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A sociohisto-rical reading of the *Dictionnaire des Mondialisations*. First steps towards a pragmatic approach to globalisation

The aim of the critical dictionary edited by Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin is to "render intelligible the structural mutations affecting France, Europe and the different parts of the world" (Ghorra-Gobin 2006, p.vii). It is an ambitious initiative. The authors who have contributed to this project start from the premise that the globalisation currently being observed is a historical process characterised by complexity and diversity. The variety of items presented in the dictionary[1] reflects the protean nature of globalisation and the authors have thus chosen to use the plural "globalisations" to describe a phenomenon that is hard to grasp. For it is a process that takes a wide variety of forms, often described as global or globalising, the effects of which are not confined to the spheres of finance and the economy. Furthermore, it can be observed at different scales and cannot be entirely contained or circumscribed within any single perspective. Globalisation thus comes into the category of totalising objects that are easier to understand using a piece-by-piece analysis such as that provided by a dictionary.

While the project is ambitious, the deconstruction of this complex phenomenon into separate items provides a powerful analytical means of revealing, characterising and grasping observable changes over the long term. The dictionary seeks to rethink territories and time, to reflect on the reorganisation observed in forms of collective mobilisation, to monitor tangible transformations in the structuring of social groups and to locate major changes linked to traditional demands such as the sense of identification with a nation, with Europe or other spatial entities. In so doing, it starts by positing the complexity of the phenomena being studied, which include several temporalities and several spaces combining microsocial interactions and macrosocial totalities. The thickness, entanglement and historical discontinuity of the globalisations we are witnessing today clearly emerge from the articles offered by the dictionary and demonstrate the authors' overall approach (see, for example, the Borders article, "Globalization: abolition or proliferation of borders?," pp.176–180 and the International Migrations article, "What place in the globalization of exchanges?" pp.246–251). So the initial impetus is quite different from a snapshot of globalisation in the early twenty-first century; it is more a gathering of viewpoints on a process with multiple, intertwined ramifications that are shifting and unfinished and relate to the very notion of globalisation in ways that are contentious among specialists.

A pragmatic approach to globalisations: stepping outside the framework of spatial scaling

This article seeks to propose a method for investigating globalisations that follows on from

the observations presented in the dictionary, as a way to approach a protean phenomenon that is hard to grasp because it follows a process that cannot be represented using stable laws of evolution. The latter characteristic is so apparent that the roots and historical rhythms of the process are a source of controversy among the contributors themselves, depending on which object is used to trace the type of globalisation under investigation. For example, developments in the global population follow a distinct genealogy, rarely coinciding with that of the development of information and communication technologies. So globalisation approached from the point of view of demographic transitions (pp.376–379) does not use the same explanatory principles as those used to describe the globalisation of technology transfer (pp.379–380).

As Ghorra-Gobin notes in the introduction (p.x), ''Globalization is not solely synonymous with capitalism; it affects different aspects of the daily lives of individuals and societies''. In other words, we have to recognise that collective social practices are probably not the only forms of action affected by globalisation phenomena. From this perspective, the first issue to be resolved is that of the scale of phenomena to be examined in considering globalisations. Returning to the sociological viewpoint, it does not seem possible to improve and generalise the outlines and clarity of observed processes by zooming out from the localised to the collective or by using a particular tracer object to provide an exhaustive, polymorphous description of globalisations. Understanding globalisations thus does not simply mean grasping the evolutionary laws they entail at the level of macrosocial entities, but paying sustained attention to the transformations to which they give rise at the level of individual actions. This statement leads straight to current work in pragmatic sociology, and especially to work focusing on the notion of regimes of engagement. Among other aims, this analytical model seeks to go beyond the opposition between the individual and the collective, highlighting normative activities in order to analyse social phenomena and their political and moral foundations (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Quéré 2004, pp.289–316).[2]

