The Changing Faces of Reality

by Eric M. KRAMER*
Richiko IKEDA**

Privileging the Virtual

In March 1998, four companies that sell diet foods received an order from the Fair Trade Commission to stop false advertising about their products ("Shikarareta": 132). They were accused of manipulating pictures in their ads and promoting false information. One of the ads used the same picture for the "before" and also the "after" image of an alleged client. They used a different width-length ratio in the "before" picture than the "after" picture. In the "after" dieting picture, the advertiser made the "happy customer" five percent thinner. Such techniques are not uncommon in diet product and services advertisements. The current case mentioned is just the tip of a large iceberg.

In the late-modern world, lying on a mass scale in the service of capital accumulation has become so normative as to be an essential part of culture with its primary mythological form being mass advertising. Advertising and public relations constitute part of what we call the "Third Sophistic" (Kramer 1993b, 1994, 1997). We are constantly bombarded by images that are fantasmagorical, like talking frogs selling beer and singing kitchen appliances generated via various manipulative techniques from air brush and computer graphics to cosmetics and video editing. Such virtual realities titillate our visual and audial senses, and teach us what we want and should be like, but have no referents in the actual world. Yet they are, by means of spatio-temporal and emotional associationism, identified with actual products and lifestyles via atunement with prerational magic and mythic modes of thinking (Barthes 1982; Eliade 1975; Gebser 1949/1985; Kramer 1988; Schwartz 1974; Williamson 1978). In this way, emotion is expressed through objects just as T. S. Eliot argued in his theory of the "objective correlative," only in the postmodern sense, the objects are virtual, not actual (Eliot 1932: 145). Although it is hardly logical that frogs are singing about beer, or that an actress is standing on top of a giant credit card with dancers, we make sense of it (integrate patterns) anyway.

* Eric KRAMER is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma, U.S.A.
** Richiko IKEDA is an assistant professor in the Division of International Studies at International Christian University, Japan.
We consume the surface images without depth just as we consume the goods and services they arationally circumscribe. In the emergent postmodern condition, lying is not merely expected but increasingly undetectable. We marvel at the sheer imagery, the myth-making wizardry that is most persuasive, bordering on the hypnotic, because we are in a willing state of suspended disbelief (Blumler & Katz 1975).

In the postmodern world, the idea of a “model” has been reversed. Modeling used to connote an act of mimicking a preexistent and actual state of affairs like making a smaller version of an actual god (as a statue), ship, or airplane. But today, modeling evokes idealistic desires, wants, and imaginings like the virtual objects that constitute mathematics and logic. The ontological priority between the actual and the virtual has been reversed. Increasingly we “model” cars, houses, even ourselves in cyberspace, and then we copy this virtual object into actual production. This is also the case with emulating a West that exists only as an imaginal screen version, like exciting spy, cowboy, and detective characters that exist nowhere, not even in their “actual” purported home, the United States for instance. A good example of this postmodern condition is described by Newcomb (1976). As an American soldier in Vietnam during the mid-1960’s, Newcomb (1976) noticed families watching Armed Forces Television signals on televisions with makeshift antenna in their primitive huts. He wanted to tell them that the cowboys the Vietnamese were watching on shows like Gunsmoke and Bonanza did not exist in the United States, indeed did not exist anywhere or at anytime but a mythic American past, that they had never existed as portrayed by television. But of course the visual evidence right before their eyes was more compelling than his less spectacular and less entertaining protests to the contrary.

With the predominance of mythic and magic consciousness structures children (but certainly not only children) are especially susceptible to the virtual, confusing it with the actual. The streets of Hollywood, California are perpetually filled with young people who have run there expecting to find something that does not exist. The fact is that almost no current “stars” live there these days, and that the Hollywood sign itself, arguably the most famous sign on Earth with its uniquely staggered letters that stand amidst the chaparral brush on Mount Lee in what today is Griffith Park, was originally a haphazard assemblage of metal panels attached to a framework of pipes and telephone poles that read “Hollywoodland.” The sign itself was a gimmick concocted in 1923, by a real estate developer to promote home sales in a Beachwood Canyon subdivision. After falling into disrepair and having become a perennial target for local vandals, it was renovated in 1949, by the local Department of Recreation and Parks, who left the last four letters (LAND) off. Today it is a protected trademark licensed by Global Icons, the worldwide and exclusive agent for the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. Hollywood is a parody of itself existing now mostly for the sake
of tourists.

Perhaps it is the case that entire cultures are rushing to embrace a virtual Western “way of life” that is nothing more than a fleeting surface image, an icon that is copyrighted and licensed for lease but which can never be bought. It is almost as if Americanism has become a franchise like McDonalds, but with less meat. In the postmodern world it is images that are fetishes. In a sense this is what Jean Gebser (1949/1985) called a “deficient” reemergence of mythic consciousness combined with modern, perspectival technology. It is “deficient” in that these myths are less vital than cynical.

Modeling suggests and often compels the making of futures while delimiting the parameters of the possible, the imaginal edge of what is conceivable. The utopian model is offered as something we should strive to emulate but which it is never possible to actually capture because in utopia, youth is eternal, beauty is perfect, and control is complete. Thus, we are compelled to continually purchase those magical objects and services like cosmetics and drugs that promise to act like symbolic capital without which we cannot in turn purchase the ideal (Bourdieu 1993; Williamson 1978). Products and images act as the necessary intermediaries for achieving our desires within the virtual actual (the Cartesian dualism already being rendered irrelevant by sheer consciousness of...) (Husserl 1970). We cannot accomplish our dreams by ourselves. We must first purchase the magical and actual products in order to then accomplish the virtual promise. Thus, we keep buying the stuff that is supposed to make our husbands and children love us, to make us more happy, finally beautiful, smart, and above all fashionable. Being fashionable is the crux of the evanescently fleeting and ephemeral thin promise, which is at the core of being “modern,” perpetually contemporaneous, “up to date.” Despite the thinness of this tissue, it resides in the core of the late-modern identity. It is a continual treadmill that is most seductive to the young, but also infects businesses, governments, universities, and adult imaginations.

We have always had ideal or model persons, but they tended to manifest exemplars of comportment, strength and beauty that predated and actually manifested these qualities. Like the Christ or Confucius, we have had actual role models and actual philosophies and deeds offered to us as guides to emulate. And if the hero was divine, we understood that we could at best only follow but never achieve identity with him or her. But today, we are saturated with ideals that seem not merely more achievable, but which actively speak to us as “individuals” via the process of appellation. Appellation means an individual who believes that he or she is a free agent acting out the dictates of a coherent ego when in fact it is an ideological process that defines the “subject,” as such, an aspect of the Lacanian “Ideal-Ego” within the “Imaginary” (Williamson 1978:40). In advertising, the images beckon us as individuals to inhabit their style and world. This magical force, for magic in the technical sense means a
one-to-one identification, of appellation, which renders irrelevant the logical
distinction between the actual and the virtual, is more ghostly than feudal and
tribal powers. The world is but a mist of electrons. The satisfaction of each
consumptive act lasts a precious short time. In fact, the use of the term
“communication” to describe this machine/human interface is something of a
mismomer. The images painted on our retinas are utterly dead for we merely
follow a decision tree through its pre-established “branches.” Our “choices” are
written for us, and any deviation is expressed as a syntax error.

