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DANA JENEI  
MĂDĂLINA NICOLAESCU  
IOANA TUDORA  
ANA MARIA ZAHARIADE

MIHAELA CRITICOS  
ANDREEA MIHALACHE  
GHEORGHE ALEXANDRU NICULESCU  
IOANA TEODORESCU

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NEW EUROPE COLLEGE

Str. Plantelor 21

023971 Bucharest

Romania

Tel. (+40-21) 327.00.35, Fax (+40-21) 327.07.74

E-mail: nec@nec.ro



## MĂDĂLINA NICOLAESCU

Born in 1954, in Bucharest

Ph.D., Cornell University and University of Bucharest (1994)

Dissertation: *Protest and Propaganda in 16<sup>th</sup> Century German and English Theatre*

Professor, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest

American Council of Learned Societies fellowship, Cornell University  
(1991-1992)

Andrew Mellon Fellowship, Vanderbilt University (1993-1994)

CEU grant (1995-96)

EU - Tempus mobility grant, University of Cardiff (1996)

DAAD grant, University of Tübingen (1997)

Scholarship offered by the School of Criticism and Theory, Cornell University  
(1998)

Papers presented at international conferences in France, Germany, Great Britain, the United States of America, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, Turkey

Several articles published in Shakespeare Studies and Renaissance Studies, as well as in gender studies and in cultural studies

Books: *Meanings of Violence in Shakespeare's Plays*, Editura Universităţii, Bucharest, 2002

*Fashioning Global Identities*, Editura Universităţii, Bucharest, 2001

*Ec-centric Mappings of the English Renaissance*, Editura Universitatii, Bucharest, 1997

*Fronă şi propagandă: Teatrul reformei în Anglia şi Germania secolului al XVI-lea* [Protest and Propaganda in the Reformation Theatre of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century], Editura Universităţii, Bucharest, 1996

# CIRCULATING IMAGES: THE TRANSLATION OF THE GLOBAL INTO THE LOCAL

## I. THEORETICAL QUESTIONS REGARDING GLOBALIZATION

### *1.1. Globalization and hermeneutics*

The impact of globalization is mostly considered in economic or socio-political terms. Ulrich Beck, for example, in an answer to the question 'what is globalization?', distinguishes between *globalism*, which is in fact a cover for neo-liberal ideology and reduces all the dimensions of globalization – ecology, culture, politics and civil society – to economic phenomena subject to the sway of the world market system; *globality*, which refers to our present perceptions of living in a world society, in which social relationships are not entirely integrated into and determined by nation-state politics; and *globalization*, which denotes the processes in which sovereign states are crisscrossed and undermined by transnational actors.(Beck:100-101).

Though the market, transnational actor and nation-state relations, and the new perceptions of a 'world society' will be of constant concern in our undertaking, this essay will shift the focus of analysis from the macro level to the micro level as regards the sense individuals make of globalization. The approach we have adopted is multiple and eclectic: it is informed by sociological and ethnographic studies, by the perspectives of cultural and media studies, and at the same time by a more singular approach derived from hermeneutics. From a hermeneutic perspective, globalization is conceived of largely in terms of a cultural translation. Support for this view has come from the widely acknowledged work of sociologists such as Jonathan Friedman, John Thompson and John Tomlinson. The latter turns to hermeneutics and translation when rethinking the idea of cultural imperialism and of Americanization. He rejects the thesis of the homogenization of culture as a consequence of globalization on the grounds that "culture simply does not transfer in this unilinear way. Movement between cultural /geographical areas always

involves interpretation, translation, mutation, adaptation, and 'indigenization' as the receiving culture brings its own cultural resources to bear, in dialectical fashion, upon 'cultural imports'" (Tomlinson, *Culture and Globalization*, 1999: 84).<sup>1</sup> Like Tomlinson, John Thompson questions the thesis of Americanization via the dissemination of mass media, a highly influential thesis advanced in the 1970s by Herbert Schiller. According to Thompson, the proponents of Americanization appear to ignore "the hermeneutic appropriation which is an essential part of the circulation of symbolic forms" (Thompson 1995:175).

It is this hermeneutic appropriation in global-local interaction that this essay will concentrate upon, while at the same time calling on the Romanian experience of exposure to the global media to adduce further arguments against the thesis of homogenization.

### ***1.2. Walter Benjamin on translation***

The perception of globalization in terms of cultural exchanges and of hermeneutic operations may benefit from the idiosyncratic views held by Walter Benjamin on translation. In his essay "On the Task of the Translator" (Benjamin 1968) Benjamin starts from the assumption that a translation is necessarily a betrayal of the original, a betrayal that is, however, valorized positively as a kind of a Derridian supplement. Though derivative, "issued from the afterlife of the work of art", translations enjoy a higher status than do the originals. They are essential to and almost a constitutive part of the originals, whose worth is measured in terms of their "translatability". The more "translatable" texts are, the more significant ("basic") they are considered to be. The original is thus deprived of its "auratic" position and the translated copies partake of the creative and cognitive process that is usually denied to them.

Benjamin also operates a reversal of positions: what comes *after* is more important than what was *before*. One could say that he anticipates the reversal Derrida introduced in *The Postcard*. There the positions of Socrates and Plato are reversed: it is Socrates who takes down notes while Plato is the inspiring source. Derrida deconstructs the opposition between the "before", the primary, the origin, the source, and "the after", that which is "post", the effect, the copy, the relay. (Derrida 1987)

As the original has been deprived of its auratic position, fidelity to the original in the act of translation becomes of secondary importance.

Similarity to the original is the hallmark of a poor translation. Nor is transmission of the meaning of the work essential in translations. Benjamin's views on translations suggest an open-ended and indeterminate communication model, in which the work of art no longer functions as *the* source of meanings to be decoded and reproduced by faithful translations. What really matters is the continuous reconstruction by readers/translators of the effects a work of art can produce. Consequently, translations enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy from the original, almost displacing the original.

The autonomy of translations from the original is enhanced by the increased historicity of the former. Since what is translated is only the effect of the work upon a historically determined cultural and linguistic world rather than its textual meanings, a translation has to be renewed and updated periodically, so as to ensure its topical relevance to the audience. The periodic reconstruction of the work in the acts of translation is a prerequisite of the work's growth and development in its "afterlife".

What Benjamin further values about translations is the network of languages that they activate: the fact that they raise individual languages out of their isolation and connect them with other languages. The most important goal that a translation has to attain is "to serve the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationships between languages... Languages are interrelated in what they want to express and the kinship of languages is brought out by translations". (72) Translations raise the original to the higher realm of "pure language", where languages supplement each other. Translations point "to the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages".

The relationship between the original and its translation, both understood as fragments, is therefore not one of governance but of **coexistence** within a wider network. "The fragments of the original and of the translation must be put together as parts of a vessel". (78) Neither should have their identity occluded in the act of translation—"A real translation is transparent, it does not cover the original, does not block its light". The ideal of coexistence is attained by means of incorporation—"a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, most lovingly and in detail incorporates the original's mode of signification". (78)

The primacy that Benjamin confers on translation in its relationship with the original is, therefore, not the result of a mere reversal of values. Translations involve an accretion in value and meanings of the original,

with the latter reaching a superior stage. Most importantly, translations make the invaluable attempt at establishing interrelations between languages and reconciling them in a system that defies all hierarchical structures and confining boundaries.

It is possible to tease out a number of features that may be more relevant to cultural translations in global-local interaction than they are to the actual work of translating literary texts. Of course, the scale and quality of the type of translations involved in the local-global transactions differs widely from those of literary translations. To “translate” Benjamin’s views into the jargon of globalization theorists, his essay insists on the localization of the original message and on its inevitable expansion and change in meanings.

The relationship between global and local texts is, if viewed from Benjamin’s perspective, one of non-hierarchical coexistence. The mutual translation of the two types of texts activates networks between cultures and works towards their mutual interaction and reconciliation.

### ***1.3. Cultural imperialism revisited***

The faithful, subservient translation that Benjamin rejects can be taken as a version of cultural imperialism. The texts of the centre are faithfully reproduced at the margins. This would involve repression of the particularity of peripheral cultures and their assimilation by Western culture. The problem with the cultural imperialism theory is that such assimilation does not take place, as translation of the texts from the centre to the margins always involves some kind of adjustment to local conditions. Analysis of cross-cultural reception of famous American television serials, such as *Dallas* (Katz and Liebes 1991) or *The Young and the Restless* (Daniel Miller 1995), indicates the large amount of cultural “reconciliation”, of negotiation, that viewers perform when translating the hegemonic message in terms of their own local culture. The wide range of responses to *Dallas* recorded by Katz and Liebes fully supports the idea of a creative translation adjusted to local, historical conditions. (Some of the viewers changed the text of the serial completely so as to fit it to the requirements of their local culture: a few male Arab viewers in Israel, for example, were so keen on defending the institution of marriage that they were convinced that the person Sue Ellen sought shelter with was not her lover, but her brother.)



