

Review Essay

News From Nowhere?: Academic Writing and Globalization

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If you are a professor of American literature and you tell people you are writing about globalization, they look at you quizzically. It does not compute: why would you be interested in *that*? Isn't that a topic for international relations? Much has been said about the need to situate American studies in a global context, and I will not reproduce those arguments here. Suffice it to say that even a cursory look at globalization will reveal that it would not be taking place without U.S. military might, political influence, money, and technological prowess. As a literary critic, however, I'm particularly interested in the ways people (especially Americans) *talk* about globalization. On the one hand, globalization is not "mere talk"—this is a process that is having profound physical effects on everyone and life-and-death effects on many. On the other hand, one cannot see all sides of the globe at once; indeed, if you want to see it well, you have to limit your focus to one point (the Indus Valley or the Kaw Valley)—and then you are no longer seeing "the globe." "Globalization" is an abstract term for something that is happening everywhere at once and nowhere in particular, a sort of socio-economic sublime that defies representation while eliciting it: "it" is so important that it demands to be represented, even as it is, strictly speaking, impossible to do so.

So how does one write about globalization? Or, more broadly, what can one say about globalization? These questions seem to me crucial, even primary, yet I neither hear nor see many people asking them in precisely this way. From a descriptive standpoint, the answer is, in as many different ways as you can imagine. From a prescriptive or normative standpoint, however, the questions

raise further ones—rather thorny questions about the epistemology and ethics of representation, as well as about the nature of politics in the present moment. As a way to approach the issue, I will look at one of the most interesting and useful volumes to examine the cultural aspects of globalization, *The Cultures of Globalization*, a collection of essays edited by Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, N.C., 1998). Certainly, the plurality of topics and approaches represented by the essays in this collection give one a good descriptive sense of the diversity of discourses on globalization. The content of many of the essays are quite instructive; the book as a whole, understood as an artifact and example, is perhaps even more so. And what it has the most to instruct us about, it seems to me, is academic writing and culture in the era of globalization.

Perhaps the most interesting comments in the volume come from graduate students, the closest “the Profession” has to a proletariat. These students attended the 1995 conference at Duke from which the essays are culled; the organizers invited the students to submit written responses, which are relegated to the back of the book, “In Place of a Conclusion.” For example, Matthew Hyland notes that “the speed and subtlety of political and economic mutation means [*sic*] that actions derived directly from descriptive beliefs risk ‘intervening’ in situations that no longer exist” (379). Indeed, this book, and any book on globalization, is, in some respects, already outdated. Backed-up publication schedules at academic presses, caused largely by the inherently slow process of review and exacerbated by the workloads of both editor and author, insure that any news in this form is likely to be old news (for review essays, the problem is compounded even further).¹ If, like me, you try to keep tabs on global trade agreements and movements against them via e-mail, you know that what is true today will not be, a couple of days from now. For commercial presses producing celebrity biographies, economies of scale and centralized decision-making allow the publication process to happen more quickly. In academia, where we like to think we take more care in both production and publication, the advantage of speed is usually lost.² Add to this that reams of literature on globalization appear every day, and that, as Hyland goes on to say, the sublime (and protean) object of globalization becomes more elusive every day as a referent, and the difficulty of writing about globalization is obvious. Moreover, for many of us, acceleration and downsizing mean that essays are all we have time for, especially for topics “outside our field,” such as the meta-topic of globalization. Not only are single-topic books more expensive to produce (and difficult to market), they take longer to read. In terms of both currency and (global) availability, electronic journals present advantages over university press books, even though electronic publications seem more ephemeral, even outré, to most tenure and promotion committees.³ Accordingly, factors associated with globalization create disadvantages for scholarly books in the print medium on the topic of globalization. This is a concrete example of the reflexive nature of globalization. A book on that *topic* also must be placed in the historical *context* of globalization; and, somehow, the language we use to describe the process must try to account for that.

