Three scenarios for globalisation. A view from cultural semiotics

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Abstract: Using the concept of the auto-model, this text describes global society as a device people use to understand their relation to other cultures. Three scenarios are analysed in terms of a model each : first, we consider the hypertrophy of the Internal Other, which results from the displacements of sizeable populations. Next, we account for the globalisation of fashions, from food stuff to intellectual fads, in terms of a sender culture having the privilege of setting messages into world-wide circulation. Finally, we consider the case in which nation states ceases to function as cultures, when big enterprises takes over.

Résumé: Utilisant le concept d'auto-modèle, ce texte décrit la société globale en tant que dispositif employé par les gens pour comprendre leur relation à d'autres cultures. Trois scénarios sont analysés chacun en termes d'un modèle différent : d'abord, nous considérons l'hypertrophie de l'Autre interne, qui résulte des déplacements importants de populations. Ensuite, nous expliquons la globalisation des modes, des plats de cuisine aux mouvements intellectuels, à partir du concept de Culture de destinateur ayant le privilège de mettre des messages en circulation mondiale. En conclusion, nous considérons le cas dans lequel les états-nations cessent de fonctionner comme des cultures, quand les grandes entreprises prennent la relève.

Globalisation, if it exists, must be understood as the process that renders society more and more 'global' every day. But 'global society', before being anything else, is a model (or, as we are going to see, several models which are rather different) that we who live in a society create, with the purpose of describing our own society. This model of global society (just as all other cultural models) implies an opposition to other societies, which are all more or less, or perhaps not at all, global, and which can be differently distributed in space and/or time, or even only from an ideological point of view. In the case of the model of global society there is obviously an opposition in time: we tend to think that previous societies were less 'global' than ours (as the Middle Ages surely were, but also industrial society). In the most glorious variant of our model, however, there is no opposition in space: global society includes everything. Perhaps others can admit that societies still exist that are less global, at least for the moment. Finally, there can be groups which, living in the same space and at the same time as we do, also do not participate in the model: in our case, for example, poor people and (paradoxically) the immigrants.

Elements of cultural semiotics

In my earlier work on cultural semiotics, I have retained two lessons from the Tartu school, on which its followers have certainly insisted less: that it is not about Culture per se, but about the model members of a Culture make of their Culture; and that this model itself is more involved with relationships between cultures (as well as subcultures, cultural spheres, and so on) than with a Culture in its singularity.i This is not to deny that a model of Culture easily becomes a factor in Culture; thus, for instance, those who insist that contemporary Culture is a society of information and/or a global village certainly contribute to transforming it into just that. As to the second limitation, relations between cultures may be seen as partly defining what cultures are, if it is not all too unfashionable to retain some aspects of the structuralist lesson.

A model is of course a sign (and, more exactly, a relatively iconic sign). So, does this mean that global society does not exist? In a way I think this is the right conclusion to draw. However, there are a number of phenomena and processes which *do* exist that more or less justify the model, which cannot, however, be described simply using the term 'globalisation'. In terms of the Tartu school, 'globalisation' does not exist for 'the other view' — if we are able to find a view outside of (the ideology of) globalisation.

The model, therefore, is a *real effect* of life in society. But it is also an *effective cause* in society: to some extent, we act in certain ways because we think that we live in global society. From that point of view, the model of global society is comparable to many other models that we have developed lately: the models of post-industrial and postmodernist society, of the society of information, and of the society of images. It is comparable also to models created members of other societies, as the 'Renaissance', a model that has had its effects until recent times, but which, as we now know, corresponded to very few changes in the real life of most people at the time.

Every kind of occurrence recognized by the Culture as its own is a 'text', whether it consists of signs from the repertory of verbal language, or is made up of pictures, behaviour sequences, and so on (cf. Sonesson 1998). Each Culture has its own mechanism for generating 'texts' which are acceptable inside the Culture while being opposed to the 'non-texts' produced by other cultures. Elsewhere, I have distinguished the *canonic* auto-model which opposes Culture to Non-culture (as when the Greeks

say themselves as different from the Barbarians), the *inverted* model, in which the Ego projects himself to the other culture in order to consider his own society as Non-culture (from Peter the Great admiring the West to young people idolizing the Unites States), and the *extended* model, in which Culture is not only opposed to Non-culture (those we are talking about) but also to Extra-culture (those with whom we are 'on speaking terms' — a culture, but not our own). I have also pointed out that culture, in this model, can be dissociated from territory: we may have an internal Other, which is found in the same space as ourselves, but is still ascribed to Non-culture or Extra-culture. (Cf. Sonesson 2000b, c; 2002, in press b, c)

