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Does Ego meet Alter — in the Global Village ?

A View from Cultural Semiotics

Göran Sonesson

Starting out from the rather different views on Ego and Alter formulated by Peirce and Bakhtin, I have attempted to characterise the position of these familiar philosophical personages within the framework of cultural semiotics, as it has been adapted in Lund from the models of the Prague and Tartu schools. The resulting model has earlier been tried out in a confrontation of well-known and thoroughly studied cultural-historical example, such as the conquest of America (cf. Sonesson 2000b). More recently, I have been interested in using the model to understand another kind of meetings of cultures which is more difficult to circumscribe, because we are in the middle of it, and it may not be much more than an ideological position, i.e. globalised society (cf. Sonesson 2002). The study of the conquest of America may be of some help in this enterprise, however, because, from the present point of view, it could be considered a globalisation on a smaller scale: but it at once strikes us as being asymmetric, while we would like to think of globalisation as being the opposite.

Globalisation, as it is known to the common man (as opposed to ‘global semiotics’ which is not my concern here) is certainly a meeting of cultures, and as such it is comparable to a number of other enterprises of human history, from imperialism to charter trips. Unlike the latter, however, it is undoubtedly first and foremost a stereotype — or, to express it in terms of cultural semiotics, it is a model the members of a culture make of other cultures as it relates to their own. Thus it is, in a sense, an expression of ‘false consciousness’ — but it *does* mean something, only not that which it seems.

Two lessons from the Tartu school

In my earlier work on cultural semiotics, I have retained two lessons from the Tartu school, on which its followers have certainly insisted less: that it is not about Culture *per se*, but about the model members of a Culture make of their Culture; and that this model itself is more involved with relationships *between* cultures (as well as subcultures, cultural spheres, and so on) than with a Culture in its singularity.¹ This is not to deny that a model of Culture easily becomes a factor *in* Culture; thus, for instance, those who insist that contemporary Culture is a society of information and/or a global village certainly contribute to transforming it into just that. As to the second limitation, relations between cultures may be seen as partly defining what cultures are, if it is not all too unfashionable to retain some aspects of the structuralist lesson.

When I first started working on the Tartu school models, I had a didactic purpose: I wanted to explain the conception of the Tartu school to my students. However, as I continued my work, trying to account for differences not taken into account by the school, correcting contradictions, and integrating new historical-cultural examples, I have come to realise that this is a new variant of the semiotics of culture — one which is, however heavily indebted to the work initiated by Lotman, Uspenskij, Ivanov and many others first formulating the thesis for the study of cultural texts during the celebrated summer schools at Tartu university. But I now want to make it clear from the start that in the process what seems like marginal remarks in the Tartu conception has become essential to my approach: it is the business of this brand of cultural semiotics to account for the models cultures build of themselves *as they relate to other cultures*.

Globalisation, if it exists, must be understood as the process that renders society more and more ‘global’ every day. But ‘global society’, before being anything else, is a model (or, as we are going to see, several models which are rather different) that we who live in a society create, with the purpose of describing our own society. This model of global society (just

as all other cultural models) implies an opposition to other societies, which are all more or less, or perhaps not at all, global, and which can be differently distributed in space and/or time, or even only from an ideological point of view. In the case of the model of global society there is obviously an opposition in time: we tend to think that previous societies were less ‘global’ than ours (as the Middle Ages surely were, but also industrial society). In the most glorious variant of our model, however, there is no opposition in space: global society includes everything. Perhaps others can admit that societies still exist that are ‘less global’, at least for the moment. Finally, there can be groups which, living in the same space and at the same time as we do, also do not participate in the model: in our case, for example, poor people and (paradoxically) the immigrants.

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

The model, therefore, is a *real effect* of life in society. But it is also an *effective cause* in society: to some extent, we act in certain ways because we think that we live in global society. From that point of view, the model of global society is comparable to many other models that we have developed lately: the models of post-industrial and postmodernist society, the society of information, and the society of images. It is comparable also to models created by members of other societies, such as the ‘Renaissance’, a model that has had its effects until recent times, but which, as we now know, corresponded to very few changes in the real life of most people at the time (cf. Burke 1997; 1998; Nordberg 1993; 1996).

Modelling Culture: the Canonical Model

What I will henceforth call the *canonical model* is constructed around a opposition between Nature and Culture by means of which both terms are constituted, in the classical sense of linguistic structuralism, i.e. by mutually defining each other (Fig. 1.). Yet, as we have seen, a fundamental asymmetry is built into the model: Nature is defined from the point of view of Culture, not the opposite. According to the *canonical model*, every Culture conceives of itself as Order, opposed to something on the outside, which is seen as Chaos, Disorder, and Barbarism, in other words, as Culture opposed to Nature. In this sense, Nature will include other cultures, not recognised as such by the Cultural model. In earlier discussions of cultural semiotics, I have given many examples of the way this model is expressed in a lot of traditional (or ‘primitive’) world-views, beginning with the Ancient Greek’s use of the term ‘Barbarism’ itself, which is mirrored in the verbally codified attitudes taken by the Aztecs and Mayans to neighbouring peoples, and even, within Europe, in the way Slaves talk about the Germans. Just in the case of the Barbarians playing the part of Other to the Greeks and Romans, these peoples are often described as being unable to speak (properly), which may be generalised to mean that they are deprived of all semiotic capacities.²

Every kind of occurrence recognized by the Culture as its own is a ‘text’, whether it consists of signs from the repertory of verbal language, or is made up of pictures, behaviour sequences, and so on (cf. Sonesson 1998). Each Culture has its own mechanism for generating ‘texts’ which are acceptable inside the Culture while being opposed to the ‘non-texts’ produced by other cultures. For example, one of the classical points of contention between Swedish Culture and the important Latin American immigrant Culture in our country is that behaviour which in Swedish terms are seen as being economical constitute to Latin Americans greediness. Thus, while to Swedes greediness is a behavioural non-text, and economy a behavioural text, both are non-texts to Latin-Americans (cf. Sonesson 1993).

