

A mannequin dressed in a vibrant, multi-colored patterned suit with orange, blue, and red tones. The mannequin is balancing on a large, vintage-style globe of the Earth. The globe is positioned on a dark grey floor against a dark grey brick wall. The mannequin's arms are outstretched horizontally, and its legs are also extended, creating a sense of precarious balance. The globe shows continents in shades of orange and red, with a grid of latitude and longitude lines.

STILL LIFE  
HOPES, DESIRES AND SATISFACTIONS



Still Life



For  
Megan Vaughan



— Still Life —

Hopes, Desires  
and Satisfactions

— Henrietta L. Moore —

polity

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## Thinking Again

This book is an attempt to think again about how to analyse the worlds we share with others. One part of this challenge is how we might understand what being historical means; how do we create the personal and political horizons that define our understandings of the present, as well as the forms of belonging and interconnection that characterize it? The present, of course, is never still, never fully present. We may be haunted by our pasts, but human social life is equally lived in a relentless forward gear. It's not just that we are open to the future, to potentialities and possibilities, but also that our perceptions and evaluations of change are formative both for ourselves and for the times we live in. It may be that 'the times they are a-changing', as the old Bob Dylan song goes, but perceptions of time and change are connected to historically specific modes of being, particular understandings of ourselves as subjects and agents in history. The Enlightenment, for example, is often said to be both a period of history and a way of being in the world, characterized by certain sorts of individuals with particular ways of thinking about the world; so too modernity. How we are placed in time and space links to modes of being – specific ways

of thinking, feeling and acting, of relating to things, to others and to ourselves. Political and economic changes alter these ways of being, and new ways of seeing and understanding drive forward further possibilities for change. In the chapters that follow, I puzzle over the challenge that analysing social change presents, and the dilemmas posed by trying to think about the connections between the kinds of people we are and wish to become, and the times we live in, with all their promise of technological, political and social transformation.

In the contemporary moment, as many chapters in this book demonstrate, there is a huge interest in self-making, and self-stylization. This is not just about self-cultivation as a form of individualization or the embrace of possessive individualism, but more properly as Foucault described it, a desperate attempt to imagine the present, 'to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it, but by grasping in it what it is' (1998: 311). Stylization in music, in dress, in politics and in all aspects of personal and intimate life is part of a drive to give form not only to the self, but to the world, and to relations with others. It is an obstinate search for a style of existence, a way of being. It accounts, in part, for the massive drive towards authenticity, truth and reality that is observable in so many different domains of life around the globe. A palpable commitment to the value of the present. This drive towards, and demand for, the 'real' is evident not only in contemporary forms of religious stylization, but also, and perhaps more surprisingly, in the engagement with virtual worlds and financial markets, as well as in the collapsing of distinctions between art, entertainment and politics (see Chapters 5 and 6).

## After Globalization

What tools do we have at our disposal for analysing these forms of self-making and their relation to lived understand-

ings of the demands of the present and the processes of transformation that seem to undergird contemporary life? Periodizations are always contentious; there is no settled agreement as to the nature of the Enlightenment, modernity or globalization, for example. My interest is not in trying to define a specific era, but rather in understanding the present as a set of lived possibilities and relations, what it might mean to say that we share our worlds. It is often said that we are living in times of great change, of speeded up connections and distortions of space and time. We are more connected than ever before, and the problems of this enhanced and, as some would have it, unwelcome proximity are manifest in the clashes of culture, faith and ideology with which we are all so familiar. For many, the root of these problems is a rapacious form of whirligig capitalism that self-devours by spinning on its own axis, moving inexorably across the globe. Before the financial crash of 2008, it seemed impossible to get off this alarming funfair, and yet now its violent arrest threatens to hurl us all into space, a frightening no-man's-land of dispossession.