Three scenarios for globalisation

Globalisation has to be experienced locally. More exactly, it is only from a local point of view that globalisation appears *as* being global. My own local point of view is not only Swedish, but it pertains to a particular part of Sweden, the southernmost tip of the peninsula, spanning Malmö and Lund. Actually, I will use not only local examples, but even personal ones.

All scenarios considered in the following can be said to involve the circulation of 'texts', in the wide sense in which this term is used in cultural semiotics: that which circulates in such a way that it tends to transgress the borders between Culture, Non-culture, and Extra-culture. The three scenarios we will investigate have to do with the circulation of *individuals*, of cultural *artefacts*, and, more simply, of *messages*.

In seventies, when it went to Paris to start my studies of semiotics, I was fascinated by the mixture of peoples and cultures that could be found there. In the streets, on the great boulevards, and at the courses and seminaries that I frequented, you could meet people from all parts of the world (or so it seemed me). Every casual stroll along the boulevards seemed an adventure, a passage through the entire world. In Paris restaurants could also be found that served all kinds of cooking, as well as stores that sold products from all countries all over the world. However, in Malmö and Lund where I lived before, not only there were no restaurants serving food from other countries (with the exception of some Chinese restaurants and some pizzerias), but on the main all the people in the streets looked more or less alike: all boringly blond and
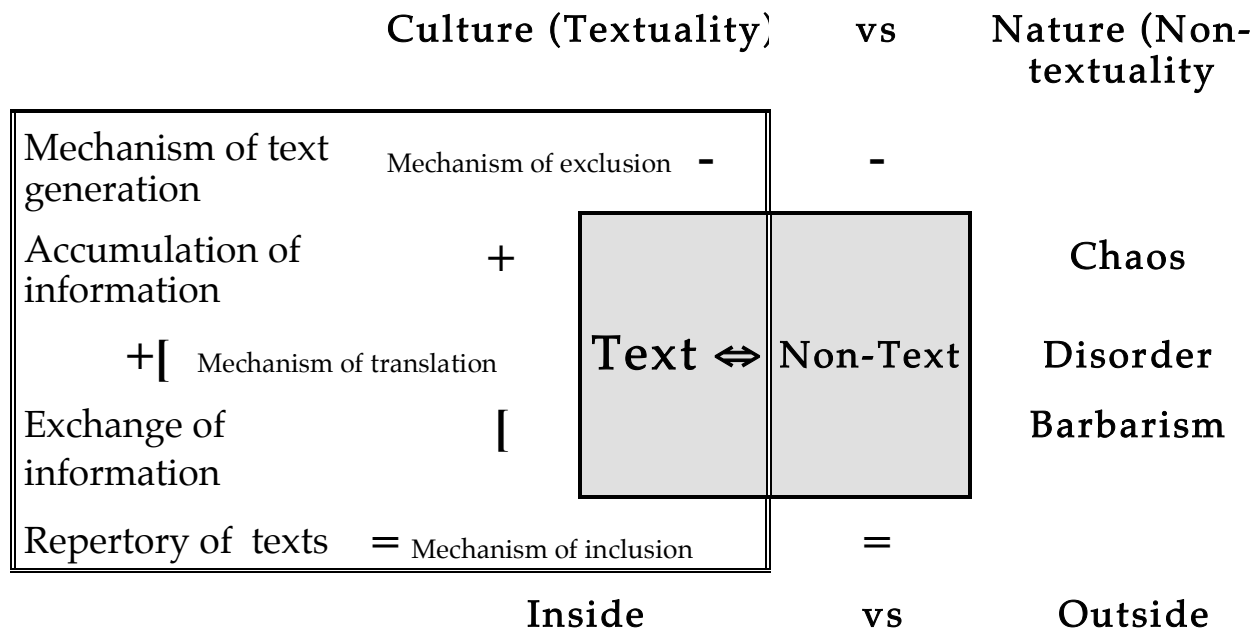
Culture (Textuality)   vs   Nature (Non-textuality

