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**The discourses of economic globalization:  
a first analysis.**

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## **The discourses of economic globalization: a first analysis**

### **ABSTRACT**

Although globalization has been with us for decades, some say, for centuries, interest in the topic has intensified since the mid-Eighties. Some discourses emanating from business circles suggest that globalization has turned into “the story and myth about international business activity” (Spick 1995). In fact, on closer examination, the struggle continues throughout the Nineties between legitimising discourses that validate the dominant Western ideology of free-market economy, and subversive discourses that question or reject it.

This paper offers a first, critical analysis of some of these discourses, using business and management periodicals as textual sources.

**KEY WORDS:** economic globalization, critical discourse analysis, business magazines, management journals

## 1. Introduction

In 1994, David Whitwam, chief executive of Whirpool, a large American corporation, in an interview for the *Harvard Business Review* (one of the most influential business magazines worldwide) observed that “everybody is talking about going global, but hardly anyone understands what that means” (Fazio Maruca 1994:135). The same uncertainty lingered on until the end of the Nineties, voiced both in academic and business circles (e.g. Robertson and Khondker 1998, Stewart 1999, Jackson 1998, Mortimer 1998, WEF 1999).

Having become important rhetorical and discursive devices in their own right, vague definitions are an apt starting point for a first analysis of the discourses of ‘globalization’ in journals primarily aimed to a business readership. A cursory look at our texts (listed in the Appendix) shows that, in fact, there is both *confusion* and *certainty*. It seems that the more troubling and unclear the situation is initially shown to be, the more this is followed by a ‘drive for certainty’ and pursuit of comfort through oversimplification. The discourse of economic globalization is indeed “characterised by considerable complexity” as McGrew notes – at the same time as himself labelling this discourse as “global babble” or “globe talk” (McGrew 1992:74). Nevertheless, there has emerged a certain pattern to this ‘globe talk’ which has been influential - beyond the writing of the more sophisticated social and cultural theorists - and which can be said to have become ‘fashionable’ if not dominant.

This is recognised by Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson who refer to a ‘rhetoric of globalisation’. They argue that

It has now become fashionable to assert that the era of the nation state is over, that national-level governance is ineffective in the face of globalised economic and social processes. It is claimed that from the 1970s onwards we have witnessed the creation of a truly global economy, one in which world market forces are stronger than even the most powerful states. National economies are being subsumed into one global economy, in which international financial markets and trans-national companies dominate. Capital is mobile and will locate wherever economic advantage dictates, but labour is both nationally located and relatively static, and it must adjust its political expectations to meet the new pressures of international competitiveness (Hirst and Thompson 1995: 413-14).

This extract incorporates many of the dualisms found in business and management discourses: the national and the international, local political expectations and international competitiveness, capital and labour, nation states and globalised economies.

Our texts show that there is a tangible sense of destiny and urgency, even connivance, among the membership of the inclusive club of business writers and practitioners who in the Nineties shared in the ‘global discourses’. Globalization as ‘something out there’, as an objective, unstoppable and value-free process to be accepted unconditionally is the message of some hard-nosed business journals and practitioner-oriented magazines, such as *The McKinsey Quarterly*, *Chief Executive*, *Management Today*.

Beyond ‘competing’ discourses and easy dualisms, the *nature* of globalization remains open to investigation. In the next section, the article will attempt to come to grips with a question that is directly relevant to a discourse-based approach to this phenomenon: is globalization an ideology or a myth? Or, more broadly, is it a historic phase in Western economy, a ‘progressive tendency of business sectors to internationalise’, or, more controversially, the latest mutation of capitalist interests, dressed up as a ‘natural’, self-evident, and even desirable?

## 2. Economic globalization: myth or ideology?

In 1995, the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* devoted two issues to demonstrating that the 'discourses' of globalization are 'Western, capitalist narratives' (Walck and Bilimoria 1995:4):

There is a lingering suspicion among the authors that globalization is not an output of the "real" forces of markets and technologies, but is rather an input in the form of rhetorical and discursive constructs, practices and ideologies which some groups are imposing on others for political and economic gain (Walck and Bilimoria 1995:3)

One of the contributors to the JOCM's special issue, Robert Spich, concludes that globalization is not a true discourse in that it has not produced a paradigm with an intellectual tradition of challenging, questioning and constantly refining concepts and theory. Instead, 'the globalization forum represents a complicated contemporary form of academic discourse' (Spich1995:10). Indeed, it is to international relations scholars, economists and international business scholars that Spich attributes the paternity of the globalization myth. Unlike ideology, Spich emphasises the benign nature of myths:

Global phenomena may be at such a large scale and level of complexity that myth making remains the principal practical means of sense making. Perhaps leaving globalization at the mythic level may really be a service to understanding rather than trying to force it to something that it cannot pretend to be – good science (Spich 1985:18)

Apart from the fallacious opposition between the unreliability of discourse-based (mythical) understanding and the objectivity of 'good science', Spich seems to think that leaving globalization within mythical boundaries would render a service to a humanity struggling with complex phenomena.

Spich discusses ideology as a formalised and institutionalised myth that has stopped fulfilling its benign sense-making function. His definition of ideology as a system of beliefs that supports institutional understandings of reality without necessarily claiming accuracy or honesty is very close to a conceptualization of ideology as 'a tool of power in the hands of dominant social groups that does not exclude potential error or mystification' (Woolard 1998:7).

The continuing debate on the meaning and the use of 'ideology' is currently largely fuelled by the question of 'neutrality'. Historically, the persisting negative connotation of these terms can be traced back to the English preference for material facts over ideas (Silverstein 1998:140, note 1).

Political and economic interests and a complex objective reality are employed in the argument that maintains that 'globalization represents an extension of free-market ideology which tries to create a coherent vision that fits capitalism into a very dynamic and complex international context' (Spich 1985:21). The internationalisation of business (see next section) is the historical fact into which capitalistic interests operate, with the ideological support of free-market theory and its later offshoot, globalization.

