

Peter Robbins (2004) 'Global Visions and Globalizing Corporations: An Analysis of Images and Texts from Fortune Global 500 Companies'

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Abstract

Transnational corporations (TNCs) have a central role to play in globalization. At the same time, globalization carries risks for the corporation, and not all of those associated with TNCs may support globalization. While much of the globalization literature suggests that corporations are globalizing their production systems, or contributing to a global culture, there is little exploration of how globalization is framed and mediated within the corporate community itself. This article employs a semiotic analysis of images and texts from annual reports of Fortune Global 500 corporations. It argues that globalizing TNCs generate several narratives geared to persuading employees, shareholders, business partners and members of the financial community of the merits of globalization. They can be divided into at least three types geared to brand, industry leadership or organization. The narratives all have common themes to the extent that they are rooted in a customer focus, but they also demonstrate multiple and sometimes ambiguous global aspirations and expectations.

Keywords: *Capitalism; Globalization; Image; Narrative; Semiotics; Transnational Corporation*

Introduction

1.1 Most major corporations have a mission (or vision) statement, and globalizing corporations have an explicit global vision. The purpose of this article is to analyse the images and texts that represent these visions in corporate annual reports. I argue that the global visions can be read as types of globalization narratives that are constructed in order to convince readers, including shareholders, employees, business partners and members of the financial community that globalization is beneficial for the firm. Globalizing companies need such narratives because they are in the process of denationalising, redefining ties to their original home base, establishing new links with global markets and ventures, and because globalization itself is inherently risky for the firm. Globalization researchers have tended to ignore visual representations, and my assertion is that these can provide an important insight into the ways in which globalization is socially constructed by its key agents.^[1]

1.2 A concern with the aesthetic - images, narratives, texts - is at an early stage of development in many of the social sciences, and calls have been made for a new visual analysis of the politics of representation (Bleiker, 2001; Amin and Palan, 2001; Amoore, *et al.*, 2000). Human geographers have long been concerned with analysing aesthetics of spatial representations. In particular, Cosgrove has contributed a perceptive historical understanding of global imagery in the Western experience that assesses the hold which the global has had on the imagination from antiquity to the present (Cosgrove, 2001; 1994), building on earlier work on the symbolic landscape (Cosgrove, 1984). Similarly, Roberts and Schein (1995: 175) have considered the ways in which technologies, such as geographical information systems (GIS), allow the powerful, including nation-states and corporations, to use imagery to capture the globe symbolically in new ways 'and to reduce it to technologically manipulatable components'. While both inform the analysis presented here, neither has a specific sociological focus on transnational corporations (TNCs) or on the connections between image and narrative.

The Risks and Opportunities of Globalization

2.1 Why do corporations produce globalization narratives? It is often assumed that globalization is an inevitable feature of the growth of large firms, welcomed by insiders. Indeed many desire it, because if globalization goes well higher than average profits can be earned, costs and risks can be reduced, and increased growth can be achieved (Drummen and Zimmermann, 1992). However, globalization is also an

uncertain process, which is widely seen by strategic managers as something that can make the firm vulnerable. Thus, globalization becomes a field where corporate struggles are carried out.

2.2 Interestingly, the strategic management literature refers to globalization triggers, both internal and external to the firm, which are invariably expressed in negative - not positive - terms. External triggers such as industry trends, competitive pressures, and technological innovations force a firm to go global. Internal triggers like declining sales volume, loss of key customers, and profit losses generate an interest in exploring markets overseas (Douglas and Craig, 1987; Jain and Tucker, 1995; Ramamurti, 2000).

2.3 Once companies do go abroad, they are faced with pressures from organised labour and politicians at home.^[2] Globalization of domestic companies is very unpopular among members of the public. A Harris Poll conducted in the United States in March 2004 revealed that a 68% to 16% majority of respondents (N = 3,698) disagreed with the view of President Bush's economic advisor that 'it is good for the U.S. economy when American companies use less expensive workers in [poorer] countries...to do work previously done at a higher cost in this country'. Survey respondents also strongly disagreed with other statements to do with American companies outsourcing labour and production, regardless of the person's political affiliation (Harris, 2004).

2.4 In host countries, companies confront protectionist measures, as well as volatile labour and sales markets. Corporate managers suggest that these can 'force trade offs which dilute the economic value of globalization' (James, 1990: 82). Corporate globalization can also fail spectacularly in penetrating uncertain markets, when currencies collapse, social protests erupt, and profits are too low (Robbins, 2003).

2.5 There is a vast literature within international economics and finance that suggests that even though we are said to live in a global age there are surprisingly 'persistent effects of the home country on economic life'. These effects can be seen in trade, financing and investment. Firms in Canada and the European Union were between 2 and 20 times more likely to trade with other firms in their own country, even with the liberalising influence of the European and North American trading blocs (McCallum, 1995; Chen, 2000; Obstfeld and Rogoff, 2000). Firms avoided internationalising trade because their managers were worried about costs and risks associated with exchange rates, tariffs (import/export taxes), non-tariff barriers like quotas, and other rules and regulations to do with trade, as well as other administrative and transaction expenditures, such as legal costs.

2.6 The second aspect of home country effects is in savings-investment. There is a significant correlation in OECD countries between national savings rates and averages of domestic investment (Feldstein and Horioka, 1980; Obstfeld and Rogoff, 2000). This means that most investment in a company is financed by assets originating in its home country, and therefore that capital does not always cross national borders to seek the best returns. Again, reasons for this are the perceived risks and costs associated with international investment.

2.7 Third is the effect of the home country on the stock portfolios of investors (shareholders). Researchers found that 94% of US citizens' stock portfolios were comprised of investments in American companies, and 98% of Japanese investors' portfolios consisted of stocks in companies based in Japan (French and Poterba, 1991).^[3] Hawawini *et al.* (2004) observe that in terms of finance theory, shareholders' home country bias could be seen as irrational, since an internationally diversified portfolio may reduce investment risk, but they accept that shareholders have concerns about issues such as fluctuating exchange rates and transaction costs.

2.8 The evidence presented here suggests that firm globalization is not a foregone conclusion. Globalizers must actively construct, and champion, the case for globalization. One place we can see this struggle carried out is in the images and texts produced by the corporations themselves.