Global capitalism, and globalization more generally, are the forces that allegedly bind us together, and speed up our interactions. However, globalization as metaphor and process has been the subject of extensive critique and debate (e.g. Bisley, 2007; Held and McGrew, 2007), and more recent approaches emphasize its uneven, nonlinear character. The plural, unpredictable nature of processes of change and transformation means that analytical frameworks can no longer depend on the earlier binaries: local/global, inside/outside, micro/macro (Moore, 2004). It is one of the paradoxes of globalization that it is not global. It exists as a partial condition that has no teleology of completion and cannot do so. Likewise, global capitalism is not a single, coherent entity or set of forces, but rather a dynamic set of processes establishing and disestablishing uneasy, shifting, often provisional connections that continually seek out new sources of profit (e.g. Harvey, 1990; Bayart, 2001; Tsing, 2005). The result is

that change may be all around us, but its directions, pulses, propensities and outcomes are maddeningly difficult to analyse and predict. This does not stop anyone from trying; from politicians, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, academics and NGO activists to ordinary farmers. What it does ensure is a great deal of theorizing, reflection and debate. As Weber suggested, people's ideas, and the 'world-images' they create in consequence, determine 'the tracks' along which action is pushed (1948: 280). Particular ways of conceptualizing the world bring about material consequences, and drive change. Ideas matter, and so talk of globalization, occurring as it does everywhere from the academy to international organizations, policy forums and the boardroom, matters.

And yet, ideas are not enough, so what value and significance should we assign them? Social critique is a form of political action, but its limitations are frequently all too apparent. In Chapter 6, I discuss the disabling effects of the melancholia that has overtaken the Left since the 1980s as a consequence of our inability to imagine viable alternatives to global capitalism. My interest is in the theories that social theorists put forward, and the kind of relationships they have with the theories of ordinary people. Social theorists are part of the worlds they investigate, and their passions and fears are often very similar to those of the people they study and write about. Successful social theory must stay close to the theories, concerns and experiences of the people being studied, but it has to be something more than mere description. When critique collapses into description, I suggest, melancholia is the inevitable outcome. The proliferation, commodification and politicization of differences under contemporary capitalism have been extensively documented by social theorists, but we have not been able to develop theories of difference that provide certain terrain either for political change or for moral and ethical critique (Judt, 2010).

In Chapters 3, 4 and 6, I explore this problem by examining how our concepts and languages of analysis and

understanding are caught up in formulations of difference that impede analysis. In a series of discussions about values, faith, gender, sexuality and politics, I try to develop forms of critique that are not indebted to the pre-theoretical assumptions underlying current discourses on globalization. In attempting this task, I do not suggest that the processes of interconnectedness and integration we usually refer to by the term globalization do not exist, or are not significant. Rather, I mine many instances of such processes to demonstrate what current theoretical preoccupations leave insufficiently theorized. My aim is to mark a definitive break with some of the presuppositions that adhere to the idea of globalization and which continue to haunt it even when they have been disavowed and extensively critiqued. Chief amongst these are notions of pessimism and loss. Discourses of capitalism – most particularly those on the Left – always invoke the ghostly spectre of change understood as the erosion of ways of life. Insofar as theories of globalization are the inheritors of specific theories about capitalism and modernity, they continue to carry with them traces of the antinomies between tradition and loss that have always animated such debates. This is true, in my view, even of those critics who have highlighted the unexpected and unstable outcomes of globalization, and its simultaneously heterogenizing and homogenizing propensities. There are many writers who have suggested that we need to move beyond the confines of the relation between the modern and the non-modern, beyond hybridity, beyond also the collapse of culture, the McDonaldization thesis, the waning of affect, and the endless play of *différance*.<sup>1</sup> However, the pre-theoretical assumptions underlying the conceptual framework of globalization constantly return us to worn out formulations of similitude and difference that invoke modernity versus tradition, authenticity versus loss.

Part of the difficulty here is the way that information technologies and the media stand in for the modern and the new. The internet and information transfer have not

only become dominant metaphors shaping our conceptions of globalization (Castells, 1996; Cooper, 2005: 96), but they function as the conceptual and performative framing for the pre-theoretical assumptions that characterize the nature of the global. We all know that we live in the age of information technology, global capitalism and globalization. What this invokes much of the time is a nostalgic, pessimistic and unproductive oscillation between the celebration of identity and authenticity on the one hand, and fears about the loss of culture and cultural selves on the other. The language of analysis is instructive here: hybridity, mimicry, resistance, reappropriation. These strangely etiolated terms are deployed to typify encounters between different world-views, systems of power and distributions of resource, and as a way of characterizing differences in reception and responses to what are assumed to be 'external' influences. In Chapter 3, I argue that such terms reflect a set of western preoccupations and concerns, and are too leached of meaning to provide us with sufficient analytical purchase in the contemporary moment.