Today, there is an entire profession called “modeling.” Just as Desmond
Morris (1969) describes the super-status struggle that characterizes the modern
cosmopolis, we now have “super models” that manifest in the very shape of
their body-images the promise and ultimate betrayal of the unattainable surface.
Increasingly, these models, which are presented as pure surface image, do not
exist as they appear. They are computer enhanced, air brushed, painted by
cosmetic and lighting artists, and otherwise morphed into purely ideational,
virtual objects. They “embody” the disembodied fixation that exists only in the
transcendental/virtual. They never age or appear clumsy. They are timeless.
They are the “angels” that work in the service of the new god, the market, with
its omnipotent and omniscient knowing.

Such manipulation presupposes the Western European attitude toward the
universe which empties everything of all historical and inherent content, leaving
the universe a randomly vibrating matrix of dead particles in total vacuum. Thus,
even the human body and face become appropriately available for reconstruction
by surgeons and digital rearrangement. In the light of this reasoning, those who
resist are considered “deranged.” There is nothing called “value,” “meaning,”
or “inherent.” Everything is eternally contingent, flexible, malleable, and on
the way to manifest destiny. Progress has become a permanent condition. Only
dissatisfaction and insatiable acquisition remain a viable way of “life” (“choice”).
In the postmodern world pixels and bits are the “building blocks” of the virtual.

To make the rhetoric more compelling, the image industry starts with a real
car, person, sunset, landscape, whatever and then digitally manipulates the basic
metaphysical substratum in order to construct an ideal image that actually exists
nowhere. Increasingly, mass manipulators don’t even have to begin with the
image of an actual person. Nevertheless, the actual audience is expected to
compare itself to this virtual phenomenon. This is like measuring one’s degree
of deviance via standard deviations from some statistically generated average
person which has the status of the “normal” conferred upon it although it has no
actual existence except as a virtual object. No ideal status is more compelling
than the “norm.” Thus, I am shorter than the average or poorer than the average
or smarter than the average mathematical generated “human.” In the system of
fashions, I am condemned to be uglier, less “cool” and unhip than the perpetually
new. And I feel compelled to converge toward the mean, that all powerful and
last value left on Earth. The norm comes to me, ironically as an extreme perfection, normalized by virtue (literally) of its mass exposure. All the actual is found to be deficient and past in comparison with the perfect future which always recedes just beyond one’s grasp. This has become a global condition called “development.”

In modeling, human or otherwise, the name of the game is comparison, often competitive in nature. Girls spend hours dwelling on images of the women they think they should be and want to be, women that don’t even exist. But the difference between the virtual and the actual has become deconstructed just as the social and personal role of a model has been reversed from being a secondary copy (a plastic model of an actual ship or a mathematical description of an actual state), to being the thing to be strived for and emulated. The traditionally unequal status between original and duplicate has become reversed and increasingly erased. According to the pluralism of so-called “deconstruction,” the politically correct version of reality is that all phenomena are metaphysically “democratized,” made ontologically equal — interchangeable. This is the age of the “hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1981). If one is not beginning with an actual state of affairs, then from “where” does the ideal hyperreal come?

In this article we argue that increasingly a single aesthetic body-image is emerging globally and that it is Caucasoid. This standard ideal is being promoted with intense force via the power of global media, which confers status onto the surgically and computationally enhanced Caucasian phenotype and aesthetic. Also we contend that according to the fundamental logic of figure/ground comparison and identity formation, nonWestern people’s inevitably find themselves to be different, and this difference is often cast in the light of being inferior. Control and access to increasingly global media is essential to this trend. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that not only is the phenotypic standard and style Western and Caucasian, but additionally the images are increasingly manipulated in a seamless fashion at the level of pictorial digitalization in order to further exaggerate characteristics that Western tastes prefer. And as might be expected, the characteristics that Western tastes prefer are, reflections of that particular self, their own look. Due to global media domination, Western tastes are becoming world tastes. But this sets up an untenable situation whereby, the more a non-caucasian internalizes this globalizing aesthetic, the more they attempt to “adapt” and fit the ideal mold, the more they are likely to come to see themselves as hopelessly inadequate, if not ugly. And this can extend beyond body-image to other intimate aspects of the self and one’s traditional culture.

In her book The Beauty Myth, Naomi Wolf (1991) exposed the digital manipulation of practically every cover photo of every major fashion magazine in the United States, Canada, and Europe. She did not include Asian publications in her analysis. But with the advent of transnational advertising agencies, the
“diffusion of innovations” in mass deception and marketing have long before become *modus operandi* throughout Asian markets (nations are passe) generally, including of course the most “advanced” industrial economy Japan. In fact, insofar as mass media exist foremost as channels for advertising and marketing messages, the systematic creation of dissatisfaction and desire and distorted communications has been actively supported by a coordinated effort of private interests and public deregulation (Greider 1997; Habermas 1971). We say “deregulation,” because G7 powers tend to be very keen to enforce laws that protect private property such as copyright and patent law, while tirelessly working to deregulate labor protection, environmental, and other laws that serve to safeguard local, indigenous interests. It is precisely the mindscape of the “local” identity that is most under assault by the “third wave” (introduced by Patrick Geddes in 1885, and discussed below).

**Global Conformity and Psychic Evolution**

Efforts of the West to defuse its sense of reality, knowledge, truth, and beauty throughout the globe are presented as the “white man’s burden,” as a massive effort at salvation. A transnational civilization based on Western style pragmatics and utilitarian reason and economic logic is roaring across the planet. The very concepts of “local” and “group” are being challenged as inadequate and naturally inferior realities by the ideology and theology of “holism.” Another aspect of the legitimization of this process is to suggest that it is inevitable anyway.

The narrow instrumental use of vast arrays of modern media as exclusively commercial apparatuses has become so normalized as to be regarded as the “rational,” “inevitable,” and “natural,” qua only conceivable, mode of comportment. Indeed, modern media infrastructures have been built with the explicit purpose of being one of the initial ways to prime the pump of economic “development.” But we must be wide awake about this seemingly altruistic and benevolent process. What is “developed” is not simply a virtual economy, but actual people.

People, individuals, are being compelled globally to “psychically evolve” to a “higher level of self-understanding,” into a more “competent,” “well-adjusted,” “effective,” “mature,” and sanely “rational” person (Gudykunst & Kim 1997; Y. Kim 1988). The explicit goal is for the world’s unwashed masses to “deculturize” or “unlearn” their backward ways, and to reorganize their personalities so as to move in a consistently “upward-forward progression accompanying an increased level of functional fitness (greater adaptation) and of psychological health” (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 363). The explicit charge of these neo-Hegelian Spencerians is for the developing world to equilibrate with
the emergent dominant world system. In fact this is the explicit meaning of “development.” And it implicitly involves the self-extermination of traditional selves, in an effort to achieve instrumental “functional fit,” as well as “perceptual development over time toward greater clarity, depth, scope, balance, and integration” (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 364).

What does “effective” mean? According to Hawes and Kealy (1981), effectiveness is a “function of professional expertise, adaptation, and intercultural interaction (i.e., interest in and capacity for interacting with host nationals)” (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 254). And “adaptation” means to Gudykunst and Kim (1997) to achieve “functional fit.” Thus, the new “global citizen” is defined by his or her ability and willingness to conform to instrumental and utilitarian criteria of “professional” life.

According to Gudykunst and Kim (1997), “What is ultimately required of strangers [if they want to be happy] in the host society is the operational (or behavioral) capacity that enables them to carry out behaviors externally in accordance with the host cultural patterns” (342). This “operational (or behavioral) capacity which enables” a person to mimic normative “external” behavior patterns is, according to Gudykunst and Kim (1997), a “mindset” that is malleable, passive, flexible. This comes down to being user friendly, easily re-programmable; to being able and willing to “deculturize,” “disintegrate,” and “unlearn” one’s “cognitive, affective, and operational” self (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 335-353). As might be expected, such a mindset is labeled “mature,” “sophisticated,” and “mentally healthy.” In modern dialectical parlance, people are defined as either “assets” or “liabilities.” An asset is a tool which lends itself to manipulation in the interest of “the system.”