Most globalization theorists disapprove of the homogenization arguments advanced within the theory of cultural imperialism. Ulf Hannerz, for example, dismisses the theory according to which globalization results in an increasing homogenization of the peripheral cultures, stating that it actually rehearses the arguments circulated in the 1950s against the impact of mass culture (Hannerz 2000). Hannerz refutes Schiller's thesis that Western media is introducing western ideology to the Third World in order to establish the supportive informational and ideological structure necessary for the subsequent conquest of global capital. The mistake that Schiller and his followers make is, according to Tomlinson, akin to the fallacy of the hypodermic needle model for interpreting the effects of mass culture or ideology. It rests upon the assumption of a passive, unreflexive audience that fully incorporates the messages circulated by the media, without subjecting them to any hermeneutical operations. (Tomlinson 1997, 2000) Cultural processes are thus misrepresented as unidirectional flows of power.

Though cultural imperialism has suffered sustained criticism on a wide front, the underlying fear of cultural invasion is still very much alive in both Third World countries – e.g. the banning of satellite dishes in many Arab countries - and in some Western countries. It is the fear of cultural imperialism that has led to the adoption of protectionist policies. The problem with these policies is that the paternalist attitude adopted in defending national cultures is not really representative of the desires of the entire population: for example, the right which the French government may have to speak for France when restricting broadcasting of American television programs or the use of foreign -mainly English - words in French is contested. Secondly, what is further called into question is the underlying assumption of such protectionist policies, the assumption of a pure, homogenous national culture that needs defending against invasion and contamination. Protectionist policies demonstrate that the debate over cultural imperialism is not yet over by a long way.

#### ***1.4. Americanization as McDonaldization***

A recent and quite compelling argument in favor of the Americanization theory has been advanced by George Ritzer's book *The McDonaldization of Society*. Ritzer no longer starts from the spread of Western mass media, but from the global success of the McDonald's restaurants. He focuses on a set of economic and commercial practices

to consider the dissemination of the values of Western global capitalism. His thesis is that the economic practices underpinning the McDonald business and the related values of efficiency, control, predictability and calculability are increasingly permeating all sectors of society, including non-profit sectors, such as health and education. The global expansion of this process threatens homogenization of all cultures and their imprisonment in the "iron cage" of Western rationalization (Ritzer 1998:3). The only areas safe from McDonaldization are the poorest of areas, which lack the necessary resources. The denizens of such frustrated areas feel deprived and are most likely to clamor for the McDonaldization of their own societies.

It is interesting that, by and large, this was also the position adopted by many Romanian scholars in a debate recently published in the weekly paper *Dilema* (Dilema 2001). While the unrestricted penetration of "cheap" American mass culture (e.g. movies and pop culture) is generally bemoaned, the process of Americanization is praised, hoped for and strongly desired. The process of Americanization is spelled out in Ritzer's terms mainly as the dissemination of the values associated with Western rationalization and enterprise culture. A possible reshaping of our economic and social practices in these new terms is considered more than desirable. The danger of homogenization and assimilation is dismissed as either nationalist or radically leftist. Needless to say, there is no mention of any "iron cage". "I Am All for America and against China and Terrorism" – is the title of one of the essays, whose author, Caius Dobrescu, fully subscribes to the dichotomy of a global Americanized world and the opposite local Jihad, a dichotomy many theorists of globalization have been keen to deconstruct (Robertson 1995, Pieterse 1995, Friedman 1995, Hannerz 2000).

To be fair to the essays in *Dilema*, we ought to add that the Americanization they endorsed is highly selective. Like Benjamin's perception of translation, it is fully tuned to the local conditions in Romania. It is only the traditional Protestant values of American society that are selected; present day American mass culture and consumerism are either ignored or dismissed. American culture is judged from the perspective of the shortcomings of present Romanian society and its advantages and disadvantages are thus understood in entirely local terms. The very selection of the values the readers are urged to embrace suggests an inevitable hybridization. They are understood as desirable 'supplements' to the prevailing norms and practices in Romania: for

example, the cleanliness and smooth organization of McDonald's restaurants. Efficiency and predictability - two of the basic features of McDonaldization - are equally lacking in the Romanian economic and administrative system. We should not, therefore, throw out the baby with the bathing water, so to speak, by insisting on theoretical issues (such as the critique of cultural homogenization via Americanization) when they are not fully relevant to the basic interests of the people concerned. Tomlinson also admits that the process of cultural homogenization has its attractive aspects when it involves better food hygiene, health care services, and attitudes to tolerance (Tomlinson 2000). Ritzer's wholesale dismissal of Weberian rationalization actually betrays a Western bias in his universalizing gestures. Control, efficiency and predictability resulting from rational rules and regulations can be protective of the needs and interests of the populations and are definitely preferable to arbitrary individual will or chaotic organization. It should come as no surprise that these values are held up as the new norms in areas that want to become part of the globalization loop.

A further shortcoming of Ritzer's account of the globalization of McDonald's is that it omits the diversification inherent in the globalization of the McDonald's business. McDonald's products themselves have been diversified in order to meet local demands, with, for example, mutton 'maharajah' burgers sold instead of beef burgers in India. Further diversification occurs in customer use of McDonald's. It is not merely a place for eating fast, standardized American food. It is used also for the purposes of dating, celebrating children's birthdays, etc. Ritzer's employment of a grand narrative should be complemented with ethnographically "thick descriptions" of local experiences of going to McDonald's. Douglas Kellner insists on the need for a "multidimensional approach" to this phenomenon. (Kellner, 1999)

As with media texts, the import of practices or of consumer products cannot be devoid of the hermeneutic dimension of interpretation and translation. The local use of global products or practices always involves a process of creating meanings. This is the reason why culture is not just an appendix to globalization but is central and constitutive in its functioning (Tomlinson 1999). The various 'scapes' in globalization flows identified by Arjun Appadurai - technoscape, mediascapes, financescapes, ideoscapes and ethnoscape (Appadurai 2000, 95) - may be disjunctive but they all share a cultural dimension.

The pull towards fragmentation and hybridization counterbalances the push towards homogenization. Globalization, as different from cultural imperialism, should be understood as a de-centered, diffuse and self-contradictory process. Overall, as Tomlinson suggests,

....globalization may be distinguished from imperialism in that it is a far less coherent or culturally directed process. For all that it is ambiguous between economic and political sense, the idea of imperialism contains, at least, the notion of a purposeful project; the intended spread of a social system from one centre of power across the globe. The idea of globalization suggests interconnection and interdependency of all global areas, which happen in a less purposeful way. It happens as the result of economic and cultural practices which do not, of themselves, aim at integration, but which nonetheless produce it. More importantly, the effects of globalization are to weaken cultural coherence in all individual nation-states, including the economically powerful ones – the imperialist powers of a previous era. (Tomlinson 1991:175)

### ***1.5. Cultural hybridization***

McDonald's adapting to local needs in the global expansion of its chain of restaurants is a move typical of most of multinational companies. Robertson has called this 'glocalization', taking his cue from Japanese companies that have gone global and local at the same time. (Robertson 1995). 'Glocalization' and 'hybridization' or 'creolization' of individual national cultures are the two ends of local-global interaction. In both instances the principle of cultural heterogeneity is asserted over that of homogeneity.

Although the idea of the hybridization of peripheral cultures fully sustains the model of globalization that most critics embrace, it too has been contested. Albrow, for example, prefers the idea of the coexistence of diverse cultures. (Albrow 1997a) The reason behind the reluctance to use terms such as creolization (Hannerz 2000) or hybridization (Pieterse 1995) is that they retain the negative connotations associated with their primary meanings. Creolization still has the flavor of miscegenation: it presupposes that at least one of the cultures was pure and homogeneous and subsequently became contaminated. Hybridization also connotes the initial existence of a pure stock.

If we reject the cultural essentialism behind the postulation of a pure core culture and accept that all cultures are already heterogeneous and therefore hybrid to some extent, then use of the term of hybridization in connection with cultural globalization is no longer justified. I believe that the hermeneutic insistence on processes of translation or shifts and mutation in the case of identity construction may provide a better way of avoiding these pitfalls.