Why might this be so? We need first to begin with a point of clarification. All cultural meanings and forms of cultural production require mimesis, repetition and reappropriation. Interpretation at its most fundamental involves the repositioning and repurposing of meaning. This process is not always one that works through direct reference; as well as cognitive and evaluative components, it also frequently proceeds through emotion, affect and somatic engagement. For example, Brent Luvaas discusses young Indonesian fashion designers who rework such things as corporate logos, the album covers of foreign rock bands and a variety of international images, and then incorporate them into their designs. Their selection process is eclectic and 'borrows from anywhere and everywhere, other places and other times, from the disco 1970s of New York to the demure Victorian era of England, without any consistent allegiances or affiliations' (Luvaas, 2010: 7). Their innovative compilations are based on a form of fashion



remix, but this is not one that is concerned with imitation, nor even with hybridity or reappropriation as these terms are usually understood and deployed in social theory. The whole point of their designs is to signal that the material comes from elsewhere, that what is being offered is a form of visual citation and commentary on otherness, one that both incites pleasure and creates innovative cultural forms. Luvaas, following Turkle (1995) and others, dusts down Lévi-Strauss's notion of bricolage and repurposes it for a computer-mediated age, suggesting that we see these young designers as bricoleurs. Lévi-Strauss's original notion of bricolage was about meaning-making, about putting existing things to new purposes. The Indonesian designers, like the African youth I discuss in Chapter 3, are doing rather more than that. They are seeking ways of contributing to cultural production, leaving their mark on the world – to use Luvaas's phrase – projecting themselves into history – to use mine. The world of transnational capitalism, transnational faith and interconnected geopolitics is now the world these young people inhabit. Their aim is not to resist modernity or western culture, or even to appropriate it or subvert it, but rather to take up their place as producers of culture within a new set of cultural possibilities.

Luvaas suggests that beginning the analysis by asking whether the designs are examples of resistance and subversion or whether they are typical of the forms of individualized subjectivity under neoliberalism rather misses the point. 'These designers are not trying to throw off the conceptual shackles of cultural imperialism; they are trying to assert some degree of direct control over the new commercial world they live in. [They] . . . are less concerned with subverting international commercial culture than working with it, or perhaps more accurately, inserting themselves into it' (2010: 13). Luvaas argues that they are attempting to reproduce themselves as global citizens, but what is clear is that we cannot gain much insight into the complex cultural forms these young designers are

producing, and the forms of self-stylization with which they are engaged if we reductively conceptualize them as hybrids, a mixture of pre-existing western and Indonesian cultures, or as involved in resisting or appropriating modernity or western capitalism.

The processes Luvaas describes are enormously facilitated and speeded up by access to digital resources and new technologies, but the crucial point, I would argue, is that they involve novel forms of belonging, novel performances of self, new ways of imagining our relations to others, to objects and to the wider social and cultural worlds we inhabit. New technologies enhance these capacities, but they do not create them. What is significant about information technologies is not just their distributed, interconnected nature, but the fact that they allow users – individuals and groups – to create and develop spaces and opportunities for emergent forms of sociality, in ways that enhance familiar cultural capacities and competences. I argue this case in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6, but I want to signal here the distance between the argument I am making and those who argue that these remediated forms of cultural production are somehow inauthentic, leached of value and meaning, mere simulacra because they are fully co-opted by capital, intrinsic to neoliberalism and technologically mediated. To take such a view seems strange – and certainly very melancholic – and we might start once again by asking whose vision is it, and how well does it capture the situations we observe?