The model minority is an ideological valuation that presents an ideal image which immigrants, and all Others, should adapt to. Adaptation is presumed to be in the form of imitation or mimicry and as such it is expected to proceed in a linear fashion. But adaptation, as it is presented by several writers, is more than merely an act of copying certain behavior patterns. Rather, we are told that genuine “adaptation,” as it has been described by Jourard (1974) and Gudykunst and Kim (1997: 362), involves the very “disintegration” of the original cultural self to allow for a “reintegration” of a new self in accord with the cultural requirements of the “host” environment. Thus, adaptation goes to the core of a psychological restructuring. This amounts to nothing less than the total hegemonic control of identity. We are reminded of the benevolent schemes religious fundamentalists offer to homosexuals to aid them in becoming “deprogrammed” and then “reprogrammed” as “healthy,” “happy,” and “saved” heterosexuals. Saved that is from God’s (or the system’s) wrath.

According to Gudykunst and Kim (1997), the old principle of “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” does not go far enough. Conforming not just behaviorally but psycho-culturally is defined as “mental health” (Berry & U.
Kim 1987; Dyal & Dyal 1981; Gudykunst & Kim 1997; Hurh & K. Kim 1988), “happiness” (Y. Kim 1988, 1995), and “satisfaction” (Y. Kim & Ruben 1988). Misery may not be the result of a refusal to “adapt” or assimilate. Rather, it may be caused by that to which one initially refuses to adapt, and resistance may be more satisfying and certainly more protean.

Thus, the “competent” communicator, and “mentally healthy” individual is recognizable as such by their willingness to accept dominating values, and to physically conform such that clothing styles and even reconstruction of the face is not only appropriate but an admirable quality of character.

The Wagnerian crescendo to this version of evolutionary development is characterized by Gudykunst and Kim as rising “above the hidden forces of culture...[to] acquire a greater capacity to overcome cultural parochialism and develop a wider circle of identification [their emphasis] approaching the limit of many cultures and ultimately of humanity itself” (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 366). The explicit goal is assimilation into a single world psychic and behavioral type, which these social Darwinists confuse with integration, a mode of being that preserves differences and disequilibrating moments and therefore meaning.

Why should the world be encouraged to “disintegrate” and “reintegrate” as a single whole? For nothing less than salvation which appears in various guises of “Enlightenment.” In the modern West, the motive force for social engineering are “positive interests,” first laid out by August Comte in his *Catechism of Positive Religion* in 1858. However, the vaunted interests of social order, certainty and stability, which are equated with “happiness” and “satisfaction” are hardly new mythological longings. Comte merely gives a rationalistic veneer to them as the raison d'être of his new secular religion. One must be leery of the salvific rhetoric of such benevolent assimilation, for one finds the same promises and demands made by practically all “floating gurus” from Jim Jones of The People’s Temple and David Koresh of the Branch Davidians to Marshall Applewhite of Heaven’s Gate and Shoko Asahara of Aum Shinrikyo (Lifton 1999: 12). It is not mere coincidence that the idealistic call to progressive evolution, be it Hegelian or some other form of “enlightenment,” first demands the destruction of the dark and “defiled” world or “self-system” so that the new “sense of certainty,” the new truth can be born. In his study of apocalyptic renewal, *Destroying the World to Save it* (1999), Robert Jay Lifton has identified three steps to salvation promised by apocalyptic gurus: 1) a period of distress or being “psychologically unmoored” from “older value systems and traditions” followed by 2) the “disintegration” of the self which then leads to 3) the goal of transformation into a new psychic structure that abides with the guru’s will and plan (Lifton 1999: 12, 13). This attempt to escape the “defilements” of life and rush into pure formalism and ascetic self-denial, Nietzsche calls the attitude of *contemptus mundi*, the hatred of this world and embodied awareness. This is why Nietzsche argues that the labeling of this “gloomy attitude” “positivism”
ironically indicates just how far the hegemonic disease of the will has advanced. In its most radical forms, “salvation,” “progress,” first demands destruction of all the past including the old self. This is why, devotees and gurus alike very often go so far as to take on a new name and time. For instance, Chizuo Matsumoto became Asahara, Ulyanov became Lenin, Applewhite became “Do,” and so forth, and calendars must begin at year 1 with each “new age.”

In all cases of salvific discourse, the world, including the self, must be despised, renounced, and finally annihilated. “Self-development” and world improvement can commence only after a person has suffered “acute frustration.” Then a form of “altruistic murder,” including self-annihilation or disintegration can lead to the “fundamentalist self,” which escapes the struggles of life by embracing “totalistic belief systems” (Lifton 1999: 4-12). Many in the modern West, such as Arthur Koestler, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and George Orwell have born witness against the benevolent sounding solutions of “reeducation” and the gulags which massive Left and Right Hegelianisms made “pragmatic,” “necessary,” even redemptive. Conformity to power came in the modern world to be called “re-habilitation,” (to change the patterns one inhabits) and “corrections,” euphemisms for the initial stages of official coercion. But none are so poignant or prophetic as George Simmel, whose magnum opus (with Helmut Loiskandl) Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and The Stranger, herald the gathering storm in early Twentieth Century Europe, and how the Jews would face their greatest challenge to preserve their collective identity while also trying to be acceptable to the “mainstream.” There is a fundamental contradiction in the “question concerning the Jews,” which W. E. B. Dubois in The Souls of Black Folk (1903/1989) recognized in another context with another group. The aporia is that if the group one is trying to join hates an aspect of your being which is immutable, like skin color, then the more you come to see through the dominant group’s eyes, their values and interests, the more you must come to hate yourself. Under such conditions, minorities can never “adapt,” or “blend in.” For if the dominant group rejects you, then in so far as you assimilate, you must be self-rejecting which negates your primary motive for adapting, to feel secure. And why should anyone assimilate if that means to embrace self-hate and self-denial? And of course, nearly all groups, not just Japanese, see outsiders’ who are trying too hard to “be native” as truly strange, as henna gaijin.

According to the morality set out in Spencer’s Social Statics: The Conditions Essential for Human Happiness and the First of Them Developed (1883), only pragmatic utility, meaning predictable stability, is “good.” And as Gudykunst and Kim (1997) state by evoking K. Lewin (1951), “we believe that ‘there is nothing so practical as a good theory’” (p. xii). Clearly, to them, practicality is the most important criteria for the value of a theory, and perhaps everything else. But what is “practical,” “appropriate,” “competent,” and “enabling” is a matter of perspective, of co-constitutional genetics (Kramer 1993c). What is
“practical” is determined only when it has been tried, and it presupposes a goal so that progress toward “it” can be measured. Here we have more than the ghost of Hegelian/Wagnerian histrionics.

Gudykunst and Kim (1997) fail to take into account the difference between social engineering and social science, \textit{teche} and \textit{theoria}, and the importance of \textit{phronesis} (Habermas 1971). Among academics \textit{teche} is often naively perceived as a process of acting upon, of engineering a dead substrate, without being changed oneself. Consequently, instrumentality lacks self-reflexive prudence and interactive growth. According to hermeneutics, social science does not merely dictate what is the case and offer alternatives, but as part of society, its role and tenor also change. The social thinker is not immune to her own embodied situatedness.