A very illuminating example of the deformation resulting from reading texts stemming from another Culture using the systems of interpretation available in one's own Culture is given in one of Lotman's (1977b) shortest articles. The two cultures involved are those of children and adults. Lotman claims that what adults take to be the Œdipus complex is really the result of the child using a very restricted code stemming from its own experience in order to interpret new information. The child's code consists in reducing everything to what it knows, the image of family structure. Here, Lotman thinks, the mother is obligatorily given the part of the good person, so that only the bad part remains for the father to incarnate. There are reasons to take at least the first part of this theory seriously: the cognitive psychologists White & Siegel (1984) have demonstrated a correlation between the development of cognitive schemes and the range of movement of the child outside its home.

It would be an error to think that, in the canonical model, Nature is simply a shorthand for others cultures. On the contrary, Nature not only includes nature in the everyday sense of the term: the latter must be thought of as the best, or prototypical, instance. Indeed, it is hard to find a better exponent for this model than Colombo, who, when exposed to the unknown cultures of the 'New World', simply treats them on a par with natural phenomena. When he talks about people, it is only as part of the landscape : in long lists of things observed, he will often mention the Indians in-between birds and trees. The first time Colombo meets the Indians, he describe them as being 'naked' ; and he turns out to have the same view on them also in several metaphorical senses. He sees no interest in mentioning the artefacts the Indians use : he believe they lack everything, including language, culture, religion, customs. Therefore, he also fails to discover any differences between the tribes he encounters : they are all alike, as are their languages.

Yet the model should not simply be taken is this ethnocentric and highly value-laden sense. It could also be seen as a very generalised model,