Globalization as metaphor and as a conceptual framework for understanding processes and interconnections across the realms of economics, technology, culture, politics and media took shape in the 1990s. It seems reasonable to suggest that 20 years later, we might step back and ask what the processes and interconnections we normally label globalization would look like if we were to place a different analytical frame on them. It is a paradox of theories of globalization – given that they are about intercon-

nections – that they overemphasize difference, starting with the differences from market, modernity and the West which undergird the whole edifice. I would suggest that the example of the Indonesian fashion designers demonstrates the value of abandoning a view of globalization that is too dependent on the binaries of impact/response, capitalism/culture, western/non-western. The point surely is that these young Indonesians are Indonesian, and their cultural productions are part of contemporary Indonesian culture in all its complexity. They certainly see themselves as interconnected global citizens, but their perspective is not one that is fractured along the lines of western/non-western, global/Indonesian. Their vision is one premised on exploring affective and cognitive dispositions, as well as the possibilities engendered by engaging with the potentialities and possibilities their connected world offers. Their interest is not in hybridity, resistance or even reappropriation, but rather in creating new connections, new meanings, novel forms of relation.

Of course, inequalities of power, resource and opportunity continue to play a key role. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are constantly in play, creating new possibilities of connection and disconnection, identification and disavowal. But, the substantive point is that communities like the young Indonesian fashion designers are not just consumers; they are also creators and producers, and what they create are not just products, but new forms of the imagination and of knowledge, new ways of connecting to each other and their object worlds, new forms of desire and satisfaction. In the chapters that follow, I examine ways in which we might analyse these desires and satisfactions by focusing on specific connections and forms of relation as they are lived, imagined, maintained and transformed. I want to explore the theoretical and political possibilities of a conceptualization of others and otherness that is not overdetermined by figures of difference.

## Culture, Subjectivity and Ethics

My interest in this book is in the aspirational character of our relations to others, to knowledge and the world. The way that hopes, desires and satisfactions are part of the making of selves, social relations and social imaginaries. Issues such as these – what we might term relationality – inevitably involve an engagement with problems of meaning and problems of value. Here we are unavoidably returned to a discussion of culture. I do not intend to engage here with the many debates in social theory about the definitions and validity of the term culture. It is worth noting, however, as many others have done, that social theorists became disenchanted with the notion of culture at almost exactly the same moment as many outside the academy were enthusiastically embracing it. This dissonance – or misapprehension – is one of several reasons why I am turning my thoughts once again to the question of the relationship between critique and politics (Moore, 1988; 1994). Contemporary forms of cultural objectification and reification are historical constructs, a particular way of configuring otherness and identity. Some have suggested that even in an increasingly interconnected world, forms of incommensurable difference continue to proliferate (Povinelli, 2001: 320). Recent formulations of culture as resource, asset and/or property tie the notion of culture to identity in very specific ways. Key to such formulations are ideas about heritage and authenticity, and, like older notions of culture as tradition, these tend to concentrate attention on history, autochthony and the past. What is evident is that those who claim incommensurable alterity are involved in specific deployments of power and power relations (Harrison, 2003). We are familiar with the historically specific way in which identities are linked to belonging and emplacement, and although these linkages have been extensively criticized in the social sciences, they nonetheless continue to exercise consider-

able dominion over people's imaginations and aspirations (Geschiere, 2009), as the many examples of war and conflict around the globe attest.

Contemporary social theory may take it as axiomatic that cultures are not fixed and bounded entities, that they are internally diverse and that individuals may have allegiances to more than one simultaneously, but this view is not one that is necessarily shared by many of the individuals and communities who make claims about culture around the globe. In this book, instead of focusing on forms of strategic otherness, on culture as difference, I want to return to the notion of culture as an 'art of living', as a means of engagement with the world, and develop new vocabularies for the analysis of change and social transformation, as well as new registers for addressing issues of belonging, meaning and value. In so doing, I am concerned to emphasize the constructive tension between the views of cultural change held by individuals and groups around the world, and various theoretical or analytical formulations developed in social and cultural theory. My overall contention is that social scientists and critical theorists have been so preoccupied with the deconstruction of 'culture' as entity/analytic category, and/or its complicities with the strategic deployment of power, that they have paid insufficient attention to the specific reconfigurations of cultural productions, capacities and relations characteristic of the contemporary moment. What is more, in examining theories of cultural change and social transformation, it seems that, despite protestations to the contrary, pre-theoretical assumptions about difference, carrying as they do the traces or residues of authenticity, tradition and belonging, continue to haunt many of our efforts.