As we see the virtual utopian dream of “holism” being promoted, it is almost always a clearly ethnocentric provocation. And what is utopia? It is that to which “everyone else” should aspire, which is to say to become like the authors of the dream, to identify with them and to come to inherit the authors’ privileged imaginings. Everyone else should assume the roles dictated to them by the imaginations of those arrogant enough to propose the delimitations of utopia. Even the authors’ version of “happiness” as behavioral and psychological conformity is presumed to be universally valid. The very authority presumed by academic proclamation takes the position of dominant ideology. Utopia is an expression of the particular imagination that dreams it up. When the ideology of adaptation reflects on those promoting it, then we see strong, sometimes even violent intransigence, the “go to hell” attitude. In other words, the promoters of adaptation rarely see it applying to themselves and even less so to those conscientious objectors who went before them and who blazed trails of social and civic justice, trails the champions of meek adaptation take for granted. Self-privileging Hegelians, who have somehow escaped their own prison-house episteme to be able to interpret it to the rest of us, seem oblivious to the fact that: (1) they are being extremely ethnocentric (actually articulating an ego-centric fallacy) in arguing that the world needs to, or even inevitably will become just like themselves (“enlightened”); and (2) that their status is itself the result of resistance to unjust systems.

By contrast, we suggest that the most sophisticated (“competent”) of social skills may be expressed in the process of testing novel ideas and behaviors, finding them to be successful and thus generating new standards of “appropriateness” and “competence.” Understanding that “critical thinking” is largely a redundant phrase, under the conditions promoted by Gudykunst and Kim, critique, and therefore thinking is impossible, or certainly a cause for suffering. One of the roles of criticism is to translate “fiction” including “naturalizing” metonymic discourses, into a language that reveals hidden agendas. This is the very purpose of social science; namely to test the common sense, the
commonly accepted “natural order of things,” such as the claim that women are naturally inferior to men, that foreign born persons should not be allowed to teach, that disease has supernatural causes, that rulers rule by divine right, et cetera. This is what Husserl (1970) meant by testing the “thesis of the natural attitude,” a duty of both science, and we must add, art.

According to new age “Zen” positivists, what is necessary is a new spiritual order (geist, esprit, mindset) that will counteract unpredictable, and therefore troublesome, disequilibria of the system. Gudykunst and Kim (1997: 366) wrongly equate integration with holism. To them, the “ideal end state” is the “intercultural person” who “transcends any type of group identity including national, racial, ethnic, gender, professional, or other sociological typifications of people” (Gudykunst & Kim 1984: 229). This is the Alexandrian dream of global conquest and total control. Their idealistic, Hegelian enthusing continues as they write that the process of becoming “intercultural” (which equates pragmatic utility with the universal good) is, “like climbing a high mountain. As we reach the mountaintop, we see that all paths below ultimately lead to the same summit...” (Gudykunst and Kim 1997: 366). Here we reach the end of evolution, the articulation of the ultimate goal of abandoning this world of differences and meaning, and evolving to a state of comfortable, uniform numbness, the dream of total disembodiment and the accomplishment of utter redundancy. The goal is to melt into the system, to reach equilibrium with it; a zero energy state.

Before such bombast was written, Friedrich Nietzsche had already surveyed this ideal terrain and pronounced it a sort of navel gazing practice of repetitive chanting that soothes the bite of being alive, bringing the struggle of climbing to an end. To him it amounts to “bad conscience,” to an, “Instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all enmity, all feeling for limitation and distancing; [a] consequence of an extreme capacity for suffering and irritation which already feels all resisting, all need for resistance, as an unbearable displeasure [...] and know blessedness (pleasure) only in no longer resisting anyone or anything, neither the evil nor the evil-doer” (Nietzsche 1968: Section 30). According to the ideal of cultural/behavioral adaptation and psychic evolution, resistance to a system could never be good or satisfying. This is what Nietzsche calls the sickness of the will which results from miserable mortals lamenting their “unstable equilibrium between ‘animal and angle’” (Nietzsche 1967: Third Essay, Section 2). The cure offered by conformists is the unnatural inclination toward the ascetic ideal to escape the “shame of man,” the shame of subjective perspective, by means of the merit of impotent obedience and priestly penance.

This is why, given these parameters, the true model minority and ultimate ideal for assimilationists is the robot. For even human chattel may offer some unpredicted and disequilibrating resistance to the master narrative. Like speechless and expressionless robots, models on fashion “catwalks” express no
mind of their own. Dress them as you please. The world’s developing masses also need to be redressed; the “darkness” rebuked, so that they may be guided toward a new attitude that is receptive to the designer’s whims. Here we encounter the “positive” eradication of all subjective residue in favor of “pure” simplicity and the value of minimalism expressed as the worship of always less, not more, of parsimony, a stingy, relentlessly reduced semantic, the distilling of the geist or spirit of a Foucaltian episteme. This is what Jacques Ellul (1967, 1973) called the “cult[ure] of efficiency” applied to the technetronic formation of mass “attitude” (see also Brzezinski 1970).

Thus we can treat our cultures and our cultured bodies as though their parts can be infinitely manipulated. Deviance, by definition, disrupts the equipollence of neo-Hegelian, ideal system. Human beings often give “negative feedback” which, to a monitor, is an “error message” that indicates a need for “correction.” I look at the image and my actual body ridiculously pales in comparison. The presumed threat to status quo is an irrational “chaos” of unexpected meanings, which positivistic negativism, what Nietzsche calls the authoritarian mind of “No,” was born to save us from (see Auguste Comte’s Catechism of Positive Religion 1858, and Jeremy Bentham’s Official Attitude Maximized 1993).

In short, the ability to mimic behavior that privileges itself with the august mantel of “normative,” does not assure happiness, and can even make a person quite depressed because they feel inadequate and continually compelled to conform, what Leon Festinger (1957) calls the “cognitive consequences of forced compliance” (also see Kondo 1990), a process that can be explained by Elizabeth Noelle-Neuman’s (1984) “spiral of silence.”

Telecolonialism and the White Man’s Burden

Thus, the spiral of “evolutionary adaptation” leads to a uniform stillness, what Nietzsche dismissed as a mysticism that promotes hypnotic redundancy found in the droll of repetition until meaning utterly evaporates.

The first victory of hyper-colonialism was that of religion, which claimed a monopoly on truth, the good, and contemplation (when the vita contemplativa belonged only to a vita religiosa). The prototypical hyper-colonial thrust came when theism gained its prefix, “mono.” The universe becomes infinitely narrow. There is no escape. Either you are with me or against me. Whenever or wherever this occurs, thinking, interpreting, becomes a deadly sin. Morality shifts from the noble, to an exclusive desire for tranquility. The “virtuous intellects” promote stupidity and act as “stolid metronomes for the slow spirit, to make sure that the faithful of the great shared faith stay together and continue their dance” (Nietzsche 1974: Book 2, Section 76). A better definition of “syncing” has yet to be written. The market is the new god.
After religious salvation, the initial legitimation for “development” in the image of Western criteria, was offered by Walt Rostow’s theory of the “take-off stage” of economic activity, a theory widely ascribed to by Western corporations, governments and academics like Everett Rogers and Daniel Lerner. As is widely recognized, this process constitutes the mass manipulation (“heightened expectations”) of psychological, economic, and political desires. But it also has very much to do with the most intimate aspects of self including body-image, courtship, moral beliefs, and gender adequacy, only to mention a complete ignorance of environmental limitations (including the actual faces of the people) to Western style “progress.”