Unlike approaches in political sociology that focus on the analysis of individual behaviour or on integrated components of society such as political networks, the pragmatic approach focuses on relations between individuals, which has the effect of avoiding the traditional dichotomy of individualism versus holism. The new direction of the pragmatic approach consists in seeking out the modes of equivalence, qualification, adjustment and justification through which actors make agreements, coordinate their actions, create orders of justice and refer to these to denounce injustice (Nachi 2006). The concept of a regime of engagement opens the door to different modes of engaging with the world, in particular crossing the line between the familiar local world and the public domain. It is thus different from the genetic structuralism of Bourdieu who, while overcoming the opposition between the individual and the collective, still regards the position of individuals as determined by society or, more precisely, by a system of power relations between different classes, whereas the pragmatic notion of regimes of engagement starts by envisaging a relationship to the world enacted by an individual acting in contexts ranging from the most personal to the most public and common (Thévenot 2006, pp.238–239). Using these conceptual and methodological tools it becomes possible to interrogate globalisations while no longer seeking to fix the focus of observation from the outset or to identify an object of analysis that seeks to represent globalisations as a whole. The method then involves studying transformations in the way that individuals develop their modes of engagement with the rest of the world, the way that they shift from the familiar to the collective and the forms of coordination involved in these mediations. Here it is the internal heterogeneity of action that is the object of particular attention (Dodier 1993).

Globalisations: a process of rescaling individual action formats

In relation to what has just been said the task may seem complex, since globalisation is located within broad policy communities (Jobert 1994, pp.9–21), involving, by definition, an extremely

diverse range of actors (a policy community should be understood as the interaction of several segments of the state apparatus, recognised experts and policies in various policy networks). Before getting into the discussion that follows, we thus decided to recognise as relating to globalisations any discourse that uses the category. This choice allows us to avoid basing our thinking on a predefined infrastructure,[3] the main disadvantage of which would be to retrospectively define a single process aggregating globalisations without taking account of the constant redefinition of the category of globalisation through the formulations and reformulations of problems by actors. Following Reinhart Koselleck, Ghorra-Gobin's team adopts the idea that the meaning attributed to the term globalisation has evolved, that it corresponds to a sedimentation of several layers of meanings inherited from the past. For "in the field of language historical experience is always translated by means of directive concepts [and] historical knowledge depends on the existence and linguistic functioning of these concepts" (Koselleck 1997, p.7). The term globalisation is thus truly a historically constructed category, which is constantly transformed and reinterpreted; thus it cannot be retrospectively understood in terms of a linear development reflecting explanatory principles and social influences that remain immutable.

Having clarified the historically located nature of globalisation as a category, we now have no choice but to consider the concrete manifestations attached to globalisation*s* by the actors involved, according to the terrains and periods studied. For example, spaces identified as marginal by the actors of globalisations or of alternative globalisations evolve as societies change. This is true notably of punk and cyberpunk cultures that were once countercultural and are now recognised as profitable commercial categories (Dauriac in Ghorra-Gobin 2006, pp.231–232). A pragmatic approach makes it possible to trace the economic indexation of these cultural movements through changes in the action format, allowing individuals to move from one mode of engagement to another, and from cultural production intended for a limited, marginal group towards standardised mass production. Recent work on social activism (Hamman *et al.* 2002; Ihl 2006) locates these transformations in a long-term historical context but without claiming any sudden break with a previous configuration. Instead, the assertion of a demand is traced through the gradual involvement of actors and the shifts of scale observed in the transformation of individual engagements with people and things, as in our own work around the notion of medical police (Tournay 2007b).

Globalisations or the transformation of individual engagements with things and people

To trace the changes brought about in the action format of actors; in other words, to describe the close connection between local actions intended for a limited number of individuals and actions addressed to the wider collectivity, pragmatic sociology offers another important tool. "Entry via coordination" (Thévenot 2006) makes it possible to grasp the multiplicity of registers of action and the slippage from one to the other. Change is also described by the dictionary's contributors as the most symptomatic motif of the phenomenon of globalisations from whatever angle it is approached. Thus, globalisations are primarily marked by a transformation of the processes of interconnection and exchange. These are multidimensional, and are not limited to the financial sphere or to the economic organisation of production (p.vii) but are part of and also codify other aspects, including culture, the environment and humanitarian issues (p.viii).

Regardless of the type of globalisation under consideration and the angle from which it is described, new social groups emerge along with a new range of actions. Still in the context of cultural movements, describing the evolution of individual regimes of engagement reflects the gradual involvement of countercultures in the web of globalisations. Thus, the original punk movement, which replaced hippie protest and rejected established values through raw, spontaneous expression, was transformed in the early 1990s by an expansion of engagements into political and protest actions addressed to the collectivity as a whole. This transformation of

action formats led to the reappropriation by mass industry of the particular symbols of this alternative cultural movement that had been invented in the street during the 1970s. The involvement of a marginal movement in the process of globalisations thus gains from being understood in terms of the transformation of individual action formats.