Globalization Theory

2.9 The analysis is informed by theories of globalization, of which there are many in contemporary sociology, emphasising different aspects of the process defined by Robertson as 'both the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole' (Robertson 1992: 8). The theories include, but are not limited to, those that emphasise global capitalism (Sklair, 2002), global culture (Appadurai, 1996), global society (Spybey, 1995) and world-systems (Wallerstein, 1979).^[4] It is not my intention to provide an exhaustive review of the theories here, but rather to draw out salient aspects from two sets of theories in particular that can frame an analysis of the construction of globalization narratives and the role of visual representation in this process.

Global Capitalism

3.1 The first is global capitalism, which is useful in the way it theorises globalization as driven by the expansion of capitalist enterprise across national borders (see Fröbel *et al.*, 1980; Chase-Dunn, 1991; Ross and Trachte, 1990; Sklair, 2002; Holton, 1998). Culture is viewed in theories of global capitalism through the lens of commodification and Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The idea is that the transnational capitalist class needs to ensure its power through 'normal processes of interaction', like consumption, while guarding against 'crises of authority', such as those represented by the environmental or anti-capitalist movements (Gramsci, 1971; Sklair, 1997).^[5] The convergence thesis, employed by theorists of global capitalism, suggests that however social systems diverge, people will all agree on the desirability of consuming more and more goods and services. In the words of a senior corporate executive, responsible for many successful global brands: 'Once television is there, people of whatever shade, culture or origin want roughly the same things' (CEO of HJ Heinz in Beder, 1998:184). This is exemplified in the ways in which global brands come to represent Western cultural hegemony: 'McWorld' (Barber, 1995), 'Coca-colonization' (Howes, 1996), and 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 1998).^[6] The approach, though initially promising, may ultimately inhibit a more profound understanding of multiple and ambiguous global cultural processes, which are not easily reduced to convergence.

3.2 Furthermore, while Gramsci's notion of dominant ideology contains an evaluation of conflict, it is usually constructed as that which occurs between classes or social movements, as part of the progression of history. What I would like to suggest is that tensions may exist within the transnational capitalist class itself.^[7] My view is consistent with Bourdieu's concept of force fields (Bourdieu, 1993). These are power struggles for cultural legitimacy, within or between classes or social movements, which aim to consolidate or transform balances of forces and globalization is one of these fields. Bourdieu's approach provides the basis to be more fluid and less constrained by too sharp a focus on historical materialism.

Global Culture

4.1 Theories of global culture may be more useful than those of global capitalism in understanding corporate narratives, in that they can address wider and more diverse cultural issues. They have a closer link with cultural studies and critical theory, which deal more directly with image and text. In contrast to global capitalism, the global culture approach sees friction between the process of global homogenization and heterogenization, and prioritises the latter, or a mixture of the two, what Robertson (1995) calls 'glocalization'.

4.2 Most theorists of global culture reject homogenization arguments in favour of descriptions of the ways in which global cultural products become indigenised and new hybrids are produced (Featherstone, 1995; Nederveen Pieterse, 1995; Lash and Urry, 1994; and Appadurai, 1990). As Featherstone points out, echoing Bourdieu, 'if there is a global culture it would be better to conceive of it not as a common culture, but as a field in which differences, power struggles and cultural prestige contests are played out.' (Featherstone, 1995: 14). Global culturalists also emphasise the medium by which cultural exchange takes place. Transnational flows of 'capital, money, goods, services, people, information, technologies, policies, ideas, images and regulations...do not simply derive from single countries, nor even from one particular geographical area', and they are independent of the nation-state (Lash and Urry, 1994: 280).

4.3 Appadurai (1990; 1996) highlights the increase of cultural interchange that globalization produces, as well as resulting tensions. A useful concept that he and others (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) pursue, for the purposes of this article, is the rhizomatic character of contemporary culture. As Fuery and Fuery point out 'the metaphor of the rhizome is strikingly visual' (2003: 112). The rhizome is a plant that has a root system that grows beneath and parallel to the ground. Periodically it sends up shoots. As such, the character of the rhizome is 'one of surfaces and interconnected root systems'. The metaphor suggests cultural practices characterised by both unity and multiplicity. Appadurai's work highlighting the interactions within and between the imagined worlds of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples provides the basis for understanding processes of globalization, as well as relationships between institutions, space and cultures. However, what he and some other theorists of global culture lack in their flowing and heterogeneous worlds of rhizomatic global landscapes is a well developed conception of the visual in the construction of power relationships. Writers like Featherstone are closer to this idea when they emphasise global culture as a field where power struggles are played out.

Critical Theory and Visual Culture

5.1 The power relationship and subjectification enacted through the visual is examined more directly by those sociologists influenced by Foucault and Heidegger (Urry, 1990; Hannigan, 1995). For example, Robertson discusses 'the construction of increasingly differentiated consumers, the "invention" of "consumer traditions"' citing tourism as the most obvious manifestation of this (1995: 29, emphasis in original; see also Rojek and Urry, 1997). Foucault's theory is that visual representations are a means by

which people are transformed into subjects. The notion of the gaze is important, where the viewer exercises control over the subject, mediated by desire. The gaze is institutionally bound and spatially determined. Foucault's theory of panopticism was built on this idea. In the panoptic prison prisoners can always be observed from the vantage point of the guard tower, but never know if they are actually being watched (Foucault, 1977). As a result, this institutionalises the power relationship between guards and inmates through visual means, and the inmates regulate their own behaviour (Fuery and Fuery, 2003; Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). Lacan probed the relationship between the viewer and subject further in theorising the effect on the viewer of a literal or metaphoric returned gaze; statues and paintings in Roman Catholic churches and Rembrandt's self portraits seem to 'look back' at us (Lacan, 2004). The fact that we watch and are also watched can serve to reinforce our subjectification. This may remind people of obligations to the group, such as the church or, in this case, the transnational capitalist class. It may also prompt an awareness of expectations for group loyalty and rewards offered to insiders, such as access to eternal life or material well being.

5.2 The analysis I pursue here is based on the notion of the gaze. I argue that the corporate images represent a type of visual capture of consumers, markets and global space, but may also serve to subjectify the viewer in the sense of reinforcing the idea that globalization is an important part of the identity of TNCs and those connected with them. The investigation also says something about the way global culture is produced, mediated and contested by transnational corporate actors. As Fuery and Fuery point out, 'in many ways images have replaced the word as the defining aspect of cultural identity, and at the same time they have become part of the attempt to create a global culture' (2003: xiv). In this article, I use semiotics to unravel the relationship between culture, narrative, images and texts in corporate annual reports.