Beginning as a fundamental aspect of the Cold War during the 1950’s, a war as much psycho-economic as ballistic, and continuing with ever greater vigor, has been the promotion and establishment of telecommunications infrastructures. Why? For their instrumental use in the globalizing effort to promote the spread of Western style consumer culture and the ubiquitous “world market.” Rising teledensity and increased connectivity are essential to the continued expansion of G7 transnational reach. Transnationals require global connectivity in order to operate. This was the explicit goal of positive social engineering wrapped, as it so often is, in the innocent sounding rhetoric of “development communication.” Academics interested in securing public grants in support of private interests continue to rush to the feeding trough, eager to “consult” and facilitate this diffusional process. As already demonstrated, others have actively rekindled Neo-Hegelian, social Darwinian justifications for the so-called rational and inevitable global homogenization in the interests of efficiency and the “greater good.”

But there have always been those such as Lewis Mumford, Jules Henry, Armand Mattelart, Herbert Schiller, Jeremy Rifkin, Paul Feyerbend, Neil Postman, and others more interested in analysis and critique than social engineering that claims for itself the causal force of a sledgehammer (and its self-contradictory claim of being “value free” yet goal oriented). After having established the virtue of becoming infinitely malleable, “adaptable,” the question that then begs attention is, “What are the majority of the world’s inhabitants supposed to develop into?”

Societies too have ecologies that are not predetermined, but instead take shape and change as individuals working together making community happen. And community generates a fundamental set of assumptions, which Husserl (1970) called the “natural attitude.” These assumptions include the nature of beauty, justice, self, power, courage, honor, purpose, expectations, and so forth. As Paul Virilio put it, “Reality is never a given, it is acquired, generated by the development of societies” (Virilio 1987: 19). But from the global perspective, all societies can now be arrayed along a single continuum of development with the “most developed” presumably being “closest” to the implied ideal. According
to this logic, a logic already taken to its limits by Hegel, once a society or person has finally evolved to identity with the ideal, then history, biography, will presumably stop (Fukuyama 1992). Fixed for all eternity, perfection cannot be surmounted. And thus it seems that the world should evolve into an image of the “last superpower.” It is only natural, logical, that the great unwashed masses should be happy to evolve finally into “positive” Americans, the non plus ultra of human development (Gebser 1949/1985).

What is emerging is a global society, made predominately in the image of America, and not by random accident but in accord with specific commercial interests. Even other Western groups such as the French, are feeling the psychocultural squeeze. As Noam Chomsky (1988) has suggested, late-modern power interests are working hard to make the world safe not so much for democracy as for Wall Street. As Henry (1963) has noted, truth in this new world order, is what sells. And marketing, including the continual statistical monitoring of the great “surfing” (an appropriate metaphor from Southern California) beast as it switches television and internet channels by the millions, makes what sells “move.” As the Cartesian dualism fades, there comes a threshold of disappearance, of “surfusion” for Jean Baudrillard (1981), where, to quote Julia Kristeva, “the sublime object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory” (Kristeva 1982:12). The disembodied traditional, local culture, comes to float without referent such that everything comes to mimic nonoriginary “orginals” and the idealized Other. All images become equally mythological, equally visible, equally “hypereal” (Baudrillard 1981; Gebser 1949/1985). For this reason, Eric Kramer (1988, 1993b, 1994) has argued that the late-modern world is essentially visiocentric, not phonocentric (ala Jacques Derrida). It is world of surface images, a world of screens and telecolonial powers. And those images, be they the clean lines of a Microsoft Window’s desktop, or the aquiline nose modeled by a virtual supermodel, increasingly they are controlled by a handful of global producers and disseminators (Bagdikian 1990; Mattelart, 1991/1994; Schiller 1993).

Marshall McLuhan is incorrect. The world is not reverting to a preliterate audial world characterized by a global tribe, but rather it is becoming a postliterate world of pure surface with the depth of a screen and tensed with temporal urgency. Fashions don’t last long, and yet they always are controlled by the centers even if they originate at the periphery. A perfect example is modern musical styles.

Thus we have the endless images of eternal youth paraded across our collective retina, by profiteers promising the “death of death.” And under such conditions “life” becomes a forgery, an endless regression of hypertextual clones of clones... Life itself becomes an infinitely malleable code, rather than a creative impulse. Here we see the fruition of a will to redundancy, a dream of total control and therefore the end of uncertainty. The world becomes limited by our imaginations, which we falsely and arrogantly believe to be limitless. Even obsolescence is planned, and even people can become obsolete.
In the late-modern world with its singular obsession with frictionless information transmission and processing (pure efficiencies), the thrill of discovery comes to be seen as pure anxiety. Uncertainty becomes the contemporary Lucifer. And the late-modern grand virtue, “adaptation,” or conformity to virtual promises is being heralded by many interests, including latter day academic Spencerians. “Competent communication,” the solution to all problems, means to assimilate into a condition of total identity (equilibrium) with all others so that intentions correspond perfectly with understandings, and “understanding” equals “satisfaction” (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 255). In classic positivistic fashion, to be “happy” means to “understand,” and understanding is best expressed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver’s (1949) informatic model of robotic exchange of data without the possibility of interpretation. Perfect communication means the need for no meta-communication, no conversations about primary productions like art and commerce. If intercultural adaptation works, there will be only one world culture left. The solution to intercultural communication “problems” is to eliminate all difference. As Nietzsche pointed out in 1887, those who flee from the “defilements,” diversities, and adversities of life and action, instead place:

[...]”adaptation” in the foreground, that is to say, an activity of the secondrank, a mere reactivity; indeed, life itself has been defined as a more and more efficient inner adaptation to external conditions (Herbert Spencer). Thus the essence of life, its will to power, is ignored; one overlooks the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions, although “adaptation” follows only after this; the dominant role of the highest functionaries within the organism itself in which the will to life appears active and form-giving is denied. One should recall what Huxley reproached Spencer with - his “administrative nihilism”: but it is a question of rather more than mere “administration” (Nietzsche 1967: Second Essay, Section 12).

Increasingly, developing economies are being subtly and not so subtly “encouraged” to “harmonize,” as William Greider (1997) derisively puts it, to adapt and assimilate into the global “host” system. This means to willingly surrender to the dominant regulatory and deregulatory (privatizing) zeitgeist promoted by the world market and its representatives such as the World Bank, The United States Federal Communications Commission, the International Telecommunications Union, and the International Monetary Fund.
Shrinking Noosphere, Narrowing Mind

According to McLuhan, the world is becoming a "global village." But we do not agree. Instead we concur with Mumford that, "What McLuhan understands has long been familiar to students of technics: it is his singular gift for misunderstanding both technology and man that marks his truly original contributions" (Mumford 1966: 456). Indeed, as we have studied McLuhan, the so-called "prophet of the media," we find that he offers little other than a liberal "borrowing" of ideas from others, and with little proper attribution, and a few poorly conceived ideas like the distinction between "hot" and "cool" media which supposedly designate the degree to which a person "participates" with a medium.

Instead of uncritically accepting the global village notion, we see the world becoming a global city. This has many consequences including a process of cultural homogenization and unprecedented concentrations of power. Many like Schiller and Mattelart, refer to the "imperialism" of the Western metropolis with its ever-spreading cultural content like MTV, Kentucky Fried Chicken, phenotypic aesthetics, morality, Shakespeare, Aristotle, and even universal social scientific Truth. But as will be shown, neither the cultural studies approach, which tends to concentrate on content, nor the McLuhanesque formal/structural approach does justice to the comprehensive impact of media ecology. The global homogenization of media ecology might be put thus: instead of telling a person what to think about, the West is teaching people how to think. The point is to shift from the dualistic emphasis on content/form, subject/object, to grasp the overall synergy of the machine apparatus (Mumford 1966).