Mechanism of text generation	Mechanism of exclusion	**-**	**-**
Accumulation of information	**+**		Chaos
	+[Mechanism of translation	Text ⇔ Non-Text	Disorder
Exchange of information	**[**		Barbarism
Repertory of texts	**=** Mechanism of inclusion	**=**	

Inside   vs   Outside

Fig.1. Canonical Model of Cultural Semiotics

Culture (the Textual)   vs   Nature (the Non-textual)

Extra-culture (the Extra-textual)   *vs*   *Intra-culture(the Intra-textual)*

Projected Alter   vs   Projected Ego   vs

Second person (Anti-ontive)   vs   Person (Auto-ontive)   vs   Non-person (An-ontive)

	cosmos-text	chaos-text	=	Mechanism of text-generation	Mechanism of exclusion −	−	
				Accumulation of information +		chaos-text	cosmos-text	Chaos Disorder
Real Ego	Extra-Text ⇔ ego-text	Intra-Text alter-text	+[Translation mechanism **Real Alter**			Text ⇔ non-text	Non-Text text	**Real Ego**
				Exchange of information [				Barbarism
			−	Repertory of texts	= Mechanism of inclusion	=	

Outside   vs   Inside   vs   Outside

Inside   vs   Outside   vs   Inside
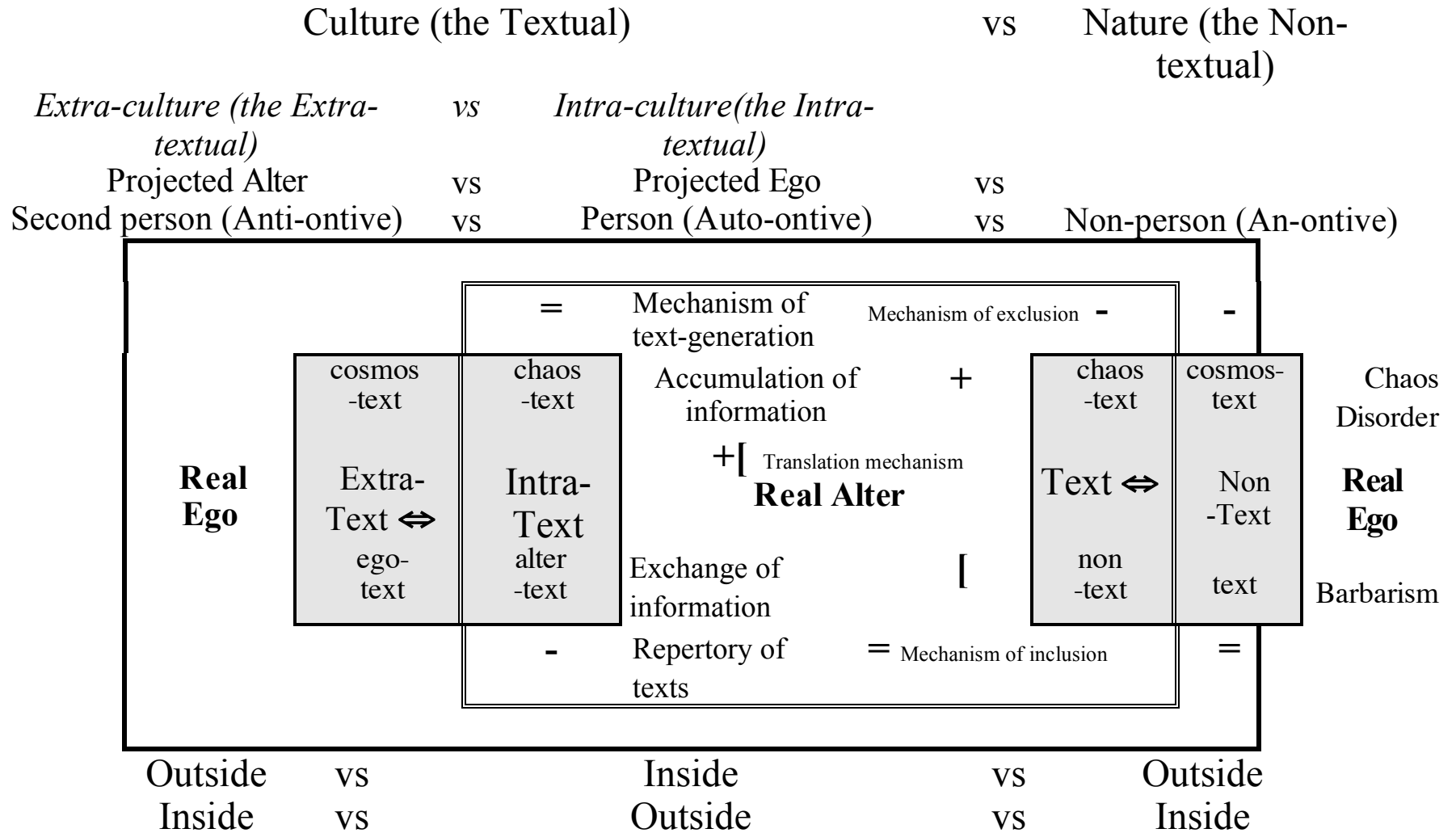
Fig. 2. Projected Ego extension of the Canonical Model