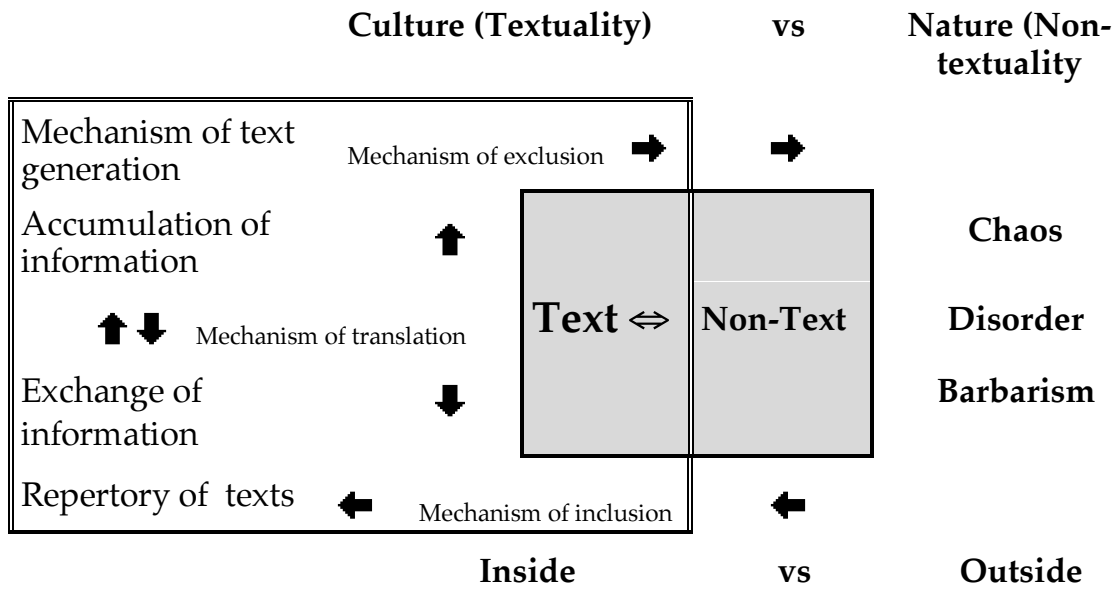


Fig.1. Canonical Model of Cultural Semiotics

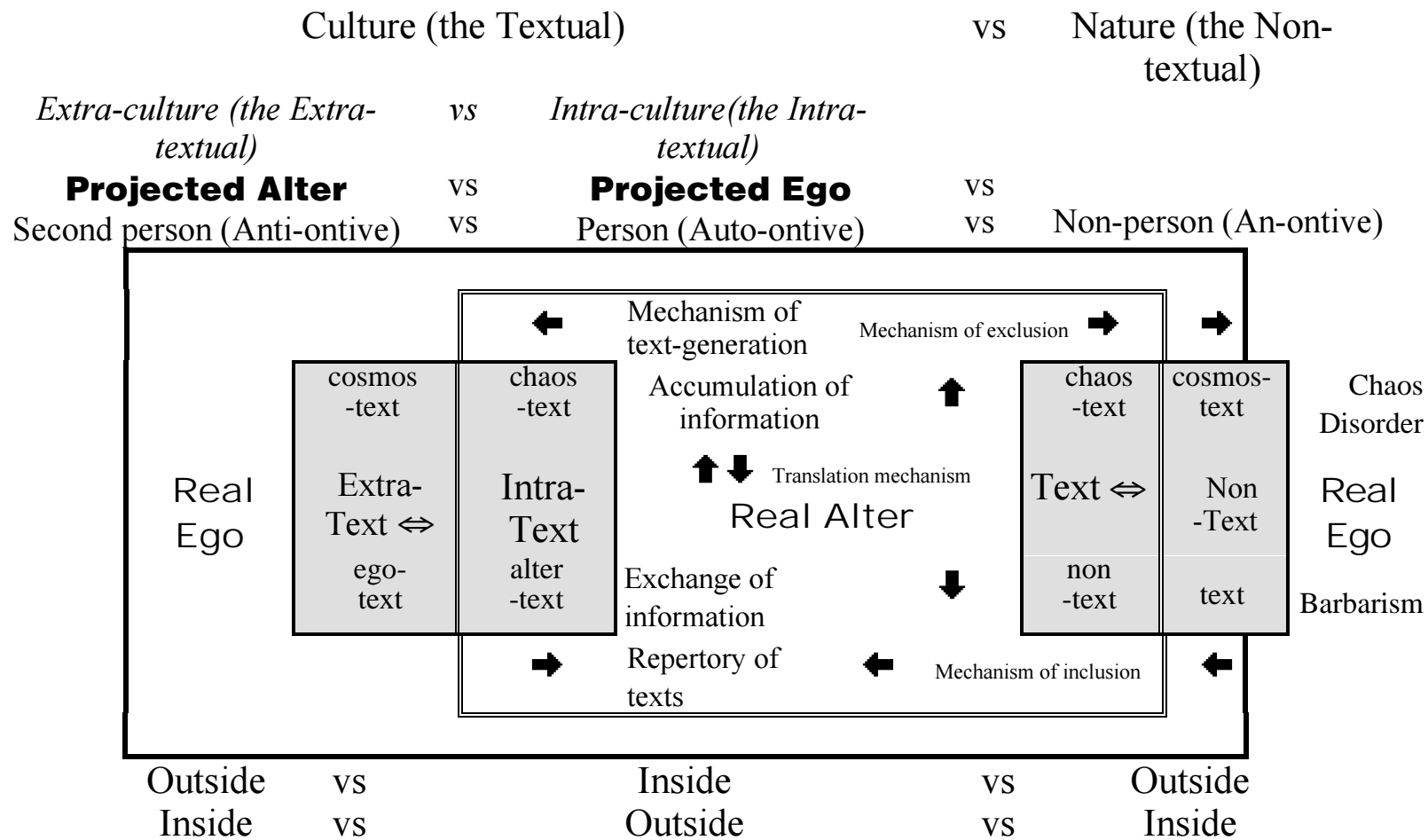


Fig. 2. Projected Ego extension of the Canonical Model

where all (human) cultures, or, more broadly, all living species, are on one side of the divide, with only nature in the strict sense remaining on the outside. In this very general sense, Culture is identical to the Lifeworld, the human niche, or even more generally, to all niches or all *Umwelten*. As Husserl insisted, the natural scientist (like any other scientist) must himself be in the Lifeworld: he must live in the world of ‘ecological physics’, to use James Gibson’s equivalent phrase. In other words, in terms of the canonical model, he is situated within the confines of Culture. The question then becomes whether he chooses to place not only stars and atoms, but also robots and perhaps animals, in the domain of Nature.

The Inversion of the Canonical Model

This scheme is of course too simple even to do justice to some of the examples given in the writings of the Tartu semioticians. In some cases, a Culture may construe itself as being on the outside, representing Nature and Chaos, while another society plays the role of Culture. To pick the example developed in most of the Tartu articles, Peter the Great and other Russians trying to modernise Russia held this latter view, while the slavophiles, more classically, conceived of Russia as Culture and the Occidental countries as being the Barbaric outsiders. It is easy to find contemporary examples, such as third world countries trying to become industrialised, or states of the former Soviet Block wanting to become integrated into Western Europe, whose inhabitants may easily come to look upon the Occident as their cultural model. More generally, for the last few decades young people all over the world have construed the United States, in this peculiar sense, as being *the* Culture.

If the cultural model is intrinsically egocentric, then Culture will always be where the Ego, the subject having the model, is, just as in proxemics (cf. Sonesson in press b); but we can imagine that this same Ego is projected to another sphere, so that there is an imaginary Culture which is built up around the projected Ego. In all those cases in which there is non-coincidence

between the real and imaginary cultures (and the corresponding egos), we will talk about the *inverted canonical model* (Figure 2). In fact, there are reasons to believe that it is not only spatially (in terms of causal history, i.e. the trajectory from birth, in the sense of time geography) that the subject having the model cannot really move from inside his original Culture. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Sonesson 1998), a close reading of the Tartu school texts shows there to be several conflicting criteria for defining what a text is, and hence what Culture is (since Textuality is that which is inside Culture), and these do not always go together. The non-text is that which is not possible to understand. But, at least, it is also that which we do not care to understand because it is not familiar and/or because we do not ascribe any value to it. Culture may well have been outside Russia for Peter the Great, in terms of attributed value, but in the sense of ease of understanding, it is a good guess that Russia remained more cultural.

This suggests another way in which the *canonical model* is too simple: the limits between texts and non-texts (extra-texts, centro-texts, etc.) will often be different according as different criteria are used, which means that the limits between Culture and Non-culture (Extra-culture, Centre, etc) will also be different: the canonical model is simply the case in which all these different oppositions will map out the same border (cf. Sonesson 1998). In fact, the divide between Nature and Culture in the canonical model, in which all criteria give the same result, is comparable to the limits between dialects, which results from a statistical cumulation of the distribution patterns for different linguistic forms.