Semiotics

6.1 Semiotics provides one model for exploring the relationships between symbols, consumer capitalism and transnational cultural practices. This is framed by Jameson's observation that 'culture is the very element of consumer society itself; no society has ever been saturated with signs and images like this one...the omnipresence of the image in consumer capitalism [means that] the priorities of the real become reversed, and everything is mediated by culture' (1979: 139).

6.2 Semiotics^[8] helps to unpack relationships between shared ideas, practices, images, texts and representations. It relates to a tradition emerging from de Saussure's structural linguistics from which structuralists, post-structuralists, and cultural studies analysts have drawn. The common link between the strands is a shared concept of language. Semiotics looks at components of a culture similarly to the ways it looks at components of language, using tools that come from the analysis of language and texts. For de Saussure, there are many kinds of semiotic systems, and language is just one of them.^[9] Elements of culture, including consumer goods, images, events, material and ideological culture are treated as texts that can be 'read'. Texts can be read by understanding them as an organization of signs drawn from language. The text makes sense and is presented in terms of the system of signs from which the elements are derived and which give them meaning, the signified (Slater, 1997).

6.2 In his writings on semiology and myth (1964; 1957), Barthes elaborates the idea of 'second-order semiological systems'. These are constructed on the analysis of the sign as the connection between signifier and signified, established by de Saussure. In this case, the sign of the first order system becomes the signifier of the second. In the first order system, for example, the sign 'fox' comprises the association of a sound-image (a word or visual representation of a fox) and a concept (a reddish coloured canine with a bushy tail). In the second order, the association becomes the signifier to the signified: sly or cunning. The fox therefore comes to represent slyness, cunning and shrewdness. The second order meaning is not taken from the sign itself, but from cultural knowledge. This notion is based on the idea of a socially shared interpretative resource. The act of reading therefore becomes a constructive process, whereby meaning emerges from the interaction of the reader with the material. Meaning will vary between readers through experience and contextual relevance. Some readings may be universal within a culture, and others more particular.

6.4 Barthes was especially interested in myth as connected to second order signification. He saw myth as the means by which a culture buries its own norms and ideology. For him, the mythological significance of a message is connected with systems of representation that appear neutral, but which legitimate and sustain a power structure or a set of cultural values (Curran, in Penn, 2000). It is for this reason that semiotics is often used to study the meaning relating to gender and consumerism in advertisements (Williamson, 1978), and why it can be particularly relevant to understanding the ways in which global capitalist values are represented by TNCs.^[10]

Carrying out a semiotic analysis

6.5 Semiotic analyses are carried out by dissecting and then articulating or reconstructing the image, 'intellect added to object' (George and George, 1972: 150). The aim is to uncover the cultural or other knowledges that are required in order for the reader to understand the image. This is not as pretentious as it sounds, the aim is merely to make explicit the meaning that is embedded in the image and taken for granted, which is important in the process of demythologising power. One constraint of semiotic analysis is that some images are more amenable to scrutiny than others. Another limitation is that the process of analysis is, to a certain extent, a subjective one, dependent on the analyst. This may be a more important concern at deeper levels of meaning, the second order meaning systems. Barthes (1964) justifies the use of certain images for instructive purposes since the signs used are intentional and therefore will be clearly defined or 'graspable'. In the case of images from annual reports, we also know that the purpose of the image will be to promote corporate globalization primarily to shareholders, the financial community, business partners, customers and employees. Since we know the 'who' and the 'what' we can concentrate instead on how the narrative is constructed and differentiate different types of global vision narratives.

Global Visions and Narratives: Data Set and Case Selection

7.1 The three cases chosen for detailed semiotic analysis are drawn from a dataset comprised of a random selection of 250 Fortune Global 500 company annual reports published between 1994 and 1999. The whole dataset was first categorised by global narrative, assessing both the images in each report and the corporate vision statement.

7.2 Reports demonstrated universal and particular narrative themes. Specifically they all made reference to consumerist values, as well as the need to increase share worth, grow, and remain profitable, which can be read as a type of cultural convergence.^[11] However, they also demonstrated a type of multiplicity, appealing to and constructing different types of global consumers (Robertson, 1995).

7.3 The global visions were manifested in three themes examined here: brand, industry leadership, and organisation. The brand narrative made connections between the global vision and people's experience of 'the good life' through brands. The industry leader narrative referred to increasing shareholder value and serving customers by becoming world number one, or best or most respected in an industry. The organisation narrative emphasised ways of organising or reorganising the firm globally in order to capture more value for customers and shareholders (Sklair, 2001). In some cases, there were combinations of all three themes in one global vision, but in practice one tended to be the narrative driver. Approximately 75% of the whole data set focused on organisation, 25% on industry leadership, and 25% on brands. Table 1 provides examples of companies, images and texts for each of the three.

Table 1: Global narratives, companies, images and texts			
Global Narrative	Company	Image	Text
Brand	Procter & Gamble (1997)	Background: globe in 2 dimensions, foreground: 30 branded products (e.g. Fairy Liquid, Ariel detergent, Crest toothpaste)	'We are building consumer loyalty to our brands throughout the world with superior products at competitive prices'
	Unilever (1995)	A close up photograph of at least 6 African children in school uniforms each holding an unidentified Unilever food product. The image	'The brands we make serve people's everyday needs...That's what has turned those brands into household names and made us one of the largest consumer goods companies in

		is centred on one child.	the world'
	Grand Metropolitan (1996)	17 people of many ethnicities and ages each holding a different Grand Metropolitan branded product (e.g. Burger King, J&B Whisky, Old El Paso tortilla chips)	'Grand Metropolitan is one of the world's leading branded food and alcoholic drink companies, with a portfolio of international brands...'
Industry Leader	Disney (1995)	Mickey Mouse	'We must concentrate on continuing to lead creatively'
	General Motors (1995)	Approximately 300 people of different ages and ethnicities surrounding an electric car giving the 'thumbs up'	'our goals of once again being the worldwide automotive pace setter and assuring consistent industry-leading financial results'
	Rockwell (1995)	Painting of the globe	'to become, as our newly defined corporate vision states "the world's best diversified high technology company"'
Organization	UAP Group (1995)	A cartoon of people walking on top of a round globe evocative of the front cover of <i>The Little Prince</i> by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry	'After...building up an international ...network...the need was to organise the new group...to achieve our top priority: profitability'
	ABB (1995)	Map of the world	'Our vision was to create a truly global company that knows no borders...while we strived for size....our vision was to avoid the stigma of the big company...'
	Elf (1995)	Photograph of earth from space	'Growth and profitability are inseparable in ensuring the Group's long term survival in today's highly competitive market.'