Perhaps an even clearer example than time, in thinking about the reflexivity of globalization and the difficulty of writing about it, is space—or, more precisely, location. If we can only see one side of the globe at a time, and only smaller parts of it well, then certainly we can only speak *from* one point on it, even if we are speaking about the whole. From where am I writing this? I am sitting in a room in a comfortable one and one-half story bungalow from the 1910s that my partner and I rent in a middle-class neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A., about two city blocks from the state of Kansas, a few miles north of the 39th parallel, in the peripheral “heartland” of the core country of the global system. The rent is a little expensive for us. I’m using a (old) laptop computer (made in Taiwan) on a big wooden table (made in Italy). I am active with the local fair trade coalition and in cross-border organizing; I’m strongly opposed to neoliberal, laissez faire “free” trade models. I am also up for tenure next year, so I will either have a promotion or a pink slip this time next June. Not only do these things affect what I have to say and my ability to say it, any of these observations could serve as a starting-point for an inductive analysis of globalization. If I were an African scholar, chances are I would not have the means to write any of this (even the book to review)—unless, of course, I made it to the States. It is important to keep such facts in mind in order to maintain perspective.

From where am I writing this? This question, it seems to me, is the crucial one when it comes to globalization. If globalization is really global (that is, if it exists), then it includes everyone, in one way or another. If it includes everyone, then it affects everyone, and each of us has a stake in it and a role in it. This quality presents the writer with an opportunity *to use* his or her position on the globe (geographical as well as social) *to understand* the globe. Unsurprisingly, all but two of the 17 contributors to *The Cultures of Globalization* are professional academics at prestigious universities; all but four live in Northern countries; all but two are men. If they were not, it is quite possible that they would not be visible to me at all. These are not ad hominem or irrelevant facts. They are the sort of particulars that instantiate globalization, that even suggest its existence in the first place. Then-graduate-student contributor Xiaoping Li puts it rather more strongly: “I see ‘localizing’ our research and theorization as the only way by which we can radically change [*sic*] theorization of globalization and culture from becoming another Western academic babble” (374). I would make “localizing” even more particular, by saying “personalizing.” What do my relative physical comfort, on the one hand, and felt economic insecurity, on the other, have to do with the intense physical pain and economic insecurity suffered by impoverished Mexican maquiladora workers, for instance? And what does their position have to do with workers in Sri Lanka who make as much in a day as the Mexicans make in an hour? How does globalization affect me, and what is my strategy for dealing with it? To what extent is that strategy individual, to what extent collective? And how do my perceptions of this situation not only affect what I say and do, but what do they tell us about culture generally, here or elsewhere? These seem to me

crucial questions for any accurate assessment of globalization, yet very few thinkers have written about it in quite this manner. It is hard to do.

Nonetheless, a few contributors to *Cultures* make the attempt. Sherif Hetata, who happens to be one of those non-academics, uses himself as an example at several points and does so to make a larger point about globalization. His discussion of “Dollarization, Fragmentation, and God” is, as the title suggests, admittedly desultory. But there is a structure: for one, it is framed by first-person knowledge. He begins:

When I graduated [from medical school in Egypt] in 1946, the hospital wards taught me how poverty and health are linked. I needed only another step to know that poverty had something to do with colonial rule, with the king who supported it, with class and race, with what was called imperialism at the time, with cotton prices falling on the market, with the seizure of land by foreign banks. These things were common talk in family gatherings, expressed in a simple, colorful language without frills. They were the facts of everyday life. We did not need to read books to make the links: they were there for us to see and grasp. . . .

And if we went on making these links, they locked us up.