Even in this sense, the inverted canonical level, as we have described it above, also remains rather simple, because it only supposes the dissociation of two criteria: that of maximum familiarity (the classical criterion of the Lifeworld) and that of the highest value. To the extent that we define more criteria, more dissociations becomes possible. However, we will next consider a case which also ordinarily involves the dissociation of the (sets

of) criteria, but where they are not simply inverted, but made to delimit smaller or greater territories (in real or only ideological space or time).

The Extended Model as reference and conversation

It certainly seems to be possible for a subject in one Culture to conceive of some other society, cultural sphere or whatever as being *a* Culture, without being part of *his or her* Culture. We may therefore imagine a model in which Culture is opposed not only to Non-Culture (or Nature), but also to Extra-Culture (cf. Fig. 2.).

This extension of the model is systematically built into the version of cultural semiotics elaborated by Posner (1989). In his view, the distinction between Non-Culture and Extra-Culture is accounted for by a scale of semiotisation, which runs from a zero degree in Non-Culture, then increases in Extra-Culture and even more in Culture, within which it attains its maximum degree at the Centre (as opposed to the Periphery). This solution seems unsatisfactory to me for several reasons. First, it is not clear what semiotisation is.³ In the second place, it is unclear how a scale, which is continuous, should be able to account for a segmentation into different domains, the limits of which change the meaning of the artefact crossing them: in fact, if there is an Extra-culture and a centre, as well as a Non-culture and a Culture, there should also be extra-texts and centro-texts, in addition to texts and non-texts. In Francis Edeline's apt phrase, 'to semiotize is (first) to segmentize'.⁴ Rather than a continuous scale (or several scales), what we need are criteria for segmenting the domain of Culture and Non-culture, in such a way that Culture and Extra-culture remain more intimately connected to each other than either of them is to Non-culture. This can be done by attending to the parallel between persons and cultures, suggested, independently, by Peirce and Bakhtin.

In some earlier articles (Sonesson 2000b, c; in press a) I have already noted the parallels which might be drawn between relations between cultures, on one hand, and relations between persons, on the other; notably

by differentiating Non-Culture into the equivalent of the Non-Ego and the Non-person. In fact, in a famous analysis, Benveniste (1966) has suggested that what is ordinarily considered the pronouns of the first, second, and third persons, should really be considered the result of combining two different dimensions, the *correlation of personality*, which opposes the person to the non-person, and, within the former pole, the *correlation of subjectivity*, which opposes the subject to the non-subject. The traditional third person, in this sense, is no person at all, and it is opposed to two kinds of persons, the one identified with the speaker, and the one identified with the listener. Tesnière (1969) later proposed to use the somewhat more enlightening, but more cumbersome, terms *autoontive*, *antiontive*, and *anontive*, respectively: i.e. the one who exists in itself, the one who exists against (the first one), and the one who, properly speaking, does not exist at all. It could be said, then, that Culture is the domain of the subject, or autoontive, while Extra-culture is the domain of the non-subject, or antiontive; Non-culture, finally, is the residence of the Non-person, or anontive. It seems particularly proper to describe Non-culture as that which does not properly exist.

The terminology suggested certainly does not involve the imposition of a linguistic model on culture; rather, it is Benveniste's merit to have discovered a cultural layering within language, which may well exist also in other semiotic systems. However, I do think the terminology is in some ways influenced by the semantics of Romance languages. It is natural for a Frenchman, a Spanish speaking person, and so on, to think of the third person as a non-person because the pronouns in question are equally employed about things and living beings; in Swedish, German, English, and so on, however, we use two of the varieties of the third person pronoun, 'he' and 'she', almost exclusively about persons.⁵ It therefore seems more correct to talk about the *axis of conversation* or *dialogue*, joining Ego and Alter, as opposed to the *axis of reference* or *nomination*, which connects the former to the thing meant, or Aliquid. Extra-culture is the one with whom Culture is 'on speaking terms'; Non-culture is the one Culture may at the most be

speaking about.⁶ In this sense, cultural semiotics becomes, in Milton Singer's (1984) phrase, a real 'conversation of cultures'; but, at the same time, it is a conversation conducted out of reach of other cultures.

Peirce also has had recourse to the metaphor of the three common types of personal pronouns to describe analogies between persons and cultures, but perhaps in a somewhat different way from mine. He even puts them in place of what was later to become the three fundamental categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. But Peirce did not identify the second person, as one may at first naively expect, with Secondness, but with Thirdness. In his view, the second person was the most important, not the first: 'all thought is addressed to a second person, or to one's future self as a second person' (quoted from Singer, 1984: 83f). In terms which Peirce took over from Schiller, the first person stood for the infinite impulse (Firstness), the third person for the sensuous (Secondness), and the second persons for the harmonising principles (Thirdness). Peirce called his own doctrine 'Tuism' (from 'Tu', as opposed to 'Ego' and 'It'), and he prophesied about an 'tuistic age', in which peace and harmony would prevail. So the Peircean other is a friend and collaborator; he is not the spirit which always says no, the devil in a Biblical sense.

In his fascinating study of the conquest of America, Todorov (1984) makes a lot of the differences in the attitude taken by the two cultural heroes of the enterprise, Colombo, on one hand, and Cortez, on the other: while both find themselves faced with a hermeneutical task, the former applies it to things, the latter to people and their society. As we have seen, the attitude of the former is of the kind epitomised by the canonical model. Yet, Todorov is wrong, I think, to say that Colombo takes a totally *asemiotic* attitude. Contrary to Todorov's opinion, the reported facts cannot be taken to indicate a lack of interest in semiotic operations. We also learn from Todorov's book that Colombo is very anxious to give names to all places he encounters, although he obviously knows that they have names already, which testifies to his interest in rewriting the foreign Culture as a text of his own Culture.

