

• Contradictions of the globalizing moment

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London, August 2004: sufficient for context. The logics of the analysis of globalization seem now to privilege space over time, geography over history. Yet history is not ending but running fast, with dramatic changes in focus and debate, so that one's standpoint needs to be addressed not only in terms of categories of social life and political orientation but also of the time and place from/in which one writes. Far from obliterating the traces of the moment, they need to be better written into our work, as indications of where we are when thinking the things we think.

British television: for the moment. BBC channels are dominated by the Olympics, throughout the day, pushing other programmes off the schedule, helped by the relative synchronicity with Athens. European timing. Mediated sport is one obvious example of globalization processes. The modern Olympics are an example of the emergence of global competitions, which Robertson (1992: 59) suggests are central to the take-off phase of globalization. No mention, though, of the role of broadcasting whereby media are carriers of this other, earlier, element of globalization and make it public.

Sport has been seen as part of the 'civilizing process' (Elias, 1978), whereby more and more people come to abide by universal rule-governed behaviour that includes making up the 'rules of the game' and the mechanisms for keeping them. Thus, articulation of International Olympic Committee (IOC) corruption (explored in a documentary in August 2004 on *Panorama*, the BBC's flagship current affairs programme) and doping scandals (high drama when two leading Greek athletes provided the headline story on the eve of the games' opening) were said to only strengthen the rule-bound and transparent nature of sport. Indeed, as the Olympic games 'come home to Athens', the 'home of democracy', at the same time that international conflict was being waged and extended 'to bring democracy' to Others, the essence of democracy is worth spelling out (pace Keane, 1991). This centres on the ability by the people to re-write the rules of the game and even to determine who has the right to write the rules. All the attempts by the Islamic Republic to write about 'religious democracy' and the attempts by US ground forces to impose democracy don't fly if the rules themselves cannot be re-written and if the rulers cannot be removed by the ruled when necessary.

Global sport is obviously big business, as is media coverage, and both function to extend the global reach of capital. Eleven key sponsors

to the IOC enjoy agreements lasting over four years to include one summer and one winter event. For Athens, elite sponsorship by companies including Coca-Cola, Kodak, McDonald's, Panasonic, Swatch, Samsung, John Hancock, Visa and Xerox cost them each in excess of \$50 million. This bought these corporations the right to use the Olympic rings in advertising and promotional activity as well as tickets, hospitality and VIP passes, used to impress top customers and give competitive edge. The broadcasting rights revenue to the IOC from the games will exceed \$1.5 billion, just over half of which comes from the US (Currie, 2004).

And at the same time, there are those who question the economic logic of the games, including many Greeks. In the light of the UK bid for the games to come to London in 2012, a BBC *Newsnight* investigative report showed how the local black communities in Atlanta did not benefit at all from the 1996 Games, albeit that it is predominantly black athletes who have brought the US recent Olympic glory. And clearly, national investment in sport, as well as commercial sponsorship, 'buys' medals so the sports field is never level.

Media organizations provide live coverage that builds global audiences in real time, a sense of a shared experience, a knowledge of other audiences in other parts of the world rooting for their competitors. This awareness of the world as a single space, this globalism, Robertson (1992) has argued, encourages an attitude of reflexivity and awareness of others. The Athens games will be seen 'in around 225 countries' and 'will attract a global audience of over four billion' (Currie, 2004). The old arguments based on Western media superiority and weakly developed systems in the South no longer work. There are real struggles for meaning, for audience, for the articulation of different perspectives, for alternatives both within and without commercial and national media systems. And at the same time that a sense of relativism is manifest, so too is a far narrower, older and possibly darker, commitment to one's country's team, its particular successes and failures as they reflect on 'us', the national audience, a pronounced example of media's banal invocation of nationalism (Billig, 1995).

And the sport never really transcends the politics. North and South Korea field a single team, prefiguring the reconciliation to come. The Afghani and Iraqi teams received special applause as they entered the Olympic stadium, only to be caught up in American political propaganda a few days later, when images of the Iraqi football team were used in Bush campaign advertising to the fury of the Iraqis themselves. An Iranian wrestler drew an Israeli opponent in the first round, and since the Islamic Republic does not recognize Israel (despite Olympic rulings about fair competition), he forfeited the round and returned home.

And then, briefly, cutting through the 'flow' of sporting images, comes the 'news' and, even more briefly, the 'international news', and even more briefly within that, images from Iraq. Scores are dead (numbers of US and British soldiers known; Iraqi numbers much harder to discern, and who bothers to count them), parts of Najaf are in ruins and US troops are perilously close to the Shi'ite holy shrines. The prevailing rules of international political engagement, of sovereignty, of UN process, of war, are torn up. Religious attachments are trampled on. Afghanistan and Darfur and Palestine and Sierra Leone and all the other places around the world where political and economic conflicts are played out down the barrels of some kinds of gun, suddenly become invisible to much of the global audience. These events do not go away. They do not lessen in intensity. The people involved continue to suffer and bleed. But the media priority shifts temporarily as we are offered sport as a more civilized metaphor for (inter-) national superiority and conquest, or as a (political) distraction from the unravelling of international rules and norms taking place in the new, bloody, theatres of war.