The notion of "regimes of engagement" also makes it possible to grasp what links individuals to other people and to the things around them. Thus, the history of punk clearly shows that entry via coordination brings a new history into the organisation of individual action formats, one not restricted to individuals alone but that extends to include objects and technologies. Certain technological operators made it possible to transfer a nihilistic, self-generated protest movement into globally exported social alternatives without distorting its history. Thus body piercing, tatoos, extreme hairstyles and certain brands ensured the survival and collective representation of the original spirit of the movement when it became globalised. Another example is offered in her introduction to the dictionary by Ghorra-Gobin, who shows admirably how technological change in the transportation of heavy construction materials in Europe led to the globalisation of the cement industry. Previously an industrial process subject to local contingencies, cement manufacture was able to free itself of dependency on particular territories when transportation became easier. The globalisation process in this case was not so much a matter of the spatial expansion of a pre-existing business through the gradual conquest of successive external markets but was more closely linked to the establishment of a new form of primitive solidarity between the manufacturing process and transportation of the material due to the intervention of a technological factor. This was the difference that made the globalisation of the cement industry possible. In other words, the multiplication and expansion of coordinations engendered by the activity of the cement industry did not stem from any uniformisation of heterogeneous practices. On the contrary, the expansion of cement industry activity can be understood in terms of innovative groupings, primitive solidarity and new forms of cooperation.

A pragmatic understanding of globalisations: the establishment of new forms of sustainable long-term coordination

According to this pragmatic logic, separating globalisations into spaces of finance, culture, environment or tourism in order to understand the different aspects of globalisation (in the singular) cannot yield a common denominator for the various phenomena, since each space relates to visible manifestations of the globalisations accomplished and represents an epiphenomenon described by the observed effects. Small variations on earlier globalised configurations, such as the improvement of transport in the case of the European cement industry, are not linked to this pre-established compartmentalisation of areas of a supposedly different nature. The arrival of a technological innovation directly underlies the interconnection of regional markets for cement, giving it international coherence. This process cannot be understood and analysed on the basis of a predetermined division of the social into spaces with distinct rationales (such as the economic, cultural and political spheres). Whether the trigger is a new technological ingredient or a transformation of the individual regime of engagement, this shows that the globalisation process results first and foremost from the emergence and long-term establishment of a form of coordination in time. In other words, it is appropriate here to say that the emergence of innovative forms of elementary solidarity precedes their spatial expansion.

Elementary solidarity should be understood here as defining the concrete link of exchange and actions underlying a social phenomenon. For example, the introduction in 1982 of the TCP/IP internet protocols, making it possible to merge all heterogeneous local networks, was a new form of solidarity underlying the propagation of electronic exchange across the globe, the opening of the electronic network to trade and then to the development of text-based forums, the globalisation of search engines and the appearance of free encyclopaedias and online telephone services (Anis 1998). Thus, a pragmatic understanding of globalisations supposes that we first establish the forms of

solidarity and then follow the expansion or otherwise of these singularities, these spaces of technological variation across the world. The manufacture of globalisations is a matter of laborious and continually updated assemblages, of composing, gathering and remobilising social entities, making it possible to establish sustainable and innovative links such as Internet networks between distant individuals and to make these forms of coordination tangible by means of a widely available material infrastructure.

Far from being imposed from the outside by constraint or causality, the long-term stabilisation of innovative social links should be seen as a pragmatic space of exchange and action moving from inside to outside (Karsenti 2002), from the microsocial to the macrosocial. This approach is an aspect of "vitalist" sociology (Tournay 2007a) rooting the social dynamic in a kind of primitive soup, which some describe as social substance (Hauriou 1896), ontological solidarity (Linhardt 2004) or plasma (Latour 2005). Such a sociology thus supposes the preexistence of a set of entities bound together by a multiplicity of ties, always shifting, under renegotiation and open to redistribution, which seem to compose the continual reorganisations of social configurations. If we accept that the spatial expansion of observed phenomena is a direct result of such small variations and of the way they coordinate and constrain the environment, we must also recognise that, for actors, the consolidation of the process of globalisations is necessarily linked to their ability to ensure the durability of the space of a given variation. This is true, for example, of technological innovations, which can often expand spatially only if they are first strongly established in a limited space.[4] Grasping the phenomenon of globalisations thus means starting from actors' projects, establishing their genealogy and tracing their hypothetical globalisation.