For me, therefore, coming from this background, cultural studies and globalization open up a vast horizon, one of global links in a world where things are changing quickly. (273-4)

Hetata does several things in this passage. First and most obviously, he establishes his perspective—his “subject position.” Secondly, he situates the subsequent discussion of current trends in globalization within the larger frame of postwar imperialism. Thirdly, he addresses the issue of how one makes links between the global and the local, precisely by using his experience as an example. Finally, perhaps most importantly, he renders all of these in concrete particulars that he knows well (dinner talk, his daily rounds), examples that bring the larger, abstract global issues down to earth, and he does so using his considerable skill as a storyteller and autobiographer.

The next section presents the cold facts of those fast-changing “global links.” It is true, Hetata unnecessarily reminds us of things we probably already know (“speculation based on informatics . . . works to the advantage of the biggest and richest,” 275); this is a tendency of much writing on globalization, including much of it in this volume. But he locates these “big statements” in the context of the specifics of North-South relations, both the autobiographical ones as well as the statistical ones.⁴ “A pair of Nike shoes are sold in the United States for about U.S. \$80. A woman worker in the Nike factory in Indonesia receives for the labor 12¢ in every pair” (276), for instance. This is not just a grim statistic examined in critical detachment, however: “When my son started wearing blue jeans and

New Balance shoes, I shivered with horror But worse was still to come. Something happened that to me seemed impossible at one time, more difficult than adhering to a left-wing movement. At the age of seventy-one, I have taken to wearing blue jeans and Nike shoes. . . . It's a culture and it's reaching out, becoming global" (277-8).

Not only does this remind us of Hetata's own position, but it also locates that position in the context of the global system. These two pieces of information, one statistical, one anecdotal, one about Indonesians, one about Egyptians (and, implicitly, Americans), start to give us a sense of the texture of the era of globalization as it is lived. It is about links between hyper-oppressed sweatshop workers and leftist upper-middle-class professionals. It is also, as Hetata goes on to point out, about desires, anxieties, and values. These are largely created by global electronic media that emanate from the United States: "An American adolescent, by the age of eighteen, will have killed around 40,000 opponents or enemies [via video games] merely by pressing a finger on an electronic button, and without a single tremor of guilt. . . . But when the game is over, the child or the adolescent returns to the real world, in which he or she has lost those extraordinary powers and feels small" (280).

By making these links—between video games and military hegemony, between U.S. television and consumption patterns in France, and perhaps more importantly, between economic statistics and normative values, especially one's own—Hetata provides us with an example of the way one needs to think in order to begin to understand globalization in any meaningful way. We may object that this procedure is rather non-linear, and it is. That's just the point: it is precisely this combination of different types of writing and knowing (of different genres, really) that allows Hetata to think (and write) globally. It is in the nature of the global that it demands an attention to many aspects at once. A single, unflinching commitment to a particular methodology would not do this, but would systematically ignore certain aspects—not least of all the role of the speaker.

This Hetata steadfastly refuses to do. Rather, he brings us back to the importance of self-representation and of resisting the definitive, detached statement about "the other" in our market-driven rush "to go global." He ends his essay by warning against the danger that "émigré scholars and intellectuals may become intermediaries who help the North to appropriate the culture of the South, instead of letting the 'others' in the South speak for themselves" (289). To illustrate, he once again situates this observation in a longer time frame and in his own experience:

When I was a young militant in the Left I thought I could express the ideas and thoughts and needs of peasants and working-class people better than they could themselves. After all, I could read and write, and very often they could not. . . . Then, as the years went by, I discovered that what we thought we knew was very different from reality, from the facts.

Because we had forgotten something very important: practice, life. As the Egyptian proverb says, “He who has his hand in the fire is not like he who has his hand in water.” (289-90)

Ironically, the proverb undercuts Hetata’s reification of “reality,” as does his method; both are thoroughly phenomenological. Knowledge of “the global” is necessarily composed of “what we think we know,” our partial, local insights.