According to Deetz, the marketplace ideology that dominated the Eighties has survived into the Nineties *'thanks to its conceptual simplicity, and despite its failings'* (Deetz 1995:22, added emphasis). Its negative effects belie the degree of penetration of its values in the fabric of western societies:

social and political relations are reduced to economic relations, democracy is reduced to capitalism, and citizens are reduced to consumers. Each of these transformations entail a constraining of people's capacity to make decisions together and reduce potential human choices to choices already available in a system as controlled by others. Even if one accepts these reconceptions, the marketplace

solution has conceptual and practical difficulties. As many have shown, free-market capitalism was never intended to represent the public well; it was intended to describe how to make a return on financial investment (Deetz 1995:23)

Notoriously, free-market economy has been pedalled as characterising democratic societies in the former Soviet-controlled countries and in Central Europe, and, before too long, Western countries, including North America, were selling a pre-packaged 'capitalist solution' conveniently forgetting that

a market economy does not equal democracy, and a market economy cannot assure democratic representation. Market economies exist in many totalitarian societies; managed economies occur in many democracies. .... The U.S. is hardly an open market economy. The market is highly controlled and planned, only it is done by corporate officers rather than elected representatives. (Deetz 1995:24)

In this article, we take the view that free-market capitalism, the 'ideological discursive formation' dominant in the Nineties, 'naturalises' (Fairclough 1995) the discourses of economic globalization, i.e. presents them as the self-evident, contemporary order. Examples of discourses found in some of the management journals and in many business magazines appear to be engaged in this work of 'naturalisation', stimulating, and stimulated by, the discourse of consumption, although 'subversive' discourses appear to become more frequent, and diverse, towards the end of the Nineties.

Applying this reasoning to economic globalization, 'naturalising' discourses would arguably be used by the dominant ideology to maintain social control, not through coercion and force, but through consent. What we are witnessing is

the tendency of the discourse of social control *towards simulated egalitarianism*, and the *removal of surface markers of authority and power* (Fairclough 1989:37, added emphasis)

This is apparent in some of the linguistic features of the 'naturalising' discourses, such as 'perspective' (Lee 1992). Inclusive pronominalisation, institutional personification, de-personalisation as agent-effacing devices instigating consensus when embedded in a style purporting objectivity and factuality, and therefore discouraging dissent and responsibility-attribution. The effectiveness of ideology is directly proportional to its (linguistic) invisibility:

Ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible .... And invisibility is achieved when ideologies are brought to discourse not as explicit elements of the text, but as the background assumptions which on the one hand lead the text producer to 'textualise' the world in a particular way, and on the other hand lead the interpreter to interpret the text in a particular way. (Fairclough 1989:85)

Through the myth of 'economic globalisation', the dominant ideology can be seen to 'naturalise' capitalism into a self-protecting, order-maintaining dominant ideology with ambitions of world-wide application.

In many of the texts selected for analysis, the discourses of globalization reflect the values and interests of the political right, the free-market lobby who more or less explicitly draws inspiration from its perhaps most illustrious master, Adam Smith, and

from his book, *The Wealth of Nations*. This has now turned into an 'archetext', or a 'founder' text, with a privileged place in the economics textual pantheon (Maingueneau 1999). What is often ignored is that the founding father of the economic philosophy of capitalism also wrote *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which proposes an ideal alternative to the current capital-governed social order, one which is based on the principle of 'sympathy' (Wright and Kirkwood Hart 1998).

The latter sharply contrasts, of course, with a blanket application of the principle of 'free-market' that lies at the heart of the 'naturalising' discourses of economic globalization. On a more optimistically cautious note, 'denaturalising' discourses concede that globalization may after all be only a metamorphosis of what was known in the Eighties as 'internationalisation', not to be confused with the dreaded 'internationalism' of Marxian memory (Mortimer 1998). One thing is sure: the juxtaposition of a sample of 'naturalising' and subversive discourses of economic globalisation in this article, suggests that capitalism, however dominant an ideology, has so far failed in its mission to create a global market:

the capitalist world system today is not a single, undifferentiated, all-encompassing whole, but a fractured one, in which forces of order and incorporation (e.g. those of globalization, unification and 'Westernization') are always undercut (though not necessarily subverted) by forces of chaos and fragmentation (e.g. localization, diversification and 'indigenization'). (Ang 1996:177)

An explanation for this is that the state of flux in which capitalism finds itself, 'the realm of uncertainty' as Ang defines it, contains the seeds of self-perpetuating change:

Precisely because global capitalism becomes ever more totalizing, the task of order making will become ever more grandiose and complex, the suturing of the fragments of the system into a totality an ever more unfinishable, Sisyphean labour. (Ang 1996:178)

In this article, we are concerned with the way discourses of economic globalization are articulated in texts primarily intended for corporate actors. As mentioned earlier, monographs such as Hirst and Thompson (1996), Ohmae (1990), Reich (1992) and Porter (1990) have not been considered among the resources proper as their treatment of the subject and their readership are mainly academic.

The perception of confusion among even the most committed supporters of globalization is a hallmark of globalization that belies their main weakness, i.e. lack of consensus on the understanding of the nature of economic 'globalization', its characteristics and its implications for business practice and social relations. In the Nineties, 'globalization' has attracted a multitude of competing discourses that only recently have been subjected to preliminary categorisation (Robertson and Khondker 1998).

It is against this fluid background that the choice of a critical discourse analytic approach seems particularly apt. Myths, like ideologies, are both cognitive and social in nature, and traceable in the discursive practices of the social groups that they serve. According to van Dijk (1998:8), ideologies are the 'basis of the social representations shared by members of a group' and 'are self-serving in nature'. That 'ideologies are constructed, used and changed by social actors or group members in specific, often discursive practices' (van

Dijk 1998:9) points to the need to direct the analytical focus on linguistic and semiotic realisations of economic globalization<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. *Globalization old and new*

Contrary to enthusiastic 'pro-globalists' (e.g. Heller 1994, Rhinesmith 1995, Ali and Camp 1996), we are no closer now than we were a decade ago to an agreement on definitions and implications. In a telling article in *Fortune*<sup>2</sup>, Thomas Stewart (1999) writes about the "affliction of ignorance" and the "disquiet" manifested by top managers on the subject of globalization and its significance to their companies' business. "For all the talk and action about globalization, Stewart concludes, what's missing is a way to think about it – a vocabulary, an armature, a structure, a logic, even a checklist that allows managers to sort through the decisions and investments they have made and need to make" (Stewart 1999:96).

British business people have been inundated by information on globalization landing on their desks from governmental and private sources. Highly-regarded international business associations such as the *World Economic Forum* (WEF 1999), actively promote globalization discourses at their annual meetings, the latest of which, held at Davos (Switzerland) at the beginning of 1999, still appeared to be struggling with the same question: *what is globalization?*<sup>3</sup>

Against the highly uncertain and volatile scene of world business, 'globalization' could be seen as just another metaphor that individuals employ 'to make sense'. In management and business circles, the unchallenged (Western) perception that the world economy is to be organised along capitalist parameters has had the effect of promoting a (Western) understanding of globalization as both a new trend and a universal one. However, it appears that 'globalization' was in fact referred to as 'internationalization' in its former manifestation. In the Eighties, world-famous marketing experts such as Theodore Levitt of Harvard and Saatchi & Saatchi were forcefully promoting the view that the world was a huge, undistinguished market for 'global' (read: Western) goods. 'Internationalization', as the dominant economic trend was then known, has not succeed in levelling needs the world over and, although there are now global brands and products, consumers still tend to clusters around local markets, supporting individual preferences (Douglas and Wind 1987, James 1990).

