

THE CULTURES AND GLOBALIZATION SERIES 3

CULTURAL EXPRESSION, CREATIVITY & INNOVATION



Edited by

HELMUT ANHEIER
YUDHISHTHIR RAJ ISAR



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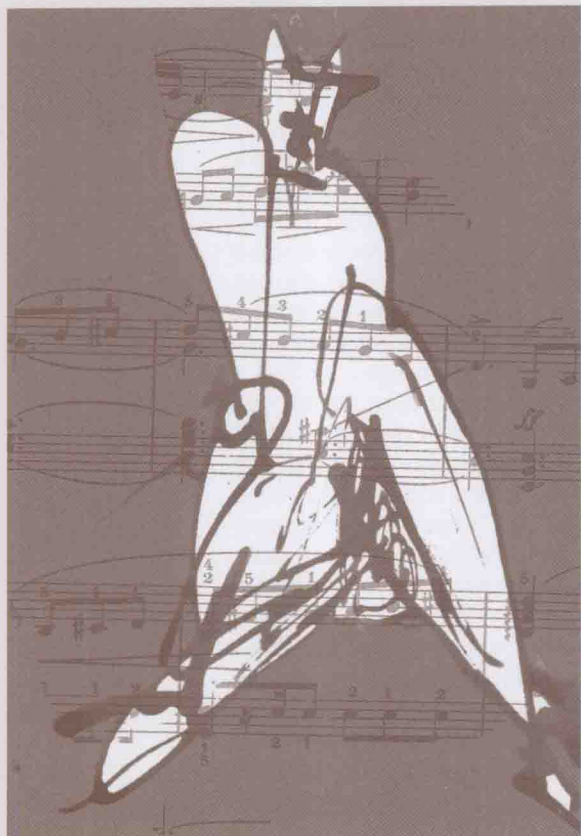
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This collection of essays follows through the line of inquiry opened up by the two previous volumes in *The Cultures and Globalization Series*. The aim of the series is to track the complex inter-relationships between globalization and culture in its many forms in the contemporary world. Volume 3 identifies a particular site of such interactions defined by the inter-relationships between three aspects of the wider question: creativity and innovation, cultural expressions and globalization. The essays and papers collected here offer, from a variety of perspectives, a rich exploration of this field. They present a diverse set of examples and deepen our understanding and conceptualization of the complexities involved in these relationships.

The three terms are fully defined in the wide-ranging introductory essay which frames the volume. Here, we try to set the stage for that investigation

by looking briefly at the way the concepts have undergone significant changes of meaning in recent years and how these shifts affect their field of operations in the contemporary period. Creativity refers to the capacity, through imagination or invention, to produce something new and original (hence its close relationship to innovation). Innovation underscores the role which the idea of novelty has come to play in modern creative practices and the high value accorded to originality, Modernism's injunction to 'make it new', the significance placed on breaking traditions and the construction of radically new forms. Cultural expressions refer to the many forms in which the values, experiences, ideas, identities, beliefs, hopes, achievements and aspirations of a people or social group find expression and take significant – and signifying – form. Globalization marks the emerging inter-relationships and inter-dependences – economic, political, cultural – between different societies and parts of the world. Its contemporary form defines the new terrain on which cultural practices interact and the 'global' character which creativity, innovation and cultural expressions assume in their contemporary form.

In western culture, much reinforced by Romanticism, creativity has been associated with the gifted individual, touched by genius, who is uniquely capable of bringing aesthetic expression to a high pitch of excellence. This excludes many of those civilizations in which the association of creativity with the individual is not so strong (which,

of course, does not mean that individual practitioners have not been of significance in cultural practices and expression). In western societies, creativity implying a social group, rather than an individual authorship, is relatively new. More recently the terms creativity and innovation have been expanded to include many fields other than the aesthetic; and, more recently still, assimilated to technological, commercial, managerial practices, in self-inflating and commodified ways which make them virtually unusable.

All these terms have been significantly redefined in recent decades and in general the principal shift of direction is from the individual to the social and collective. This reflects the application of sociological and anthropological concepts to cultural fields, originally thought of primarily in aesthetic terms. It entails the shift from 'culture' as the sum of particular works, texts and objects which constitute an ideal order against which universal judgements of value can be made – what Matthew Arnold once called 'the best that has been thought and said' – to what Raymond Williams called the *social* definition of culture: 'a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour'¹: culture as 'ways of life'. This has shifted the location of cultural creativity and expressions, from the domain of high culture to the terrain of the popular, collective and everyday life.