Nor does mixture of cultures take place exclusively at the periphery. The centre-periphery dichotomy needs to be deconstructed, for one thing, since with more complex overlapping, disjunctive models prevail, where, according to Appadurai:

For people of Irian Java, Indonesiation may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanisation may be for Koreans, Indianisation for Sri Lankans, Vietnamisation for Cambodians, Russianisation for the people of soviet Armenia and the Baltic republics. (Appadurai 1993:328)

‘Global cities’, such as Los Angeles, London, and an increasing number of other western metropolises testify to the striation of western culture that has ceased to be homogeneous and has to accommodate a multitude of Asian or African traditions and practices. Globalization does not involve one-way traffic from the West to the rest but also includes reverse flows and processes of fragmentation and hybridization at the ‘centre’.

Another aspect that the celebration of hybridism seems to play down is the unequal power relations between the cultures interlocked in the global-local interaction. Latin American scholars such as Jesu Marin-Barbero have insisted on the difference in capacity of legitimization available to different discourses and the practice of marginalizing, if not demonizing the traditions and practices that fall outside the scope of Western rationalism (Martin-Barbero 1999). The temporal dichotomy between pre-modern traditions and beliefs, which are looked down on as barbarian and backward, and modern practices and attitudes has now been re-designed in spatial terms. It defines the divide between the countries initiating the globalization movement (for the most part Western countries) and the rest. Local practices and knowledge, when not re-packaged as ‘exotic’ or ‘natural’ to make them marketable, tend to be repressed or banned. Cultural exchanges between “the West and the rest” are still a far cry from the ideal held up by Benjamin of the original and the translation coexisting together without occluding each other,

functioning as mutual supplements within larger networks. Practices of social, economic and cultural inequities are rapidly spreading as an integral part of the process of globalization.

Resistance to the injustices generated within global economic, social or cultural processes is still in an early stage. It is in need of a theoretical framework from within which to subject these processes to a radical re-thinking and to conceive ways of transvalorizing some of its basic tenets.<sup>2</sup>

The hermeneutic model of a creative translation seems to be well suited as a theoretical and critical instrument with which to undertake this constructive, oppositional critique of global-local interaction and of the norms that should govern it. It is better equipped to capture the complexity of the unpredictable, multidirectional and disjointed flows of present global processes than is the model of cultural imperialism.

### ***1.6. De-territorialization***

The redefinition of the local is of fundamental importance to the new processes. Localities are subjected to radical transformation because, as Giddens was among the first to point out, "they are penetrated by distanciated influences" (Giddens 1991: 187). As distant events and remote forces are interwoven with and shape local experiences, the 'phenomenal world' of our everyday life is subjected to a process of displacement or de-territorialization. That means that, to quote Giddens again:

"...although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global...in very few instances does the phenomenal world correspond any more to the habitual settings through which an individual physically moves. Localities are thoroughly penetrated by distanciated influences." (Giddens 1991: 187-188)

We are anchored in a given locality, but due to global connectivity, our experiences incorporate elements and events from remote cultures, which are rendered familiar and even closer to us than are events in our neighborhood. Giddens mentions the case of the political leader, whose life we know better than that of our neighbor's and who exerts an important influence both in our everyday life and on our imagination and beliefs. Other familial features of our local life, such as consumer goods, are not unique to this world but can be found in almost any place across

the globe. The idea is that these features have been 'placed' there by distanced forces, such as multinational companies.

There is increasing awareness that the mastery of an individual's life plan, down to the level of establishing his or her daily routines, no longer depends on choices or the conditions of the local world. Rather it is determined by remote events, organizations and economic forces that even transcend national borders. At the same time there occurs a 'stretching of social relations' across vast distances in space and time. Giddens considers this "disembedding of the social system" – "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction" - to be responsible for producing a radical shift from a pre-modern age to a modern age (or late global modern age).

In cultural terms, globalization involves a dislocation of culture from its local moorings. De-territorialization involves the weakening or dissolution of the connection between everyday lived culture and territorial location. (Tomlinson 1999: 128) The culture that informs a person's desires, attitudes and beliefs increasingly transcends and even escapes local and national boundaries. Consider the case of Romanian urban teenagers who en masse watch MTV and American movies, play computer games downloaded from the Internet, wear the 'universal' casual wear of jeans, sneakers and t-shirts, and identify with a globalized youth culture and youth community. They find it more difficult to identify with the relatively self-contained, localized Romanian 'classical' literature that is taught in schools and which relates in only a minor way with their concerns and interests. Special efforts have to be made to anchor their feelings and commitments to the local and the national. Carnavalesque celebrations of the victories by national or local soccer teams meet with more success. Cultures are no longer bounded by specific places; they have lost their 'natural' relationships to geographical and social territories (Garcia Canclini 1995).

De-territorialization produces the expansion of the cultural horizon and, at the same time, the weakening or the dissolution of the connection between everyday lived culture and territorial location. It can induce a destabilization or even a dislodging of traditional values. The supraterritoriality of globalization (i.e. the fourth global dimension added to experience) offers a distanced vantage point from which the local and the national can be judged and reassessed. This may result in self-reflective skepticism, or fear and anxiety at the loss of moral and epistemological certainties. A higher degree of openness to the world

may be conducive to fundamentalist and nationalist tendencies. In the experience of large numbers of people, however, de-territorialization is an ambiguous blend of familiarity and difference, in which foreign, remote elements are rendered familiar and “at home”. As such, it is not generally alienating and is taken smoothly in one’s stride, culturally speaking.

What impact does this have on the processes of constituting cultural identity? Ien Ang argues that “in the increasingly integrated world system there is no such thing as an independent cultural identity; every identity must define and position itself in relation to the cultural frames affirmed by the world system” (Ang 1966:145).

### ***1.7. The construction of global identities***

Which concepts of identity are best suited to the understanding of the articulation between the globalization flows and the local constitution of cultural identities?

Giddens operates with an upgraded notion of the sociological subject developed by Mead, Cooley and the symbolic interactionists. In this view, which has become the classic sociological conception of the issue, identity is formed in the interaction between ‘self’ and society. Giddens insists on the idea of *self-identity*, which is the representation in form of biographical narratives of what the individual reflexively perceives his or her identity to be. Key to Giddens’ concept is the idea of reflexivity—the individual reflexively understands his or her self—and the capacity of the self to build and sustain a continuous and coherent biography (Giddens: 53 and 244). This understanding of identity presupposes an unchanging core that can be further related to the idea of change. Giddens, and later Thompson, insist on self-identity as a design involving change and a continuous process of re-establishing order and continuity within the elements incorporated:

The self is a symbolic design that the individual actively constructs. It is a design that the individual constructs out of the symbolic materials available to him or her, materials which the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity. (Thompson 1995:210)

Though it is admitted that globalization is destabilizing in the sense of the self-conflict that the localized appropriation of global media can produce, insistence is placed on the coherence and reconciliation that



the self effects in the process of incorporating various, often clashing cultural resources. In fact, the individual assimilates only those resources that are congruent with the system of values and the frames he is accustomed to and avoids any “epistemological dissonance”. This avoidance of dissonance forms part of the protective cocoon, which helps maintain ontological security (Giddens 1991:188).

Giddens and other the sociologists, such as Thompson or Tomlinson, rely upon the notion of a basic core self that provides continuity in the design of identity and radically denies any fragmentation of the self that derives from tension in the local-global interaction.<sup>3</sup> True to the rationalist thrust of their sociological tradition, they dismiss the intrusion of approaches from other disciplines that foreground the role of fantasies, affections and processes of identification. (Scholte 2000)

How can the radical change or the self-conflict brought about by globalization be accounted for? How can individuals incorporate symbolic resources that have a destabilizing potential? What induces them to accept the risks inherent in the de-territorializing the influence of globalization? How can we explain the co-existence of contradictory positions, such as fundamentalists using the Internet and global media to promote their views?

By negotiating between Marx and Foucault, Lacan and feminists, social thinkers working in a poststructuralist and postmodern tradition have come up with different notion of late modern identities, defined as shifting, plural and fragmented.

