte discusses the multiplicity of causal factors behind globalization, he notes that 'an explanation of globalization that considers only technological forces is both superficial and incomplete' (Scholte, 2000: 100). On the other hand, when he makes statements about the novelty of globalization, he has no other alternative than to ground these on precisely media-technological arguments. This holds true for globalization theory in general. To be sure, the literature of globalization is huge and media and communications are not central in all of it. But they are of central strategic importance for the core

idea of mainstream sociology of globalization: the above-mentioned ‘spatio-temporal reformulation of social theory’.

It should be noted here that all the sociologists of globalization mentioned above – defined as ‘transformationalists’ by Held et al. (1999: 7) – are arguing against Marxist ‘sceptics’ of globalization theory, who they claim are working on the basis of a monocausal paradigm. I argue, however, that the main fault line in academic globalization debate does not run between ‘good’ multicausality and ‘bad’ monocausality. Emphatic charges against monocausality by transformationalists serve to hide their own theoretical emphases. It seems to me that the central dividing issue concerns the question of particular determinations: what are the specific tendencies to which different globalization authors alert us, and what do they hold to be primary in analysing the process?<sup>1</sup>

Certain theoretical tendencies and modes of explanation are more visible in mainstream globalization theorists’ literature than others and this limits the inclusiveness of their self-proclaimed pluralistic outlook. What I have pointed out so far is that in the works of seminal globalization theorists, there is a forceful theoretical investment in spatio-temporal changes and with them, a tendency to reduce everything to changes in media and communications technology. The emergence of new media and communications technologies is often offered as a decisive point of departure for explorations in globalization, accompanied by the claim that their ubiquitous presence in all areas of social life forces us to renew social theory. Yet, it is not such a new observation as it is often claimed to be. Earlier theorists of postmodernity have made similar claims, such as Poster (1984) who has demanded that we should rethink social theory because of the rise of a ‘new logic’ of ‘mode of information’ that ‘accounts for the prominent place of information in the social space’ (Poster, 1984: 53). An enthusiasm for the overcoming of time and space has an even longer history in western social thought, as will be discussed later on. Because of such continuities, there are reasons to think that globalization theorists are not so much offering a renewal of social theory as repackaging older arguments in a new form.

A heightened interest in so-called new media and communications raises a doubt that globalization theory is characterized by a distinctive reductionism of its own, that is, a media-centric version of technological determinism. In any case, when arguments concerning media and communication technologies are paraded so forcefully in the globalization theory perspective, then I think we need to pay more attention to how its advocates have analysed the assumed new characteristics of these technologies. I will begin with a critical analysis of Manuel Castells’s treatment of media and communications, to be followed by the same with regard to Arjun Appadurai.

## The McLuhanisms of Castells’s Network Society Theory

Starting his career as a Marxist urban sociologist in the 1960s, Manuel Castells became world-famous in the late 1990s with the publication of his trilogy, *The Information Age*.<sup>2</sup> The key effort in all of Castells’s late work is the attempt to understand ‘the emergence of a new social structure’ as a shift to the ‘informational society’ (Castells, 2000a: 18–26). This notion is already significant but the concept of ‘network society’, which is most central to Castells, brings his thinking even closer to the problematic of globalization. Castells repeats in many different variations the standard argument of mainstream globalization theory, according to which place-based social structures give way to networks and flows that give rise to a new economy, new kinds of social and power relations and new cultural experiences, together with providing new frames for political action.

In a key passage towards the end of the first volume of his trilogy, Castells (2000a: 500) sums up his position:

as an historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. ... I would argue that this networking logic induces a social determination of a higher level than that of the special social interests expressed through the networks; the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power.

This constitutes Castells's 'overarching conclusion'. Whatever concepts Castells uses to highlight social transformations – whether in the economy, culture or politics – these always refer back to the idea that we now live in a network society, a society whose structure is no longer as fixed in space and time as it used to be, and which is also less hierarchical and centralized. The structure that now prevails is the 'new social morphology' of informational networks that shape social organizations and relationships of production, consumption, power and experience in ways that are more diffuse and complex than ever before. Due to these emphases, I argue that Castells's work belongs to the hard core of globalization theory.

Arguments about media and communications are fundamental for the information age. Advances in information and communications technology, especially the emergence of the internet, forms the basis on which Castells builds his idea of a 'new social morphology' that dominates society today: the network that Castells speaks about is primarily an electronic communications network. Even though Castells admits that there have been networks in earlier periods of human history, he maintains that they are today of a different kind. New information and communication technologies 'have spread throughout the globe with lightning speed' in the past decades, 'connecting the world' in a more fundamental sense than was the case with previous technological revolutions (Castells, 2000a: 32). The main theoretical point offered by Castells is the argument that while the networks of today are not 'placeless', their 'structural logic' is. The novelty of the information age lies in the fact that the 'network of communication is the fundamental spatial configuration: places do not disappear, but their logic and their meaning becomes absorbed in the network' (Castells, 2000a: 443).

Apart from conceiving new information and communication technologies as the material basis of the network society, Castells writes also of the media (both the 'old' and the 'new') more concretely. For example, he (2004: 316–21) discusses the development of media systems and the loss of state power in the field of media regulation, and he reserves a full chapter (Castells, 2000a: chapter 5) for an outline of how the media sphere in western countries has changed historically and with what cultural consequences.