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<sup>1</sup> Recent research on economic and managerial discourse has concentrated on lexical choices and use of metaphors in periodicals (Boers and Demecheleer 1997 and Fox 1999) and spoken interaction (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1997). There is, for example, an interesting overlap in the findings on metaphorical clusters identified in *The Economist* and *Financial Times* (Boers and Demecheleer) and in business and management magazines and books (Fox). The 'war' and 'path' metaphors, the former subsuming the 'combat' and 'sport' metaphors, characterise business and management discourses.

<sup>2</sup> "Fortune is dedicated to the business executive and those striving to become one. The bimonthly magazine attempts to present guidelines of how to improve business and personal management skills while regularly reporting on investment trends and analysis of current events in the business world." (From: the Fortune website)

<sup>3</sup> The 1999 World Economic Forum's 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting (Davos, Switzerland) included the presentation of a study entitled *Innovative Leaders in Globalization* in which an attempt was made at providing a definition of a 'global company', so that 'companies can be analysed and measured and their experience translated into best practices'.

A characterisation of globalization that attempts to break free from the 'internationalization' of the Eighties comes from academia: 'globalization means more than doing international business', points out Professor Jim Wilde of the Western Business School. 'Globalization, continues de Wilde, describes three worldwide economic and technological trends: '(1) the cumulative effect of information technology, (2) the development of global capital markets and (3) the generation of export-oriented business strategies as global market becomes accessible to entrepreneurs in Lethbridge or Lisbon' (adapted from: de Wilde 1991:41). At the end of the Nineties, Thomas Stewart, writing in *Fortune*, gives a remarkably similar rendering of globalization:

[...] and globalization continues to be the biggest business trend going, something easy to forget because it's had such a long run. On transoceanic aircraft, business-class cabins have expanded almost to the size of their occupants' egos. The Internet has made worldwide communications richer, faster, cheaper, and more incessant than anyone could have imagined just five years ago – when globalization was already an old had. Never before in history has there been such a spree of intercontinental mergers and acquisitions (Steward 1999:95)

What has become a typical Western-capitalist account of the visible indicators of globalisation includes IT, financial and export expansion. This is hardly an original tale, if one recalls the business literature of the Eighties, which already indicated that global finance and exports were pre-eminent features of, guess what?, 'internationalization'.

Could the metamorphosis hypothesis (globalization as a mutation of internationalization) be a possible key to understanding the semantics and the dynamics of the 'new' discourses of economic globalization?

In the business literature, Western bias feeds the dogmatism of 'naturalising' discourses: 'Globalization is approaching the point where it has become the strategic norm rather than the exception' (James 1990:80). Globalization is no longer an option, it is the 'strategic norm' to be adhered to in order to be ahead of competition, that is, in order to survive. The instrumental relationship between globalization and survival is a recurrent theme of the 'naturalising' discourses of economic globalization, which have identified in the 'competitive advantage' the ultimate aim of every successful company:

In the hustle to globalize to capture the elusive 'holy grail' of competitive advantage – continue James – companies are only slowly coming to the realization that there is many a slip 'twixt the cup of global strategy and the lip of reality' (James 1990:80).

There is more than a passing echo here of *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* by the famous international business strategist Michael E. Porter, who has been attacked as a founder of the rampant organisational orthodoxy of managerialism. Negatively-charged like many 'isms', *managerialism*, some of its critics argue, is both the value system that governs modern organisations and the way international business is conducted (Wright and Kirkwood Hart 1998).

It is 'denaturalising' discourses that are left to contend with the social and ethical implications of 'globalization', often wrapped up in lexical creativity and semantic ambiguity. The quotation below is from an interview with one of the so-called 'management gurus', Percy Barnevik, legendary president and CEO of ABB (Asea Brown Boveri), which in 1990 was overseeing a 25 billion dollar empire employing 240 000 people worldwide<sup>4</sup>. He described his company as one with 'no geographic centre' and positioned on a dimension between the 'superlocal' and the 'superglobal' :

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<sup>4</sup> 1990 figures

We are a federation of national companies with a global coordination center', a "multidomestic organization" [...] That does not mean all of our businesses are global. We do a very good business in electrical installation and service in many countries. That business is superlocal. ...We also have businesses that are superglobal [...] The vast majority of our businesses – and most businesses – fall somewhere between the superlocal and the superglobal (Taylor 1991).

In contrast with matter-of-fact discourse of practitioners, theorists of economic globalization frequently employ the powerful argument of the *inevitability* of globalization based on its *desirability*:

Despite flurries of protectionist rhetoric and nascent regional trading blocs, we remain convinced that the forces of globalization will prevail. ... whatever the short term retrenchments, the long-term trend toward globalization is irreversible because its economic benefits are so great (Lewis and Harris 1992:129)

William Lewis and Marvin Harris of the McKinsey Institute make only oblique remarks to the human costs of globalization as "*the political and cultural adjustments*" (Lewis and Harris 1992:115, added emphasis) that will ultimately force protectionist attitudes to give way. A somewhat myopic and mechanical understanding of society as mainly driven by utilitarianism, to which political and cultural concerns are subjected, is further evidence of the influence of the 'managerialist' ideology at work within 'naturalising' discourses.

#### *4. The ideology of economic globalization: the inevitability of change*

In his article on the ideology of 'liberalism', de Beaugrande (1999) earnestly argues for critical engagement with ideology and ideologies that overcomes the paralysis of 'opposition and negation without a coherent alternative programme' (de Beaugrande 1999:268). His discussion on ideology and the role of critical enquiry touch on several issues that are relevant to the concerns of this article. Moreover, the funding from his corpus-based analysis of the ('ideologically' loaded) term 'liberalism' nicely engages critical linguistic commitment on a potentially vast source of living discourses and their overt and, more interestingly, covert ideological meanings.

Similarly, the diverse texts used for our analysis (and listed in the Appendix) attempt to reflect aspects of the fluidity of the discourses of economic globalization without claiming to portray comprehensively their manifold nature. Access to the same corpus of data in electronic form could have opened the texts up to exploration of "the normally naturalized constraints upon discourse, including ideological ones' (de Beaugrande 1999:286) which, during manual search, is affected by the researcher's own intuitions and ideological posture.

##### 4.1. NATURALISING DISCOURSES: GLOBALIZATION IS HERE TO STAY

To the non-linguist, 'naturalising' discourses from the sources in the Appendix appear to cover a spectrum of tones, ranging from uncritical or even enthusiastic (e.g. Lewis and Harris 1992, Kanter 1991, Hrebiniak 1992, Rhinesmith (1992,1995, Welch 1994, Yip 1996) to more thoughtful and

reflexive (e.g. James 1990, Meffert and Bloch 1991, Kanter 1994, Qureshi 1996, Crook 1997).