Stuart Hall has summed up the positions formulated and developed successively in this field, focusing on the articulation between discourses and the psychological mechanism that determines concrete subjects to adopt the subject positions with which the discourses address them. (Hall 1996a, 1996b) The notion of articulation suggests that this not a one-sided process. Hall traces the theoretical work on the issue of identity from the compelling theory of Althusser (ideology interpellates the subject and thereby determines the individual to adopt certain positions) and of Foucault (the subject is an effect of discourse, discourses have the regulatory power to produce the subjects they control), to the positions developed by postmodern feminists. If, as according to Foucault, the subject is produced through and within discourse, and discourses construct subject positions through their rules of formation, then why is it that certain individuals occupy some positions rather than others? A theory that relies exclusively on discourse fails to answer this important question. Hall

highlights the need to close the gap between the account of discursive regulation of subjects and their actual practices of self-constitution:

A theory of what the mechanisms are by which the individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce, and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. In short, what remains is the requirement to think of this relation of subject to discursive formation as an *articulation* (all articulations are properly relations of 'no necessary correspondence', i.e. founded on that contingency which reactivates the historical (cf. Laclau 1990:35) (Hall 1996b: 14)

In terms of our discussion of the effect of globalization we can develop the idea that a strictly Foucauldian view of the regulatory power of discourses suggests that present global discourses produce global subjects. This formulation smacks of a rudimentary theory of cultural imperialism in which global subjects are not uniform and homogeneous due to the inherent plurality and de-centeredness of global discourses.

The insistence on discourses can, however, account for the constitution of fundamentalist, hard-line traditionalists. They are an effect of the pressure of the global that produces a fierce assertion of local discourses. The discourse-based approach can also explain why global identities are in effect hybrids, resulting from the competition or, rather, struggle between global and local discourses and the respective subject positions they create. Hall raises the difficult question as to why some subjects adopt some of these positions while others adopt none, negotiate them or simply resist them (Hall 1996a). This question raises the issue of identifications and their role in the constitution of identity. Judith Butler's account of identification can be used to go some way towards accounting for the pressure exerted by the normative ideals circulated by global discourses:

...identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are the sedimentation of the 'we' in the constitution of any I, the structuring presence of alterity in the very formulation of the I. Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability.

They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give way. (Butler 1993:105, quoted in Hall 1996:16)

Stuart Hall uses Butler's insights to explain the pressure of 'compulsive Eurocentricism'. We can also employ it to understand the attraction it exerts on our imagination and our desires to "be integrated in Europe".

Identifications with representations offered by remote or global discourses always presuppose a process of translation since both the process of reception and identification are locally inflected. The disembedding that global identification produces is always accompanied by a certain degree of localization.

Global discourses offer alternative symbolic and identification resources that subjects can combine with the elements of their local background and which relativize and hybridize their values, attitudes and beliefs. Global resources may also simply coexist with traditional positions and with subjects shifting from one position to the other. Having conceived of identities as plural, we can accept that subjects can assume different and often contradictory positions.

Where globalization produces a strengthening of local identities as a defensive mechanism against de-territorialization, 'global' discourses are not necessarily rejected; having been subjected to the process of cultural translation they may re-enforce or be instrumental to traditional orthodox positions. This is, as I will further argue, the case with some of the images circulated in soap operas and women's journals.

## **II. THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL IMAGES UPON LOCAL IDENTITIES**

### ***II.1. Global TV***

Global television is one of the major components of present media flows or of what Appadurai has called the "mediascape" of globalization. At the same time it is a leading resource in the construction and reconstruction of cultural identities and can be best discussed under the heading of cultural globalization.

The refiguring and restructuring of television under the impact of globalization has followed similar patterns as evidenced in other global

“scapes”, i.e. de-regulation and de-centering. This has led to the erosion of the national institution of public television and to the fragmentation of the ordering impulse that used to make national TV an important component in the construction of the imagined community called nation.

Television is nowadays one of the most important sources of de-territorializing experiences: the co-existence of channels originating in remote and diverse places determines the penetration of the familiar every day world by distant events, processes and forces. The pluralization and globalization of TV programs has offered viewers a wide variety of cultural resources that has largely expanded their selves but has also been conducive to the production of fragmented, highly complex and even contradictory identities.

In economic terms, the globalization of television actually refers to the concentration of private televisions in the hands of a few transnational multi-media companies whose channels and programs have become ubiquitous. Fierce competition has determined public television stations to turn commercial. One serious consequence of this process is the tendency to subject large amounts of what used to be called (high) “culture” to the logic of the market.

## ***II.2. Global TV and the spectacle of society***

Global TV has been instrumental in the dissemination of consumerism. Its close association with the spread of Western consumer culture has largely accounted for the perception of globalization as cultural imperialism and has fuelled much of the resistance to it. It is principally consumerism, its values and the subjectivity it promotes, that Islamic states, for example, wished to oppose by banning satellite dishes.

The development of commercial television has meant that visual-based advertising has been placed in the forefront of its activities. Consequently, television is pivotal in the production and reproduction of what Wernick has called *promotional culture*, that is, a culture focused on the use of images to create commodity signs (Wernick 1991:184).

Television’s promotion of images associated with the pervasive commodification of social life can be said to be central to what Guy Debord has called *the society of the spectacle* (Debord 1995). The spectacle, according to Debord, is the locus of inversion, appearance, simulacra and not substance being what matters. The void at the heart of the society of the spectacle is further determined by the colonization of

social life by commodities. Debord's iconoclastic criticism of the present postmodern visual culture is coupled with the in effect leftist critique of consumer culture and its materialist, market-based ethos. Images, defined as 'appearances', are all the more dangerous as they appeal to emotions rather than to reason. Their predominance is perceived as indicative of the crisis in Western rationalism as it gives way to narcissistic, hedonistic indulgence in a world of signs and simulacra.

In the eyes of scholars such as Debord or Baudrillard, spectacle and consumerism (i.e. the new visual culture efficiently promoted by global TV) threatens to dissolve all the certainties of the modern era. Sociologists such as Featherstone, however, while noticing the displacements effected, have also pointed out the continuity with the previous period that this present 'aestheticization' of every day life produces. The new 'de-control' and 'de-centering' is a 'controlled de-control', whereas the hedonist thrust in the promotion of leisure culture is based on old protestant values, such as hard work and discipline, that seem to have colonized the world of pleasure (Featherstone 1991). The proliferation of images, which is so unsettling to text-based thinkers, takes up and extends this ambivalence. As we shall see later in the discussion of soap operas, television promotes the consumption of reality constructed as spectacular or theatrical, in the sense of display, extravagance and excess.

The very texture of television material has changed dramatically over the last ten years, with a marked increase in the visuality of the medium. As a result of the fierce competition with cable television stations, American network television stations have dramatically increased the appeal of visual components, restructuring their programs and investing in highly theatrical, visually aggressive and stylistically self-conscious approaches (Caldwell 1999:7-15). The other television stations have gradually followed suit and started adopting this excessive visual style. This development has changed the status of television from being "a radio with pictures" that was basically listened to and occasionally glanced at (Morley and Robbins 1995, Ellis 1992), to a medium that is primarily visual. (Modern remote controls include a 'mute' button, which means that the TV set can be used with the sound off, while the main business of watching the images carries on. There is no button that switches off the images but keeps the sound.)

Thornton Caldwell has shown how television has appropriated the techniques of avant-garde cinema and of postmodern advertising to self-reflectively foreground its artificiality and theatricality. (Caldwell: 7-25,

90-105).<sup>4</sup> What Caldwell calls the “masquerade” of postmodern American television displays not only a concern to make the style of television more visual and more theatrical, but also, more interestingly, it promotes “the image as an image-commodity”. (Caldwell: 92) Postmodern TV has turned into a medium perfectly adapted to the requirements of the new visual culture and suited to stage ‘the spectacle of the society’.

### ***II.3. Global programs: soap operas and telenovelas***

The programs that broadcast in Romania that qualify as global and are of key importance to the dissemination of images of Western consumer culture are news programs, soap operas, TV serials and advertisements. My investigation of the local translation of global images will focus on soap operas, serials and telenovelas.

In an attempt to cover as many markets as possible, soap operas have recently developed an international style that has adopted some features of emerging postmodern television. These include a glossy and expensive look, seductive visual appearance (suggesting glamour and wealth), more action sequences and physical movement than in the traditional soap opera centered on talk, faster pace, the adoption of cinematic techniques and an emphasis on melodrama at the expense of a more “realistic” approach. The international style involves sacrifice of the localized elements that were the making of the initial success of the soap opera. For example, in Brazil and Columbia, telenovelas were initially used as instruments in the raising of a unified, modernized nation, displaying a high degree of local realism. Since narrow localization restricts the market, companies such as Globo TV adopted a more general, myth-based approach. American prime-time serials such as *Moonlighting*, *Miami Vice*, and in particular *Twin Peaks* opted for a daring postmodern “semiotics of excess”, mixing styles and genres. *Twin Peaks* in particular mixes various conventions and is brimming over with meanings that seem irrelevant to the forward movement of the narrative, but which are part of the spectacle.