This is more fundamental than agenda setting. While the world is in a sense "shrinking" from the point-of-view of transnational corporate interest, for many individuals, travel and communications have greatly expanded their horizons. Unlike the village minded inhabitant, late-moderns live in an expanding world that is also becoming more fragmented and abstract, even minimalistic. In this sense, minimalism means that people risk minimal emotional commitment to each other, preferring instead to keep relationships "functional," meaning essentially econo-mechanistic in nature. In fact, minimalism has come to be seen as "standardized," "efficient," "convenient," and "unifying." In a word, "good." The concurrent distortion of hypertrophic individualism and anonymity with massification is self-evident (Gebser 1949/1985). The transfer of technology and organizational models, and the values they presuppose such as what counts as "good," "efficient," "beautiful," and expertly authoritative, can be very detrimental to the survival of endangered cultures and forms of selves.

In this article we focus on the transfer of something more intimate to the imagination and identity than economic policy or telecommunications standards; the very aesthetic sensibility of the human body-self. In the case of Japan, this is a process begun in early Meiji with the likes of Antonio Fontanesi, the Barbizon
style landscape artist who came to Japan to teach young artists how to see personal perspective. But before we deal with what has been transferred in terms of values, expectations, and desires, we need to articulate the more fundamental conditions for such massive civilizational transformations (Polyanyi 1958).

Discontinuous Mutations of the Machine

Not only did Mumford and Gebser understand that the world is becoming a single metropolitan machine, but it has been clearly drawn out by the great expert on technological development, Patrick Geddes (1885, 1915). In 1934, we find Mumford, following Geddes' lead, arguing that, "we begin in our own day to observe the swelling energies of a third wave: behind this wave, both in technics and in civilization, are forces which tend toward a new synthesis in thought and a fresh synergy in action" (Mumford 1934: 5). Thus we see that like McLuhan, Alvin Toufier too owes practically all of "his insights" to Geddes and Mumford. As is explicated below, the "third wave," refers to the technological complex, Geddes called "neotechnic" civilization, which is based on electrical energy and material alloys. But first we must clarify what is meant by "machine" and "technological complex."

A machine is a complex of non-organic agents for converting energy, performing work, enhancing the mechanical or sensory capacities of the human body, and for reducing to a measurable order and regularity the processes of life (Mumford 1934: 9-10). The essential difference between a tool and a machine is the degree of independence in the operation from the skill and motive power of the operator. "The tool lends itself to manipulation, the machine to automatic action" (Mumford 1934: 10). Both multiply power. Thus, while many refer to artificial intelligence, Mumford would argue that even computers, which offer the power of automation, are among the dumbest of all beasts of burden. Doing without thinking is the definition of automation. The automaton is a mindless operation. And while many celebrate the invention of cyberspace, in many ways cyberspace is an extension of the Western form of individualistic visiocentrism that is a hallmark of what we choose to call cosmotopia; world city as progress (Kramer 1988, 1993b, 1997).

Cyberspace is the latest advance of the panoptican. It traces every move you make, every view and purchase, noting your preferences and behaviors, compiling a dataset which in turn is sold to other political economic interests. The great step beyond one-way consumption of virtual reality such as traditional television and magazines, is to the interactive circuit that enables the viewer to be viewed. As we leave electronic trails our dataset, a disembodied and fixed (objectified) virtual value-added self, like a personnel file or police record, can be compiled and distributed anywhere anytime.
“Value-added” means that data, to which everything is reduced, has been organized to serve a specific interest and most often that is the interest of corporate consumers of data-selves (including demographics and psychographics). Value-addition reduces the dataself, compiling and generating a self that is constituted only of information deemed “valuable” or “interesting” to the client. Every other dimension of the self is rendered irrelevant and erased. It is in these areas of self that the system is blind to, that the actual yet exists. This is why the use of the term “monitor” for computer screens is appropriate and reversible.

According to Mumford (1970) a machine differs from “the machine,” in that the machine is the entire technological complex that characterizes a civilization. And according to Geddes (1885) a technological complex, such as the eotechnic phase in human history, includes technical mechanisms, social values, cultural attitudes, economic order, and organizational styles that reinforce each other in a complete system of structuration. Each phase; the eotechnic, paleotechnic, and neotechnic, forms a different technological complex that has its origins in certain definite regions and tends to employ certain special resources and raw materials; of generating and utilizing energy and specific forms of production. The eotechnic phase is the water-and-wood complex. The paleotechnic phase is a coal-and-iron complex. And the neotechnic phase is an electricity-and-alloy complex. Each complex has its own form of social organization including its own types of value, labor, economics, entertainment, power structure, styles of interpersonal interaction, aesthetics, and so forth.

The “third wave” that is currently rushing across the globe is the neotechnic complex or machine, which is being promoted by those who are benefiting most from it, to co-opt the world’s populations into its singular system of values, motives, and outcomes. It is a conscious and planned effort, more or less coordinated by Western governments, especially the United States, and their private sector interests. Contrary to its advocates, the cyber-revolution is not some Hegelian predetermined and autonomous force of history sui generis. But this claim has been put forth by many who are promoting the expansion of the neotechnic complex by claiming that this shift to what Teilhard de Chardin (1955) calls the “noosphere,” which is a global electrical matrix of disembodied decision making and information circulation, is “inevitable,” and even “logical” and “natural.” As non-Western populations are subsumed by the advance of the neotechnic complex, they are disappearing. Many, having been psychologically convinced via mass media, are rushing into the vortex, having already been persuaded that the salvation of modernity awaits them in some virtual future. Others are plagued by a great ambivalence, a sense widely expressed in Japan by Meiji era artists and intellectuals (see Najita 1974).
Cosmopolis and Cosmotopia

The world is indeed shifting, culturally minimizing, imploding in terms of shared values and motives. A homogenized future is being cultivated. The world is “shrinking” while also expanding as a market. It is taking on a whole new attitude called globalism, which is a change in ideology, values, conceptions and perceptions about the world, the self, one’s place, and the future. Rather than the hamlet or village as a metaphor, what is emerging is the global cosmopolis. The cosmopolis is the logical conclusion of modernism. It embodies the almost irresistible allure of the city for most modernized yet mythological persons on the planet today. We find the first truly modern writer, Aristotle, making the claim that civilization itself resides in the city and is manifested actively as trade. It is no random accident that Alexander the Great was his student and also the first grand empire builder in the West.

Today, vast migrations of our species are moving from an agrarian lifestyle that has sustained the human race for millennia to an industrially inspired urban way of being. Time/mobility, both physical and psycho-social are of the essence. Much of this is inspired by virtual images propagated by ever-expanding communications networks. The process leads from urban center to empire, to regional convergence of interests as in inter-imperial allegiances like the European Union, to the final global government (see Peyser 1998; Toulmin 1992; Zolo & Zolo 1997).

Governance in this instance, is totally dissociated and transcendent in the form of the mechanistic “laws of the market.” These “natural,” and therefore unbreakable, laws run like a precision instrument, like autonomously indifferent clockwork, synchronizing the motives and movements of the world’s teeming multitudes. It is arguable which was the world’s first mass medium that transcended linguistic boundaries, the mechanical clock or the conventions of double-entry accounting since they emerged almost simultaneously out of the same Renaissance mentality, which is to say Neo-Aristotelian attitude.

The Columbia professor Zbigniew Brzezinski (also National Security Advisor under President Jimmy Carter) drew on Geddes’ insights and Mumford’s further development of them, specifically concerning the nature of interpersonal “participation” and technological environments. In the book *Between Two Ages: America’s Role in the Technetronic Era* (1970), Brzezinski notes that the new reality resulting from global telecommunications would not be that of a “global village” because “McLuhan’s striking analogy overlooks the personal stability, interpersonal intimacy, implicitly shared values and traditions that were important ingredients of the primitive village” (13). And we add polychronic time (Hall 1959). We must remember that monochronic (mechanical clock time) ordination is an essential characteristic of telecommunications and also that the mechanical clock was invented in a mona-stery inhabited by an “order” of monks who spoke
only under strictly prescribe conditions.