white-skinned. Now Malmö (and, to a lesser extent, Lund) have changed totally: it looks like Paris did before.

One third part of the inhabitants of Malmö are immigrants or children of immigrants, from Latin America, from Africa and Asia, and from Eastern Europe. The city is full of restaurants and stores whose offer stems from all imaginable cultures. Just like in the Paris in the seventies, there is even on numerous corners the shop owned by an Arab which, against the local customs, never seems to close. But it would be naive to imagine that these cultures are mixed in any fundamental way: rather, each one constitutes a ghetto of its own. They all occupy (partly) the same space and time, but they are located on different ideological planes.

My experience of Paris in seventies depended on that development of the system of the boulevards and the big stores which made the great French city (according to the expression of Walter Benjamin) into 'the capital of XIXth century'. But the capital of XXth century (or at least of its last part) was situated somewhere else: perhaps it was New York. During the last decades of the last century, it was from there, and from United States in general, that a series of fashions arrived which very fast became customs *à la mode* (for however short a time) of all countries, at least within the Western orbit, in the wide sense of the word (including for instance the middle-classes of Latin America, of Asia, etc.).

Art students are surely going to believe that I am thinking to the fact that movements within the visual arts no longer take their origin in Paris but in New York; but I am really referring to culture in the vast, anthropological sense, of the term. The case of food is, from this point of view, most instructive, because very often recent fashions have involved traditional plates removed from the context of a particular culture that suddenly, and sometimes for very limited periods, are spread to all parts of the world, after having been reviewed and corrected in the United States. The French always have eaten their croissants; but suddenly there were special shops in which to buy croissants, or 'croissanteries' (not a French concept) all over the entire world, of course with fillings and other complements which where unimaginable in the traditional French culinary culture, and in the end those shops even appeared all over Paris. Soon came the next fashion which were supposed to be Mexican food, this time reviewed and corrected several times over before it arrived to us: first by the 'Chicanos' of California and Texas, then by the producers

of tinware, and finally by the 'chefs' (who were Yugoslavs, North Americans, Peruvians, but never Mexicans) of the 'Mexican' restaurants that were opened everywhere, and who often were content to open the tin can coming from California and to mix the content with any product they could invent. The latest culinary fashion is the *café express,* traditionally drunk in the Mediterranean countries, which now is served throughout the world, in special coffee houses. In all these cases we really received messages of a kind from other countries: but only one country, the United States, has at the moment the power to put those messages into circulation, and it does not do it without deforming them by means of its own code.

As far as we can estimate now, the capital of XXIth century is not found on the Earth: it is located on the Internet. Instead of encountering the cultures of other peoples in the boulevards of Paris, we now run into them within the network that connects the computers of the entire world. I can interchange letters with scholars and friends in Latin America, as well as with other persons in Australia, Asia and Canada. I can visit Web pages constructed anywhere of the world.