Underlying Castells's analysis of historical changes in the nature of social communication is a medium-theoretical summary of the development of human civilization. Here the powerful influence that Canadian cultural philosopher Marshall McLuhan has had on Castells needs to be pointed out, a feature which has typically been either ignored or left without enough elaboration in commentaries on his work.<sup>3</sup>

For McLuhan, the effect of media for society was not generated by its 'messages' but by its form, that is, by the medium itself which shapes consciousness and social interaction through its technological features. This was the basis on which McLuhan – whom Castells, in an interview, considers 'a genius' (Rantanen, 2005: 142) – made a distinction between three stages in the history of civilization. According to McLuhan, the first stage of oral cultures was characterized by the predominance of speech but also by direct face-to-face contact, unified collective experiences and the interplay of all senses. A dramatic shift occurred with the development of the phonetic alphabet and, later, printing. The phonetic alphabet broke down the collective framework of

preliterate cultures and destroyed their sensual richness, separating those who can read from those who cannot, and giving rise to divergent experiences as people engage themselves in different types of literature (Meyrowitz, 2003: 194). McLuhan argued that by comparison to orality, literacy fosters rationality, linearity and more effective instrumental control over the environment – at the expense of ‘the ability to feel, express, and experience emotions’ (Czitrom, 1982: 174).

In contrast to this, McLuhan argued that with the coming of electronic media technology, we have moved into a culture where ‘the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village’ (McLuhan, 1962: 31). With his trope of ‘global village’, he referred to a conceptualization according to which the ‘detrribalization’ caused by phonetic alphabet and print is being supplanted by the process of ‘retribalization’ caused by new electronic media, especially television. They restore the rich sensual spectrum and cohesive communal bonds of premodern societies, ‘translating the visual or eye man back into the tribal or oral pattern’ (McLuhan, 1964: 58).

It is easy to be dismissive of McLuhan simply by noting the basic naivety of his media-based communal romanticism. Yet McLuhan’s optimistic scenario was well received by the media savvy younger generations of North America in the 1960s, and it has also had an impact in western academia. Comparing contemporary advances in media and communication technology to the invention of the alphabet, Castells (2000a: 356) emphasizes ‘the integration of various modes of communication into an interactive network’ that occurs now ‘for the first time in history’. Recycling McLuhan’s gnomic style and technological naturalism, Castells (2000a: 356) proposes a grand synthesis that takes place not only in the technological apparatus but also inside the human psyche: ‘The human spirit reunites its dimensions in a new interaction between the two sides of the brain, machines, and social contexts’. McLuhan’s choice of words was more psychedelic (he spoke of the same thing as ‘regaining our Wholeness ... on a cosmic plane’, cited in Czitrom, 1982: 174), but the same underlying story is recounted by both of them: a return to a more sensory unified communications environment after nearly 3000 years of domination of literacy and emotional detachment.

Like McLuhan, Castells is optimistic in terms of the impact of new communication technologies and they both share a communitarianist vision according to which these technologies offer a chance to renew communal bonds in an otherwise individualizing society. However, McLuhan wrote in the 1960s when the cultural impact of television was peaking, whereas Castells has written extensively about the internet around the turn of the millennium. Interestingly then, ‘the McLuhan Galaxy’ of television is for Castells (2000a: 358) similar in its features to the ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’ of print discussed by McLuhan. This is to say that they are depicted by the authors as standardized, over-rationalized cultures of domination. The main difference between the authors lies in their historical assessment of media-technological change relative to domination. McLuhan placed his hopes in television, which he saw as affording channels for interaction and participation; Castells now places it in the internet for the same reasons. Thus he argues that the internet ‘will remain, technologically open, enabling widespread public access and seriously limiting governmental and commercial restrictions’, since ‘unlike the mass media ... they have technologically and culturally embedded properties of interactivity and individualization’ (Castells, 2000a: 384–5). A similar stance characterizes also Castells’s more recent analysis of the subject (e.g. Castells, 2007).

Although Castells claims in an interview that ‘the question of newness’ is of no interest to him (Castells and Ince, 2003: 23), his network society theory is in fact founded on precisely this question. Statements such as ‘in a broad historical perspective, the network society represents a qualitative change in the human experience’ (Castells, 2000a: 508) are plentiful in his work. Especially crucial for him is the idea that communication networks and the ‘structural logic’ of ‘spaces of

flows' which they support offer fundamentally new modalities for contemporary human existence. But is he warranted to make such sweeping claims?

In a critical response, it can be argued that electronic communication networks have a long history that can be traced back to the period of roughly between 1860 and 1930. In this context, one learns much from Winseck's and Pike's (2007) history of the globalization of media (telegraph, news agencies) between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Criticizing earlier accounts which claim a close fit between national interests, inter-imperial rivalry and the development of media-technological networks, they argue that rather than being tied to territorial dominance (although that was also a factor), the early forms of media globalization resulted from the actions of liberal globalizers from many countries who wanted to make the world open to investment and capitalist property relations, often in the guise of discourses of 'modernization'. Those interests were realized to a considerable extent, and as a result 'globalization during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth was not just shallow and fleeting, but deep and durable ... built around networks and hubs that 'supported huge flows of capital, technology, people, news, and ideas which, in turn, led to a high degree of convergence among markets, merchants, and bankers' (Winseck and Pike, 2007: 1–2).