7.4 Next, the image on the front cover of each report was examined to determine whether there was a clear indication of a global theme. This could include any type of globe, many flags, or a map of the world, which were defined as signifiers of globalization for the purposes of the research. Reports with global themes on the front cover comprised around 16% of the dataset, or approximately 40 reports. Of the 40, I chose three global images, from the front covers of the Colgate-Palmolive (C-P), News Corporation, and Mitsubishi annual reports. The main reason for choosing these three was that I found them personally to be the most interesting visual images of the 40, although there were others that could have been analysed as well, and another researcher could have chosen different images. The second reason for selecting these three in particular was that each of the corporations varied by industry (personal goods, media, and diversified manufacturing) and continent of legal domicile (North America, Australia, and Asia).

Brand focus: Colgate-Palmolive (C-P)

8.1 The global vision of C-P expresses a consumerist theme through an emphasis on the importance of brands for production and profits. But, it also illustrates a reflexive understanding of the diversity in which brands are perceived, marketed and used by various consumers in assorted countries. A senior executive with extensive 'international experience' outlined the global vision in a nine-point narrative that demonstrates a focus on the universal and particular in brand recognition and consumption. The points cover:

- an awareness of the fact that people all over the world clean their teeth, but do so in different ways;
- the need to map technically relevant products to specific markets, especially in developing countries where there is growth potential; Brazil is identified as having 100 million potential consumers of its products;
- the importance of global brands that can be marketed worldwide for profitability through standardised production processes and recognition;
- the need for a highly trained, flexible and multicultural management team based on 'people prepared to move around the world,' with language skills and cultural sensitivity; and
- the importance of shareholders.

8.2 The homogenous and heterogeneous aspects of globalization represented in the C-P narrative reflects an appreciation of cultural flows in terms of brand use and uptake that Appadurai has identified in his critique of unitary theories of global culture: 'What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized in one or other way: this is true of music and housing styles as much as it is true of science and terrorism, spectacles, and constitutions' (Appadurai, 1990: 295).

8.3 The global vision was illustrated through the image on the cover of the corporation's annual report.

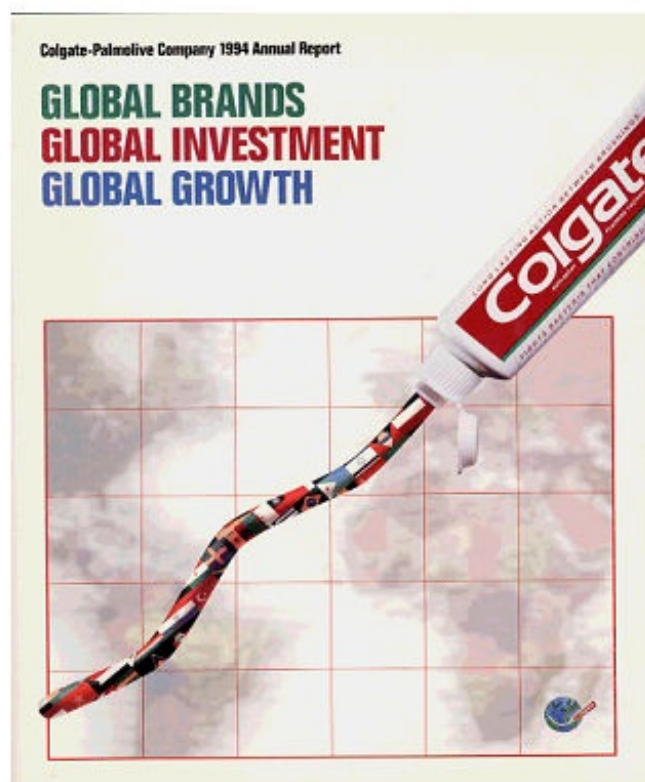


Figure 1. Colgate-Palmolive

8.4 The text in Figure 1 is 'global brands global investment global growth'. The main image is that of a tube of 'anti-decay fluoride' Colgate toothpaste. Coming out of the tube is a line of 'toothpaste' comprised of the flags of the world, this is superimposed on a grid, so the line of toothpaste appears to be a table representing rising growth. The whole grid is superimposed upon a map of the world, out of focus, in which the Americas, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East are visible. An initial reading suggests that the message is: global brands are the basis for global investment that is the basis for global growth. Colgate toothpaste is one of C- P's most recognizable global brands. Global investment represented by the line of toothpaste with the flags, and the image of the globe behind the grid, leads to the growth in corporate profits. Table 2 presents the results in tabular form.

Table 2: Analysis of corporate images				
Corporation (and narrative)	Denotation	Syntagm	Connotation/myth	Cultural knowledge
Colgate-Palmolive (brand)	Tube of toothpaste Graph Line of flags moving upwards from left to right into/from tube of toothpaste map of world text: 'GLOBAL BRANDS', 'GLOBAL INVESTMENT', 'GLOBAL GROWTH' [globe] [tube of toothpaste]	Equivalence suggested by: tube of Colgate (represents company brands) 'toothpaste' (represents its manufactured products) flags (represent globalization) graph upward trajectory (represents growth/increase in profits)	brand-led globalization brings profits; consumers can be captured, 'won', or possessed	business discourses about globalization; surveillance society
News Corporation (industry leader)	a large satellite dish, a sky at dawn/dusk, three clocks labelled 'New York' 'London' and 'Sydney', a picture of earth from space, at night, showing populated areas illuminated	Equivalence suggested by: size of the satellite dish, angle upwards (suggests relationship between dish and people of globe), global consumers (suggested by populated areas lit up at night), dawn (suggests a new day?)	News Corporation delivers media products to its consumers around the world; content is delivered to consumers; consumers can be watched and monitored	Post- 1960s contemporary culture: 'spaceship earth'/'blue marble'; George Orwell's 1984
Mitsubishi	Globe, circle	Equivalence	Mitsubishi	ancient