Certain parts of the Internet have advantages as far as their interaction potential is concerned which is not found on the boulevard or in its complement, the café with a view on the street: the latter ones, considered as communication systems (as I have said in another article, see Sonesson 1995), are *permeable to sight,* but to very few other senses (partly to the sense of smell, which is not necessarily an advantage, and partly to hearing, but not to touch) and at very rare moments do they give access to an interchange of words. Internet, of course, is very much open to dialogue, but it gives very little access for the other senses: even though it is quite often permeable to sight, what we get to see is very rarely the person communicating, at least not in the *hic et nunc* (with the exception of 'girl-cam', that last avatar of exhibitionism which earlier on could be satisfied on the boulevards).

Still it would be wrong to think that the Internet is a culturally neutral and authentically multicultural territory. The predominant language of the Internet is English; its origin is in the North American Arpanet.

First model of globalisation: cultures without a territory

Like all cultural models (auto-models), 'globalised society' cannot be 'true' – but it does not come from nowhere. There is, first, a series of ongoing processes which inspires its construction, and second, the model itself becomes a factor in the development of society. It thus is both a cause and an effect.

Contrary to what is suggested by the canonical model and its revised version, globalisation would ideally not exclude anything at all. Clearly, it excludes other cultures in time, or else it would not be a process partaking of the Western thrust for progress. But it also normally excludes other cultures in space: some cultures are reputed 'more globalised' than others. This also applies to the inner other, whose difference cannot be accounted for neither in terms of space nor time.

One of the scenarios of globalisation that we have considered above involves a difference of ideological location within the Culture: Swedes and immigrants share the same space and the same time, but they are in different ideological spheres. Although they meet in the street (but more rarely in their homes), there remains a difference between the behaviours and artefacts that for these different groups are 'texts', 'non-texts' and perhaps 'extra-texts'. The same applies to the case of the Internet: we are within the same (virtual) space and at the same moment (as measured in 'beats', the unit of atomic time that serves to co-ordinate computers located in different spaces and times), but we do not go there with the same definitions of Textuality; however, as the Internet constitutes a more restricted and specific scene of interactions involving a permeability of very few properties (which is what explains the possibility, in a MUD-MOO, to appear as an individual of the opposite sex or even as a chair), it may turn out to be easier to share the criteria that define what a text is. But the cases also differ on the axis of the conversation: they are different from the point of view of power and solidarity.

Globalisation, then, is, among other things, the hypertrophy of the inner Other. In the model applied, in a more or less conscious way, by contemporary Swedes, the internal Other is called 'the immigrants'. The model does not observe (at this level) the differences between immigrants coming from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and East Europe, etc. Also it confuses immigrants of 'the first', 'the second' and unto 'the third generation', that is, to relieve ourselves of this absurd bureaucratic

language, real immigrants and persons having been born in Sweden whose parents or grandparents (or just one of them) were immigrants. I call this a hypertrophy of the internal Other because this group now constitutes a third part of the population (in Malmö, but the percentage is quite big also in other parts of Sweden). This implies that, in this model, a significant part of the population lives in a territory that others define for them as being not-textual.

That the Other is asymmetric does not mean that the internal Other cannot define his/her Other as being radically Other. But being immigrant from the point of view of a Swede is not the same relation as being a Swede from the point of view of an immigrant. The immigrants, or at least certain groups among them, can attribute an equally radical Alterity to the Swedes as the Swedes do to the immigrants. But the Swedes never can become internal Others in Sweden, not even in the model of the immigrants; because also in that model the territory belongs to the Swedes. Or else the meaning of being a Swede must change first.

Now the question is if, in the prevailing model, the immigrants appear as being members of a Non-culture or an Extra-culture, deprived, in both cases, of their own territory. Both cases may exist, but I fear that the most common is the one in which the immigrants are ascribed to a Non-culture. There are exceptions for certain 'texts': certain artefacts and behaviours, such a particular dishes, dances and pieces of music, have been absorbed, and therefore deformed, by the Swedish culture. Many Swedes now eat falafels or empanadas prepared and sold by persons coming from countries where those are traditional plates. Nevertheless, they are textualised in a deformed way, because the use to which Swedes put these dishes is not integrated into the culture of those peoples as a whole.