And then the Republican convention, in New York, greeted by demonstrating New Yorkers not about to forgive a Texan red-neck for using their suffering as justification for foreign war; a visible testimony to intra-US political divisions, a mobilized public within the dumbed-down heart of the beast, lest 'we' outside forget the complex reality of the hegemon. This is a political convention that is 'domestic' but also has most profound implications for the rest of the world, not least in the comparative weakness of Kerry's foreign policy to that of Bush, but where small differences in political party leadership probably do count.

My television carries all of this to me, and more. It's a contradictory mixture, with no clear overriding value position, and I probably wouldn't want it any other way. The world doesn't fully make sense. I'm not sure I want television to try. And the press says something else. And the net yet more.

The articulation of global, regional, national and local spaces and meanings derives from this particular moment in this specific locale. These categories have no meaning except relationally. The 'global' is increasingly a hollow signifier, rarely defined. Sometimes it is used to describe phenomena that are not nation-specific; sometimes to signify anything that involves more than one country; sometimes it alludes to general processes and sometimes to purportedly 'universal' values. Mainly it's a term of Western hegemony, as though there's only one optic on these processes. In relation to media, it is not clear if it is the diffusion of the technology, the production process, the construction of

audience(s), the product or the so-called 'flow' of the product, or all of these or indeed none of these, that is 'global'. There is no settled usage.

We're still examining 21st-century phenomena using imagery from old disciplines: spatial relations from Euclidean geometry; molecular structures from chemistry; flows from hydraulics. Disciplines of matter, not of the human. We need new vectors (Wark, 1994), a new topology (Massumi, 2002). Instead of endless 'third spaces', too easy syntheses, let's at least have 'four colours globalization' (Sreberny, 2004) from the limit condition for making maps. Binaries in tension, intersecting.

Much is made in the contemporary moment about the globalization of empire (Hardt and Negri, 2000), of the extension of hegemony, of the lack of an 'outside'. But inside and outside are always mutually constitutive, and separation and attachment form part of the dynamic of human existence. The universalizing of principles of human rights, of respect, of the fundamental coequality of each human being is to be embraced at the same time that 'local' struggles for power, resource and meaning doubtless continue, maybe indeed around the 'narcissism of minor difference' (phrase taken from Freud, 1977[1918], by Ignatieff, 1998).

Sport and communications are two arenas suffused with the contradictions of the globalizing moment. Our future media analysis needs to be open to ambivalence and contradiction and to refuse too early closure. Electronic media are not yet a century old, and Media Studies is barely middle-aged. The perpetual 'now' of media content and the near-future of media developments often pushes us to too hasty judgements, too early determinations of process and logic. It took 50 years for the modern printing press to diffuse across Europe. The net is less than 25 years old, yet there are scores of net-based newspapers in, for example, Brazil, and Iran has just held the world's first blogging festival (albeit while imprisoning political bloggers), and still what we mainly say is that there is unequal access. Inequality of resource and access, especially in the digital arena, do remain vitally important issues, but more is happening that is creative and empowering and worthy of attention.

Each of us speaks from somewhere, some vantage point that is not necessarily an advantage point. I would like to see more reflexivity in our writing, more subtlety and nuance. I would like to see more explicit work around the nature of criticism, the process of making judgement, values and our criteria for both condemnation and praise. I would like to see the emergence of a less dour cultural policy-making, from one that is always wagging its finger and berating to one that is praise-giving and celebratory and yet still critical. Massumi (2002) talks about the manner in which critical thinking disavows its own inventiveness and suggests

that 'the thought-path of movement ... requires ... that the balance shift to affirmative methods: techniques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add (if so meagerly) to reality' (p. 13). He posits a cultural studies that is a 'political ecology affectively engaged in symbiosis-tending', adopting not quite the role of 'arbiter' but more 'intercessor', a disinterested but affectively engaged political risk-taking role.

If this journal is to provide a new space, it might work to foster such symbiosis-tending activities, an agonistic space which fosters new, rich, debate which doesn't simply repeat the received mantras of the past, become reduced to simple moral judgements or unwilling obeisance to power. As Massumi (2002) argues, there needs to be something experimental in our writing: 'You have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things you didn't think you thought' (p. 18). It is the time for inventiveness and affirmation. If not now, when?

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• A different scale of difference

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I pick up at random a recent issue of a leading journal in the field of media and communication. There are 10 research articles. Their themes include: the relationship between television content and body image; children's social interaction with computers; the ethnic address of