A critical comment against Castells's version of 'spatio-temporal reformulation of social theory' can thus be presented: whatever one may think of the difference regarding the intensity and extensiveness of the mentioned technological processes between the late 19th century and more recent times, the fact remains that a similar 'structural logic' of 'spaces of flows' to which Castells refers – the absorption of distinct locales into networks that link them together and the extension of communication beyond nation-state borders – was well established already in the earlier period. Likewise, the trope of 'annihilation of space and time by electronic means' which Castells (2000b: 374) uses has a long history as well. In the modern western imagination, *Zeitgeist* is very typically associated with communication technologies and their capacity to put an end to geography. The years between 1880 and 1918 were a veritable 'culture of time and space' (Kern, 1983) in North America, a period characterized by all kinds of awestruck social commentaries that proclaimed the overcoming of time and space with the help of new communications and transportation technology. McLuhan (1964: 19) continued this tradition as he explained the meaning of his most often cited slogan ('global village'): 'Today, after more than a century of electronic technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned.' 'As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village' (McLuhan, 1964: 20). Castells may be more cautious in his conclusions, but there is a basic similarity in their media analysis and its core theme: spatio-temporal compression and its broad cultural effects. Due to the recurrence of this theme in social commentary of the media in the past 100–150 years (Mosco, 2004), it is a poor indicator of what is now 'historically new' (Castells, 2000b: 367).

However, there is more to the issue than historic myopia. Beyond the fact that similar thoughts of technological revolutions of time and space have been presented before, they reflect certain ideological features. Karim (2003: 73) writes of 'the mass amazement expressed towards the capabilities of the internet' which 'seems magical, even miraculous, in enabling activities that were supposedly impossible', such as the overcoming of time and space and a new, more democratic political culture. For Castells, too, the network society is a different kind of modernity, characterized by democratization and emancipation from the fetters of the previous standardized mass culture, and these features are enabled above all by the new 'horizontal' media and communications technology.

I propose that Castells can reach such an optimistic conclusion only through selective weighting of history, social dynamics and technological developments. The method for this selection follows

a medium-theoretical understanding of how media and power are related. As the argument goes, the properties of media and communications technology allow different things in different stages of history; we can analyse their societal and cultural effects primarily by looking at these properties. It is not that Castells would leave enduring social and economic dynamics totally out of his analysis, but that the force and logic of technological innovation is ultimately decisive.

Castells's tilting towards technological determinism is also visible in what he leaves out or plays down in his analysis, namely questions concerning political economic determination of the media. For example, Castells does not discuss the development of public service media and related trends in broadcasting policy in his work at all, especially in terms of how these reflect the general neoliberalization of western media (e.g. Chakravarty and Sarikakis, 2006: 85ff.). Additionally, while Castells notes the concentration of media industries into oligopolies at the global level and the resulting commercialization of television (Castells, 2000a: 369), these remarks are mainly vehicles for arguments that chart the transforming power of the informational mode of development. He writes characteristically that, 'while there is oligopolistic concentration of multimedia groups, there is, at the same time, market segmentation, and the rise of interactive audience, superseding the uniformity of mass audience' (Castells, 2000c: 12) – as if the social power of media conglomerates is dictated solely by the organization of people into a singular mass audience (cf. Turow, 1997).

A further point is that Castells has a very weak concept of ideological or material domination in his analysis of media and communications. It is notable that when Castells discusses economic power and the media, he does this mainly so as to notice how insignificant it is as a source of social power. For example, Castells proceeds to make the claim that whatever methods political elites and corporations use in order to influence public opinion, they are negated by the new technological logic: 'Information networks, in the age of Internet, are truly out of control' and in the network society 'the power of flows overwhelms the flows of power' (Castells, 1998: 400, 402).

It is, however, rather bold to state that information networks are 'truly out of control', given that corporations and states still have enormous resources in their hands – much more than, say, individual bloggers – to influence public perspectives on important social issues through different types of public relations activities. This is true especially in cases when elites try to set into motion actions that are potentially loathed by the majority, as in the build-up towards the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Boyd-Barrett, 2004; Moeller, 2004). Yet even if we put aside the most blatant examples of how mainstream media have failed to live up to their ideals of objectivity, the continuation of established patterns of media ownership and conglomeration ensure that they continue to privilege those elites that control them, in other words, social groups that are essentially interested in making profits and upholding the unequal social relations that make this possible (e.g. Bagdikian, 2004: 19–21, 28–9). This source of structural power is not something that we should forget when assessing the democratic potential of social media networks (see Baker, 2007: 98ff.).