(organization)	with electronic component, floppy disk, satellite, satellite dish, gas container, building, ship, cog, no text	suggested by: products representing parts of company's operations, (suggested by annual report text), globe (suggests globalization), circuit circling globe	organisation is global, 'the all is one' (many businesses, one corporation or one corporation, one world), infinity, opportunity, universality, perfection, self-sufficiency control, management	mythology and religion: globe, mandala, uroboros
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8.5 The image suggests that the globe - represented by the flags of many nation-states - is possessed and emerging from the corporation, signified by the tube. A second order reading recalls Foucault in the implication that the viewer is given the opportunity to 'own' the globe, or at least to 'own' its people, in the case that all people are potential consumers of C- P's products. It may reveal the aspiration that the world's people are trapped or encased in the 'brand', a tube of toothpaste, only to be liberated from it as consumers. The text on the inside front cover states that the corporation is a leading 'global consumer products company' marketing leading brands such as Colgate, Palmolive, and Ajax in 194 markets '(Afghanistan to Zimbabwe)'.^[12] From a Lacanian point of view, it may suggest that identification with a globalising TNC carries with it the understanding those associated with it will champion the firm's unfolding global destiny, in order to reap the implied rewards.

8.6 The visual representation of the capture, possession and ownership of global markets and consumers that is present in the image is consistent with theorists' reflections on the role of the visual in modernity. Heidegger (1993) suggests that modernity is characterised by what he calls the 'modern world picture'. This is not just about capturing the globe as a photographic image as seen from space, but more so that the 'fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture' (1993: 134). That is, capturing, encasing, organizing and defining reality in visual images. Visual 'mastery' then becomes an important feature of modernity and its key institutions and actors.^[13] Slater (1995) argues that 'conquering the world' in this way incorporates a certain degree of fetishisation, or 'visual enchantment', in which the 'sanctification of the visual' is based on the secularised notion of 'seeing is believing' or 'believing is seeing'.^[14] In this sense it becomes important in the social construction of reality. Processes such as declining seal stocks and the thinning of the ozone layer became seen as crises when they were depicted graphically.^[15] The process of creating visual images is therefore a social process whereby the creator as well as the observer is involved (see Gregory, 1994:37) and the visual 'is rendered the property of the individual, detached observer' in the 'possessive gaze' (Cosgrove, 1984; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). The viewer has the privileged position and power to compose the view and 'see' the image (see also Crawshaw and Urry, 1997). In this instance, the readers of the annual report can become empowered by the notion of 'capturing/winning' consumers and profits, while being reminded that identifying with the corporation means supporting globalization.

Industry leadership: News Corporation

9.1 The global vision of News Corporation, articulated by its controversial leader Rupert Murdoch, is tied to its aim to be a world leader in media. A global identity is central to Murdoch.^[16] He is widely seen as a visionary leader and has often outlined the globalizing intentions of News Corporation.

9.2 In the company's 1994 annual report, Murdoch outlined the company's 'future' to become 'the preeminent supplier of first class creative and editorial products to readers and viewers around the world. We believe that we are uniquely positioned to fulfil this destiny.'

9.3 The quotation evokes Tom Wolfe's character Sherman McCoy's obsession with his providence to be a 'Master of the Universe' in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, a cautionary tale that articulates a dystopian vision of the risks of corporate hubris. It also brings to mind Bagdikian's (1989) observations about 'The Lords of the Global Village', which, in turning McLuhan's thesis on its head, analysed how Murdoch and a handful of

others came to control the world's media. Further, it provides an important insight into the identity of News Corporation as a key actor within globalising mediascapes, uniting culture and consumerism. To Appadurai mediascapes 'provide...large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and "ethnoscapes" to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news is profoundly mixed' (Appadurai, 1990:299).

9.4 > Murdoch states this globalizing imperative in a speech in 1996 in terms of meeting consumer needs, again manifesting an undercurrent of core cultural values: 'When consumers are offered more choice they choose more...The consumer is being given more opportunities to access more entertainment, more news and more information. Everybody wants to make sure they can reach those consumers.'

9.5 As in C-P above, what is emphasised is the ability of the firm to serve various tastes and markets all over the world. As Robertson has pointed out 'to put it very simply, diversity sells' (1995: 29).

9.6 This global vision is exemplified in the front cover of the 1994 annual report (see Figure 2 and Table 1).



Figure 2. News Corporation

9.7 The most visible part of the image is a large satellite dish at dawn or dusk pointed skyward. The night sky above the satellite is superimposed with a satellite picture of the globe at night, with the most populated areas illuminated by their lights. The connection is made between the satellite and the world's population, the consumers of News Corporation's media products. In between the satellite and the globe are three clocks labelled 'New York', 'London' and 'Sydney', with times at 5:10, 10:10 and 7:10. They represent the company's bases in the USA, Europe and the Pacific, these are the centres from which the corporation extends its global reach into surrounding areas, Latin America, continental Europe, India, China and the rest of Asia. In the report itself, readers can find out that the satellite dish represents News Datacom 'the world's first large scale digital satellite system', and refers to the new technologies in which News Corporation invests. This is part of what makes it is an industry leader among global media corporations.

9.7 The vision calls to mind mediascapes (as well as technoscapes) in the provision of image and narrative to viewers throughout the world, mixing commodities and news: 'During fiscal 1994 News Corporation changed the *landscape of television* broadcasting, not just in the US but around the *world*. From the printed word to the *digital image*, News Corp now enjoys an *unmatched* combination of *content creation* and *distribution on a global scale*' (emphasis in original).

9.9 Murdoch has claimed that News Corporation is 'a vertically integrated global media company...maybe the only one.' Vertically integrated in this sense means producing media content (ownership of movie studios), as well as delivering it to consumers (ownership of satellite systems).

9.10 This is the only image of the three to include an image that evokes a picture of the world from space, taken from a satellite. It is remarkably similar to the NASA composite photograph that its designers entitled 'Global City Lights', a two-dimensional image of the world at night, with areas of population - or sites of consumption? - illuminated (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. 'Global city lights'

C. Mayhew & R. Simmon (2000-11-09) PIA02991 (NASA/GSFC), NOAA/ NGDC, DMSP Digital Archive.

9.11 The *Apollo 17*^[17] moon shot astronauts took the most famous photograph of the whole planet earth in space (see Figure 4). At the time, NASA curiously left it untitled, giving it the antiseptic label 'AS17-148-22727'. The image became popularly known as 'Spaceship Earth', and NASA now refers to it as 'The Blue Marble'. This first photograph of the Earth portrays a small and fragile ball shining blue against the dark of outer space; covered with soft clouds, blue oceans, green continents and rich soils. Ironically non-geopolitical for its era, the land mass focus is on Antarctica, the African continent, Madagascar and the Middle East. Never before had the whole planet been visible to the human eye in its spherical shape, although it had been imagined for millennia, and is implied in Ptolemaic cartography's representation of a round earth, which dates from the fifteenth century (Cosgrove, 1994; 2001).