Some elements of the culture of the 'immigrants' become extra-texts for the Swedes; therefore, there is a certain measure of dialogue which is added to the axis of reference which relates Swedish culture to the cultures of the immigrants. I believe that one could say that, for this to become really a model of global culture, there must be a greater part of interaction between the two cultures. In this sense, it is possible that the mixture of cultures that I came to know in Paris in seventies was a little 'more global' than the present Swedish model.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to take into account that, even on the axis of conversation, a distinction must be made between two ways of

conceiving the relation: in terms of power, or in terms of solidarity. Even in the relation of interaction, there is asymmetry, because Extra-culture is not Culture. Within the asymmetry of the interaction, solidarity introduces a certain symmetry, whereas power renders the relation asymmetric from another point of view. The relation to the internal Other is always a relation of power, not of solidarity, because it occurs in the territory of his Other. Power always belongs to the one who controls the territory.

Second model of globalisation: the Sender Culture

The case of the Internet is not so different from the model of the immigrants in Sweden, although the relations of domination are less obvious: we are all the asymmetric Other of the North Americans. I am not only thinking about the predominance of the English language: the British also are asymmetric Others on the Internet, because they must adapt to other than verbal codes of the Internet defined by the North Americans. There are, of course, portions of the Internet where another languages (and perhaps also other semiotic systems) predominate: I know, for example, an electronic mailing list where anyone who is not a native speaker of Spanish is the one playing the part of the asymmetric internal Other. I am only speaking about a general tendency. And probably the North American domination of the Internet turns out to be less limiting than the power that the Swedes have over the immigrants. After all, the Internet is not a world in which it is possible to live, in the complete sense of the term: it is not a Lifeworld, a *Lebenswelt* (cf. Sonesson 1995; 1997c; 2000a, b).

Cultures without a territory involve the circulation of individuals; the Internet, in contrast, concerns the circulation of messages. However, we have seen that, from the point of view of cultural semiotics, they appear to pertain to the same model of globalisation. The circulation of ethnically characterised dishes and the like, however, must perhaps be described as being something more than just messages (although they are also that), as artefacts. More obviously than to individuals, we can apply to these artefacts the rules of Textuality. 'Non-texts' that are assimilated firstly must be 'translated', which often leads to deformations, since they are read with the codes of Culture. Nevertheless, in due time a new code can be constituted which also includes those imported 'texts'. Very obvious cases of such 'deformations' are the croissants, the tacos and the

café express outside of their culture of origin. It is too early to say if, in our culture, we will ever manage to set up our own code for interpreting those 'texts' (although in the case of the croissants we already know that it did not happen).

During the last half century or more, young people in almost the whole world have interpreted the United States, in this peculiar sense, as being *the* Culture. We know this phenomenon, normally, as Americanisation; but globalisation is not exactly the same as Americanisation, although it is surely related. The culinary fashions that we have mentioned above have an element of Americanisation: but they are something more, because what the North Americans distribute are 'deformed texts' extracted from other cultures. The important observation is that none of these dishes got spread over the whole world, until they had become a fashion in the United States. Nor does this 'croissant paradigm' apply only to food stuff: pseudo-intellectual movements such a 'postmodernism' and 'deconstruction' did not become known outside of France, until they had been adopted (and adapted) in the United States. Once again, I can refer to my personal experience: when I lived in Paris in the seventies I followed Derrida's seminar. At the time, nobody had heard about him in Sweden. But shortly afterwards his fame – and that of his followers – came back to us from the United States.

In this sense, United States is a sender culture in the contemporary world,, it may even be the only sender culture, on a global scale. This concept of sender culture is different from what the Tartu school call sender- vs. receiver-orientation: a culture having the former is one in which the sender adapts to the level of understanding and knowledge of the receiver, while in the latter kind of culture it is the receiver which has to adapt. A sender culture, rather, is a culture which, in the global circulation of messages, tends to take the part of the sender, however indirectly. Correspondingly, a receiver culture is one which is more commonly found on the receiving end. This is particularly significant when, as in globalisation, as opposed to Americanisation, one culture has the power to decide which texts to put into circulation, even though is does not create them, but deform them after extracting them from the repertories of other cultures. I am of course not concerned here to criticise the Unites States for playing this part in the contemporary world. It is simply a fact of world history. In other historical circumstances, other cultures have been the ultimate sender cultures, although of course

on a smaller scale, or in a more limited range (Rome in Antiquity, Byzance during the early Middle Ages, France in 17th century Europe, etc.)