The redefinition also has to do with the transformation – one might even say the collectivisation or 'massification' – of social processes, which emerged in developed western societies at the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth centuries. This process has given us such terms as mass production, mass society, mass politics – and of course, mass media, mass communication and mass culture. It marked the reorganization of social production and consumption along more 'Fordist' lines, and was facilitated by the rise to dominance of the new mass technologies of culture. In his famous essay, 'The Work of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin, anticipating the explosion in visual culture which was to come in the twentieth century, saw *film* as one of the earliest manifestations of this collective and technological transformation. He identified this not only in terms of the collective nature of cultural production and its relationship to its audiences but also in terms of the effects he predicted this would have in destroying what he called the 'authenticity' associated with the idea of 'originality' in art, the detaching of the work from, and the shattering of, tradition, and the destruction of the 'aura' of the individual artist and the individual work of art, still very much alive and kicking today. Theodor Adorno called these new technologies 'the cultural industries' but he intended to contrast these typical products of an 'administered', one-dimensional mass society with the critical and dialectical function which he thought could only be performed by the individual artist and the work of art. Though the tensions between high, mass and popular culture continue to resonate in cultural debates, few would find it possible these days not to regard these new media and technologies as potential sites of creativity and innovation. So when we say creativity, innovation or cultural expressions today, we must be conscious of the fact that we say them, as it were, *after* these great transformations in meaning, technologies and relationships have occurred.

Globalization is the most radically transformed and transforming of all the terms. Ever since the moment of European exploration and conquest at the end of the fifteenth century, (which Marx identified as the beginning of a struggle to make the globe 'a world market'), there have been successive waves of what can only be called 'globalizations'. And since they involved, in different forms, conquest and the crossing of frontiers, the clash of cultures and traditions and the exercise of power in the 'conscripting' of traditional cultures to modernity, they still have something important to tell us about what happens to cultural processes when distances, societies and economies are brutally condensed. However, there is nothing to compare with the scale and depth of contemporary globalization. The time-space condensations, the new global division of labour, the speed of the flows of capital, investment, profits, goods, services, images, messages

and stories, the driving power and trans-national reach of the new cultural industries, the emergence of a 'global' consumer market inter-connected with the permeation of cultural models, information, goods, symbols, stories and languages across frontiers, the collision when different cultures, traditions, religious systems and forms of life are convened in the same space and struggle for rights and recognition, and – the dark underside of globalization – the trans-national character of migration and the movement and displacements of peoples: these constitute, if not an absolutely new historical reality, then a momentous epochal shift in global relations, which leave no relationships untouched. One feature is the way culture has become part and parcel of, harnessed to and mediating economic, geo-political and social relationships; and consequently the way the exercise of creativity, innovation and cultural expression has become intensely related to and caught up with the 'play' of power. These new features of contemporary globalization have transformed the meanings of these concepts out of sight.

Globalization has therefore created new sites and arenas which, on the one hand, provide and enhance creative expressive possibilities, with groups and communities functioning as innovators in the role which the Introduction calls 'social authorship'; at the same time – and for the same reason – they mark arenas of huge tension, resistance and difficulty. One powerful tendency in contemporary globalization follows from the permeation of cultural expressions in the flows across boundaries and frontiers. This is sometimes said to be a precondition of that 'one world' towards which globalization is supposed to be pointing us. It is sometimes argued that, in the post-colonial, free trade world, cultural globalization now operates on an 'even playing field'; that the new global culture has no centre. This is to suggest that the one-way cultural flows characteristic of the imperial and colonizing moments have been surpassed.

The most powerful tendency is certainly towards a kind of one-directional cultural homogenization, powered by trans-national flows, the cultural industries of the developed world and the new digital means of communication. It tends to favour the transmission of standardised products, standardized western models and meanings, using standardized western technologies and reflecting standardized western forms of everyday life. This has the effect of eroding local particularities and differences, producing in their place a western-oriented 'world culture', which bears the strong imprint of its sources of origin. The interplay between new cultural expressions and the rise of new consumer markets are part and parcel of the same process.