With Castells's perspective, it is difficult to understand why one can find in the media systematic patterns in the production of meaning in the service of dominant social relations (Wayne, 2003: 178–9). This is all the more confusing since Castells (2007: 238) himself notes that 'the fundamental battle being fought in the society is the battle over the minds of the people', and that this battle 'is largely being played out in the processes of communication'. This implies an analysis of media as sites of ideological domination and the institutional-structural reasons for the particular symbolic forms that are manifested. Castells, however, does not pursue this line of analysis, since it would call for a critical analysis of mode of production vis-a-vis the media.

Instead, Castells's work and the major conclusions that he draws from media and its globalization always come back to the inherent properties of media technology, especially the 'open' character of the internet. Taken together, these approaches coalesce into an excessively media-centric

analysis of contemporary society and culture, where the dynamism of new media and communication technologies is given primacy. Castells assesses their social consequences optimistically especially because to him, they betoken the end of grand totalitarianisms of the industrial society: one-way communication to anonymous masses, statist forms of governance and increasing political indifference among the populace. I argue that the emergence of such themes can be understood in the context of the rise of neoliberalism. Before that argument, however, I want to elaborate on a different type of globalization theory.

## **Arjun Appadurai and the Poststructuralist Reformulation of Culture**

Cultural globalization theory can be singled out as a distinctive position within globalization theory. Exponents of this orientation share the same interest in media and communications technologies, flows, mobility and shifts in the spatio-temporal constitution of society that comes forward in the work of Castells and other sociologists of globalization. Nonetheless, cultural globalization theorists are more sensitive to the cultural specificities and manifestations of such transformations, especially in terms of how they affect collective identities. The accent of cultural globalization theory does not fall on 'the transformation of our "material culture" by the works of a new technological paradigm organized around information technologies' (Castells, 2000a: 28), but rather, on the transformation of symbolic culture, even if media and communications technologies are a crucial part of it.

Following this view, cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996: 5) notes that 'there has been a shift in recent decades, building on technological changes over the past century or so, in which imagination has become a collective, social fact'. This does not refer to increasing 'global awareness', conceived as some kind of unitary development of human consciousness. Instead, Appadurai wants to call into question the importance of national and territorial boundaries in the formation of culture and identity. One of the claims that he emphasizes is that group identities 'around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous'. This poses 'an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called deterritorialization' (Appadurai, 1996: 49).

Because of deterritorialization – which is a keyword of cultural globalization theory, together with a related concept, hybridization – people and ideas are continuously flowing and coming into contact with each other around the globe. The net result is a tremendous multiplication of 'imagined worlds' (Appadurai, 1996: 33). Cultural identities have become more unstable and more 'improvised' in conditions of globalization and thus the 'transmission of culture' from one generation to another 'can no longer be assumed' (Appadurai, 1996: 43). By the same token, nation-states are less successful than before in their attempts to uphold 'official' identities, which are functional for the maintenance of their dominant institutions. The reproduction of such identifications is in crisis, which accounts for recent state-directed attempts to re-establish and monopolize ideas of true 'nationhood'. The crisis of reproduction of national cultures clears the way for the production of 'post-national imaginaries' (Appadurai, 1996: 21–2).

Such positions have since become conventional wisdom in contemporary cultural theory, but they should not be treated as indisputable empirical developments in the world. Underlying the notions of deterritorialization and hybridization is a specific conceptualization of culture that is founded on poststructuralist ideas that were well rehearsed even before academic discussions of globalization began. These notions refer to the process by which ties between culture and place

have become dissolved and to the fusion of various cultures that springs up from their constant and recently heightened interaction. As such, 'deterritorialization' and 'hybridization' exude the kind of poststructuralist celebration of cultural difference which looms large in the paradigm. One of the key arguments of cultural globalization theory is that instead of being anchored in a naturalized essence, cultural identities are anti-essentialist, in the unending process of becoming. Accordingly, the processes of cultural globalization are presented as supremely emancipatory: they challenge all attempts to fix identities to their 'primordial' origins (ethnic, local, national, etc.). They make possible endless cultural interbreedings, play with identities and the mobilization of difference which 'blurs the canon, reverses the current [and] subverts the centre' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: 57).

Electronic media and communications technologies and networks are central building blocks for cultural globalization theory. For Appadurai (1996: 10), the media are catalysts of 'the work of the imagination' that transform 'everyday subjectivities'. He (1996: 53) explains that 'until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of possible lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places'. However, 'in the past two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force ... More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by the mass media in all their forms' (Appadurai, 1996: 54).

Note here, again, the claim that media are transformative agents of history. As imagination has been 'unyoked' from place (Appadurai, 1996: 58), it becomes attached to new aspirations, new cultural expressions and new politics. All things considered, mediated imaginaries are sources for explosive cultural mixtures – for agency, action, reaction and struggle.

The topic of deterritorialization is connected to another crucial argument in cultural globalization theory. Appadurai and others who work within this paradigm are united in their aversion towards theories of cultural imperialism which were developed in the period between the 1960s and 1980s. The theorists of cultural imperialism (e.g. Schiller, 1976) emphasized

- (1) the division of the world system into dominating core and dominated peripheral countries;
- (2) the pressure exercised by the core countries on modelling the media structures of other countries in ways which benefit the former;
- (3) the imbalance or non-reciprocity of flows of media products between the North and the South; and
- (4) the threat posed to indigenous local cultures because of the relationship of dependency that exists between the core and the periphery.