Segmentation, it should be remembered, is the primordial semiotic operation. But Colombo treats everything, from islands and animals to people, as Non-persons. This is semiosis as reference or nomination, not as conversation.

As he is described by Todorov, Cortez takes a very different attitude from that witnessed in Colombo: first of all he wants to understand the other culture, although he is of course not interested in understanding for understandings' sake. He interprets the world in order to change it. So his first priority when arriving to the New World is to find an interpreter. He is conscious of the symbolic importance of weapons, beyond their value as brute force. He even uses the knowledge about the other culture which he acquires for his own purposes. The most notable example of the latter is the way he takes advantage of the myth about the return of Quatzelcoatl. In order to realise purposes undoubtedly defined by his own culture, he allows his own behaviour to be rewritten as a text of the other Culture. There can be no doubt that to him, Aztec society is an Extra-culture. But this does not mean, as can be seen, that his behaviour is necessarily more ethical than that of Colombo. The 'conversation of cultures' is here not for mutual benefit, but serves to subtly overpower the other. Cortez makes use of the *extended canonical model*.

Nothing of this should be taken to imply that segmentation only applies to the canonical model — it obviously applies to all variants of the cultural model, in all its aspects. But it precedes conversation. For instance, when Edward Said (1979) says that 'the Orient' was invented by the Occident, he is of course quite right: that which is so designated has no unity (segmentation), nor any name (nomination), unless seen from the vantage point of the Occident. Said is not necessarily right about the rest, however: it does not follow that the Orient must be seen as Non-culture rather than Extra-culture. Segmentation and nomination precedes, and is presupposed by, conversation; it is not excluded by it.⁷

Following more or less the same itinerary as Eco's (2000) fictive character Bardolino, many real Europeans travellers sought for a land route to 'Cathay', after Marco Polo has told the story of his travels by sea: for instance, the Castilian ambassador to Timor Lenk, Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo (1403-1406), the German soldier Johann Schildberger who was taken prisoner and lived for many years as a slave in the Orient (1396-1427), the English businessman and ambassador Anthony Jenkinson (1546-1572), and the Portuguese missionary Bento de Goes (1594-1607; cf. Harrison 1999). Something seems to have happened between the first two trips and the second pair. Conzales de Clavijo and Schildberger express their fascination for that which is unknown, and although they find many things to be strange or 'wrong', they do not condemn the other culture. For Jenkinson and de Goes, however, all foreigners are stupid, despicable and dangerous. Of course, de Goes, like all other good Jesuits beginning with his master Mateo Ricci, tried to adapt and assimilate himself externally to the surrounding culture, somewhat like Cortez. So he really entertained a canonical model, while appearing to conform to an extended model. On the whole, however, it seems that the Orient started out as Extra-culture, but ended up being Non-Culture.⁸

The symmetrical other and the asymmetrical one

Both Bakhtin and Peirce has developed a parallel between cultures and persons, which is reminiscent of the models of cultural semiotics, and Peirce has even expressed it in terms of pronouns. There is no space to discuss these parallels here, except for noting one essential difference: for Peirce the other is another self, and the self is another other. For Bakhtin they seem irreducible.

Bakhtin (1990; 1993) over and over again points out that it is only the other which may be (and must be) seen from the outside, and thus is perceived as a complete and finished whole; the self, on the other hand, is an unlimited process which can never be grasped in its entirety, indeed it is

some kind of stream of consciousness, which only comes to a stand-still at death. This is so because ‘my emotional and volitional reactions attach to objects and do not contract into an outwardly finished image of myself’ (1990 :35 ; cf. 1993). Only the other’s body can be seen completely: there is an ‘excess of seeing’ (1990: 22ff). In the case of ourselves, some part of the body is always lacking, even as reflected in a mirror. This difference translates to the mind. In this sense, the other, contrary to the self, has the property of *outsideness*, or *transgression* (1990:27ff).

Both Bakhtin and Peirce see the self as something which is not and cannot be concluded, something which exists only as developing in time. But while to Bakhtin the other is something static, essentially closed off, he is for Peirce of the same kind as the self, that is a stream of consciousness which cannot be halted — before the moment of death. So from this point of view, the other is just another self to Peirce. On the other hand, Peirce claims there is no direct access to knowledge about the self, just as there is none about the other: both are only indirectly known through signs. As far as access to knowledge is concerned, then, the self is merely another other to Peirce. The outsideness, or transgression, which Bakhtin attributes to the other is also a property of the Peircean self.

What seems to be lacking in Peirce’s thought is the second person as a real Alter, someone who is basically different. It could be said, then, that while Peirce is preoccupied with the *symmetrical other* (the one which may take my place so that I may be the other), Bakhtin talks about the *asymmetrical one*, which is for ever defined as different. It is the latter which is the subject of cultural semiotics. Mead, Cooley, and their followers within ‘symbolic interactionism’ naturally apply the Peircean conception. Todorov, who in his *America* book was clearly concerned with the asymmetrical other, curiously joins the company of the ‘interactionists’, in a later book (1995: 34ff, 15f, 31ff) in which he takes Hegel and Sartre to task for interpreting the dialectic between Ego and Alter as a combat where one of the participants must always lose — or, indeed, both. In this reading of Hegel, Ego can only

be recognised as a person by subduing the other; but once the latter has been subdued he is a Non-person, and his recognition of the other as a person has lost its value. Like Peirce, Todorov points out that we are always *with* the other. There is, so to speak, no moment in time in which the other is not already there with us. Todorov (1990: 39ff) goes on to quote evidence from developmental psychology, which naturally shows us that the first other is not a man met in combat but the mother taking care of her child. And there is no problem in being recognised as a person: in fact, already after a few weeks the child tries to catch its mother gaze and is rewarded by the mother's attention. Conflicts emerge later and suppose a third party who determines who the winner is.