The reasons for this have much to do, I suggest, with the way theoretical frameworks link critique to the recognition of difference. Since the 1980s, social constructionist and poststructuralist theories have emphasized the centrality of difference, and, across a wide range of scholarship and political activism, the recognition of diversity and

difference has been consistently linked to the determination of political rights and political agency. The demand to be heard, to be recognized, has served as the basis for authentic claims, not just about rights and resources, but about identities. Identity has become a legitimate and defining feature both of self-expression and of group membership. It is curious that this development has occurred at the same time as performative theories have emphasized that identity is not something you are, but something you do. In theoretical terms, identities may be conceived of as non-essentialist and constructed in and through difference, but in practice the various deployments of performative theory – often contra the intentions and philosophies of their original architects – have ended up privileging the performance and expression of identity, if only through the performative transgression of identity itself.<sup>2</sup> Identity as an analytic notion has expanded to fill the screen, and there is talk, both inside and outside the academy, of gender identities, sexual identities, class identities, nationalist identities and much more. In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, I discuss how individuals in Africa, Southeast Asia and elsewhere imagine, create and deploy links between culture and identity, and I explore the limitations of existing frameworks of analysis and suggest new ways forward, alternative pathways to approach old questions.

One possible pathway – in an analogous fashion to the arguments I make about globalization – is to explore notions of culture that are not overdetermined by theoretical formulations of difference. In suggesting this, I am not advocating the dismissal or disavowal of differences, and their evident political, economic and cultural consequences. Rather, I am interested in the ways that the recognition of diversity and difference produce particular kinds of self–other relations through engagements with specific forms of hope, desire and satisfaction. One aspect of this is already captured by existing approaches that take as their starting point the assumption that all individuals and groups wish to be recognized in and for themselves. I do

not deny this – indeed, recognition and identification are crucial for the making of self–other relations on which selves, social relations and social imaginaries rest – but I ask the question what happens if we begin from elsewhere, what then does the terrain we usually refer to by the term culture look like? In this book, I attempt to rethink belonging, emplacement, identity and culture. I do so by emphasizing that the recognition of diversity and difference is not a simple matter of self-presence, of the differences that exist between pre-existing individuals, entities or units, because the making of selves, social relations and social imaginaries always involves both being yourself and being other to yourself in ways that create new possibilities for imagining self–other relations. I discuss these ideas in more detail in Chapters 3 and 5, but critical to this approach is that, instead of reading culture backwards, looking at it in the past tense, I examine how it is deployed as a means for dealing with the alterity of the future, with the not-yet. More properly speaking, I suggest that we should think about culture as the radical potential for creating meanings, relations and values and that we should do so by reading culture forwards rather than backwards, exploring the relation between the present and the future through the conditional and future perfect tenses (see Chapters 6 and 7). Many contemporary processes of cultural creativity, expression and relation are not concerned with the authenticity or origins of the forms they employ, but with processes of subjectification and self-stylization that depend on cultural diversity and cultural change, on borrowing, mimesis, identification and projection, as I argue in Chapter 5. The key analytic issue here is how we deal with the potentialities created by new forms of sociality and new forms of knowledge.