According to its critics, the existence of cultural imperialism called for a comprehensive change in international communication structures – such as the ill-fated 'new world information and communication order' (Golding and Harris, 1997) – that would help Third World nations to preserve their cultural autonomy against the interests of the West and the USA in particular.

Claims over cultural imperialism have been subjected to a number of critiques. In several studies made in the 1980s and 1990s it was pointed out that nations outside the core were reducing US imports and producing an increasing amount of programmes of their own (e.g. Straubhaar, 2000) and in some cases becoming media exporters themselves. Some observers greeted these changes as a sign of something completely different, maybe even 'reverse media imperialism' (Rogers and Antola, 1985: 33). A second major critique of cultural imperialism theory involves the allegation that its conception of media audiences and reception is unsatisfactory and paternal; even if audiences in the periphery have to make do primarily with a western media diet – which is by no means

certain any more – they still make reinterpretations of those symbolic products on the basis of their own cultural understandings (Tomlinson, 1991: 41–50).

While Appadurai refers to these standard critiques of cultural imperialism in his work, they only go half the way, at the most, in so far as we are discussing his and other cultural globalization theorists' position. Appadurai is proposing a more thorough cultural complexity which challenges not only the notion of cultural imperialism but also its more traditional culturalist critics. The reasoning is this: if there are no national hierarchies (but only complex global flows), then there is no reason to speak of external control, nations as agents, new world information and communication orders, cultural autonomy or cultural imperialism (or its reverse). In a rhizomic global system, there are no centres and no peripheries, no sense of what is internal and what is external to the system. Borrowing vocabulary from chaos theory, Appadurai (1996: 46) notes that cultural forms today are 'fundamentally fractal ... possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities'. If we follow this logic, then we have to conclude that global cultural flows are *acentric*, and this is something the theory of culture imperialism, backed up with an out-dated world systems theory perspective, seems to be unable to handle.

In cultural globalization theory we can find the same spatial reduction that distinguishes globalization theorizations in general, that is, the use of such concepts as deterritorialization that point to a transformation of space as the leading development of our age. The speciality of cultural globalization theory is that this theme of deterritorialization is intimately connected to a poststructuralist analysis of cultural flows which points to the destabilization of territorial or national fixing of culture. In the cultural account of globalization, the main target of critique is the tyrannical nation-state that maintains homogeneous identities. Yet, for cultural globalization theorists, new media and communications technologies have offered possibilities for new cultural attachments which bypass national boundaries and foster the hybridization of cultures. These focuses lead, as is the case in sociological analysis of globalization, to an optimistic scenario regarding the emancipatory effects of media and communications technologies.

The poverty with this scenario is in the fact that it pays scant attention to the global neoliberal hegemony of recent decades which has entrenched capitalist dynamics also in the field of media and culture all the more vigorously than before, regardless of the coming of a more culturally deterritorialized world. By framing the issue of cultural homogeneity and imperialism so that it is reduced to a question of hierarchic patterns of domination between nations, cultural globalization theorists sweep aside the homogeneity of how the capital and the commodity form increasingly dominate cultures everywhere. Combined with the claim according to which western cultural domination has now been severely weakened, this sweep is bound to clear the way for a picture of cultural globalization that radiates with empowerment.

The concepts of deterritorialization and hybridization are conceptual tools that are meant to demonstrate the radical de-centredness of the world in an economic, political and cultural sense. The poststructuralist theory perspective that informs this perspective is geared towards the conclusion that if there are no spatial centres – understood as the unquestioning cultural power of western states or corporations – but only flows in a decentred network, then there are also no hierarchies of domination. Clearly, I think, this leaves much to be desired from a theory that is trying to be critical and emancipatory.

The problem with the rejection of the notion of cultural imperialism – which has, to be sure, deficiencies of its own (see e.g. Sparks, 2007: 105ff.) – by the advocates of cultural globalization theory is in that it leads to a dismissal of any notion of imperialism as part of a critical social or cultural theory. There is no need to speak of imperialism solely as a question of western dominance, as cultural globalization theorists habitually do. Instead of discarding the issue altogether,

however, it is better to notice the simultaneous existence of 'territorial imperialism' and 'capitalist imperialism' (Harvey, 2003). Recent decades have been a period of extensive capitalist imperialism, that is, the introduction of neoliberal political measures that make the world safe for capital ('structural adjustment', privatization, the concentration of transnational corporate power and the spread of the culture of consumerism, etc.) and which serve transnational class interests.

Nonetheless, capitalist imperialism has not made nation-states and geopolitical hierarchies redundant. There is now an 'Empire of capital', based on the worldwide spread of market imperatives, which is, however, dependent upon 'a system of multiple states' (Wood, 2003: 14). This is so because the economic imperatives of capitalism require a certain amount of 'extra-economic' protection: the mechanisms of regulation and coercion by nation-states 'to create and sustain conditions of accumulation and maintain the system of capitalist property' (Wood, 2002: 178). As in the past, we are today 'confronted with a hybrid form of sovereignty, in which appeals to universal principles coexist in complex ways with assertions of national interest' (Callinicos, 2002: 262).