A different example of a useful approach comes from the book’s other non-academic contributor, filmmaker Barbara Trent. Trent’s story of her producing the documentary *The Panama Deception* (1992) illustrates the difficulties of making the rest of the globe visible to U.S. audiences, particularly when their own government’s actions are at stake. Her own experience leads her to the pessimistic conclusion that “[t]o really saturate the country with any new information is almost impossible, unless you own a network” (232). Her documentary “brought in more money” than any of the first-run Hollywood movies running in a particular multiplex. However, “Warner Brothers or another studio called the theater and said, ‘We need a screen,’ and our movie was the one that got bounced because it was an independent film. . . . [t]he United States does have perhaps the freest press in the world, but it is free to the highest bidder and we know who those bidders are” (232). “[F]or people who make controversial films,” however, “there are many tedious economic obstacles that add up and that prevent independent films from getting made” (235)—and hence, in some cases, prevent the public from forming an accurate perception of global processes (such as U.S. military hegemony). And this is not a problem unique to the United States: “the highest award-winning filmmakers in Mexico . . . cannot find theaters in Mexico to release their films” (231).

As in the case of Hetata, Trent tries to back up large claims such as those above with details—examples of those tedious economic obstacles, examples that are both statistical and eyewitness. It is precisely those sorts of tedious details, it seems to me, that, taken together, add up to “globalization.” Here, Trent’s experience points to two larger aspects of that process, namely, the reach of transnational corporations and the monopoly on the media of U.S.-based conglomerates. These can be conveyed using statistical surveys, but the addition of first-person perspective brings the political implications home, via, for instance, her own perceptions and reactions to the events she describes, such as the necessity of sleeping in the office to guard footage against sabotage. Having to deal with these issues on a daily basis gives one insights and knowledge that the more “objective” outsider would not necessarily possess.

Because Trent is an activist, she does what other critics of globalization do not do—she presents strategic ideas. This kind of talk is partisan and personal rather than objective and scholarly, and it deals with the small-scale nuts-and-bolts of movement-making, rather than the grand, sweeping, general gestures of much “globalization theory.” For instance, Trent co-founded The Empowerment Project to help independent filmmakers. “I would like to see something like a

retreat where filmmakers could go to work with skilled people to prepare a strategy, develop promotional materials, book theaters, and launch the organizing campaign to fill the theaters and get the information out" (244), she suggests; and, "[i]n terms of television, we must start focusing, as I have said, away from public television . . . and develop relationships with A&E, HBO, The Learning Channel . . . if we want people to keep making controversial films and if we want to really exploit these films to their fullest" (245-6).

Such statements strike me as offering information about how the world works and ideas for how it might be changed, and that sort of writing is particularly urgent now. As Leslie Sklair puts it, in his very useful contribution, "resistances to global capitalism can be effective only where they can disrupt its smooth running (accumulation of private profits) locally and can find ways of globalizing these disruptions" (305). I would go even further and say that the global manifests itself and is known locally; it is our ability to read the details of those manifestations, to link local specifics to global patterns, that determines the success of a descriptive or strategic theory of globalization. And if the global is the local, then the local, whatever else it may be, is personal. We know and respond as particular individuals in a web of connections.

This is not to say that these are the only valuable essays in *The Cultures of Globalization*. Liu Kang's discussion of intellectual trends in China is not a first-person account, but it does teach the reader about discourses of modernity in China and how they are and are not alternatives to capitalist globalization. Enrique Dussel's article argues that modernity was caused by, rather than caused, modern colonization, though this breathtaking historical/ethical argument is too large for an essay (see his book *Invention of the Americas* [New York, 1995]). Geeta Kapur's critique of Homi Bhaba's legacy as that of "the cosmopolitan world of the 'twice-born,' the immigrant intelligentsia from the third world lodged within the first world" (199) is a keen argument that links geographical and class location to theoretical outlook. Noam Chomsky makes his typically focused, well-documented historical argument, in this case that Northern countries foisted free trade policies on the rest of the world after having practiced protectionism for hundreds of years.