The analysis reported in this article has to contend with the common difficulty of being unable to provide readers with the full texts to 'read off' ideological positions that could possibly be quite different from those suggested by the reading of the author of this article (de Beaugrande 1999).

One's own ideology, shaped by and shaping epistemological and methodological preferences, is the *sine qua non* of a critical analysis in the first place, in fact, it is the enabling constraint that permits access to the textualisations of other ideologies. The analysis that follows has been carried out in the awareness of the inescapable limitations imposed by an ideological reading that uses selected texts for interpretative purposes. One other issue raised in de Beaugrande's article (1999) that pertains to discourse analytic work, and critical analysis in particular, is the concern with the 'insufficiency of texts in isolation'. It is quite clear from a number of the articles examined here that the ideology of economic globalization is not immanent in the texts as discursive objects. References to past and future discursive events and practices connect these discourses to others in an intertextual web that is too complex for any individual, historically situated analysis to map. Setting aside research paralysis by textual overload, each limited, but not limiting, analytical effort becomes a contribution towards the larger picture which can be arrived at by following 'unexpected leads toward relations between discourse and society which only become well-defined whilst we examine large sets of authentic data' (de Beaugrande 1999:273).

The analysis that follows looks first at 'naturalising' discourses and how they define, and justify (economic) globalization and depict the expected adaptation by labour and managers to the new value system. But where does economic globalization come from? In the metaphor of the 'virtuous circle', economic globalization acknowledges its debt to a predecessor from the Eighties, the discourse of Total Quality Assurance (TQA):

- [1] Our view is that a **virtuous**, upward-ratcheting **cycle** of economic convergence and technological transfer, driven in large measure by the actions of **transnational corporations** and the expectations of well-informed **consumers**, will drive globalization forward – despite all the obstacles in its path (Lewis and Harris 1992:114)

In their unflinchingly positive characterisation of globalization, economists William Lewis and Marvin Harris of the McKinsey Global Institute echo the 'quality circles' that relied on teamwork to achieve 'total quality'. In the globalization scenario of the early Nineties, the actions of multinationals and the expectations of consumers are seen to converge towards a common aim.

It is not clear who the agents of change really are:

- [2] The cycle is **virtuous** but **unforgiving**. The conditions for participation are strict (Lewis and Harris 1992:117)
- [3] In today's business environment, globalization means that **companies** need to reshape their processes and structures so that they **conform** to the requirements of the expanded **world marketplace** (O'Reilly 1996:5)

The companies that have first been seen to effect change, turn out to be the objects of a standardisation process imposed by the 'marketplace', the government of which

is presumably in the hands of other companies, probably the big players such as the multinationals.

Circularity of arguments such as exemplified by [3], is far from uncommon in management writing but it becomes even more intriguing when it is served to the reader with 'historic' evidence, such as in [4] and [5]:

- [4] And what they [the anthropologists] have found, **through generations of research**, is that economics, as we understand it, dominates politics and culture over the long term (Lewis and Harris 1992:118)
- [5] **Throughout human history**, more productive societies have consistently replaced less productive ones. (Lewis and Harris 1992:118)

The same legitimisation device is also used by World Bank officials like Zia Qureshi, who quotes the objectiveness of figures as an unquestionable basis for the existence of globalization:

- [6] **statistics** all point to globalization – the growing international integration of markets for goods, services, and capital (Qureshi 1996:30)

For some, globalization is a fate-driven journey and its destination all in one:

- [7] It is important to emphasize, first, that 'going global' is primarily a **process**, not just an outcome for a company to pursue. It is a **journey**, as well as an ultimate **destination**. And the journey is marked by difficult **transitions** and problems of **passage** before the destination is reached. [...] There are a number of **stages** or forms of global presence that companies go through in pursuit of their global **destiny**. (Hrebiniak 1992:396)

For others, globalization is not the aim, but a process, the material rewards of which make it the obvious choice:

- [8] If managed carefully, globalization can create tremendous **shareholder value** (Stalk jr. 1996:56)
- [9] I believe globalization is about creating **value for people**. Producing products they want, creating interesting jobs, and delivering excellent returns for our shareholders. That's the bottom line [Jurgen Schrempp, CEO of Dailmer-Benz]. (Bowley 1997:16)
- [10] These corporations [multinationals] are transforming the way wealth itself is created, deriving ever-greater **productivity** from the wide and **rapid diffusion** of improved know-how or **innovation**. (Lewis and Harris 1992:114)

The impact of the internationalisation of business is ultimately borne by the workforce or 'human resources', at times pawns in the game of change, at times its agents, but always expected to adapt for survival:

- [11] Just as industry standards are emerging to make computers portable and plug-compatible, standards should be developed to help **people** become **learners** who can **adapt** to many circumstances, carrying their skills and pensions with them to plug into new companies. (Kanter 1991:10)
- [12] **Labour mobility** is now a fact of life...As business globalizes, local loyalties decline... **Flexibility** can hurt people, but **stability** can hurt even more by

depressing economies... **Entrepreneurial dynamism** often involves wandering talent; Silicon Valley was built by roving engineers. **Mobility** is both a cause and an effect of a mismatch between people and jobs. [...] New policies must reflect **new forms of security** while embracing the emerging realities of flexibility, mobility, and **change**. If **security** no longer comes automatically with being employed, then it must come from being *employable*. (Kanter 1991:9, original emphasis)

However, workers differ from managers (and executives) in the demands made on them. While the former adapt to change, the latter are deemed to possess an astonishing repertoire of attributes that makes them into the new species of the 'globalites':

- [13] '[g]lobal executives [and managers] are an **emerging species** (Welch 1994:55),
- [14] 'open-minded... They are at once **national**, yet **multinational** (Hrebiniak 1992:399).
- [15] 'the emphasis has shifted from managers being a cultural expert on a particular society to becoming **multiculturally oriented** and able to understand what the broadest cultural impact might be on business transactions' (Marmer Solomon 1995:101)
- [16] Global managers, **like global products**, must be able to cross national and cultural boundaries with very little modification (McBride 1992:50)
- [17] Transnationally competent managers are endowed with '**global mindsets**', which enables them to 'drive for the bigger, broader picture (Adler and Bartholomew 1992:53).
- [18] In one word, they are 'globalites' (Marmer Solomon 1994:89).

Perhaps unsurprising in this mesmerising scenario, workers and managers share one feature:

- [19] People with global mindsets are constantly **looking for context** (Rhinesmith 1992:64).