The contradictions between existing forms of capitalist imperialism and territorialist imperialism are operative in the cultural sphere as well. Appadurai's (1996: 31) claim, according to which the USA 'is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes', is an understatement. World television and film markets are still dominated by US producers, the latter even more so today (Flew, 2007: 127; Sparks, 2007: 176). Even as peripheral media production and export have gained momentum in the past decades, US media industries continue to benefit from their large domestic market where the costs of production can be recouped. This gives them a position from which to flood the world's media market with their products at a level that is impossible for rivals to attain. While there are now 'regional versions of *Blind Date* or *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* all over the world ... they are all modelled, in the first instance, on Anglo-American formats' (Morley, 2006: 36).

There are also palpable difficulties with Appadurai's argument that, because of the proliferation of world-wide media flows, 'imagination has become a collective fact', i.e. more democratic resource of human agency. Besides being a dubious historical argument – is it really true that imagination was less of a collective social fact, say, a hundred years ago, regardless of the range of media that existed then in different parts of the world? – this claim glosses over the issue of class. The possibility that imagination is 'unleashed' from its fetters is mediated not only by the presence or absence of electronic media but also by the hierarchies of class. Appadurai may be right in stating that mediated imaginaries are increasingly available for all kinds of people across class lines. But class still has a powerful impact on media production and consumption: it determines the questions of what is being offered to whom, who consumes what and how, and with what kind of societal consequences. Because Appadurai sidesteps these questions in his examination of media and communications, we can see traces of technological progressivism in his analysis – in other words, he assigns too much causal power to the development of media technologies alone.

Appadurai's belief in the capacity of the media to provide new imaginations forgets also the fact that media spheres throughout the globe have become more commercialized (e.g. Artz and Kamilipour, 2003). The claim that imagination is now more democratically available to all does not register the form towards which collective imagination is geared in contemporary societies: fantasies of material possession that are propagated through advertising and myriad types of marketing. Global media industries have become increasingly fluent in capturing audiences with their visual grandeur and their 'aesthetics of the hybrid, mixing, diaspora, or creolization' (Hall, 1991, quoted in Haug, 2005: 38). But these advances have been channelled towards the intensive promotion of commodities, at the same time as new media technologies have 'globalized the range of commodity aesthetics' (Haug, 2005: 47). This does not mean the emergence of the kind of

'capitalist monoculture' against which cultural globalization theorists argue, but neither does it bespeak of any true democratization of imagination. While most of humanity, especially in the South, has been materially excluded from the promises of commodity aesthetics in the media, the lifestyles associated with them certainly affect the imaginations of the dispossessed as well, conjuring up the possibility of '*another world*' whose material promises, however, exist only 'as something missing' (Haug, 2005: 46–7).

Appadurai treats the media, communications and globalization in ways which weaken the force of his work as a critical resource. The main reason for this is an over-confidence in the emancipatory nature of deterritorialization that is based on a selective analysis of power as a cultural and spatial issue, a feature which is a hallmark of cultural globalization theory in general. The poverty of that perspective results from its missing counterbalance: the analysis of the expansion of specifically capitalist dynamics in media and culture, a development which is both cultural-ideological and structural-material at the same time. This omission leads cultural globalization theorists to discuss deterritorialization and hybridization as novelties of the current period whose presentation as such can, however, only be maintained if their links to the long history of capitalism have been cut off. The global economic integration that has followed from the expansionary nature of capitalism is in no way antithetical to the creation of more translocal or hybrid cultural forms that transgress national boundaries; it is in fact what drives the latter forward. This did not elude Marx and Engels (1998 [1848]: 54), of course, who noted in the mid-19th century that the 'cosmopolitan character' of 'production and consumption in every country' facilitates 'intercourse in every direction', with the result that 'national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness [would] become more and more impossible'. More recent developments offer support for this view (see e.g. Kraidy, 2005), even if cultural globalization theorists dismiss the importance of capital for the analysis of global cultural flows.

Trying to survive without critical concepts such as imperialism, capitalism or neoliberalism, cultural globalization theorists seek solace from the 'radically open cultural future' that lies ahead (Tomlinson, 1997: 190; see also Appadurai, 1996: 47). There is one distinctive cultural construct against which they direct considerable argumentative power: the nation-state. However, the high premium that cultural globalization theorists have put on emerging 'post-national imaginaries' or 'cosmopolitanism' – assisted by global media networks – point to a substantial weakness in that position. It has no real vision. Instead, it offers an appearance of vision, based on a certain analysis of what exists already. What I mean by this is that the visions of post-nationalism or cosmopolitanism are in fact already substantially contained within the notion of cultural globalization or deterritorialization which they evaluate basically as an emancipatory process. Because of that, one suspects that these visions are offered as cloaks which hide the absence of more ambitiously critical ideas at the level of the transnational system of capitalism itself (rather than at the level of the nation-state; see Jameson, 1998, 74). The extremely limited nature of cultural globalization theorists' critique and their unwillingness to examine capitalist dynamics in their analysis of media and communications leads me to consider possible links between globalization theory and neoliberalism.