### ***II.4. The bricolage available to Romanian audiences***

My study of the soap operas broadcast on Romanian television channels has been largely audience centered: it was based on a sociological investigation including interviews and questionnaires that was conducted

over a period of three years. The interviewees were from Bucharest and the provincial town of Tecuci. The group of respondents included students (mostly from Bucharest University and some from the Academy of Economic Sciences), high school students from a school of disabled or socially disadvantaged children, as well as more mature women from various walks of life.

Romanian audiences are offered a relatively large mix of serials, soap operas and telenovelas. The US, as the centre of global media, has had to compete with media empires emerging on the periphery. While prime-time space is shared by British crime serials and American serials, such as *Melrose Place*, *Dynasty*, *Santa Barbara*, *Miami Vice* and *Cagney and Lacey*, the programs scheduled to show before the news program are the Latin American telenovelas of *Marimar*, *Café with Female Perfume*, *Nano*, or the US soaps *The Young and the Restless*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, and *Passions*. The success of telenovelas in the 1990s has been so great that a special channel was launched (called *Acasa*) that offered viewers telenovelas almost round the clock. In the late 1990s viewers regularly followed both a telenovela and a US soap opera, though the ratings for telenovelas were higher.

The viewing experience of Romanian female audiences has thus been a kind of cultural bricolage, providing them with varied and at times contradictory visual and cultural resources.

If applied to the Romanian experience of soap operas, the thesis of cultural imperialism in the sense of Americanization proves rather limited. US normative images have had to compete rather unsuccessfully with the culturally peripheral but equally global Latin American representations of femininity. Studies of the viewing experience in other East European countries, notably in Russia (Baldwin 1996) have confirmed these findings and have reinforced the idea that global programs, such as soap operas, are contingent in their success upon both the specific conditions of reception and upon their own structural make-up.

While the images circulated may be global, the success of their reception is often only regional. US soap operas, for example, do well in the States, Canada and in many West European countries, though the British prefer to watch their or Australian own soap operas. Spain, Portugal and Italy are a good market for Latin American telenovelas, largely for linguistic reasons and due to the culture similarities. Telenovelas received the cold shoulder in the Czech Republic and in Hungary, but have an enthusiastic following in Romania, Russia, Bulgaria and China.

### ***II.5. Utopian images***

The main appeal for Romanian audiences of both prime-time and daytime serials is their utopian dimension. Here I am using Richard Dyer's influential essay "Entertainment and Utopia" (Dyer 1995) and Christine Geraghty's application of his concepts to soap operas (Geraghty 1999:116-122). Dyer points out that the image of 'something better' to escape into is related to the specific inadequacies in society. Both US soap operas and American telenovelas appeal to East European audiences on account of their projection of a world of abundance – glamorous settings and clothes, luxurious foods and fashionable women. Needless to say, the enjoyment of the projected abundance is set against the experience of need and scarcity, of dullness and ugliness the viewers want to escape from. Many of the interviewees disliked British serials on account of the plain, realistically presented female characters. This is exactly what they wish to get away from. I shall dwell further on the local reception of the abundance dimension in the projection of desirable modes of femininity.

Another utopian dimension identified by Dyer and Geraghty is energy. US and Latin American soap operas express energy primarily through their characters, most often the evil male characters, though there are also some fascinating evil female characters (like Alexis in *Dynasty*). Further aspects include intensity and transparency. Dyer identifies transparency as the sincerity of the characters. In the case of the Romanian reception of soap operas, I would suggest that transparency is experienced more in relation to the clear, unambiguous, often Manichean moral scheme of soap operas which appeal to the audience's melodramatic imagination. As Ien Ang and Jon Stratton have pointed out, the strategy of excess of melodrama only confirms the 'normality' of a pre-established order (Ang, 1995:126-127).<sup>5</sup>

Melodramas, and indirectly soap operas and telenovelas, are modern morality plays. In a transitional age of moral relativism, the normative perspective that soap operas offer is very comforting. The viewer's privileged position from which he or she can see through the scheming of the 'baddies' makes up for the inability to make sense of the local social and political life. The latter is obscure and perplexing and hardly allows women any scope for action over which they have full control.

The yearning of the Romanian female audiences for the experience of moral order is better gratified when viewing telenovelas than US soap



operas. The increased employment of melodramatic devices in telenovelas and the consequent higher transparency of the characters, coupled with a plot that has a clear teleological structure and a predictable closure, can be considered reasons behind the preference for telenovelas in the mid 1990s.

### ***II.6. Identifications with images of ideal femininity***

More accessible identification with images of normative femininity in telenovelas may provide another explanation for the preference for Latin American soap operas.

Romanian women, particularly those in older age groups and of lower-middle class backgrounds, find it difficult to identify with the positive female characters in the US soap operas, glamorous and successful as they may be. There is a cultural gap that often prevents identification. Many of the discourses circulated in soaps operas, and which these characters embody, are either little known to our viewers or do not resonate with their concerns. This is primarily the case of the discourse rights and of the individualistic attitudes adopted in this respect. Much of the vocabulary circulated, from terms such as sexual harassment to the familiar phrases of "I have a problem", "let's talk it over", lacks familiar cultural references in Romania. The slightly feminist or post-feminist positions adopted by characters like Cagney and Lacey, Dr. Quinn, Cybil or Susan do not cut much ice with Romanian female audiences. A position smacking of feminist self-assertion or career orientation is palatable only if coupled with parody or serious self-questioning. The cultural gap prevents Romanian audiences from being on equal footing with the characters. They feel they are lagging behind. Even the perfectly stylized bodies of the heroines are intimidating. Parodied characters fare a lot better as cultural differences are played down.<sup>6</sup> Feminist, or rather post-feminist, meanings come across mainly in comedies with characters that prove to have a great sense of humor and are shown as in fact quite vulnerable and inefficient (e.g. Cybil or Susan).<sup>7</sup>

The Cinderella, rags-to-riches stories of the Latin American telenovelas provide more venues of identification than do US soap operas or even prime-time serials. The telenovelas deal a lot with prospects of social mobility achieved via marriage and which does not involve hard work or any special skills or knowledge. The more disadvantaged young women in Romania, who on account of their poor education have only slim

chances in the labor market and who feel doomed to poverty and squalor, can easily identify and fantasize about heroines who owe their social success and wealth solely to love and marriage.<sup>8</sup> The powerless, often disabled, yet beautiful, pure and self-sacrificing heroine offers no difficulty in identification: she corresponds to traditional models of femininity and indirectly represents the position many of the Romanian viewers find themselves in.

The low social origins of the telenovela heroine and her very extraction from a Third World country create a more comfortable position for the Romanian audience. The latter indirectly looks down on the heroine as culturally and socially marginal and enjoys a certain degree of superiority, while fully sympathizing with her in her tribulations.<sup>9</sup>

Ien Ang's analysis of the work of the melodramatic imagination in soap operas (Ang 1995: 127) may provide a different approach to the fascination of women for the marginal, powerless heroines of the telenovelas. Ang explains the appeal of helpless victims like Sue Ellen in terms of the exploration and enjoyment of various modes of femininity that female viewers experience at the level of fantasy. Such experiences are not accessible in the every day world. It is only in a fantasy world that one can identify with a passive victim and not suffer negative practical or moral consequences. Why should Romanian female audiences emotionally invest in the vulnerable subject positions of helpless, suffering victims? Why not be attracted by the strong, independent and successful quasi-feminist or post-feminist US heroines? The economic and political marginalization of women in Romanian society in the feeling that remote global forces control their everyday world and career prospects, make moments of passive resignation more attractive than the continual effort of coping with adverse situations. The moral purity of the heroines the audience identifies with further clears the latter of possible feelings of guilt about having given up the struggle. Independent and successful women such as the US heroines that "make things happen" only increase the feelings of powerlessness and inferiority.

## ***II. 7. A defense against de-territorialization***

The mix of pre-modern and postmodern images in telenovelas suggests further reasons for their popularity in the countries of Romania or Russia.

Latin American scholars defend the important social and cultural role that telenovelas play in their postmodern, globalized, decentered society.

It could be argued that telenovelas discharge a similar function in the context of the unsettling “transition” period that Romanian audiences are experiencing.