'Naturalising' discourses are particularly effective when they employ the tools of managerial prescriptivism, such as 'dos' and 'don'ts' lists. In an article with the foreboding title of 'Ten management development commandments for global competitors in the new millennium', professor of management Robert Fulmer (1995) distils the precepts of economic globalization :

- [20] Think and act globally
  - Make learning a core competence
  - Empower teams to create the future
  - Use time as a competitive weapon
  - Lead with vision, courage and example
  - Stay flexible, fit, and resilient
  - Honor your customer with responsiveness and quality
  - Seek leverage through technology and information
  - Focus on the system not its parts
  - Regularly reinvent yourself and the organization
- (adapted from Fulmer 1995)

The wealth of moral, military, mechanistic and naturalistic metaphors is familiar to readers of management literature and business magazines. The 'warriors' of the third millennium will be guided by a synthesis of values from various ideological domains:

- (1) moral (learning, vision, courage, example, responsiveness);
- (2) military values (competitive weaponry, competence, empowerment, leadership, honour);
- (3) technical (quality, technology, information, system focus, re-inventing self and organization) and
- (4) naturalistic (flexibility, fitness and resilience).

This compendium amounts to what de Wilde calls a 'global value system, requiring a complicated reach in terms of ethics and interpersonal skills (de Wilde 1991:42). Within this system, the first 'commandment' (and, in biblical tradition, the most important) is a revised version of the well-known *mantra* 'think globally, act locally', which leads the reader to believe that the destructive tension between the 'local' and the 'global' will become a thing of the past.

### 5. *The national test: how the local fits the global*

Despite much talk in the early Nineties about the inevitability and desirability of economic globalization, half a way through the decade there is evidence of some 'naturalising' discourses defending globalization whilst echoing caution and concern before the local and the national, often described as 'obstacles'. Eventually, the contest between 'global' and 'local' positions, from latent or subdued in the early Nineties, becomes clearly articulated by the end of the decade.

'Thinking globally' and 'a global vision' are not simply the wishful organic mutations of 'act locally' and 'the local touch'. There is a political component which sets them against the economic interests of globalization:

- [21] one of the major challenges we face today is the tension between the globalizing power of business and the localizing power of politics (Kanter 1994:2)

The same Rosabeth Kanter, a much revered management thinker, calls upon strong metaphorical language in her graphic depiction of global change:

- [22] [o]ne of the metaphors for change which I like to use compares it with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The **change is tearing down of walls**. We are tearing down walls between countries, between companies and their customers, between companies and their suppliers, between functions, and between levels. So, in two years' time, I think another of my main prescriptions will be a new job description for chief executives: '**destroyer of walls and builder of bridges**'. (Kanter 1994:8)

More dire pronouncements come from the economists:

- [23] [e]ven if they try, **nation states** will find they have limited power to stop these **companies** [transnationals] from using creative means like alliances or foreign-owned subsidiaries to become "insiders", as Ford and GM have done in Europe, and Honda, Toyota, and Nissan have done in the United States. (Lewis and Harris 1992:130)

Even momentous political events in Europe only count as 'distractions' to the paramount mission of the multinationals:

- [24] Of course, **regional pressures** add another dimension. For example, there is a danger that the events occurring in Europe – the re-unification of Germany, the emerging democracies of former Eastern Bloc countries, along with the Single Market – will distract European multinationals from the globalization path. (Welch 1994:65)

A more moderate 'management position' is the one that avoids confrontational and conflictual tones whilst still embracing the dualism:

- [25] a **strategic corridor** which weaves its way through the conflicting demands of globalisation and local differences (Meffert and Bloch 1991:4)
- [26] **integrated strategies** that maximize commonality and standardization across all country, while minimizing the cost of local adaptation. (Yip 1996:66)

Managers are again either agents or instruments in the struggle:

- [27] Global managers create **efficiency** by creating a **uniformity** of approach across national and cultural boundaries (McBride 1992:57)
- [28] An effective cadre of managers is critical to the success of co-ordinated global strategy. These managers, first and foremost, are **integrators** (Hrebiniak 1992:398, original italics)

The 'integration' and 'relationships' metaphors characterise certain 'naturalising' discourses that promote globalization in developing countries, obvious soft targets, dependent as they are on international loans and imports. The troublesome 'local' is converted into the benign phenomenon of 'integration', the positive overtones of which offset the ugly language of 'low cost production' and 'quick financial returns' that globalization discourses more or less explicitly draw upon:

- [29] Globalization requires **relationships**: it means much more than the growth of a transnational company. It even involves local companies [...] being tied into global webs. (Kanter 1994:5)

The 'integration' metaphor (as facilitating globalization) is supported right through to the top of the world's financial pyramid, as a (Pakistani) economist at the World Bank shows:

- [30] Developing countries (excluding the transition economies) are a driving force in globalization. [...] Successful integration of countries in the global economy will increasingly distinguish strong from weak economic performers. (Qureshi 1996:30-1)

In the same piece, Qureshi redresses the balance by reminding the reader of the human price to be paid for 'integration', not in the Third, but in the First World:

- [31] **Increased integration** with developing countries will not be without adjustment costs for industrial countries, especially for their labor-intensive industries and low-skill workers. But, economywide and over time, these costs will be far outweighed by the gains from **integration**.... Successfully managing this **process of integration** will perhaps be the most important economic challenge of the future. Protectionist pressures to slow or reverse **integration** must be

resisted, since that would make both industrial and developing countries lose – and lose dearly. (Qureshi 1996:33)

For a fresh and unadorned account of economic colonialism and shrewd short-termism, one could turn to a freelance writer's reminder that some of the pro-globalist discourses may seek to justify unpopular ideologies behind the ever-present metaphors of 'competition' and 'survival':

[32] Being able to **colonize** new and growing markets relatively quickly makes globalization an attractive option. Adding to its allure is an **increasingly competitive environment**, in which companies have to cope with quick-moving capital, regulatory changes, and shorter product life cycles (Cottrill 1998:38)

## 6. *'Denaturalizing' globalization: nations, people and other values*

I do not know the difference between global, multinational, and transnational. They all sound pretty big to me. (Olins 1994:29)

As already mentioned elsewhere, the passing reference to the 'adjustment costs for industrial countries' (Qureshi 1996:33) is only one of the few hints to the economic and social costs of 'globalization' (see also James 1990, Lewis and Harris 1992, Kanter 1994) to appear in the 'naturalising' discourses examined in this article. A note of bland dissent with the notion of 'global managers' comes from two well-known management scholars, Christopher Bartlett and Sumantra Ghoshal:

[33] In fact, in the volatile world of transnational corporations, there is no such thing as a universal global manager. Rather, there are three groups of specialists: business managers, country managers, and functional managers. (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1992:125).