## Globalization Theory and Neoliberalism

In the above, I have identified the strong presence of arguments concerning media and communications in globalization theory, together with their shortcomings. Yet these shortcomings seem to have been no hindrance to the rise of globalization theory as an extremely popular perspective in contemporary social sciences and cultural studies. Why is this so? What I will propose as a

conclusion is that the real reason why arguments concerning media and communications have been so important for globalization theory is not based on their analytical value – which is rather shaky at best – but more so on their confluence with certain political and ideological tendencies that characterize the same historical conjuncture in which globalization theory emerged, namely the post-1989 period marked by neoliberalism.

Ever since the Reagan and Thatcher revolutions in the early 1980s, and especially since the fall of Berlin Wall in the 1989, neoliberalism has become the dominant political and economic dogma throughout the world (Harvey, 2005: 3). Neoliberalism's ideological centre of gravity lies in a forceful defence of private property, competitive market and 'individual freedom', accompanied by an attack against state intervention. Policies and principles of deregulation, privatization of public enterprises, fiscal prudence, reduction of taxes for the rich, management of the public sector via methods developed in the private sector, removal of welfare benefits in the name of making people more 'active' and belief in the desirability of free capital mobility are all manifestations of the neoliberal orthodoxy (Harvey, 2005: 23; Hay, 2007: 54–5).

The neoliberalization of the world has by no means been total, but it remains a hegemonic project. Although neoliberalism is associated with a slogan according to which 'there is no alternative', it is not directly anti-utopian as such. Neoliberalism offers a utopia of individualism and freedom, understood as freedom from the tyranny of the state. This vision has been supremely successful, coming under sustained attack only lately because of the ongoing financial crisis.<sup>4</sup> Neoliberalism has become the encouraging political vision of the age. Much of this is based on its critique of the repressions of the 'paternalist social state' that has been successful enough to make even subordinated social groups, social democrats and former 1960s radicals 'the driving force behind the orientation towards 'self-responsibility' and the dissolution of public structures' (Candeias, 2008: 53, my translation).

Yet there are contradictions in this utopian, anti-statist vision of neoliberalism. The great irony of the neoliberal utopia of individual freedom is that it has arrived at the moment when utopias have been declared dead, when 'history has ended' (Fukuyama, 1992) and the capitalist liberal democracy has been announced as the final condition – the closest thing we are likely to have to any utopia. Besides the fact that neoliberal ideology works by announcing the obsolescence of alternative ideologies, it is today in such a powerful position that it ends up emptying its own utopian character. As neoliberalism has become really existing and even hegemonic, in contrast to being on the fringes of ideology and political practice as was the case in earlier times, its utopian dimension has necessarily declined.

The neoliberal mood of the present times is characterized by 'the paralysis of criticism in a society lacking opposition' (Smart, 2003: 46). It is my claim, supported by Hodgson (1999: 7), that such a massive denial of social alternatives creates a void of imagination. This void makes room for visions that are far more limited in their utopian character. The political implications of this are obvious to anyone who has paid attention to recent parliamentary politics in, say, western Europe. But this is also the point where mainstream academic globalization theory converges with neoliberalism and offers an example of the latter's intellectual influence. Academic globalization theory has been developed in an intellectual context that was formerly permeated with, or at least much more conducive to, discourses that were critical of capitalist domination of society. Especially with the collapse of state socialism that has reoriented the lines of debate, discussion is centred on issues other than the human consequences of the present socio-economic order, or is characterized by different degrees of submission to it. None of this follows an inexorable logic, for the triumph of capitalism could equally have been interpreted as a reason to direct more, rather than less, attention to capital as an object of study. Instead, however, social theorists started to show signs of

resignation in front of the rise of neoliberalism. In this situation, to borrow a phrase, thinkers on the left have compensated 'for an experience of defeat with a rhetoric of supersession' (Anderson, 1998: 74).

A key motivation for contemporary sociologists, including the globalization theorists discussed above, is the search for the logic of social change, often in millennial terms (Golding, 2000: 165). Because of the fact that globalization theorists reject Marxist-materialist explanations of social change – which would have to take into account not only changes but also the continuities of capitalist social relations and economic dynamics – they have to introduce other explanatory variables into their models. Therefore, in the period characterized by capitalist triumphalism and the lack of social alternatives, it becomes understandable that we have recently witnessed a renewed fascination with the shifts in the spatio-temporal constitution of society which new media and communication technologies are said to have caused. The transformative power of these technologies promises to move us towards a new social existence that is superseding the old.

When grand societal utopias have been declared impossible, and when the power of capital seems more consolidated than ever, belief in the revolutionary nature of new media and communications carries on the belief that we are still on the threshold of millennial change that is pregnant with possibilities. Thus I would argue that the void, created by neoliberal hegemony, of utopian imagination in academia finds its expression in the recent *mediatization of social and cultural theory*, in the forceful emergence of arguments regarding media-technological changes and their sweeping socio-cultural consequences. They are paraded forward with such a force that they must not only be seen as serving historical-analytical but also utopian functions, that is, the longing for a better world in times when such longing is otherwise suspect or even considered impracticable.