Figure 4. 'The blue marble from Apollo 17'

9.12 On Christmas Day, 1968, the American poet Archibald MacLeish observed in the *New York Times* 'For the first time in all of time men (sic) have actually *seen* the earth: seen it not as continents or oceans from the little distance of a hundred miles or two or three, but seen it from the depths of space; seen it whole and round and beautiful and small.' (MacLeish, cited in Cosgrove, 2001: 259) Its beauty and vulnerability produced feelings of wonder and awe. For the first time, it became possible to talk about 'our' planet.

9.13 According to Sachs, this image at the same time as it can represent 'our planet', it can also create 'a deep ambivalence'. 'On the one hand, "our" can imply participation and highlight man's (sic) dependence on an encompassing reality. On the other hand, it can imply ownership and emphasise man's vocation to master and to run this common property. Consequently, the image of "our" planet conveys a contradictory message; it can either call for moderation or for megalomania' (Sachs, 1992:26).

9.14 It is worth reflecting for a moment on the previous two quotations, both of which use gender specific language. While it may be true that male astronauts actually saw the Earth, and the rest of us only saw a photograph, and that men, more so than women, have dominated nature, both of these sentiments are expressed unreflexively in the quotations. This may in part be due to other factors, such as the era when they were written. However, more interestingly they may also represent the ways in which the feminised Earth has always been a subject of the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1989).

9.15 The dualities of the 'global gaze', or the 'light' and 'dark' visions of the globe suggest that Figure 2 can be read in at least two ways. A 'light' reading might herald the opportunities afforded by globalization to reach consumers and industry leadership through provision of the best variety of media and news content to customers throughout the world. A darker reading of Figure 2 in terms of George Orwell's *1984* or Foucault's theory of panopticism would suggest that the global consumers are fixed, controlled and subject to surveillance by the massive satellite dish—a type of 'big brother'—that dominates the image (cf. Wood, 2003). It is, of course, the case that the world's people are subject to extensive surveillance by TNCs, from their actual buying habits to their willingness to pay for new or higher priced goods.^[18]

Organization Oriented: Mitsubishi

10.1 Organization oriented global visions are marked by a stress on restructuring corporations for globalization rather than on industries and brands. As with the other narratives, they exemplify commonality and diversity. Many of the corporations that have organization oriented global visions are *sogo shosha* (general trading companies) based in Japan, involved in many industries. In the case of Mitsubishi, for example, its industries span:

- information systems and services (computer systems, semiconductors, telecommunications, consumer electronics, defence systems, commercial aviation and space systems)
- fuels (petroleum)
- metals (steel, bullion, nuclear fuels and other metals)
- machinery (automobiles, shipbuilding, and machine tools)
- foods, (grains, oils, meat, fish, seafood and beverages)
- chemicals (plastics, fertilisers, and other chemicals)
- textiles (fabrics, textile raw materials and industrial textiles)
- general merchandise (finished goods, pulp, paper, construction materials, tyres, cigarettes, and beer).

10.2 For the senior executives of such corporations, it may not make sense to structure a global vision based on a collection of consumer brands or on one industry. This may be why a narrative is composed that focuses on organising the firm for globalization, connected with serving a customer base.^[19]

10.3 The annual report in 1995 focused on the changes taking place at Mitsubishi.

- Change is 'more than just a buzzword'
- It is important 'to capitalise on the dynamic forces sweeping the globe today' by focusing on key regions in Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

10.4 In 1996, it outlined four 'Principles that define Mitsubishi Corporation', which all targeted the firm's globalization, these included:

- A focus on business relationships - which the company had 73,000 covering 10,000 products globally
- An understanding of markets - exemplified by Mitsubishi's marketing of Harrods, KFC and other

'premier brands' in Japan.

- The importance of a long term vision
- The globalization of human resources - the company had 36,000 employees, a third of which worked outside of Japan.

10.5 Similar to C-P above, the aim of human resources globalization was about training highly capable employees who had global vision, dealt with change effectively and were available to work at Mitsubishi's facilities anywhere in the world. In order to institute this an International Core Staff system and a Global Leadership programme were established.

10.6 These themes for an organization based vision of globalization are illustrated in the cover of the 1995 Annual Report (see Figure 5 and Table 1).