At least since the early Nineties (and possibly in earlier sources not examined here) there has been a strand of pro-globalization discourses which contains signs of uncertainty and concern about damaging economic and social effects. In the late Nineties, uncertainty and concern about economic globalization has crystallised into the nuclei of progressively more subversive or 'denaturalising' discourses of two types:

(1) the regional/national discourses, which are by now quite well established, supported by a large literature in sociology and social theory; and (2) the ethical/moral discourses, which will be referred to in this section.

Under (1), the debate ranges from economic to political issues - the socio-economic cost of globalization in the industrialised economies and in the developing countries, and the allegedly endangered role of the nation-state. Under (2), 'denaturalising' discourses question, among other issues, the ethical basis of unrestrained economic growth and the unequal distribution of the economic benefits of globalization. Some of these discourses go as far as to evoke religious beliefs in an attempt to influence, moderate, or curb the anti-humanistic ethos that supposedly permeates 'naturalising' discourses.

In the beginning, it is regional (economic) interests that threaten to undermine the pro-globalization edifice, and this is because, paradoxically, 'a striking feature of international economic relations [...] is the growth of regionalism' (Levy 1995:351). The pressures and tensions of the global economy are graphically rendered by Barrie James, head of marketing development at Ciba-Geigy AG in Basel:

[34] Globalized economies are forced to wrestle not only with the multidimensional nature of multi-country environments in their supply chains but also with the

**constantly changing, and often conflicting, demands of home and host countries** to maintain viable global operations. These demands have not only added a new layer of complexity but also added a significant degree of **vulnerability** to firms operating on a global scale [...]. In their home countries firms with global operations are beginning to face **increased censure from politicians and organized labour**. Concerns are being raised over the impact on indigenous employment, the long term effects on national competitiveness by transferring skills offshore and trade balance implications (James 1990:81)

In this visionary and reflective account which, at the turn of the decade already points to the weaknesses of the 'global solution', companies are vulnerable, economic relationships are strained and tension is anticipated in the social arena. Five years later, it is an economist who has to acknowledge the severity of the damage to social relationships :

[35] **Globalization has disrupted long-established patterns of social relationships**. As national sovereignty and the capacity of central governments to guarantee prosperity erode, one can still expect strong protectionist impulses. (Levy 1995:354-5)

and to economic prosperity alike:

[36] At a macro level the effect of a large number of firms shifting to global operations will result **in transforming the home country into an assembler and seller** downgrading competencies and narrowing the national skills base (James 1990:82)

Wally Olins, company chairman and visiting professor, treats his RSA audience to a sober and sobering account of economic globalization that cuts through much encrusted language:

[37] [there are] two profoundly antagonistic trends –globalism and nationalism. [...] All companies seek to square the circle between globalism and nationalism. Their aspirations aim at creating a singly, bland, homogenised world market place in which everybody buys more or less the same things. The reality, however, is a world in which the obstinate and irrational behaviour of the world's peoples manifests itself in nationalism, fundamentalism, regionalism, tribalism and every other kind of separatism. This leads them to seek variety and diversity frequently based around national stereotypes in what they buy and consume (Olins 1994:17-8)

The political colouring of globalization is undefined, as if globalization had become an overarching ideology of its own, capable of commanding allegiance from both the right and the left:

[38] The argument goes something like this: globalization of markets and widespread privatization are the dominant economic trends and are causing the national state to wither away. This thesis has been embraced by both the right and the left. [...] The right loves the trend. The left hates it. But both believe it. Both are wrong. The national state is not withering away (Hanke 1996:56)

Not all agree with this view. *The Economist* is far more cautious about the alleged death of the nation state whilst identifying one specific factor that may affect national economic policies:

[39] The fact remains that, in all these respects, global integration has left governments with about as many economic powers as they ever had. Why then has the idea of the powerless state won so many converts? Like most fallacies, it contains a germ of truth. ... The **international competition for capital** is fiercer, and this is exercising a new influence (or should be) on the design of all manner of government policies (Anonymous 1995)

Of course, it is easy enough to set globalization and national interest at loggerheads, claims professor Krugman from Stanford in his Adam Smith Address:

[40] If you attribute the economic woes of American workers to the global mobility of goods and capital, you can tie practically everything up in one glossy package: growing world trade, the rise of multinational corporations, the decline of the West, the Asian economic miracle, even the fall of Communism (which has made the world safe for the foreign investors) (Krugman 1996:9)

In the same Address, Krugman moves from hyperbole to ridicule, a 'denaturalising' discursive tactic that is quite rare in the texts examined.

The 'hidden political agenda' behind economic globalization is used as an argument by critical voices, both from the East and the West:

[41] by the negation of the nation states, it is not meant that the states are being evaporated but that states are voluntarily clipping its power to facilitate the expansion of world capitalism. In effect world capitalism is in the driver's seat while the state is in that of the passenger (Maitra 1997:251)

[42] There may be other (political) reasons why globalisation is a 'convenient' trend. Free-trade policies are putting unprecedented pressure on governments who are faced with the balancing act of allowing unrestrained economic expansion whilst having to explain (or hide) its costs to the questioning masses (Anonymous 1995):

More tentatively, international business scholars recover the journey metaphor to incorporate the 'local' but can no longer avoid reference to the human and material costs:

[43] Increasingly, regionalization is being viewed by managers as a stepping-stone to more effective global competition. [...] In fact, according to the majority of the companies surveyed, the evolution to **true global competition is currently on hold** (Morrison, Ricks and Roth 1991:24)

[44] Companies are finding that the implementation of global strategies is often **prohibitively costly** in terms of **morale, internal opposition, and lost opportunities** to exploit key subsidiary strengths. (Morrison, Ricks and Roth 1991:28)

A practitioner's view of the First World Order is no less cynical:

[45] The global company operates within a framework, which is as rigid and orthodox as the pre-Copernican universe. In our current orthodoxy, the world is divided into three competing power blocs. Often called the Triad. [...] The leading commercial/industrial organisations of these three power blocs – the assault troops are its global companies. They are highly visible and glamorous. They have profound psychological as well as economic significance in their home base. They use the world as a battle ground in which each strives for dominance. Each global company fights its rivals, more particularly those from another power bloc. Alliances both temporary and more permanent are forged

and it is generally assumed that an alliance inside one of the Triad groupings is superior to one outside it. (Olins 1994:18-9)

The Third World spectators that watch over the battle ground have very little say on the unfolding action:

- [46] How is the Third World fitting into this global scenario? Not very well. Except for a few Pacific border **countries the majority of the developing countries seem to be left behind** and spiralling rapidly towards the world's outer periphery of development. Burdened by huge levels of debt, overlooked by transnational companies whose activities require an increasingly sophisticated supporting infrastructure, **they seem doomed to be captive consumers of goods they can ill afford**. Thus, in the changed world order of business, the developed North appears to be settling into a position of hegemonic dominance over the developing South (Srinivas 1995:27)

A rich display of metaphors is present throughout the discourses of economic globalization. The ultimate goal of the strife, for many companies is simply 'survival', the ability to surf change rather than being engulfed by it. From the jungle metaphor 'naturalising' discourses develop the notion of 'survival' both in a Darwinian perspective and in an anti-evolutionary, static scenario:

- [47] We must focus on how different elements and components enmesh in a great cobweb: **we must learn to distinguish between the predators and the victims** and between promises of the brave new world and the miseries of those who, in that world, would be left behind. (Sethi, Kurtzmann and Bhalla 1994:133)

- [48] Like the natural world, the world of geopolitics does not easily change its species. The coming century will still be the home of recognisable beasts: muscular lions and fearful deer, lumbering rhinos and cunning jackals. That may be a pity; but the inhabitants of the jungle have to live with it. (Anonymous 1995-6:20)

Among the 'recognisable beasts' that populate the regionalism discourse, one can catch glimpses of the 'fearful deer', the members of the anonymous and increasingly large Third World block. They have been long relegated to play secondary roles on the scene dominated by the Triad (America, Europe and Japan):

- [49] The integrated global village of the optimist excludes the highly fragmented Third World – where the majority of the people live. One of the pernicious effects, thus far, of growth in global wealth is the shift in income and wealth distribution it has created and the widening gap between the haves and have-nots that has resulted therefrom (Sethi, Kurtzmann and Bhalla 1994:133-4)

From the West, the admonition comes against under-estimating interdependence:

- [50] Our somewhat surprising answer is that both concerns about uneven development and worries about maintaining First World living standards in the face of Third World competition have some justification. (Krugman and Venables 1995:859)

The reply from the Third World is the call for a 'new socialism' that acknowledges (accommodates?) the capitalistic demands of globalization:

- [51] True, capitalism by definition has got to be globalized just for the sake of survival, prosperity and exploitation, yet, paradoxically, it thus kills the possibility of a capitalist transformation of the economy and society, as well as

the development of the social consciousness of 70 per cent of the world's population (that of the Third World) thus ensuring its long life. The only alternative path for the Third World to take is to socialize the production and distribution and thereby prepare the ground for developing the technology to materialize its ideals and develop productive forces (Maitra 1997:248-9)

## 7. *Rhetorics and ethics: from 'denaturalization' to 're-naturalization'?*

Towards the end of the Nineties, somewhat surprisingly but not totally unexpectedly, what one could call 'ethical discourses' become established as the most vocal alternative to the 'globalize-or-die' lobby in business and management journals. Feeding on the theme of the North-South divide, a growing and distinctive collection of texts advocate the adoption of a critical stance to economic globalization based on ethical and even religious beliefs.

One inspiring principle of these counter-discourses must be that of 'sympathy' (proposed by Adam Smith), according to which the ideal society should benefit all its members (Wright and Kirkwood Hart 1998). But there are also Eastern and Western religious beliefs that are drawn upon by ethical discourses. A theme from these is the sacredness of the self-expression of each individual through (among others) their work, justly organised in a effort to improve the lot of all human beings worldwide (e.g. Upadhyaya 1995 and Scaperlanda 1998). These discourses are represent a serious threat to managerialism, 'the value system that underlies the practice of modern management, the ideological orthodoxy of modern organizations [which] is exposed as the paradigm legitimising the 'mercenary society' in which we live (Wright and Kirkwood Hart 1998).

The first hint of the new wave of discourses is found in a text which, in all other respects, is pro-globalist. Opposing Kanter's (1991) call for total human mobility regardless of costs [see: 11,12] consultant Marmer Solomon concedes that managers are 'human capital', even 'people':

[52] Eventually, **human capital** will cross national borders as easily as computer chips and cars do. However, unlike computers and cars that need only minimal adjustments to succeed in a foreign environment, **people require great care – and each one is different.** (Marmer Salomon 1994:89)

The individualism of Western discourses, often motivated by vested interests, or self-interest, is challenged by the Indian focus on local communities as centres of 'transformative politics':

[53] The task of generating **transformative politics** is the co-creation of truly global service, one that will concern itself with all of life and all ways of life. **Community** is central to such processes. [...] Community is a space where the particular and the universal meet, without absolutism or nihilism. This is a site for transformative politics – but one to do, not to talk about (Upadhyaya 1995: 50-1).

In Upadhyaya's understanding, 'globalization' has evolved from being purely economic and self-centred, to holistic and community-centred. This is echoed by qualitative Western discourses that don the mantle of humanistic values – whilst maintaining the centre of economic power firmly within the corporate circles:

[54] Success was often measured in dollars and ignored the qualitative aspects of **relationships with people.** [...] concerns about efficiency and quantification of everything in terms of dollars can ignore real failure. [...] today's work is as much about **spirit** as about dollars. [...] Concerns for **human equality and**

**dignity** are no longer the monopoly of the charitable and humanistic organizations. In addition, the quest for realizing a world-class operation, enhancing the **quality of life** in the workplace, and the desire to be involved energetically in international affairs, induce managers to **pursue truth and meaningful relationships** in their business conduct instead of being motivated by winning at any expense. (Ali and Camp 1995:14)

It may be argued that some Western countries, though by no means all (see Mediterranean region) owe their predilection for pragmatism and quantification to a certain Protestant ethos [56], which, in turns, shares in the dialogic nature of Christian theology. Upadhyaya (1995) contrasts the latter with instances of (non-dialogic) communication offered by Indian spirituality, which include meditation, visualisation and story [57]:

[55] Simplicity – the black or white option of the Puritans – expresses and reinforces itself through quantitative measures. Americans count heads in education, dollars on the bottom line, and bodies in wartime. (Barnett, Weathersby and Aram 1995:11)

[56] the centrality of dialogue in European thought is a direct flow from Christian theology [...]. While it is appropriate that such a model be used within Europeanized worlds, it is inappropriate unquestioningly to extend globally this paradigm. Stories and meditations are not dialogic, but are a different type of communication, based on other understandings of language and reality from that common in Euromodernity (Upadhyaya (1995:49)

The second half of the Nineties has also witnessed self-critical, at times, cynical positions on economic globalization. Dissenting academics (e.g. Krugman 1996 and Upadhyaya 1995) engage rhetorically and playfully, but nonetheless scathingly, with the nature and manifestations of globalization:

[57] I believe the basic force driving the rhetoric about globalization that is now so pervasive in economic debate is something more subtle, yet perhaps more powerful: the fashion sense of policy intellectuals. [...] Such stories have a sweep and glamour that is rare in economics – indeed, the way that talking about globalization allows one to combine a vision of vast global struggle with a sense of exotic travel brings to mind the early James Bond movies. And such stories have the additional advantage of allowing the writer or speaker to sound immensely sophisticated (because everyone knows that sophistication is measured by the frequency with which you can use the word “global”) (Krugman 1996:9).