In his earlier book, Todorov (1984: 251) claimed the other had to be discovered. Human existence was said to take place between two extremes, where the Ego invades the world, or the world absorbs the Ego. Now, however, Alter appears as a given. But this is not the same Alter as the one which emerges from the study of the Conquest, or from the book on French attitudes to foreigners, although Todorov nowhere comments on the difference. In the first two books, Todorov is concerned with radical otherness, a property attributed to somebody coming from another culture. Such radical otherness may of course be attributed to somebody who does no longer occupy another space: it may be an *inner other*, like the moors in Spain, women in the men's world, or, to take a more topical example, the immigrants in contemporary Europe. Here otherness is dissociated from space, though it may have a real or fictive origin in another space. This otherness is not only characterised by 'outsideness', in Bakhtin's sense, but by some more definitive kind of foreignness. It is not reversible.⁹

In contrast, the kind of otherness which Todorov now discusses is the otherness of just about everybody. In this version, as well as in the work of Peirce, Mead, Cooley, etc., everybody is the other for another, i.e., the other is the Ego viewed from another point of view; and the point of view changes as it changes with the use of the first person pronoun. This relationship is

certainly constitutive of life in society (that is, life en general), but it is the other kind of relationship between self and other which is constitutive of relations between cultures.

There is no way — or at least no easy one — from asymmetrical otherness back to the symmetrical kind. Robinson and Friday, in Michel Tournier's (1972) version of the story, certainly start out as asymmetrical others, as master and slave; and when they later end up being simply symmetrical others, that only happens after a major crisis, and perhaps only in Robinson's imagination. After all, Friday then chooses to leave.

The internal other and territoriality

Inner otherness is an important factor in history, or rather, in the models which have contributed to form history. History would have been different without the moors in Spain, the gypsies in much of Western Culture, and, more obviously, woman in what has through most of history been the man's world. Some such kinds of inner otherness is part of the *anthropological universals* present in all societies: women as opposed to men, children as opposed to adults (cf. Sonesson 1997b). Other divisions are characteristic of particular societies: slaves as opposed to free men in Ancient Greece, servants and their masters until the beginning of the century in Sweden (as in Bergman's 'Fanny and Alexander') and still, for instance, in Mexico, rational persons and fools through much of Western history, the 'gay' as opposed to the 'straight' in contemporary society, and the 'first- to third-generations immigrants' as opposed to 'real Swedes' in contemporary Sweden. More clearly than the separation of cultures which is distributed between territories, these divisions between persons occupying (more or less) the same space seems to implement some kinds of 'mechanisms of exclusion' (cf. Foucault 1971).

This does not mean that we can identify the two kinds of relationship between self and other which have been mentioned above, the reciprocal and the non-reciprocal one, and that of the other which is external or internal to

the Culture. Both the internal and the external other is necessarily a non-reciprocal other. There is no point in subdividing the reciprocal other, for he is not defined as other: he is just the other of some Ego which is his other.

It follows that the kind of otherness which interests us here is always non-reciprocal. Thus, it is not only the relation of Culture to Non-Culture which is asymmetrical, but also that to Extra-Culture. The asymmetry concerns the relationship to the other Culture as non-subject, not only as non-person. There is a possibility to communicate, but the relationship is not reversible. Only within Culture, and outside its domain of inner otherness, is outsideness exchanged between peers.

Everything said so far tends to connect Culture with spatial extension: the visual layout of the model itself, the comparison to proxemics (behind which lurks territoriality as found in different animal species), the very idea of Culture as identical to the nation state, etc. But how are we then to understand the notion of the internal other? I would suggest that the connection between Culture and territory *is* fundamental, yet it is apt to be dissociated, becoming merely metaphorical.

In a fascinating study of a working class community in England, Elias & Scotson (1994) describe how newcomers are frozen out, although they are not different from the point of view of social class, profession, interests, etc. In the end, the authors are forced to conclude that the only difference between ‘the established and the newcomers’ is that they latter have not been there as long as the former – that is, they are not ‘owners of the territory’ (Cf. Hammad 1989). The notion of ‘inner other’ supposes someone to be present in a territory without being defined as an owner of it – either because he or she comes from the outside (immigrants) or because he or she is socially subordinated (women through most of human history, lower classes, children, etc.). Both criteria often apply to slaves.

In at least one sense, as we shall see, globalisation involves the hypertrophy of the inner Other.

Three scenarios for globalisation

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

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

In the following, I will consider three scenarios for globalisation. I will have very little to say about ‘economic globalisation’, strictly speaking, even though it certainly has its cultural consequences. All scenarios can be said to involve the circulation of ‘texts’, in the wide sense in which this term is used in cultural semiotics: that which circulates in such a way that it tends to transgress the borders between Culture, Non-culture, and Extra-culture. The three scenarios we will investigate have to do with the circulation of *individuals*, of cultural *artefacts*, and, more simply, of *messages*.

It is my contention that globalisation can only be experienced locally, so I will start from my own experience. More exactly, it is only from a local point of view that globalisation appears as global. My own local point of view is not only Swedish, but it pertains to a particular part of Sweden, the southernmost tip of the peninsula, spanning Malmö and Lund. So this is exactly where I will begin my journey into global society.