In short McLuhan, that “grandfather of cultural studies,” did not understand culture at all. He should have studied Ferdinand Toennies (1979) distinction between instrumental Gesellschaft culture and organic Gemeinschaft culture. In fact, already in 1958, with the publication of The Passing of Traditional Society by Lerner, the darker side of globalization, or more correctly, the globalizing Gesellschaft culture, and what George Gerbner (1967) would later call “cultural mainstreaming” or mass homogenization, had been documented. It was Mumford, followed by Harold Innis (1950), who clearly articulated the relationship between communications and the command and control of imperial system. This insight is Brzezinski’s starting point as he discusses the United States and its strategic interests.

We take the time to analyze the phrase “global village” in this way because there are many who have uncritically adopted the phrase “the global village” and repeatedly use it as a battle cry for unchecked globalism presupposing that this means telecommunications “progress” and “development.” Nearly every great scholar whom McLuhan borrowed from agreed that the turn to inorganic forms of communication have profound psychological (Ong 1982) and political (Innis 1950; Mumford 1934) consequences that are not all positive. And the two most powerful scholars of civilizational change, Gebser and Mumford, sounded a cautionary note about the dangers of the current mutation, a warning that late in his career even McLuhan repeated (although typical of his confused thinking he feared diversity as “Balkanization”). Gebser (1949/1985), reflecting on the industrial might that enabled Twentieth Century fascism to nearly conquer the world, noted the danger of fusing modern technological forces to predominantly mythologically minded people like Nazi’s. Likewise, Albert Einstein was concerned that having perspectival technology at their disposal, the mythologically minded could use nuclear force to settle political/theological (often identical) disputes. Similarly, and in the wake of the first “Great War,” as it was called before we began numbering them, Mumford wrote that: “To the extent that neotechnic industry has failed to transform the coal-and-iron complex, to the extent that it has failed to secure an adequate foundation for its humaner technology in the community as a whole, to the extent that it has lent its heightened powers to the miner, the financier, the militarist, the possibilities of disruption and chaos have increased” (Mumford 1934: 213).

Indeed, many like Toeffler have noted that the current “third” wave of techno-social change is having tremendous effects on everything from concepts of time to family structures and labor markets.

Instead of the planet “retribalizing” with a shift in sensory emphasis from vision (books) back to hearing (radio), as McLuhan claimed, what we are witness to is the greatest mass extinction of organic cultures ever on the planet and the formation of a world characterized by fragmented individuals staring at screens.
It has spawned what Kramer (1997) has called the “screen world,” dominated by a visiocentric epistemology, commonly referred to as faith in the empirically “given” what Othello called “ocular proof.” This is problematic, however, since digital imagery transforms this faith into a peculiarly potent susceptibility to being misled (Kramer 1993a). Furthermore, the virtual is taking precedence over the actual. Now it is important to understand that from the point-of-view of instrumental culture that values behavioral conformity and “functional fit,” this is good news. Conforming to Western images means “modernization.” The faster traditional Gemeinschaft type cultures disappear, the faster the world is “developing,” which means “modernizing” “Westernizing,” thus getting into, and coming “on line.” The extinction of traditional forms of life, the minimizing of cultural differences, is not only a measure of modernization but also a measure of the penetration of Western values, including individualism in its many guises such as privatization of the means of production, and also body aesthetics. Today we have the cosmopolitan look and the cosmopolitan mentality, which amounts to a virtual disembodied mind that Peter Berger, et al., has called “homeless” (Berger, Berger & Kellner 1973).

In Hegelian terms, “the future” sui generis is sweeping the globe with developmental, even evolutionary changes, which are futile and even irrational to resist. Thus, any attempts to preserve traditional ways are seen as either quaintly misguided but understandable, or as dangerously resistant terroristic efforts that defy rational understanding and order. The former can be met with bribery and reformation rhetoric, the latter with counter-revolutionary terrorism (Chomsky 1988).

Double-Consciousness and Self Hate

The self is a sort of node within a dynamic field of information. It is a moment and place where meaning coalesces and concentrates, or as Martin Heidegger (1962) put it, where Being shows itself through conscious awareness. The structure or pattern of that crystallized distillation of meaning varies from civilization to civilization, culture to culture, individual to individual. There is a continuum of variance such that two individuals in the same culture have more in common than two individuals from the same civilization but different cultures. The greatest variance is between people from different core civilizations. This we shall call cultural distance. Cultural distance and variance has in the past been maintained by geographic and linguistic isolation.

Today, however, a global culture is emerging which is largely the result of the erasure of isolation by the dynamic drive of Western industrial and post-industrial civilization. But increasingly, there is no source of the colonial “thrust.” It has become hegemonically ubiquitous with the very media of communications.
G7 citizens are continually bombarded and cultivated by fleeting images of the future that is “here today” yet never quite fulfilled. Even leaders berate their people to have a “reach that exceeds their grasp.” Satisfaction has become a sin. Global colonialism involves the very identities of far flung populations including the formations of their imaginations, dreams, hopes, expectations, beliefs, and values. “Local” identity is being threatened in the U.S. as much as anywhere. It is being attacked as “backward,” “feudal,” “obsolete,” “an obstacle to progress,” and ultimately as “impoveryshced” and “irrational.” But the actual resides in the local while the virtual resides nowhere...and everywhere. The alternative, which presents itself as the glorious future, the “evolution of consciousness,” “the new man,” is the urban cosmopolitan that is essentially the same the world over.

This is problematic in so far as the genesis of meaning comes from diversity, difference. So as difference is extinguished in favor of global sameness, everyone’s world is shrinking not just in terms of space and time but more importantly in terms of meaning. The semantic spectrum of life is being shrunk. Now, so long as developing countries still retain a sense of their local ways, which are increasingly being dissociated as tradition in a museum case or entertainment for tourists, this process of being exposed to modern Western values and ways of living actually introduces alternatives and diversity. But “tradition” can come to be viewed in such a way that one is a tourist within one’s “own land” (Ikeda & Kramer 1998). And often the comparisons offered by the influx of Western styles, values, motives, and ambitions, leave those in both the developing and developed world with a sense that their own traditions, even their very faces, are hopelessly inadequate. When has a person ever gone to a reconstructive “plastic” surgeon and asked to be made to look more African or more Asian? Their forefathers and foremothers are caste in a light of being pathetically backward, and in some theological interpretations, even damned to hell.