Globalisations: the historical manufacture of constantly-redefined categories

To speak of a process in studying globalisations means regarding them as a historical construction. Many articles in the *Dictionnaire des mondialisations* refer to an image of the chronological development of a phenomenon. The article on "The globalisation of agricultural markets, between urban growth and international negotiations" (J.M. Dauriac in Ghorra-Gobin, 2006, pp.1–6) thus starts with a rapid diachronic presentation of agricultural activity. The article reveals that today's phenomena have not emerged out of nowhere but have grown out of processes that may have been under way for a very long time.[5] The value of tracing the evolution of these objects also lies in enabling us to relativise their novelty. Ioday's globalisations are not the first; there have been others, though certainly on a smaller scale. In her introduction Ghorra-Gobin notes:

> The globalization of the early 21st century . . . is not the first in history. . . . The establishment of empires (Roman, Byzantine, Mongolian and others) marks the earliest stages in this process and, later, the period of the great discoveries of the 15th century, centred on Europe, is recognized as the "pre-modern" phase of globalization. (Ghorra-Gobin, 2006, p.8)

Here we see elements of the analyses of Immanuel Wallerstein ([1974]1985) and also of Fernand Braudel. At first The world economy primarily affected Europe before gradually extending to the rest of the world: "in the 1580s the might of Spain was suddenly directed towards the Atlantic. . . . A powerful movement tipped it [the Spanish empire] towards its oceanic destinies" (Braudel 1966, p.12). Economic globalisation applies at ever smaller scales.[6] The globalisation of today is not the first, but its scale has never been seen before. Through this presentation of spatial characteristics and temporal relations, the authors also show that power relations have been modified. Thus, the global equilibrium is constantly evolving and involves other territorial entities as well as states. The article "Power" invites us to consider this. Here we return to the questions relating to the relevance of territory that have been posed by Badie (1995) and many others (such as Castells, Lévy, Ohmae, Veltz and Virilio). The proliferation of actors involved leads us to territorial postmodernity as redefined by Antheaume and Giraut (2005).

Adopting a diachronic approach to the concepts presented also illuminates their

chronological thickness and avoids regarding them as a simple macrosocial totality overshadowing individual actions. Here we find the three rhythms of the Annales School, for which historical time could be seen in terms of layered planes of geographical time, social time and individual time (Braudel 1966, p.14). The dictionary does not thus confine itself to the presentation and off-the-cuff analysis of observable phenomena, but locates them within an underlying genealogy and links them to different scales. The ramifications of globalisations cannot be explained solely in terms of spatial expansion; crucially, their effects must be grasped at the inter-individual and microsocial levels.

Tracing globalisations through emerging forms of coordination

As the authors of the *Dictionnaire des mondialisations* show through their analysis of different aspects (including inequalities between territories and individuals, the increasing lack of confidence in market functioning, risks of pandemics and the likelihood of catastrophe), the uncertainty of investigations into the globalisations process shows that its path is as yet unknown. Firstly, its evolution is not linear and implacable, but gradual and hard to grasp, dependent – in the hypothesis we propose – on the emergence of small differences that lead to the redefinition of macroscopic totalities. Another example of technological difference is the central role played by certain tools in the development of modern finance.

Consider the teleprinter: while its visible contribution consists in the improved speed and transmission quality of stock market information, Preda (2003) shows how this machine triumphed (unlike other, better performing rivals such as Caselli's pantelegraph) and radically changed the form of what we understand by information in finance and, thus, the organisation of financial activities themselves. Secondly, both the dictionary's authors and civil society actors are aware of radical temporal transformations: for some decades the pace of events has been speeding up, so that life seems more intense and complex.[7] In the pragmatic approach developed here, this phenomenon reflects an intensification of interdependencies between points on the globe and between actors, observable since the late 1980s; constituting a profound reshaping of forms of coordination between the various social entities.

This article is thus a plea in favour of describing the concrete processes of globalisations rather than explaining them in terms of external causes. For over 25 years science and technology studies have sought to understand the concrete production of scientific truth by focusing on scientific institutions, the actual work of researchers, the structuring of scientific activity and the rules guiding their collective output. It thus breaks radically with traditional approaches regarding scientific production as something obvious and indisputable in itself. Similarly, the present article seeks to grasp the process of globalisation(s) by looking at the concrete reality of actors and the way that they establish solid and long-term links. It seeks to turn the spotlight on the history of modes of coordination that have not yet been consolidated, to examine with similar attention both the technological innovations, collective protests and cultural movements that have managed to establish themselves more broadly, and also those that are less well crystallised or generate mixed opinions.