However, many of these essays (even the good ones) reproduce problems common to much writing about globalization in the mid-late 1990s. There are some tendencies that are particularly irksome; rather than single out one article (or book), I will simply present the recipe.

1. Make a Global argument. It might seem like an essay is a very limited form of writing, one that is best suited to a very circumscribed topic. But if you are writing about globalization, and you're writing theory, then, rather than situating the global in the small, local instance, you should use your small, local essay to encompass the globe. Anyway, print is expensive, and Americans don't read books. Thus, you can say things like "economic globalization is facilitating . . . the conceptualization of the civilizing process as one to which the entire humanity [*sic*] contributed and is contributing" (37), "globalization is a communicational

concept, which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings” (55). It might seem that such claims would take a 500-page book to illustrate and substantiate, but your global claim may not seem as true next week, so you’d best get it out now. If you’ve already written that 500-page book, don’t be afraid to repeat the argument. Try to remain on the level of the broad general abstraction without descending into the local and particular (the *Theory, Culture and Society* school of globalization studies offers particularly good models). If you absolutely must present concrete examples in order to represent “the global,” do a kind of montage, where you jet from country to country and instance to instance (Benjamin Barber’s *Jihad vs. McWorld* [New York, 1995] is perhaps the classic example of this procedure).

2. Repeat things that other people have already said. You may wish to repeat only one writer’s argument (as Jameson rehearses Leslie Sklair’s), or bits of several (as Miyoshi does with David Harvey, Noam Chomsky, Bill Readings, and others). In any event, you don’t necessarily have to add much to these other writers. You can always restate commonplaces. For instance, Miyoshi informs us that, in the last 20 years, executive pay has gone up, real wages have declined, and a third of all jobs in the United States have been eliminated, with most of those laid off taking other work with lower wages and benefits. National interests are being subsumed by corporate interests. Economic colonialism has replaced administrative colonialism. Surely this was not news in 1998 or ‘95. And try not to advertise that you are presenting “a pastiche of research” (152). If you get stuck, attack multiculturalism as being complicit with multinational capital—David Rieff got that ball rolling years ago.⁵ At any rate, remember that the literature on this topic is piling up every day; if you do protracted empirical or textual research, or even if you take too much time to think, you may very well be scooped.

3. Avoid gender. This probably won’t be difficult, since, if you’re writing about globalization, there is about a 90-percent chance that you are a man. Though corporate globalization⁶ arguably impacts women harder than men, and although globalist regimes such as the W.T.O. or I.M.F. are overwhelmingly male-controlled, the topic of gender receives scant discussion. As commentator Amie Parry notes, in this case, feminism “was brought up in various contexts but was rarely itself the subject of prolonged discussion” (376; Nawal el Saadawi apparently presented some remarks along these lines at the conference, though they did not make it into the present volume). By avoiding the topic of gender (including your own), it will be easier to maintain the role of the disembodied Mind Who Represents the Globe.

4. Present a Third-World Mascot and a triumphalist conclusion. Once you’ve gotten everyone depressed by telling them how bad things are, you have to give them cause for hope. Since few among your academic audience will be organizers themselves, display examples of those who are. If these examples are from among oppressed peoples, so much the better—it’s to be expected that the wretched of the earth would actively oppose corporate globalization before we would. The mascot could be Rigoberta Menchú, Jennifer Harbury and her murdered husband

Everardo, culture hero Mami Wata, the west African marketplace, the environmental justice movement, or even academic postcolonial Latinamericanism. It doesn't particularly matter if you are *in* the South, or if you are supporting activists there with your time and energy. The main thing is to present the mascot as a utopian "site of resistance" that is growing in strength, if not a *fait accompli*, rather than small, embattled, isolated, peripheral, and desperately in need of the money and political clout that people in the North have. Thus, "In Latin America, the increasing influence and internationalization of indigenous organizations had a remarkable impact on the politics of language and education" (43); indeed, a "border gnoseology" is emerging that "is a new way of thinking" (46). There is also "a worldwide movement of self-conscious peasant agroecology that is not at all a postmodern fad but a route toward an alternative modernity" (320). The pan-African trickster-fetish is "a means of engagement with, and deconstruction of the West, while ambiguating hegemonic control over thought and action" (138). This is very good news indeed.