In seventies, when it went to Paris to start my studies of semiotics, I was fascinated by the mixture of peoples and cultures that could be found there. In the streets, on the great boulevards, and at the courses and

seminaries that I frequented, you could meet people from all parts of the world (or so it seemed me). Every casual stroll along the boulevards seemed an adventure, a passage through the entire world. In Paris restaurants could also be found that served all kinds of cooking, as well as stores that sold products from all countries all over the world. However, in Malmö and Lund where I lived before, not only there were no restaurants serving food from other countries (with the exception of some Chinese restaurants and some pizzerias), but on the main all the people in the streets looked more or less alike: all boringly blond and white-skinned. Now Malmö (and, to a lesser extent, Lund) have changed totally: it looks like Paris did before.

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

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

Art students are surely going to believe that I am thinking of the fact that movements within the visual arts no longer take their origin in Paris but

in New York; but I am really referring to culture in the vast, anthropological, sense, of the term. The case of food is, from this point of view, most instructive, because very often recent fashions have involved traditional plates removed from the context of a particular culture that suddenly, and sometimes for very limited periods, are spread to all parts of the world, after having been reviewed and corrected in the United States. The French always have eaten their croissants; but suddenly there were special shops in which to buy croissants, or ‘croissanteries’ (not a French concept) all over the entire world, of course with fillings and other complements which were unimaginable in the traditional French culinary culture, and in the end those shops even appeared all over Paris. Soon came the next fashion which were supposed to be Mexican food, this time reviewed and corrected several times over before it arrived to us: first by the ‘Chicanos’ of California and Texas, then by the producers of tinware, and finally by the ‘chefs’ (who were Yugoslavs, North Americans, Peruvians, but never Mexicans) of the ‘Mexican’ restaurants that were opened everywhere, and who often were content to open the tin can coming from California and to mix the content with any product they could invent. The latest culinary fashion is the *café express*, traditionally drunk in the Mediterranean countries, which now is served throughout the world, in special coffee houses. In all these cases we really received messages of a kind from other countries: but only one country, the United States, has at the moment the power to put those messages into circulation, and it does not do it without deforming them by means of its own code.

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

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

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

First model of globalisation: cultures without a territory

One of the scenarios of globalisation that we have considered above involves a difference of ideological location within the Culture: Swedes and immigrants share the same space and the same time, but they are in different ideological spheres. Although they meet in the street (but more rarely in their homes), there remains a difference between the behaviours and artefacts that for these different groups are ‘texts’, ‘non-texts’ and perhaps ‘extra-texts’. The same applies to the case of the Internet: we are within the same (virtual) space and at the same moment (as measured in ‘beats’, the unit of atomic time that serves to co-ordinate computers located in different spaces and times), but we do not go there having the same definitions of Textuality; however, as the Internet constitutes a more restricted and specific scene of interactions involving a permeability of very few properties (which is what explains the possibility, in a MUD-MOO, to appear as an individual

of the opposite sex or even as a chair), it may turn out to be easier to share the criteria that define what a text is. But the cases also differ on the axis of conversation: they are different from the point of view of power and solidarity.

Globalisation, then, is, among other things, the hypertrophy of the inner Other. In the model applied, in a more or less conscious way, by contemporary Swedes, the internal Other is called ‘the immigrants’. The model does not observe (at this level) the differences between immigrants coming from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and East Europe, etc. Also it confuses immigrants of ‘the first’, ‘the second’ and unto ‘the third generation’, that is, to relieve ourselves of this absurd bureaucratic language, real immigrants and persons having been born in Sweden whose parents or grandparents (or just one of them) were immigrants. I call this a hypertrophy of the internal Other because this group now constitutes a third part of the population (in Malmö, but the percentage is quite big also in other parts of Sweden). This implies that, in this model, a significant part of the population lives in a territory that others define for them as being not-textual.

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

Now the question is if, in the prevailing model, the immigrants appear as being members of a Non-culture or an Extra-culture, deprived, in both cases, of their own territory. Both cases may exist, but I fear that the most common is the one in which the immigrants are ascribed to a Non-culture.

There are exceptions for certain ‘texts’: certain artefacts and behaviours, such as particular dishes, dances and pieces of music, have been absorbed, and therefore deformed, by the Swedish culture. Many Swedes now eat *falafels* or *empanadas* prepared and sold by persons coming from countries where those are traditional plates. Nevertheless, they are textualised in a deformed way, because the use to which Swedes put these dishes is not integrated into the culture of those peoples as a whole.

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

Even on the axis of conversation, nevertheless, a distinction must be made between two ways of conceiving the relation: in terms of power, or in terms of solidarity. Again we can make an analogy with the social structure incorporated into ordinary personal pronouns: there is solidarity when (in the terms of the social psychologists Brown & Gilman 1960) we address the other as T (like in the ‘tu’ of French) and receive the same term in return; and there is a relation of power when we address the other with V (like in ‘vous’ of French) whereas he or she answers us with T — and these two relations cannot involve the same subject at the same time. We have seen above that, even in the relation of interaction, there is asymmetry, because Extra-culture is not Culture. Within the asymmetry of the interaction, solidarity introduces a certain symmetry, whereas power renders the relation asymmetric from another point of view. The relation to the internal Other is always a relation of power, not of solidarity, because it occurs in the territory of his Other. Power always belongs to the one who controls the territory.