Martin Barbero relates the continuing success of melodrama and telenovelas in Latin America to the process of de-territorialization within globalization. Telenovelas can be seen as a mechanism of defense against the dispossessing effects of de-territorialization and the imposition of new social and political institutions that are not in touch with basic forms of social life in Latin America. Telenovelas provide a form of recognition to the ‘residual’ forms of pre-modern social practices and social relations that cannot be assimilated into the new global structures and the logic of the market. The telenovelas’ stubborn insistence on a primordial socialibility (*socialidad*) within the extended family, or within a neighborhood organized on the principle of the extended family, countermands the cultural dispossession, the devaluation of social relations and the commercialization of life that is taking place under the influence of globalization (Martin Barbero 1996:227).<sup>10</sup> These residual elements are suppressed or at best relegated to the status of “barbarian” and anachronical. Melodrama offers these socio-cultural structures a form of recognition and facilitates their displaced, “anachronical” return to the public sphere (Martin Barbero 1999:29). Telenovelas are thus seen to mediate between the traditional social and cultural texture and the new commercialization of life.

I believe that telenovelas perform a similar function in Romania, where social life is increasingly exposed to the new commercial logic of the globalized age, while its underlying structure evinces a heterogeneous mix of pre-modern rural, modern urban, and socialist quasi-feudal social practices, values and attitudes (Sorin Alexandrescu 2001).

The genealogy of telenovelas provides further explanation for the appeal of telenovelas in post-communist countries, such as Romania and Russia. Telenovelas are thought to have played a crucial role in the fashioning of modern, nationally united Latin American societies and are the most important medium for reaching the mass of Latin American population (Lopez 1996, Straubhaar 1982, 1988). They initially emerged as the local version of American soap operas. Eventually they fully displaced them, achieving a triumph over the American media empire (Straubhaar 1982). In fact, telenovelas have displaced all other types of prime-time TV programming and now dominate the evening hours; their audience includes viewers of both sexes, much of the targeted audience

belonging to the more affluent sections of society, with the consequent emphasis on consumption. It is in Europe, as part of the localizing re-reading of global media and the de-valuation of cultural products coming from the “periphery”, that telenovelas are demoted to the level of daytime soap operas, are gendered (i.e. feminized) and looked upon as cultural “trash”. It is important to stress here the localization of the “global”, the transcendence of the cultural imperialist import and the emergence of a powerfully “national”, local genre. Interestingly it is this feature that will make telenovelas successful as “globally” circulated products.

### ***II.8 An initiation in consumer culture***

Telenovelas were initially designed to induce capitalist development and to create consumer ideals for a basically pre-modern society. In Brazil they served to support the economic policy of military governments and promote its positive image as agent of economic miracle. The Brazilian military government heavily sponsored TV Globo in promoting a genre that could make the values of consumer capital popular while preserving the given social hierarchy and reinforcing a highly conservative patriarchal morality. Nothing that questioned the economic and social policy of the regime or that contained a suggestion of the transgressive freedoms of Western consumer culture was permitted, while the basic ethos of capitalism was reinforced. These strict ideological constraints and the need to ensure popular support for the programs determined the producers to tap local traditions ranging from folk stories, myths and legends, to the photo-novelas and radio serials that had been immensely successful in Latin America (Martin Barbero 1996:277-281). The resulting mix of modern and postmodern images, of pre-modern oral traditions and the insistence on consumerism has made telenovelas highly appealing in areas that experienced traumatic socio-economic changes. Audiences of Eastern Europe have turned to telenovelas for initiation in the life style, consumerism and media environment of late modern capitalist societies, without having to face radical changes in their moral and social paradigms.

The conservative censorship imposed on the serials, which was gradually internalized and continued even after the fall of the military regimes, ensured that telenovelas were ‘free’ of the disturbing effects that the new changes brought about. Their ‘purified’ images bear no traces of the de-centering process and the social and cultural fragmentation

that produce much of the anxiety and insecurity of the present globalized age. These images are, however, overcharged with all the sensuousness and visual appeal that high tech consumerist media can muster. The global does penetrate the everyday world of the local, but takes the seductive form of glamorous Western consumer goods and life styles.

Telenovelas, not unlike US soap operas, are famous for the covert, 'in-program' merchandising of consumer goods. Covert advertising is further supplemented by big swathes of standard advertising broadcast in the five-minute breaks specially allotted to them. Telenovelas thus function as successful forms of the spectacle of Western consumer culture. This is beneficial to the transnational companies that sponsor the programs in direct or indirect ways and to the television stations that produce or purchase them and depend on the advertising revenues generated in the airing of the program. In Romania, telenovelas are an important source of revenue. "Telenovela salveaza televiziunea" ('Telenovelas are saving television') is the title of an article published in the Romanian financial journal *Capital* and which details the net profit television channels make from the advertisements broadcast during the more popular telenovelas.<sup>11</sup>

The seamless interlacing of modern/postmodern commercial images and pre-modern narratives, and consequently two types of temporalities<sup>12</sup>, neutralizes any possible resistance to the changes produced by consumerism and the new global economic and social reality. The melodramatic structure and the traces of totalitarian censorship reassure the more nostalgic audiences that the old values and certainties are still in place.

### III. GLOBAL JOURNALS

#### ***III. 1. Romanian versus British Cosmopolitan – more texts and fewer images***

The same approach that combines textual readings with the investigation of audience response has been employed in the analysis of global journals. The interviewees belonged to the same groups as those that had provided feed-back on telenovelas.

Magazines with global circulation, such as *Elle* or *Cosmopolitan*, are structured on the principle of what Friedman has called "glocalization." As already mentioned, "glocalization" indicates how the global is from

the very beginning conceived as existing in hybrid, localized forms. Localization happens simultaneous with the production of the global and not only subsequently. Romanian versions of globally circulated magazines use the same format as the British, American or Russian ones, but they contain local material. Similar moves have been made in television where formats of shows, games and even soap operas have been circulated globally, while being injected with local elements, from landscapes and street names, to more substantive issues referring to inter-racial relationships.<sup>13</sup>

A brief comparison of the Romanian and British issues of the *Cosmopolitan* indicates the localization process introduced by the editors of the magazine. We will trace later on further negotiations in the act of reading and talking/gossiping about the journals and consider the contribution of the global images and discourses in producing changes in the construction of values and normative gender identities.

The Romanian issue of *Cosmopolitan* is half as thick as the British one, but is considerably more expensive in comparison to the average income of its female readers. The price itself places *Cosmopolitan* alongside *Elle* in the category of magazines that target the affluent elite of young and very young women. The price is further indicative of a hierarchy between the Western, more stylish and provocative journals, and the more homespun, cheaper, local magazines. I am not aware that the British *Cosmopolitan* enjoys any such privileges, though *Elle* and *Vogue* are definitely designed for upwardly mobile women.

The Romanian issue is half as thick because it has half as many advertisements. The reduced number of advertisements may well reflect the limited purchasing power of the readers, as well as the limited range of subject positions they are addressed in. An issue of the British *Cosmopolitan* typically includes advertisements for a wide variety of cosmetics, some detergents and household gadgets, and cars and furniture, banks and insurance companies. The Romanian issue advertises cosmetics (though not all brand names are represented, e.g. Calvin Klein, Yves Saint Laurent, Ralph Laurent are not present), detergents, such as *Persil*, and mobile phones. The relative absence of other commodities (cars, electronic equipment) or financial services indicates that they are not considered "feminine" and are mostly taken care of by males or are too expensive for the readers' financial means.

The limited number of advertisements further suggests that consumerism and consumer culture in Romania is still in its early stages. There are

relatively few large multinational companies operating on the Romanian market and there are a correspondingly limited number of potential consumers, that is, people for whom consumption is a way of shaping a lifestyle and a social and cultural identity. Romanian society has not as yet witnessed the shift that has occurred in post-Fordist Western countries from focus on the producer to focus on the consumer (Du Gay 1997). To begin with, the pervasive poverty in Romanian society makes discussion of consumer culture somewhat laughable as it ignores the predicament of the majority of the population.

The new (global) discourses that have been circulating along with new economic practices in the private sector have inevitably generated new subjectivities. To ignore the emergent subjectivities of the consumer or the enterprising subject that coexists with more traditional identities would be to deny the increasing heterogeneity of Romanian society, as well as to neglect the impact of economic and cultural globalization.<sup>14</sup>

Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* play an important role in the construction of the new subjectivities. Unlike their British counterparts these magazines have not set out solely to please their post-feminist, sophisticated readers. They also attempt to teach, mobilize and to shape new values and new identities. Their tone is often patronizing, if not imperative: the readers are urged, even told not to repeat the same mistakes and change their attitudes and practices. This tone is not resented as most of the readers look upon these journals as sources of a basic type of education that the school system fails to give. The texts teach young Romanian women basic skills required in the job market (how to write a CV, prepare for a job interview or find another, more gratifying job). As one of the more mature persons I interviewed remarked: "Lots of women of my generation would have been able to shape their lives in a more meaningful way, had they had access to the kind of information that journals like *Cosmopolitan* offer."