Finally, assure your academic audience that there are democratic anti-globalist movements (or at least moments) out there somewhere, and that, as Alberto Moreiras puts it, "the university welcomes them and contributes to their theorization" (82). Whatever you do, do not leave the reader with the nagging suspicion that, as Ioan Davies suggests, "it might be possible to be critically book literate and also be politically impotent" (132).

The really good news about *The Cultures of Globalization* is that it critiques academic discourse on globalization, even as it exemplifies it. Dussel fulminates that, before the threats of ecological destruction and the degradation and hyper-exploitation of the poor, "the projects of many philosophical schools would seem naïve and even ridiculous, irresponsible, irrelevant, cynical, and even complicitous . . . for they are closeted in their 'ivory towers' of sterile Eurocentric academism" (20). Liu Kang echoes this indictment, claiming that "globalizing theorization is premised on a Eurocentric and teleological narrative of modernity (and postmodernity), which may ultimately exclude possibilities of historical alternatives and/or alternative histories" (167). And a purely cultural consideration of globalization, Jameson warns us, risks merging "into a postmodern celebration of difference" (56).⁷ Even Masao Miyoshi hurls a few stones from the glass-walled buildings of U.C. San Diego: "Once professors presumably professed; they are now merely professionals, entrepreneurs, careerists, and opportunists, as in the corporate world" (267). Indeed, as Eric Cazdyn reminds us, "corporations and universities have always had a lot in common, not the least of which being [*sic*] the questions they ask" (379). Some contributors go on to suggest alternatives. "The university's foremost responsibility," Subramani contends, "is to hold out against the current trend of remodeling itself as a business organization" (161-2). And Xiaoping Li submits, very sensibly, I think, that "[t]o go beyond the contours of discourse and of global production and trade, we [academic intellectuals] must participate in the political, social, and cultural worlds outside the academy. . . . This shift is imperative," he suggests, "if we want to connect theory

to practice and if we really hope to contribute to sociocultural transformation. Both would demand a style of research, theorizing, and conducting conferences different from the conventions of the ‘Ivory League’” (374). These observations would seem rather obvious to students and faculty at the Autonomous University of Mexico, Seoul National University, or any number of schools outside the United States, and I would hold that more students than faculty in the United States recognize their validity.

Part of this perceptual gap stems from a misunderstanding of our own role as Northern academics writing within the institutions of a globalized capitalist economy. We say that we know everything is different now that the university (and everything else) is being globalized and marketized. It’s true that the objects of study are very different now than they were a decade ago. Yet we *act* as though our cultural role is unchanged—as though the university intellectual continues to speak from a space somehow at one remove from the economic, social, and political tendencies she critiques. And, indeed, this stance is (implicitly) expected from us by the institutions of which we are a part (whose mores and fetishes, by the same token, really haven’t changed dramatically in the last 50 years)—that is, it’s what we expect of ourselves and one another.

In practice, writers in cultural studies continue to maintain the eighteenth-century fiction of the critical space apart from the world that we judge, even as we (ironically) critique that fiction. The kind of disembodied, disembedded critique that Dussel attacks is really the writing voice that most of us adopt without question, and it is the *sine qua non* of transnationalism. But is this writing voice appropriate, not to mention compelling, in the era of globalization? Can we—should we—write “objectively” or impersonally as our workplace is being “flexibilized” to meet the needs (or lack thereof) of corporations who increasingly pay for it? If we actually believe that globalization is “an untotizable totality” (xii), and that it represents the dominant social and economic logic of our time, then objectivity is a much harder pose to hold with a straight face. Academic writers assuming this position—of critical intellect detached from, yet referring to, an object of critique—is only going to seem more ludicrous and disingenuous to both those in and out of academia as time goes on and the effects of economic globalization become ever more apparent. Can we instead speak honestly about and examine the ways wage disparities between North and South increasingly enable Americans to continue to live according to the standard to which we have become accustomed, even during a period of wage compression and declining buying power? And can we really understand globalization if we do not, as Li asserts, become active off campus?