Second model of globalisation: the Sender Culture

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

Cultures without a territory involve the circulation of individuals; the Internet, in contrast, concerns the circulation of messages. However, we have seen that, from the point of view of cultural semiotics, they appear to pertain to the same model of globalisation. The circulation of ethnically characterised dishes and the like, however, must perhaps be described as being something more than just messages (although they are also that), that is, as artefacts. More obviously than to individuals, we can apply to these artefacts the rules of Textuality. ‘Non-texts’ that are assimilated first must be ‘translated’, which often leads to deformations, since they are read with the codes of Culture. Nevertheless, in due time a new code can be constituted which also includes those imported ‘texts’. Very obvious cases of such ‘deformations’ are the croissants, the tacos and the café express outside of their culture of origin. It is too early to say if, in our culture, we will ever manage to set up our own code for interpreting those ‘texts’ (although in the case of the croissants we already know that it did not happen).

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

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

history. In other historical circumstances, other cultures have been the ultimate sender cultures, although of course on a smaller scale, or within a more limited range (Rome in Antiquity, Byzance during the early Middle Ages, France in 17th century Europe, etc.)

Third model of globalisation: change of centre

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

During these recent years, many of the great Swedish companies that sometimes have hundreds of years of existence have been united to companies from other countries and have transferred their headquarters to the other country. Even Ericsson, that continues having a majority of Swedish owners, is considering the possibility of changing its main office to London. The most interesting case concerns the Swedish car-makers. Swedish cars supposedly have a reputation in Europe as well as in the United States for being safer than others. But Saab has now, for several years, been a section of the great North American company General Motors, and its division of buses and trucks ended up being sold to Volkswagen. Volvo sold its division of personal cars to Ford about two years ago, and the division that makes trucks and buses has now united with Renault in a collaboration that seems to give all the real influence to the last company.

Therefore, the label ‘Swedish cars’ no longer seems to be anything more than an effect of meaning that can be used in the publicity campaigns of companies that do not have anything Swedish about them.

This seems to be the most serious scenario: it does not only mix pre-existing cultures, but it redefines what is the centre and the limits of the culture. One of the models of globalisation that we considered earlier admitted the possibility of dissociating the nation state from its territory. Now we are confronted with a case in which a culture does not relate to the nation state at all. That is what happens in the third scenario of globalisation, where companies cease completely to be parts of a nation state. In the long run, this may turn out to be the most dramatic model of globalisation: when what defines the Culture, within the dialectics of cultural semiotics, no longer it is a nation state with its territory, but something else, such as a company.

It is an illusion to think that this is an impossible situation: at other moments in history, the identification of Culture with the nation state has been far from obvious. During the European Middle Age, for example, the model according to which the nation was identical to Culture already existed, but it was a very weak model, indeed. The king, as the maximal representative of that model, tried to impose it, but for a long time he was not very successful: the true identification that predominated, was the identification of the Culture with the county or the duchy, which could be made up of feudal possessions in diverse parts of Europe, scattered between different countries. In that model, the king was just one among the dukes, and quite often he was not even the most powerful one (cf. Duby 1990a, b; Elias 1978; Nordberg 1993; 1996). At the other extreme, Culture could be identified with Christendom (or perhaps Western Christendom as opposed to the Eastern variety). It can be said that the model that identified Culture with the nation state already existed; but that it was subordinated to the model that identified it with a set of scattered feudal possessions, as well as another

model which comprised the whole of the domain dominated by Christian believers.

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

Conclusion

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

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¹ The Tartu school model has been variously described in a number of texts, some of which were written together by Juri Lotman and Boris Uspenskij, and some involving several other authors. The version which is used here was developed in Sonesson 1987; 1992; 1993; 1994a,b; 1995; 1996; 1997a,b,c; 1998, 1999, 2000b, c; 2002; in press a, b). Though there are few direct references to the writings of the Tartu school in this article, many titles are given in the bibliography.

² See, in particular, Sonesson 2000b and also (for some of the examples) Todorov 1982 :81f

³ I suggest some possible interpretations which, in the end, seem unacceptable, in Sonesson 2000b.

⁴ In a conference given at the Second Congress of the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies, Lund 1992.

⁵ Such a linguistic bias is also a problem with Ricoeur’s (1990) discussion of Ego and Alter (which contains a reference to Benveniste’s ideas).

⁶ Dialogue should not be understood in Bakhtin’s rather truncated sense. As noted above, the other of the Bakhtin circle is rather the one we speak about (the hero) or even only look at (as when we see the other’s body but not our own in its entirety). This is even true about dialogicity as it is understood in the later books, familiarised as ‘intertextuality’ by Kristeva: the author relates to the speech of the other, but the other has no way of talking back. In the Rabelais book and the late version of the Dostoevsky book the quoted other is curiously supposed to be able to talk back; but then the asymmetry between Ego and Alter is also given up (cf. Also Morson & Emerson 1990: 172ff).

⁷ It is of course also true that, for a more detailed scrutiny, nomination presupposes but is not presupposed by segmentation. It just so happens that, in human beings, these two operations tend to go together (if we admit that nomination is not necessarily expressed in verbal form, but may also be conveyed by means of other semiotic means)

⁸ After my lecture in Bacau, Sorin Alexandrescu asked me why I had not proceeded to the “deep structure” level where all this can be reinterpreted as an opposition between the subject and the anti-subject. While I am not sure that this kind of models are in any sense “deeper” than those inspired by the Tartu school, I do think they are relevant, and I am currently exploring them. It should be remembered, however, that I am not interested in

some kind of “true” articulation of signification, unlike the Greimas school, but in models such as they are construed by the members of a culture.

⁹ Or rather, it cannot be reversed without changing its meaning: the otherness of Cortez to Moctezuma is not the same otherness as that of Moctezuma to Cortez.