What is proposed here is more a sociology of foundation rather than of action, and, like Stéphane Cadiou and Stéphanie Dechezelles's investigation of emerging globalisations, we are concerned less with asking, "why are there globalizations?" and more "why do we not see them more often?" (Cadiou and Dechezelles 2007, p.13). This involves tracing the legislative, regulatory, fiscal, informational and communications instruments used in emerging movements that stabilise public action (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2004) or that expand the market for a particular product. Ultimately, the process of globalisations should be seen as a project, since it is primarily a matter of tracing the way in which a group of actors gradually becomes or does not become dominant. This importance given to the idea of a project is also to be found in work relating to the sociology of expectations (Lente and Rip 1998, McMillan 1979; Nowotny and Felt 1997), which refers to the promises linked to medical innovations as prime performative factors for the development of high-performing technologies (Geels and Wim 2000).

The expansion of a process or social demand thus cannot truly be separated from the expectations that form around it. This dimension is an essential component in the understanding of globalisation(s).

Conclusion

The processes of globalisation are protean and their vague outlines are constantly renegotiated. Understanding them can be made easier through a piece-by-piece analysis such as that of a dictionary, based on a history of innovative forms of coordination and transformations of regimes of engagement. The challenge is ambitious, but proves fascinating. The work of this group of authors is innovative and should be regarded as a first step in the structuring of pragmatic analyses of the globalisations process. Whatever social entity is under consideration – from technological innovations to social protest or cultural movements – failures are as important as successes in tracing the multiple forms of globalisation. Globalisations can thus be described as the submerged part of an iceberg under which lie a "graveyard of practices (Offerlé 1998) that mostly did not lead to globalisation, as well as emerging movements (on the question of the construction of interest groups and the recognition of those that proved unable to develop).

From this perspective, the primary aim is to consider globalisations as visible orderings of social activities without recourse to traditional explanatory principles, the main disadvantage of which is that they appear permanent or external to the process of globalisation.[8] As a mechanism, and despite the wide variations observed, the processes of globalisation can thus be described as operations of contextualisation characterised by the shaping of a new space for actions that leads the actors to describe the environment in a different way. Globalising thus means making a sudden break with an earlier situation and marking out a new historical narrative shared by an ever-growing number of actors. The dictionary initiative and developments that consider the processes of globalisation in terms of a genealogy of forms of coordination can thus avoid the usual pitfalls generated by research objects of this kind and are not obliged to give primacy to either the defence of triumphant neoliberalism or alternative globalisation denunciations.

Translated from French

Notes

1. The lexicon of entries is broad, covering domains from agriculture to citizenship via the sex industry and terrorism.

2. A current launched by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, which seeks to study the interdependency of forms of coordination, the texture of social interactions when tested and their accompanying debates. On the idea of a dynamic totality see Quéré (2004).

3. An example of this approach was applied to understand and trace the emergence of hygienism in Europe, a movement that is hard to define (being, among other things, medical, health-related and urban) and extremely polymorphous in its manifestations and ramifications. The rejection of any predetermined definition of hygienism in favour of simply noting the way that actors used the label made it possible to show how the movement's mouthpieces recomposed society and to follow each step of the shift in desires that hygienism brought about. The same approach was used to trace a genealogy of an ill-defined concept – bioethics – without suggesting any initial moral position (Tournay 2006).

4. We could think, for example, of the standardisation of the QWERTY keyboard. The arrangement of the letters was designed to permit the fastest possible typing speed while minimising the risk of jamming. The commercial success of this type of machine began 20 years after it became established. The machines were adapted for English but became widespread in France and Germany, where other keyboards might have seemed to be better adapted (ZHJAY in France), because the French female workforce was already used to QWERTY keyboards. So a compromise was found

(AZERTY), which is simply a slight modification of the American keyboard.

5. "Some empires (Rome, Persia) organized the circulation of food products centrally from the capital, but it has only been possible to speak of international systems of agricultural exchange since the 16th century" (Dauriac 2000, p.3.)

6. We recall here that the larger the scale is said to be, the more it represents a restricted space. The smaller the scale, the larger the space represented.

7. "Over the last thirty years we have seen the fastest changes ever in human history" (Singh 2008, p. ix).

8. Michel Dobry (1992, p.48 ff.) points to three types of pitfall: the aetiological position, which refers to explanatory variables that are supposed to define the entire phenomenon studied; the definition of the problem in terms of interests and groups of actors, which starts from the presupposition that these data are permanent factors of a conflict and, finally, the objectifying approach, which ignores the definition of the problem provided by the actors, thereby setting itself up as external to the social.

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