It would be wrong to claim that globalization theory is a direct mirror of neoliberal ideology. It is nonetheless resonant with the latter, in at least two senses. Globalization theory has

- (1) assisted in switching the theoretical frame of reference away from the analysis of capitalist mode of production over to the analysis of latest technological developments; and
- (2) has produced visions of new freedoms through new media and communications technologies that are in many ways homological to the emancipatory vision of neoliberalism.

It is in this context that Castells's media-centrism and his remark that 'if I had to choose now which to oppose, capital or the state, I would still say the state' (Castells, in Rantanen, 2005: 138) can be understood. The transition into 'informational capitalism' in the 1990s is viewed by Castells as the coming of a more open, creative and productive economy, bringing with it also social and cultural freedoms, such as the de-massification of the older 'standardized' mass media culture and its replacement by the decentralized culture of the internet. His focus is thus firmly locked onto technological developments at the expense of a critical analysis of 'the continuities imposed by the logic of capitalist institutions' (Bromley, 1999: 14), also within the new media and communications sphere (see Wayne, 2003: 262).

The compatibility of cultural globalization theory with neoliberalism is linked to its post-structuralist emphases. The central motivation of cultural globalization theory is the critique of cultural essentialisms and especially the attempt by nation-states to homogenize cultural identities. From this position, Appadurai operates with a dualism that recognizes only the bad boundary-thinking of the nation-state and the good cultural difference created by global flows of 'imagination'. This position leads to the same problem noted by Rehmann (2007: 13) with regard to postmodern positions in academia in general: the 'critical project of de-naturalization of fixed identities is always at risk of morphing into an overall de-materialization of social life'. The

cultural globalization theory argument misses the realization that not only the nation-state but also the social and political order of capitalism, especially in the context of ongoing neoliberal hegemony, is based on structures of exclusion of the other. Railing against the notion of 'cultural imperialism', cultural globalization theorists see no reason to examine critically the imperialism of global capitalism which has consequences for culture and identity as well. That project has been taken over by a discourse of global cultural hybrids, deterritorializations and new imaginations (i.e. less spatially fixed cultures) which obscures the dominance of 'corporate culture on a global scale' (Jameson, 1998: 66).

What unites mainstream globalization theory is a polemic against Marxist-materialist perspectives and with this, the conspicuous absence of a substantive critical account of capitalism and neoliberalism. This is unfortunate in terms of the analysis of globalization, whose dynamics and trajectories can be more effectively understood via Marxist categories rather than through the idea that globalization needs to be analysed as a new reality that is driven by the speed of new media and communications technologies (see Harvey, 1990; Rosenberg, 2000: 32ff. ; Wallerstein, 2000). The absence of critical material considerations also does away with countering 'neoliberalism's deliberate policy of depoliticisation' (Munck, 2005: 68) and renders thought submissive to the suggestion that this policy is automatic, since we cannot imagine radical alternatives to that which it boosts, namely, 'the capitalist character of contemporary societies' (Klein and Brie, 2008: 73). Because of its omissions, globalization theory is incapable of addressing the outrage that capitalism continues to reproduce through old and new forms of exploitation, inequality, insecurity, inauthenticity and uneven development of the world. Globalization theory is not uncritical but its critical energies are spent in directions which make it subservient to the still ongoing global neoliberal hegemony.

### Acknowledgements

A shorter version of this article was presented at the Historical Materialism Conference, New York City, January 2010. I thank the participants in our panel for their useful comments.

### Notes

- 1 I am in agreement with McLennan (1996: 66) who argues that 'Any theory which has interesting and bold things to say about social structure and social change must be essentialist; it will identify central concepts to 'pick out' purported key mechanisms and forces within a complex whole'. A complex multicausality leaves us without any sense of sociological generalization or explanation.
- 2 The three volumes of *The Information Age* have since been reprinted and revised, though with no major changes to the author's overall arguments (see e.g. Castells, 2009).
- 3 Medium theory has directly influenced other globalization theorists as well. For instance, Giddens (1991: 84), Appadurai (1996: 29) and Held et al. (1999: 58) all cite the work of Joshua Meyrowitz, who has been a leading medium theorist after McLuhan.
- 4 The global financial and economic crisis, starting in 2007–8, has brought to the surface the negative social consequences of neoliberal policies. However, while there is a loss of trust in the self-regulating wisdom of the market, neoliberal ideas are still powerful. Harvey (2009) is right to point out that neoliberalism is at its heart a 'class project' and that the current crisis may very well lead to 'a far greater consolidation of the capitalist class' than before.

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# Refutation of Neruda

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Critical Sociology

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DOI: 10.1177/0896920511XXXXXX

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*Nació*

*la palabra en la sangre,  
creció en el cuerpo oscuro, palpitando,  
y voló con los labios y la boca.*

[The word  
was born in the blood,  
grew in the dark body, beating,  
and flew through the lips and the mouth.]

No,  
not that red milk-train chugging through the hills,  
taking the eggs to market and garbage to the tip.  
Wrong metaphor entirely.

Words are born  
from the break of the stupendous ocean  
on the dawn beach, where she walked past the headland  
towards me.

Words are born  
from silicon and metal as we users  
grope, hopeful,  
across the net.

Words are born  
in the immeasurable space between  
the Messenger  
and the Angel.