The fact that cultural globalization has no one centre certainly does not mean that somehow cultural power has ceased to operate and that the power of the industrial and technological forces of modernity mediated by the western cultural industries have been suspended. The cultural field is *not* open or equal. It is not an 'even playing field'. Contemporary globalization in all its aspects is a process of 'combined and uneven development' – 'combined' because it draws huge differences, disparities, historical divergences and temporalities together; 'uneven' because it creates greater disparities and inequalities – in resources, wealth, income, health, welfare, material well-being and cultural power – greater even than the differences and inequalities it claims to be surpassing. Paradoxically, however, creativity itself is not mal-distributed in this way. Those most marginalized in the global pecking order can, precisely, use their powers of creativity and innovation to describe and protest against the grim conditions of life these inequalities impose.

The cultural fields into which these global forces penetrate are not an open, unstructured terrain either. They are densely constructed of impacted traditions, aesthetic values, belief systems, ways of life and creative forms and expressions which have long histories and coherences of their own. Though often represented as fixed and unchanging, they have in fact been modified over time, evolving and appropriating new materials. The consequences of the homogenizing processes, like the economic processes they mirror, are neither uniform nor are their effects as easy to predict as the power and

reach of their economies and technologies would suggest. They have generated powerful defensive responses and resistances – fundamentalist or progressive – in the development of which creativity and innovation are necessary ingredients.

In many places, the 'debased' cultural forms can and have been appropriated to local uses and meanings, borrowed, translated, indigenized and 'vernacularized' so as to express a very different kind of outlook and reality. To take just two examples: in what sense can the 'soap opera' about daily life, now a ubiquitous global popular form, any longer be said to be exclusively an 'American' form (though, in another perspective, it *was* indeed one of the great forms of American popular radio and television)? Or, to take another case: that great practitioner and innovator of *reggae* music, Bob Marley, used the most modern technological means of production (the sound system) and distribution (vinyl, the transistor radio) to make local rhythms 'global' and to transmit the styles, ways of life and troubles of Trench Town, a tiny, poverty-stricken and unknown urban community in the little-known island of Jamaica, familiar across the globe. Creative practitioners and innovators have been busy making the same forms and technologies speak of other different worlds.

Diasporas where different peoples and cultures meet, occupy the same space and are often obliged to struggle against discrimination and racialized marginalization are, paradoxically, highly productive spaces, creatively producing a variety of new cultural forms and expressions which mark creative cross-overs. By translating between cultural languages, they create genuinely novel forms which, because they are hybridized, cannot be reduced to the original cultural sources and traditions which went into their making.

Are these diasporas not also places where groups and communities can gradually lose touch with their authentic cultural origins and roots? This is never quite the zero-sum game which the beneficent term 'creativity' suggests. These crossings of cultural forms and models, the samplings and 'versionings', emerging where people are obliged to live together, struggle for space and speak across cultural languages are some of the most creative sites in the contemporary world. They may be the only places where displaced traditions – which in any event are not fixed forever in amber, but are more like what Paul Gilroy has called 'the changing same' – lose their absolute authority and inner certainties, and become more negotiable, translatable and open-weave. Perhaps this is indeed the nature of culture in modern global conditions: where that which seems unalterably fixed in the past, becomes an opening to the future. All displacements of peoples and migrations, as they say, 'free' or forced, always involve gains and losses. Indeed, to take the paradox one step further, the finding of significant form and voice for this sense of 'loss' and the ways memory intervenes to give it shape, are some of the most powerful sources of contemporary creative cultural expression. The terms creativity and innovation may soften or disguise the degree to which, in cultural collision of this kind, questions of identity, recognition and power are always 'in play'.

In this globalization 'game' there are no absolute winners and losers. Neither homogenization nor diversity can capture its contradictory movement and character. We lose everything if we force the contemporary forms of creativity and cultural expression into one or other end-point of this binary schema. Cultural globalization, like other aspects of the process, is profoundly and unalterably *contradictory*. We must continue to 'speak it' in this way. This volume of essays, in all their diversity of contents and theoretical perspectives, demonstrates the rich value of this paradoxical, oxymoronic approach.

Note

1 Williams, Raymond (1945) *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

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