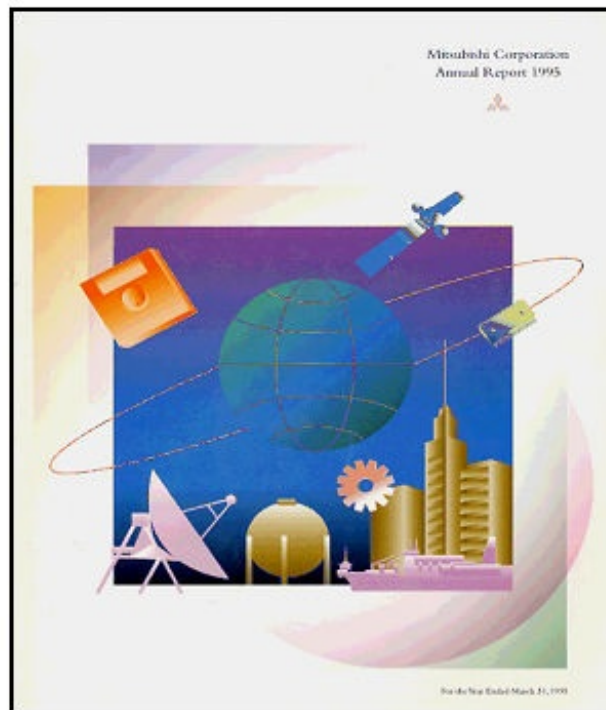


Figure 5. Mitsubishi Corporation

10.7 In the image, which has no text - the picture in this case more important than the printed word - the centre is dominated by a globe with lines representing latitude and longitude, without land or ocean. The rest of the components of the figure represent business activities of the corporation. Behind the globe is a red circle with an electronic component, as if it is orbiting the Earth, or encircling all of the other parts of the image. Above the globe is a satellite, and a floppy disk. All three of these images, the electronic component, the floppy disk and the satellite represent the information systems and services group in Mitsubishi. Underneath the globe is a horizontal plane, 'the ground' with a satellite dish, also representative of information systems and services. The information systems and services group along with machinery, were the most profitable sectors of the group (calculated together they represented 26% of the company's profits). It was also the second highest of all Mitsubishi industrial groups in terms of revenues (at 22%). Next to the dish, to the right is a container of natural gas as well as a ship. These represent the fuels group. Fuels were the least profitable of the company's business groups with a 9% profit, and it was fourth in terms of revenues, with 11%. Above the ship is a cog, which stands for the machinery group, and in the right hand corner is a building (factory?), symbolising the textiles and general merchandise group. The textiles and general merchandise group represented 12% of corporate profits, and 7% of sales. The text on the inside cover of the image describes Mitsubishi as 'one of Japan's leading trading companies with 232 offices in 87 countries...' It also states 'Drawing on its considerable expertise in the fields of information, financing, investment and organization, the Company is able to offer a broad array of integrated services and undertake investments in myriad exciting growth areas.'

10.8 Figure 5 may be ripe for a second order reading in at least a couple of ways. First, it is the only image to foreground a representation of the globe. The one used is a modern ideogram of the planet Earth, with imaginary lines of latitude and longitude. The image is synonymous with much older versions from the ancient world and Middle Ages that represent Tellus/Terra the goddess of the Earth in Roman mythology, or the Earth. Tellus was a goddess of fertility, and was seen as a type of Earth Mother.^[20] The symbol is also linked to a representation for the planet found on Cyprian coins dating from 500 BC (the *Globis Cruciger*).

The Roman ruler who displayed the *globis cruciger* (cross on globe) wished to convey that he was the supreme power and authority in the world, and this power was given by divine institution, which Cosgrove links symbolically to the Greek god Apollo, who was associated with terrestrial order, harmony and civilization (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. *Globis cruciger*

10.9 Cosgrove suggests that 'if the emperor and empire are cosmographically located and legitimated by reference to the predictability and order of the heavens, the terrestrial orb denotes direct territorial authority' (2001: 19). The *globis cruciger* was similar to the orb used by rulers in the Middle Ages to symbolize their control over territory. The ideas conveyed by the symbols are that the earth represents productiveness, opportunity, and universalism. The history of the symbol also suggests that people can control the earth and that it is finite and manageable.

10.10 The second aspect of the image that is particularly curious is the electronic component circling behind the globe. It bears a similarity to the uroboros, the name for the symbol of the Great World Serpent encircling the earth in ancient religions (see Figure 7 for one example). The uroboros is an image of a worm, snake, or dragon swallowing its own tail and has been found in a number of eastern and western religions, first appearing in ancient Egypt around 1600 BC.^[21] The ancient Greek version of the symbol was accompanied by the words 'The One, the All' or 'the all is one', which also forms an interesting link with the global cultural themes of unity and multiplicity. The uroboros is a powerful representation of infinity, of universal nature, completion, perfection, totality, the cycle of life, self-sufficiency and the connection of earth with sky or space. The symbol was adopted by alchemists in the Middle Ages, and has also appeared in Norse cosmology. The psychologist Carl Jung saw it as one of many archetypes; primitive mental images inherited from early human ancestors, shared by all people, and accessible through the collective unconscious.

10.11 For Jung, the uroboros was an important archetype in two respects. First, it symbolised the integration of the opposite, what he termed 'the shadow', and in this respect it has similar connotations to the yin yang. Second, it represented immortality in the sense that the uroboros kills itself, brings itself back to life, fertilises itself, and gives birth to itself, like a phoenix (Jung, 1980).

10.12 If this part of the image can be read as a uroboros, then it may suggest, as a fetishised representation, the link between the many activities of the corporation and the construction of opportunities afforded and expectations entailed by globalization. Most importantly, the implication of unity in diversity and immortality suggests powerfully at the level of myth that the only future for Mitsubishi is in globalization, which will bring the firm eternal life.

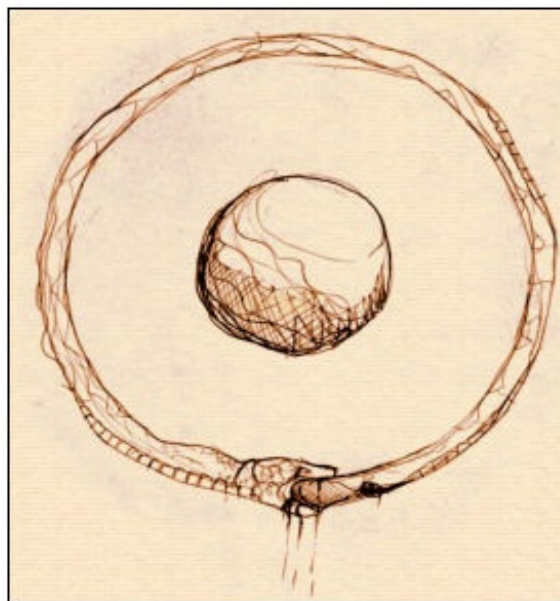


Figure 7. The uroboros

10.13 The three images were chosen because they contain visual references to maps or globes. The development of the discipline of geography in the 18th century was important because it was based on the visual representation of the whole world as if it were a picture, through maps and globes (Gregory, 1994).

With it, the world became an object to be displayed, viewed, investigated and experienced (Mitchell, 1988). The process of creating a visual image of the world defines it. It comprises a specialised form of representation (Harley, 1992; Rodaway, 1994: 133-42) in which an imaginary bird's eye view of the world that is taken, becoming 'intensely symbolic, with the use of all sorts of apparently arbitrary signifiers of figures, and lines' (Rodaway in Macnaghten and Urry, 1998: 120). Representations of maps and globes are culturally specific visual strategies that tend to reinforce a Western view of the rest of the world. That is, they capture aspects of nature and society through visual abstraction and representation, express distance and objectivity from what is being sensed, and organize and articulate control or mastery over what is being viewed. They therefore can be seen as employing the visual as a means of surveillance and domination. This forms a link between control, hegemony and the idea of 'winning consumers', through brands, industry leadership, or organization, and is consistent with consumer values as the driving force behind global business. Corporate executives must know the consumers, and think like them, in order to win them. Therefore consumers must be watched.