Masao Miyoshi ends his essay with another question: “And how do we—the workers in Dayton, Ohio, and those of us in the university—form an alliance?” (267). I’d start by not assuming that “the workers in Dayton” (or graduate students “in the university”) would include professors in the pronoun “we,” or that they necessarily *want* to form an alliance.⁸ Rather, I’d recommend something as simple as walking a picket line in one’s area for an hour or two. Chances are, there

is one near you, and chances are, the workers on the line will appreciate it.

The underlying issue here, it seems to me, is professionalism—that twentieth-century outgrowth of eighteenth-century critique. Accordingly, I would restate Miyoshi's question thusly: are we going to do unpaid political work? That's a basic question for public life anywhere, and for most academic writers, the answer is probably no. A left-leaning colleague told me once, "I'm a professor, not a political organizer." This is a restatement of what is perhaps the pithiest definition of professionalism I've heard, namely basketball superstar Michael Jordan's response when confronted with the working conditions of the impoverished Indonesian producers of the Nike shoes he promoted: "They do their job, I do mine." Needless to say, this attitude would foreclose any possibility of large-scale political participation or social movements. As the tenant farmer turned tractor driver says, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, "Big shots won't give you three dollars a day if you worry about anything but your three dollars a day." And the big shots don't give you three dollars a day to participate in social movements. The bigger the big shots become, the more willing we petit (and not-so-petit) bourgeois academics become, not only to observe, but to explain why this observation is, in fact, the most important form of political action possible. And we sure can talk a good fight—as long as it results in what my institution refers to as "outputs."

But everyone has to make a living, including academic writers and editors, and so we continue to play the role of detached critics. It's hard to imagine that someone working in a sweatshop wouldn't act exactly the same way if given the chance. Most of us, in this profession, consider ourselves underpaid and overworked by U.S. standards, but we are fabulously wealthy, leisured, and powerful compared to most people in the world, and that is important to bear in mind. Indeed, most of us could be considered members (for the time being) of what Sklair calls the "Transnational Capitalist Class," a class defined not so much by ownership as by mobility, relative freedom of choice, and access to information. And if you have a mortgage, kids, upkeep of a house, alimony, on top of the demands of a career, there is very little time left for activism, and any time you spend there will be taken away from promoting the career in order to pay for the rest. Much the same could be said of most Americans between 35 and 65, many of whom may risk losing their jobs altogether by participating in social movements (the working poor and single parents are, if anything, faced with even more demands on their time and energy).⁹

Nonetheless, it is precisely the inability or unwillingness of academic writers to admit to these factors and take them into account that makes much recent writing on globalization seem anemic, gestural news from nowhere. Particularly when it comes to that reflexive and totalizing phenomenon, globalization, it is incumbent upon the writer to think about the writer's role in the world. A participant-observer is not someone who participates by observing. Doing one's job is fine, and academic writing about globalization can be interesting and useful, but it doesn't produce the same results as civil disobedience, media campaigns,

or lobbying, and we ought not to imply that it does. In the interests of accuracy (honesty), it would be well to examine our own assumptions and methods in order to eliminate self-delusion and posturing. If we were to understand the ways our own personal lives, careers, and writing are implicated in and shaped by globalization—even if it's not very flattering—then our writing about globalization could only be more substantial, credible, and significant.