The importance of the text based information for the readers also accounts for the reduced quantity of images included. What all of the interviewees liked about *Cosmopolitan* were the informative and formative texts. The images were hardly ever mentioned. Unlike the public in the media and image saturated Western countries, and very much like that of other former communist countries, Romanian women of varying levels of education cherished books and favored text based information over visual information. A graduate student in the British Studies M.A. course complained about the large quantity of adverts in British journals: there

is little to read in them, which makes them boring. The larger space allotted to text-based information in the Romanian *Cosmopolitan* is the result of a shrewd localization policy of the journal.

### ***III.2. The tension between images and texts***

At the same time there is a tension between the tenor of many of the texts and the adjacent images: on the one hand, the texts project empowering modes of femininity and stress the need for change, while on the other hand, most of the images of the women appearing in advertisements re-enforce traditional notions of femininity, conceived of as “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Laura Mulvey 1975), as objects of the male gaze. The texts insist on self-assertion, energy and self-confidence in dealing with hostile circumstances. Inertia, fear of change, and the desire to look for shelter in the grooves of traditional values or forms of action are all brandished.<sup>15</sup> The images, however, glamorize passivity along with narcissistic pleasure.

The October 1999 issue urges its readers to “be like a man”, to behave like a man and overcome the weaknesses and shortcomings that they acquire in the socialization process of “becoming women”. The magazine relies on a pseudo-liberal feminist approach that valorizes male values and male patterns of behavior. The readers are told that traditional modes of femininity pre-determine them for failure in their social and intimate, emotional life. If they don’t want to be losers, then they must behave and feel like the winners, that is, like men. Indirectly the text challenges traditional gender distinctions and proposes a more fluid and heterogeneous gender identity. The article was actually translated from English (i.e. it is a globally circulated text) with the names and a few details changed to give it a local flavor. The important localizing moment occurs in the choice of the picture illustrating the text. The picture stabilizes the fluid gender identity and reasserts gender distinctions.

The editors of the Romanian *Cosmopolitan* are fully aware of the great investment by Romanian readers in “femininity”, often described as a “feminine”, attractive appearance. The socio-economic development of Romanian society in the post-communist period has re-enforced sexual distinctions and foregrounded sex appeal and “feminine” appearance as the major, if not the only source of power for women.<sup>16</sup> To behave like a man, to be assertive, individualistic and self-confident like a man, is transgressive enough in the present traditional and highly patriarchal



system of values. But if this stretches to meaning looking like a man as well, it becomes totally unacceptable to a Romanian audience. Consequently the editors chose to illustrate the text with a photograph to allay these fears. The woman in the picture may be dressed in a black manly suit, but her blouse is unbuttoned and the sleeves and cufflinks are exquisitely stylish. She may be holding a cigar as a phallic symbol, but she is not smoking it. Her make up emphasizes her deep “feminine” sensuality, as do her mysterious eyes and her lasciviously parted lips. Her head tilted to one side conveys anything but determination. Rather it is the typical position that cover girls adopt. All in all, dressing like a man, “being like a man”, seems to be the perfect recipe for increasing sex appeal. The caption in the corner of the picture asking readers to “Copy the manly attitude, full with the confidence of success” is either not referring to the photograph or is radically de-constructing the notion of manliness (*Cosmopolitan* 1999: 50).

Another example of the tension between image and text can be found in the way the Romanian *Cosmopolitan* dealt with domestic violence. Unlike Western issues that have fought similar battles in the past and have now reached a post-feminist stage in which its readers know all there is to know in the field, the Romanian issue takes it as a point of duty, as fulfillment of a mission to bolster all action in defense of women’s rights. The leading article of the March 2000 issue set out to mobilize women in the taking of individual or collective action against domestic violence. However, there is no image attached to this article, no photograph of a battered woman; such an image would have jarred with the pleasant fantasies associated with consumerism that the journal is supposed to induce. Nor is there a picture of the demonstration against domestic violence that had taken place previously in Bucharest, which comes as something of a surprise as the staff of *Cosmopolitan* had taken part in the very same rally carrying banners with strong anti-violence slogans. Paradoxically, the image placed next to the article is that of a seductive advertisement for the latest Nina Ricci perfume. Clearly, the journal is simultaneously pursuing clashing policies: one policy is in support of the struggle for women’s rights and has to deal with the gritty reality of women’s oppression; the other promotes consumerism and aims to immerse readers in a utopian fantasy world of abundance and pleasure.

Reading between the image and the text produces two more directions of interpretation. The first stresses the bricolage quality of both the images and texts, where there is no need for a sense of coherence and consistency.

Texts and images can function on relatively independent, sometimes contradictory levels. The other direction exists in the creation of meaning through interaction of image and text at the syntagmatic level. The Nina Ricci advertisement has the reassuring effect of establishing an oppositional relationship between the privileged readers of *Cosmopolitan*, who can afford French perfume, and the poor, underprivileged women who suffer abuse. The identity of the *Cosmopolitan* reader is constructed through this oppositional difference. The glamorous images function as a defense mechanism against corrosive doubts in respect of the blurred or porous boundaries between the two categories of women. This implies that the economic and cultural gap between *Cosmopolitan* readers and ordinary women, who may be victims of abuse, might not be that great after all.

The images in the advertisements function as strategies of exclusion and take the edge off the more provocative texts (though it could equally be argued that they perform the function of seducing the reader to read the challenging texts that she might otherwise reject off hand). Images provide comfort by re-establishing certitudes and inherited values. This feeling of comfort and security is a necessary condition for the individual's participation in consumer culture.

### ***III.3. The spectacle of consumer culture***

I have written elsewhere of how the stressing of post-feminist values in "global" journals like *Elle* or *Cosmopolitan* can have an empowering effect on Romanian women, who, as a consequence, are made aware of new technologies of the self and tempted to depart from the traditional values of self-sacrificing and nurturing femininity (Nicolaescu 2000a, 1999). I would like to add to that that the journals in question were responsible for introducing a visually seductive and artistically elaborate treatment of commodities in the Romanian market. Commodities thus transcend their utilitarian condition and are displayed as aesthetic objects, the purchase of which indicates refinement, sophistication and class, not to mention financial power. The carnival of luscious and irresistible images with which both the British and Romanian issues of *Cosmopolitan* envelop their readers is designed to reinforce the identity of the hedonistic and individualistic consumer. The circulation of these journals in Romania promotes the aestheticization of the everyday life that Mike Featherstone speaks of. Global journals excel in performing a spectacle of consumer culture, a spectacle in which we are strongly urged to participate.

Unlike the British version, the Romanian issue of *Cosmopolitan* does not encourage the female gaze. There are fewer instances of the male body held up as an object of female gaze and desire than there are in British issues. When images of male nudes appear, a traditional excuse is always proffered. The March 2001 issue contains a blown up image of a male nude for the perfectly acceptable purpose of teaching the reader how to provide the greatest erotic pleasures to her partner. The female reader is apparently not placed in the male subject position of voyeur. Rather, the reader occupies the traditionally “feminine” position, from which she must strive to please her man.

The graduate and undergraduate students interviewed as part of this research responded with most enthusiasm to the carnival of images displayed in the magazines, despite finding the informative texts more useful. Ruxandra, an MA student in American Studies, confessed that *Cosmopolitan* filled in an important gap in her training. She values the skills that the journal tries to impart as well as the new gender identity it actively promotes. When she reads the journal and tries to shape her attitudes and actions according to its advice, she feels she is “inhabiting a new world”. Much of the feeling of novelty is indirectly induced by the overt or covert advertisements in the journal. Douglas Kellner has perceptively pointed out that it is not only commodities that advertisements sell, but also a whole set of values (Kellner 1999). The glossy images are designed to seduce the readers into adopting the values and practices of capitalism and consumer culture. Together with the texts providing technical information on various commodities, images urge the reader to break with the older “inadequate” everyday practices and routines, to develop new technologies of the body, new life styles, new identities, all of which ultimately involve new patterns of consumption.