Third model of globalisation: change of centre

In this last section, I will go on to consider the third scenario which concerns, at the primary level, economic globalisation but which also has consequences at the cultural level. Again I will take a local point of view (but comparable examples can be found in many other countries of the world). In the long history of Capitalism, from the Medici to Rockefeller and further on, even big companies always have been companies of certain countries, although they have had activities and even branches in several parts of the world. In spite of often having considerable power and influence, the industrialists have until recently felt the need to identify themselves with a particular country. In recent times, some companies do not only have economic resources greater than many countries, but they do not even experience national divisions as pertinent limits.

During these recent years, many of the great Swedish companies that sometimes have hundreds of years of existence have been united to companies from other countries and have transferred their headquarters to the other country. Even Ericsson, that continues having a majority of Swedish owners, is considering the possibility of changing its main office to London. The most interesting case concerns the Swedish car-makers. Swedish cars supposedly have a reputation in Europe as well as in the United States for being safer than others. But Saab has now, for several years, been a section of the great North American company General Motors, and its division of buses and trucks ended up being sold to Volkswagen. Volvo sold its division of personal cars to Ford about two years ago, and the division that makes trucks and buses has now united with Renault in a collaboration that seems to give all the real influence to the last company. Therefore, the label 'Swedish cars' no longer seems to be anything more than an effect of meaning that can be used in the publicity of companies that do not have anything Swedish about them.

This seems to be the most serious scenario: it does not only mix pre-existing cultures, but it redefines what is the centre and the limits of the culture. One of the models of globalisation that we considered earlier admitted the possibility of dissociating the state-nation from its territory.

Now we are confronted with a case in which a culture does not relate to the state-nation at all. That is what happens in the third scenario of globalisation, where companies cease completely to be parts of a state-nation. In the long run, this may turn out to be the most dramatic model of globalisation: when what defines the Culture, within the dialectics of cultural semiotics, no longer it is a state-nation with its territory, but something else, such as a company.

It is an illusion to think that this is an impossible situation: at other moments in history, the identification of the Culture with the state-nation has been far from obvious. During the European Middle Age, for example, the model according to which the nation was identical to Culture already existed, but it was a very weak model, indeed.As we know from numerous historical accounts, the king, as the maximal representative of that model, tried to impose it, but for a long time he was not very successful: the true identification that predominated, was the identification of the Culture with the county or the duchy, which could be made up of feudal possessions in diverse parts of Europe, scattered between different countries. In that model, the king was just one among the dukes, and quite often he was not even the most powerful one. At the other extreme, Culture could be identified with Christendom (or perhaps Western Christendom as opposed to the Eastern variety). It can be said that the model that identified Culture with the state-nation already existed; but that it was subordinated to the model that identified it with a set of scattered feudal possessions, as well as another model which comprised the whole of the domain dominated by Christian believers.

In a parallel fashion, it is conceivable that we are now living in a phase of history, in which the Nation model of Culture continues to exist, but a new model that already identifies it with the Big Company begins to prevail. Also in the present case globalisation is easily confused with Americanisation: many of the most powerful companies in the contemporary world are North American companies, and it is also possible that most companies today operate according to codes first invented in the United States. On the other hand, United States is perhaps the only country that is still sufficiently powerful to do hem in big companies. In this sense, the national model there continues being relatively strong. The Secretary of Justice at least tried to stop Microsoft from taking over Culture altogether. In this sense, they were defending the national model of culture against the global model.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have considered a few scenarios for globalisation, and I have proposed some corresponding models for them, within the framework of cultural semiotics. Contrary to what could be expected, from a naïve point of view, all these models, like those of the conquest, turned out to be asymmetrical. This is not to say that there may not be other scenarios, and their corresponding models, which yield a more positive account of globalisation. At present, it is impossible to tell which of these models will come to be identified with globalisation in the future.

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[i] The Tartu school model has been variously described in a number of texts, some of which were written together by Jurij Lotman and Boris Uspenskij, and some involving several other authors. The version which is used here was developed in Sonesson 1987;.1992; 1993; 1994a,b; 1995; 1996;

1997a,b,c; 1998, 1999, 2000b, c; 2002; in press a, b). For references to the Tartu school works, see my articles quoted above.