In discussing these issues, one persistent difficulty is how we envisage and theorize what links human agency and human subjectivity to forms of the possible, to ways of living that open up new ways of being. In Chapters 6 and 7, I look at recent theories of change and social

transformation that draw on biological and vitalist models to develop alternative views of social transformation and the human subject. A critical reworking of these innovative and provocative theories demonstrates very clearly why theories of social transformation are so closely linked to specific theories of agency and the subject. What is important here is the way these theories focus on affect, and on the capacity of embodied experiences and affective states to refuse and/or exceed social subjection and social constraint. The ‘affective turn’, as it is sometimes termed, is not just about new theories of change, but about new ontologies, new ways of conceiving of the human subject and their relation to the world. Affects encompass the human and the non-human, life and matter. They function through non-linear connections, potentialities that circulate and are qualified in context, and while they are the stuff of everyday life, they are not held to reside in or be possessed by any single body or subject. Affect theory thus displaces the centrality of the human subject, but reconnects it to the vitality of the world, where the potential for change resides in radical forms of relationality and indeterminacy. These theories have been extremely influential in social theory and philosophy, and I focus on them as a way of returning to the kinds of relationships that social theories have with the theories of ordinary people, and as a means for re-examining how social theorizing is necessarily influenced by the social, economic and political contexts in which it is carried out. Affect and other vitalist theories are often explicitly described as an antidote both to the melancholia of the Left and to the limitations of the poststructuralist subject, constituted in language and founded on an ontological lack, precisely because they offer a way of reconnecting human subjects to the material world, and to its potential for change and transformation (Braidotti, 2002: 57). In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I explore how well these theories serve us in an attempt to understand the world we share with others, and its interconnected and technologically mediated nature. One of the



questions I raise is how such theories might take account of people's own projects of self-making, including their desire to transform the conditions that make them. Once again, my explicit interest is in asking what significance and value we should give to people's own theories of the self and social transformation, given that we know such theories play an important role in driving social change.

## The Ethical Imagination

Theories of self always entail theories of self–other relations, and any discussion of the self in relation to others must necessarily engage with questions of the ethical (Foucault, 1998: 287). Ethics, however, is not simply a matter of rule-following, a question of moral imperatives (Laidlaw, 2002; Zigon, 2007). As Foucault, drawing on Aristotle, so cogently reminds us, the ethical must always be distinguished from mere obedience or transgression, and it is this distinction, I suggest, that allows us to expand our ways of thinking about social change and how it occurs. In this book, I am not concerned with ethics per se, but with what – following various precedents – I want to term the ethical imagination:<sup>3</sup> the way in which technologies of the self, forms of subjectification and imagined relations with others lead to novel ways of approaching social transformation. As already discussed, existing theories of globalization and culture invoke a series of oscillations between determination and subversion, mimicry and resistance, tradition and freedom. Such antinomies continue to animate many of our analyses, and one consequence of their spectral presence is that we find it difficult to recognize what Foucault called the stuff of ethics, ‘the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other’ (1998: 300). I take the question of how we deal with each other to be part of the larger problematic of understanding the world we share with others, and comprehending the forms of complex relationality that

characterize it. The forms and means, if you will, through which individuals imagine relationships to themselves and to others, and this is what I intend by the phrase 'the ethical imagination'. Foucault's invocation of freedom in regard to self–other relations envisages it as a practice, a human possibility, rather than as a given state of affairs or actual set of capacities (see Faubion, 2001: 88–90). He recognizes that ethical practices are not invented by individuals, but are rather 'proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group' (1998: 291). But equally, in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1985) makes it clear that neither culture, nor society, nor rules provide absolute limits to the ethical imagination or to ethical practice (Faubion, 2001: 89–90). They are not, and cannot be, absolutely determining. In a similar manner, forms of subjectification and the technologies of self, while engaged with the normative and with distributions of power, cannot completely bind people to identities, particular forms of the self or external powers. What remains open, unforeclosed, unfinished is present in its active possibility.

Consequently, the ethical imagination is, I suggest, one of the primary sites of cultural invention (Foucault, 1998), precisely because it deals with the self in its relations with others, both proximate and distant, and as such provides for historical possibilities. In contexts of social change and transformation, it is brought into play by the advent of new information and new ideas, new ways of being and acting, new forms of representation and their mediation. However, it does not always involve conscious thought and is not always based on a privileging of language. While we must always have regard for the kind of interpretive talk the ethical imagination makes possible, we need to attend equally to the importance of affect, performance and the placement and use of the body. More than this even, we have to acknowledge that identification and fantasy often proceed through forms of unknowing and types of incomprehensibility. I have in