Most respondents liked the tables and question and answer formats in which information is conveyed. *Cosmopolitan* is particularly successful in disseminating Western rationalist, instrumentalist thinking that enables people to solve their immediate problems. Ian Aart Scholte argues that this kind of rationalism both underpins the latest boom of globalization and is one of its major effects. (Scholte: 93-95). The layout, in which most texts are in columns of various colors and fonts, with the interspersing of appealing pictures, reinforces the combination of rationalism and aestheticism that is typical of present day consumer culture.

### **III.4. The aura of the West**

Dana, aged 35, a successful career woman working at Procter and Gamble, is less impressed by the educational side of the journal. "It is basic and may be useful to young and inexperienced women". Nor does she find much use for the fashion section, as it is not suited to the "smart and casual" style she wears at the office. Advertisements no longer fascinate her as they used to in the communist period when *Cosmopolitan* had to be smuggled into the country. At that time each and every detail was charged with significance and subjected to close scrutiny. The novelty of the world represented by *Cosmopolitan* has worn off. She doesn't find useful the presentation of international collections of haute couture. Rather, she is more interested in clothes that can be bought in local shops. If she knows where she can find them, she can then save time and energy when shopping. In general, local aspects have become more appealing than Western, global aspects as the utopian appeal of Western goods and the Western way of life has lost some of its utopian appeal. (Cf. Nicolaescu 1996a, 1996b)

Having said this, Dana is still an avid *Cosmopolitan* reader. When she misses an issue she is struck with panic as if she had missed some important event in her life. She keeps expecting to come across something that will provide a ground-breaking and eye-opening experience. The magazine holds out this promise for her. At the same time, she does not fully embrace the "*Cosmo*" values and its mode of assertive, if not downright aggressive femininity of the individualistic, pleasure and profit seeking new woman. She would like to negotiate a path between this mode of femininity and a more traditional mode that still allows scope for nurturing and caring for others.

Dana has a passion for the quizzes that help identify what category of personality she has (e.g. "Are you the adventurous type or are you a chicken?" October 1999). She works hard at the quizzes, though she knows that every time the result will be inconclusive for her.<sup>17</sup> The magazine projects a challenging cultural ideal of femininity that generates a certain degree of anxiety, even in a successful and highly self-confident woman such as her. Is she not assertive and dynamic enough? Is she lagging behind in her career? Is she not sexy or feminine? The clash of values and ideals that the *Cosmopolitan* ideal of femininity is based on is deeply unsettling.

Details of the models that appear on the front cover also arouse an irresistible fascination in her. She wants to know all about her make up and what she likes to wear and eat, and how she takes care of her body. Dana, like most *Cosmopolitan* readers, unconsciously identifies with the glamorous cover girls: she likes them (they are constituted as objects of desire) and she wants to be like them. What is appealing to her is the representation of ideal femininity as spectacle, as exquisitely stylized appearance. She does not seem to be aware of the contradictions in the myth of beauty that the journal promotes: that she must be at one and the same time a successful career woman, who behaves and feels like a man, but also the glamorous object of male desire. It is in fact the exploitation of this mix of contradictory positions that makes *Cosmopolitan* attractive to Romanian readers. It suits well the conflicting demands made of them to both preserve their traditional gender identities and to make a clean break with those same identities and develop new aggressive attitudes and skills in order to survive in a tough market-oriented world.

In conclusion: both soap operas and journals circulate global images that perform various and often contradictory functions: they introduce new values (e.g. the values of consumer culture or post-feminism) and at the same time provide comforting reinforcements of traditional identities and social structures. Their impact may be one of de-territorialization and the expansion of the cultural resources used in the making of cultural and gender identities, but it is also one of buffering the unsettling effects of de-territorialization.

## NOTES

- 1 Tomlinson actually builds upon insights developed earlier by himself and Arjun Appadurai, (Tomlinson 1991, Appadurai 1990).
- 2 Against the general background of the injustices generated by and through the processes of globalization, Jan Aart Scholte's otherwise highly perceptive and insightful critical introduction to these phenomena operates a distinction between the processes and forces of globalization and the neo-liberal ideology that has shaped them thus far. Scholte operates this distinction in order to formulate a strategy of resistance where the processes themselves cannot be undone but the ideology and values governing them can be changed (Scholte 2000). Whereas the strategy can prove useful in undertaking concrete immediate action, I believe that globalization cannot be dissociated from the neo-liberal *Weltanschauung* that has promoted it. Any action to redress the present imbalances and injustices has to consider a radical rethinking and transvaluation of the globalization processes themselves.
- 3 Giddens discusses the diversifying of contexts of interaction in which individuals are caught up but explicitly denies a corresponding fragmentation of the self (Giddens 1991:190). Likewise Thompson (209-210). In a more radical and theoretically explicit move, Ian Art Scholte places himself in the tradition of western rationalism and discards post-structuralist thinking as marginal and of little impact on the thinking of globalization (Scholte2000: 93-95)
- 4 The stylistic markers of postmodern television have been seen as: a) aesthetic self-consciousness/self-reflexivity, b) juxtaposition/ montage/ bricolage, c) paradox, d) ambiguity, e) the blurring of the boundaries of genre, style and history (Barker 2000:56). Caldwell points to the wide range of combinations of digital storage, mixing and matching that has been used in television to achieve shocking videographic effects. The "videographic exhibitionism" is coupled with a penchant for pastiche, the quotation of earlier films, or their restyling, all of which acknowledge the form itself (Caldwell: 92).
- 5 "Melodrama's strategy of excess operates to assert - and naturalize - certain values by placing them under threat...the disruption caused by melodramatic excess will ultimately confirm the 'normality' of a pre-established order naturalized by realism (Ang and Straton: 127).
- 6 Sitcoms, e.g. *Married with Children*, have had a much greater success. Parody brings American characters closer to the Romanian audience and diminishes the sense of inferiority. All the persons I have interviewed told me they found Peg Bundy to be funny. Most of the female viewers could identify and laugh with Meg. She was recognized as an embodiment of their own "illegitimate" wishes, projecting a topsy-turvy version of the reality of patriarchal relations

- as Romanian women experience them. One woman, putting it bluntly, said “Meg is clever, while we are all a bunch of fools. We work our fingers to the bone and make do with very little, whereas she does not lift a finger and watches TV all day long or goes shopping for herself”.
- 7 Any postmodern sophistication in the visual character of the programs renders participation more difficult since Romanian audiences, particularly older women, have not as yet acquired the visual skills necessary to read and enjoy such visual messages.
- 8 I base my data on interviews of female students from underprivileged backgrounds, studying in a special vocational school that trains them for modest and poorly paid jobs.
- 9 Kate Baldwin makes an extensive psychoanalytical analysis of the reception of a Mexican telenovela in Russia and indicates the multiple meanings of the word ‘trash’ as well as the mixture of feelings of superiority and empathy as reasons for the success of the soap opera (Baldwin 1996).
- 10 Martin Barbero goes as far as to wonder whether the basic plot of a melodramatic telenovela that hinges upon the misrecognition of the hero’s identity does not have a secret connection with the cultural history of the Latin American sub-continent (Martin Barbero 1996:277). As the position of Romania is hardly any different, we may wonder whether Romanian viewers do not identify themselves as mis-recognized by the “centre”, i.e. by Europe.
- 11 See *Capital* (1998) n4. P.21
- 12 Mattelart points out the unique combination of a long dure temporality created by the pre-modern narratives and the fast pace of postmodern advertisements introduced during the program in the designated slots (Mattelart 1992).
- 13 The costs of producing local programs and the risks that these programs might not be successful are thus avoided.
- 14 Mihaela Miroiu dedicates an interesting chapter to poverty and particularly to poverty among women in *Societatea Retro* (Miroiu 1999). I believe there is an unsuspected relationship between the new discourses circulated by the magazines and her appeal in favor of the construction of an ideology against poverty.
- 15 The April 2000 issue clearly spells out the shift in values that has occurred: the values of the past are centered around the family, marriage, children and care for spouse and children, while money and career are completely secondary; the values of young women of today have veered towards career, money and material satisfaction, freedom of movement, investment in the self and particularly in appearance. The shift is visualized in form of a table that dichotomously opposes the two sets of values. The table is further commented on at length in several paragraphs with indicative headings like “Career above everything”. *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 20-23.

- <sup>16</sup> This situation is widespread in most post-communist countries, where the economic development and foreign investments seemed to have been based on the reinforcement of sexual distinctions and of traditional models of gender identities. (See Jaqui True 1999)
- <sup>17</sup> The quizzes are also localized and geared to the deontological dilemmas Romanian women face. Examples of such quizzes: "Find out what career you are suited for", December 2000, "Are you the adventurous type or are you a chicken?" October 1999.



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