It is a shame when writing about globalization, academic or not, becomes non-news from nowhere and no-body. And it is a shame when it becomes precious, self-serving, or affected. But not all of it is. Fortunately, readers in the United States can also gain access to the self-representations and analysis of organizers and educators who take their localities and their specific historical situations as their starting points in writing. Some of this writing you may find in your university library, if you do some digging. But some of the best comes in the form of e-mail, web pages, or—as in the eighteenth century—wheat-pasted broadsides.

Notes

1. One indication of the pressures on academic presses is the sloppy copy editing in this book, such as the errant reference to the great sociologist “Thornton Veblen” (262). This may in part be attributable to fewer copy-editors handling more books—another version of speed-up and downsizing (due not least of all to defunding of academic presses and the libraries they depend upon to buy their books). It may also evince the desire to get the book out quickly by cutting corners. This would be understandable, given the rapidly changing nature of the field and the mandate to be current, and hence competitive; all the same, one may lament that the sexiness of a topic or the prominence of the author can justify slapdash production. It could, however, be a very small clue about that very big process, globalization.

2. Though not always. Some of the better-capitalized university presses have shortened production time for some of their more commercial titles. But this underlines the problem: a book must be perceived as having significant sales potential to receive the fast track. And if it does, there is still the process of putting ink on paper and physically getting books out.

3. This may change sooner rather than later. Project Muse, from Johns Hopkins University Press, for instance, offers a “bundle” of journals via CD-ROM that would otherwise get the axe from strapped library budgets. And the success of such “mainstream” online journals as *Salon* may increase the caché of the medium, especially given lower costs (and time to publication) than print. Part of the process of globalization, of course, is the decreasing tax load on corporations, increasing corporate control of the electoral process, and consequent de-funding of those aspects of public services that do not obviously and immediately benefit those corporations, such as library books in the humanities and social sciences. This tendency may encourage state university presses, or smaller private ones, to follow Hopkins' lead, rather than simply producing fewer books and journals. Another strategy, of course, brought on by the tendency of economic globalization to put every aspect of life on a competitive market footing (i.e., “marketization”), is university presses' producing more commercial books intended for wide sales outside of an academic audience. There is nothing to stop them from using electronic media for this purpose, too.

4. Rather than use the terms “first world” and “third world,” or “developed” and “developing” (both of which imply a hierarchy of value as well as wealth), I follow the editors in using the imprecise terms “North” to designate rich industrialized countries and “South” to designate economically impoverished postcolonial ones.

5. David Rieff, “Multiculturalism's Silent Partner: It's the Newly Globalized Consumer Economy, Stupid.” *Harper's Magazine*, August 1993: 62-71.

6. I use this term to designate the increasingly multinational and monopolistic nature of corporations over the course of the last 30, and especially the last 15, years, as well as their increasing power and influence over policymaking, in Northern as well as Southern countries. Thus this term would encompass the activities of “neoliberal” institutions, such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank, which work, on an international or “multilateral” basis,

toward open markets, unfettered investment across borders, curtailed government regulation and spending on social programs, and privatization of government owned industries. It should also be distinguished from what might be called a "globalization-from-below," that is, the embryonic transnationalism of movements against neoliberalism. Needless to say, "corporate globalization" is an epithet, and one that has a great deal of force, owing not least of all to the actions of multinational corporations themselves.

7. The alternative, for Jameson, is an economic critique, which reveals to him "increasing identity (rather than difference)," "assimilation," "forced integration," "standardization" (57). We may infer then that the plural "cultures" of the title is a bit of postmodern whistling in the dark.

8. Presumably those who work at the University of Dayton or Wright State University are already both workers in Dayton and in the university, though they would seem to be left out of Miyoshi's categories here (as would, for instance, the undocumented Mexican workers who tend the expensive lawns and houses in La Jolla, California).

9. As for long-term activists, this leaves young people, retired people, and (in some cases) the unemployed—all of whom, in fact, tend to make up a disproportionate share of the (small) movements with which I've been involved. The demographics of recent anti-globalist protests in North America do little to dispel this impression.