Conclusion

11.1 Visual data tends to be ignored in studies of globalization, but they can provide an illuminating source for understanding important questions, as well as adding to an analysis of the ways in which actors construct meanings. The evidence presented in this article suggests that globalizing corporations use particular kinds of symbolic imagery and text in order to create globalization narratives. The main aim of these narratives, I suggest, is to convince those associated with the corporation that globalization is a beneficial process. Globalization involves risks inherent in entering new markets, and the dominant themes suggest that these uncertainties can be controlled. Whether the narrative is focused on brands, industry leadership or organization, it is connected to consumer culture, rooted in the capture, 'knowing' and 'winning' of consumers, which represents a type of cultural convergence. This provides the rationale for globalization, and it may also be the basis for reminding those associated with the corporations of obligations to a class or corporate identity. At the same time, the narratives embody the multiplicity that theorists of global culture have identified. While some of the images consist of signs that are easily 'graspable' in terms of their meanings, others are more vague and open to multiple interpretations. The visual content present in the images analysed suggests that global signifiers represent ambiguity, duality, contradiction, universality and particularity: the control and surveillance of people/consumers throughout the world, as well as the bounty, opportunity, universality and profitability that encapsulates the capitalist global dream.

Notes

¹ There is a fairly well established ocular concern in sociology (Harper, 1994) and anthropology (Taylor, 1994). Social constructionists have discussed the importance of dramatic verbal and visual imagery in representing environmental problems for example, and the struggles that occur when meanings are contested in the public domain (Hannigan, 1995).

² There is a great deal of evidence that workers have concerns about globalization. Michael Moore's documentary film *Roger and Me* (1989), which depicts the social effects on the town of Flint, Michigan of General Motors' decision to move production to Mexico where labour was cheaper is a notable example.

³ There is some evidence that in countries with smaller domestic markets, where there are fewer companies to choose from, there is less of a home country bias (Lewis, 1999).

⁴ Broadly, world systems and global capitalism theorists tend to be influenced by Marx, and cultural theorists by Weber (see also Waters, 1995 and Albrow, 1996).

⁵ Discursive strategies are often employed to address such crises. Major corporate actors have responded to the environmental crisis by employing the language of ecological modernization in which it is argued that consumption can continue as long as it is seen to be environmentally responsible (Robbins, 2001).

⁶ The literature on the global reach of many TNCs is usefully summarized in Robbins (2003).

⁷ Although there is evolving investigation of the globalizing aspects of the transnational capitalist class, further study could examine struggles between global optimists and pessimists within the class itself (Sklair, 2001).

⁸ 'Semiology' translates the French *sémiologie* and is associated with the work of de Saussure. The philosopher Peirce use 'semiotics', supplementing de Saussure's theory by suggesting additional types of

sign (Cook, 2001: 74).

⁹ I am grateful to Guy Cook for pointing this out to me.

¹⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) and Baudrillard (1998) link semiotic analysis to the understanding of consumerism. They stress that for consumer goods, as use-value is overpassed by exchange-value, the commodity can take on a second use-value (Rose, 1978). Through this process, commodities can take on a range of cultural associations and illusions, such as romance, beauty and fulfilment. Baudrillard draws on semiotics to suggest that consumption entails the active manipulation of signs. Via the media, signs can float free from objects and are available for a multiplicity of associative relations.

¹¹ Key management writers, such as Rosabeth Moss Kanter, focus on the importance of the consumer or customer to global corporate success (Luthans and Hodgetts, 1997; Kanter, 1997).

¹² The value of reading the image, in this case, is that it clarifies and encapsulates the global vision at the level of myth, the narrative of why globalization is important, as well as what it will bring the corporation and its shareholders.

¹³ See also Levin's analysis of 'modernity and the hegemony of vision' (1993).

¹⁴ There are similarities between this idea and Barthes' conception of myth.

¹⁵ Key images were baby seals being clubbed to death on the ice floes of Labrador, and the Antarctic continent defenceless to the sun's radiation through the 'hole' in the ozone layer as seen from space.

¹⁶ The company's head office is in Sydney, Australia and Murdoch is Australian by birth, however the Australian government considered News Corporation to be a foreign corporation. Murdoch had renounced his Australian passport and taken American citizenship in order to avoid US media ownership rules. However, the US government still deemed News Corporation to be an Australian company in some senses. Changing passports is an extreme example of the importance of access to global markets above national citizenship for transnational corporate leaders.

¹⁷ Cosgrove observes that the naming of the *Apollo* space program was especially appropriate. The Greek god 'combined the strength and beauty of male youth with the severe purity of reason. As a sun god he circled the Earth, his dispassionate vision encompassing the pathetic doings of mortals' (Cosgrove, 1994: 273). This mythology of American space age heroes is illustrated in novels and magazines such as Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff*, which canonized the likes of Chuck Yeager, Alan Shepard, John Glenn, and Gus Grissom, and *Time* magazine which designated Glenn 'a latter day Apollo'.

¹⁸ In Orwell's *1984*, hegemony had taken the form of a totalitarian power: 'big brother'. The world was controlled by three superpowers (London, New York, Sydney?). Control over individuals was maintained by video surveillance. It may not be coincidence that this image from News Corp's annual report was published in 1994! Links with Orwell's classic novel are becoming more popular in contemporary media culture. Television programming between 2000 and 2003 featured 'Big Brother' (people in a house subjected to 24-hour surveillance), this aired in many countries. In Britain, 'Room 101' was a direct reference to the place of torture in the novel (celebrity guest sends things that he/she finds particularly abhorrent to 'Room 101'). Many writers explore the issue of increasing surveillance and control of populations in modernity from sociological as well as philosophical perspectives (Foucault, 1977; Lyon, 1994).

¹⁹ Like News Corporation, Mitsubishi had a visionary leader that has orchestrated its globalization. Tetsuro Matsuda was President of Mitsubishi until 1995, when his plans for globalization were met with considerable opposition from the Japanese workforce.

²⁰ Her Greek equivalent was Gaia.

²¹ Its Japanese form dates from the 15th century and is represented by a dragon eating its tail.

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