In so far as traditional nonwestern societies are infected with what has been called “Westernaholism,” the developing world suffers from what, in the “developed world,” W. E. B. Dubois (1903/1989) calls “double consciousness.” By adopting western values and seeing themselves through western eyes people of tradition often come to hate themselves and to feel a fundamental inadequacy. It may be the case that Japanese artists like Shime Fubatei, Ogai Mori, Kafu Nagai, Soseki Natsume, Junichiro Tanizaki, Yasunari Kawabata, Yukio Mishima, all embodied this sort of schizophrenic condition. The invention of deito, which was actually an attempt to preserve Japanese values and aesthetics, ended up reducing “culture” to something antiquated, stripping everyday life of its living coherence with things past yet present and vital (Ikeda & Kramer 1998). Thus, in the face of Western senses of history and progress, a sort of ersatz nostalgia emerged casting the cultural past into hopeless obsolescence while longing for things foreign such as James Dean, Charles Baudelaire, and blue jeans (Smith 1997).
Ever Onward

The dichotomy between tradition and modernism for many has already become irrelevant and meaningless. The hyper-colonialism of the late-modern era is not just a Japanese problem, although it broke upon the mental horizon of the Japanese earlier than most and was met with a profoundly gifted resistance in the form of many confused but brilliant artists. Many in both "traditional" and so-called "postmodern" societies suffer from inferiority complexes and generation gaps. What is happening is a perennial temporal syndrome in the West and Westernized world (hence the alienated youth James Dean personified). Thus everyone is striving to become a copy of a virtual, ever-shifting future which demands that we all continually shed our identities as quickly as possible. We are rushing to abandon what we have been convinced are primitive superstitions, backward irrational modes of two-dimensional thought, and ignorant darkness, and to believe that what the future forever brings is not equally irrational, superstitious, or gloomy. Fashion has a home in academics too, and the Euro-American origin always seems "ahead."

In fact, all the world is developing. Each day we are told we are all getting a little "better and better," and "happier and happier."

But while the developing world still retains a sense of itself, no matter how distorted, the "new and improved" Western way of living does increase the semantic spectrum for people there. However, and ironically, for people in the West, the faster it conquers the world, the faster they find themselves in an imploding box of dismal sameness (Feyerabend 1987; Gadamer 1975; Heidegger 1962). It is the West that is culturally imploding by means of expanding redundancy. As diversity disappears, the West increasingly finds the world looking like a mirror image of itself. The disappearance of the exotic in favor of "accurate" renditions of "universal" human nature, may be efficient for trade and capital accumulation but it is also a fading of what Joseph Campbell calls the rapture of life (Campbell & Moyers 1988). Following Nietzsche’s warnings about semantic impoverishment, we too warn that reducing uncertainty by means of globalism is leading to a form of cultural blandness which can be characterized as the darkest of ages, the commodity age. The new universal theology is the dogma of transcendental market forces. This is an age with little real uncertainty let alone adventure or danger except economic downturn.

The cosmopolis is growing. A migration of the human herd from the land to the urban centralized environment in the hopes of gaining modern forms of wealth and status is underway. And the new "intercultural person" is being actively promoted. This westernaholism has been resisted in a few places like Vietnam and Iran, but in both of these cases, they have been demonized as psychopathic murderers, fundamentalist lunatics who can’t understand what is good for themselves and what is inevitable anyway. Societies in their
cosmotopian condition, which is to say, in so far as they partake in the global cosmopolitan structures, are what Morris (1969) calls “super-tribal,” a condition that shifts interpersonal comportment from cooperation to competition and which fosters the formation of super-status struggles and huge gaps in the subordinate superordinate hierarchies of daily life.

One can never be too young, too rich, or too beautiful. The treadmill of endless “improvement” and beautification may be best articulated by the world championships of aerobics and bodybuilding. Here we see extremism embraced as an endless search for perfection. In a scene no ancestor could of imagined, narcissism explodes on stage before our eyes as self-starving young men and women move in a frenzy of frenetic robot movements so violent that they threaten to injure themselves. They are doing no actual work. Instead they are trying in a futile way to embody an ideal. They are true believers in a religion that is not shared. The ritual does not encompass all. We no longer dance together but instead view together. Instead, everything is spectacle. Even war. The exercisers on a stage are sponsors for products that promise “results.” We are the dissociated, passive audience that “desires.” They jump, tumble, clap, stretch and strain to the amplified beat of modern pop music, beauties in fear of time, struggling to “give good face.” They present an image that is somewhere between a grimace and a smile while putting themselves through paces, that if commanded by an external authority would be deemed torture. The future is being born from the inside out, ripping away at the actual flesh in an endless effort to achieve final satisfaction. But tomorrow, always tomorrow, I will be even better, if I can just afford the time and money.

What kind of effect do utopian images of pure desire create? We need only look at each other for it is we who reflect the mass media in our style of talk, dress, comportment, aspirations, ambitions, and imaginings. We are the screens onto which these images are projected. Public myth is individual dream. Like a shattered hologram each of us is a splinter of Western virtue. The “West” exists not as a geographical place but as a dream. And like the conundrum of permanent progress, the West as an ever-receding future can never be achieved. For once we grasp the future it immediately becomes obsolete.

In a major mass media campaign, a beauty salon in Japan, Takano Yuri, has chosen to use Uno Kanda as its objective correlate for high fashion, up to date, modern beauty. There is no mistaking Kanda for a traditional beauty like one finds on a Ukiyo-e print of the old Edo pleasure quarters. For one thing she stands alone, without context in a space-free, time-free virtual place and stares into the lens, out at us totally naked and without shame, a stark, objectified statement. There is no partial concealment here with a kimono, fan, or a sliding door. There is no hint of romance for that involves others. Instead she is pure form. And she is surrounded by caucasian beauties that are contextualized by being portrayed as clients in the salon, receiving its “gifts.”
Via associationism, it is implied that Kanda is a product of the "Clinic." She is, to recall McLuhan, the Bride of Frankenstein. She is the experiment that went absolutely right. And the salon is making of her a gift to the rest of us. Because she is not a natural beauty but the product of a clinic, there is hope for us all, for a price of course. And yet, the clinic promises the "natural look." She is a piece of work, a sample of their gifts at making one, anyone, beautiful. The salon treatments are a miraculous "gift." And thus the salon is our savior. Kanda too is made into a gift, as her image is offered to real and potential customers in the form of a promotional book of her body-image. But not all receive the book. The magic of pure luck is integrated into the commodity process and the pseudo-science of cosmotology. Those who will receive the book are selected by lottery, and in turn, by representatives of the Takano Yuri Clinic.

In the tightest hairpin turn of cybernetic feedback, Kanda comments on her image within the advertisement within which she appears saying, "I wanted to show my real self to the audience." But instead of a "real self" she is presenting yet another virtual self, a costume called "nudity" (Berger 1972). As "her" body-image, which is no longer hers but a licensed property of the Takano Yuri Clinic, is exposed, it permeates the audience through layers of commodity technique. She is no longer an authentic "You" but an objective "It" (Buber 1958). As a part of the overall media ecology, she becomes part of the popular imagination and a standard of beauty that is not organic, not emergent from the common, but instead instrumentally selected, manipulated, and handed down from on high. Her naked body, is an instrument of commerce which serves to foster late-modern dissatisfaction and narcissism on a mass scale. Private imaginations are thus manipulated in a one-to-one correspondence with the manipulation of her image. This is a world of having more than being. As Gebser (1949/1985) put it: "The current situation manifests on the one hand an egocentric individualism exaggerated to extremes and desirous of possessing everything, while on the other it manifest and equally extreme collectivism that promises the total fulfillment of man's being. In the latter instance we find the utter abnegation of the individual valued merely as an object in the human aggregate; in the former a hyper-valuation of the individual who, despite his limitations, is permitted everything" (3).

Kanda is offered as a heroic role model. But genuine heroines are self-effacing. They sacrifice for others. But Kanda is nothing but face, a celebrity who wants everything including to show that she wants to show her "real" self which is yet another mask, a cynical face with the depth of the paper it is printed on.
NOTE

1. The “first sophistic” is widely regarded as being identified and confronted by Socrates in his attempt to bring simple demonstration and logic to bear on argumentation and to de-emphasize emotion. The end of the “Second Sophistic” is widely seen as the emergence of Europe from Medieval to Renaissance attitudes towards truth and debate, shifting warrant from testimonials and untested authority to empirical demonstration and logical deduction.

REFERENCES