[58] Global is an incredibly protean term in being “other” to the “local”. [...] Techno-economic elites construct global space by compressing the world as technology, communication and easy travel shrink physical distances. Virtual worlds become the realities of global symbolic elites: billions of bytes and trillions of dollars are instantaneously transferred, and the capacity to roam the globe is proffered by pressing a key. Simultaneously, time is compressed globally, as the past and future recede in the holocaust of a hyper-consuming present. (Upadhyaya 1995:34-5)

Instead, business writers (e.g. Jackson 1998, Brimelow 1998 and Mortimer 1998) are ready to expose economic globalization as ‘babble’ using the matter of fact, irrefutable style that appeals to much of their readership:

- [59] Is globalization irreversible? History says no. Déjà vu all over again? Capitalist triumphalism and globalization glorification are the conventional wisdom of today (Brimelow 1998:76)
- [60] One of the great clichés of management today is the need to be global.... To be local is to be small, and to be small is to be vulnerable. Get global or die.... Most of the big old conglomerates have died or been broken up. As the world's markets evolve, might it not also be possible to be in too many countries? (Jackson 1998:12)

In other business quarters, namely from one of the most prestigious world organisations, of the World Economic Forum reveal<sup>5</sup>, the signs are that the 'ethical' is being appropriated by the 'global', as some speeches of the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Davos (Switzerland) early in 1999 indicate. Klaus Schwab, WEF's founder and president, in his opening address programmatically states that the most important challenge facing the WEF in the new millennium will be 'finding the right balance between the forces of the market and the needs of people'. And he goes on to reassure that 'competitiveness and globality are not natural enemies' and that the meeting aims to define 'responsible globality' on the basis of shared moral values. This section of his speech is well worth reproducing in full:

all the new frameworks and procedures in response to the need of **responsible globality** will not suffice to make the 21st century peaceful as long as we do not share some fundamental moral values. We will need a **new ethic of globality** which will consist mainly of a sense of **responsibility**, of **caring**, caring for the neighbours in our global village, caring also for our ecological integrity. The most crucial value in a world of globality is the **tolerance** for religious, ideological, ethnic and historic differences. While looking at the 21st century, which will be different, dangerous and full of opportunities, we should respect **our roots** and at the same time try to discover the best that is hidden in each of us and bring it together. That is what will make our global **community**, our Annual Meeting here so distinct, so productive and so valuable for us and for all those who observe us (Schwab 1999).

Another exercise in 'legitimation', a subtle one from chameleon globalization? At least on the surface, we appear to have come a long way from the more or less covert and self-interested appropriations of *The Wealth of the Nations* by free-marketers. Adam Smith might be surprised to find that his second, far less known tome, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, might be re-discovered as the archetypal text by new, 'caring' globalists.

## 8. Conclusion.

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<sup>5</sup> 'The World Economic Forum is a nonprofit foundation composed of leaders in business, government, academia and the media. The forum works to identify new business opportunities and address key economic, social and political issues. Forum constituents include Kofi Annan, secretary general of the United Nations; Renato Ruggiero, director general of the World Trade Organization; Peter Sutherland, secretary general of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); and Donald J. Johnston, secretary general for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. [...] By the end of June, the video conferencing technology will link 500 forum members across 54 countries, including Russia, India and Argentina.' (source: <http://live99/weforum.org>)

By the end of the Nineties, the 'free-market unlimited' ideology underlying many of the earlier discourses of economic globalization seems to have given way to concerned, if not self-critical, positions. An increasingly vocal stream of 'ethico-moral discourses' is generated by some unexpected sources such as *The Financial Times* (e.g. Rogaly 1998, Jackson 1998 and Mortimer 1998). On searching deeper, however, it appears that the motivations of 'caring corporations' lay somewhat beyond the realm of ethics:

Twenty years ago, companies might have been tempted to put up cheap, dirty or unsafe plants in poorer parts of the world. Now, the big global companies insist they work to the same standards everywhere. This is not merely altruism. Today, the communication revolution means that companies conduct their affairs in conditions of much greater transparency. In purely pragmatic terms, the question is not what they are prepared to do, but what they can get away with. (Jackson 1997:16)

The view taken in this article is that economic globalization, as a set of discourses, is unfolding in business and management magazines as much as in corporate boardrooms. Searching for a match between the discursive nature of globalization and its manifestations 'out there' does not lead further than the internationalisation of business.

As textual sources show, the very managers who run 'global' corporations cannot agree on the nature of the phenomenon. This uncertainty permeates earlier globalization discourses and is exploited towards the end of the Nineties by growing minorities who question its economic inevitability and its social desirability. The 'denaturalising' discourses from the academic texts of the mid-Nineties are echoed by the visionary (or, plainly, opportunistic) sections of the business elite who, at the end of the decade, are beginning to call for 'responsible globalization'. This may be an insidious way of 'naturalising' the denaturalising power of ethical discourses, by incorporating them into the *repertoire* of influential bodies such as the WEF<sup>6</sup>.

It is evident from the complexity of the debate on economic globalization, which this article has attempted to introduce, that the long-term, ambitious aim of providing 'an empirically and historically sensitive theory of globalization' (Robertson and Khondker 1998) will continue to be out of the linguists' reach for some time. However, it should be equally clear that critical engagement is not solely an academic pursuit, but a political task for individuals and groups concerned with the sustainability of the world in which we all live.

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<sup>6</sup> The World Trade Organization's (WTO) web site ([www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)) is also well worth a 'critical' visit by linguists in search of 'globalization treasures'.

## **Appendix: TEXTUAL SOURCES**

Academy of Management Executive  
Across the Board  
Business and Contemporary World  
Business Economics  
Business Forum  
Business Quarterly (Canada)  
Chemical and Engineering News  
Chief Executive  
Columbia Journal of World Business  
The Economist  
Economy and Society  
European Management Journal  
Finance and Development  
The Financial Times  
Forbes  
Fortune  
Journal of Organizational Change Dynamics  
Journal of General Management  
Journal of Management Development  
Journal of Organizational Change Dynamics  
Harvard Business Review  
Industrial Management and Data System  
International Business  
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Organizational Dynamics  
Personnel Journal  
Research Technology Management  
RSA Journal (UK)  
Training & Development

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