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Global Flows and the Globalization of Nothing: Synthesizing the Incongruous

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Globalization is a topic at the very heart of current issues in politics, economics, and social theory. To some, it encompasses all aspects of modern life in an inevitable trajectory toward some sort of global consciousness or optimistic cross-cultural understanding. To others, it is a foreboding preface to massive international conflict and upheaval. Of course, there are some thinkers who have chosen to establish a broad image of global forces and analyze the precise movement of globalization in our current time. It is two such theorists that I have chosen to examine in hopes of finding some implication of the future state of the global systems that are growing ever more prevalent.

Arjun Appadurai and George Ritzer, an anthropologist and a sociologist, respectively, understand the movement of global forces in two seemingly disparate ways. In this essay, I will show that the concepts of Appadurai's five "flows" of globalization as presented in *Modernity at Large* (1996), and Ritzer's *The Globalization of Nothing 2* (2007), can be reconciled and used constructively to build a more complete model of global movement.

Appadurai's theoretical perspective of five "flows," all given the suffix "-scape," originates from his field work as an anthropologist. A professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago at the time of publishing *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai's conception of global flows has been highly influential in how the fields of anthropology and sociology define the relationships between individuals, groups of people, and ideas in contemporary society. According to this theory, there has been a dramatic shift in modernity and the movements of people, media, technology, capital, and ideologies that have always been present in the world have suddenly increased to a rapid pace with the

advent of the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment thought. The disjuncture between the five “-scapes” is the key to understanding the complexities of globalization. Each of the -scapes informs the others and all are present to varying degrees in almost any instance of interaction between parties, regardless of how global or widespread the phenomenon.

Corresponding to the aforementioned movements of people, media, technology, capital, and ideology, Appadurai’s signature terminology follows “(a) *ethnoscapes*, (b) *mediascapes*, (c) *technoscapes*, (d) *financescapes*, and (e) *ideoscapes*” (Appadurai 1996:33). Each term is responsible for describing a certain dimension that is manifest in global cultural forces. With *ethnoscapes* designating the more tangible movement of “persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” such as tourists, immigrants, and exiles, each succeeding “-scape” is less rooted in physical forms (Appadurai 1996:33). A *technoscape* is “the global configuration . . . of technology and the fact that technology . . . now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” such as the physical distance separating countries or the natural resources of an area (Appadurai 1996:34). Necessarily connected to technology, *financescapes* describe the temperament of global monetary wealth as national currencies, stock exchanges, and the like move massive amounts of capital at an ever-quicken pace. Appadurai’s *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*, as he describes them, are “closely related landscapes of images” (Appadurai 1996:35). “*Mediascapes* refer to both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information . . . and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai 1996:35). *ideoscapes* are

the most abstract of Appadurai's conceptions of global flows. Frequently directly political in nature, ideoscapes "have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it" (Appadurai 1996:36). As ideoscapes stand in the contemporary global environment, they are derived from an Enlightenment worldview that is composed of elements such as freedom, sovereignty, and democracy. Taken as a whole, Appadurai's five flows of globalization act as the building blocks how individuals and groups of people construct a conception of their own movements within a global context.

Ritzer, influential professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park, forms an understanding of the states of being that characterize different phenomenon instead of looking at the movement of global forces. Through defining a phenomenon with these terms, it can be clearly understood in a consumption-related, as opposed to production-related, sense which Ritzer sees as declining. Defining these terms comes from an understanding of the dynamics of two continuums – the something-nothing continuum and the glocal-grobal continuum. Being opposite poles of the same continuum, Ritzer's concept of "something" is characterized by uniqueness, localness, temporal specificity, humanization, and enchantment, while "nothing" (the key factor in Ritzer's globalization theory) is characterized by generality, a lack of local ties, timelessness, dehumanization, and disenchantment (2007:42). "Glocalization involves the integration of the global and the local, producing a unique outcome wherever in the world it occurs. Grobalization involves the imperialistic ambitions of corporations, states, and

others and their imposition of their way of doing things, products, and so forth on the local” (Ritzer 2007:118).

According to Ritzer, most phenomena fall somewhere between the two poles of both continuums. On opposite ends of the something-nothing continuum, a homemade meal made from scratch is characterized by something, while a cheeseburger from a chain restaurant is characterized by nothing. The homemade meal is unique to the specific setting it was created in, and it embodies the personal creativity of its chef. The chain burger, in contrast, is just one example of a model replicated at thousands of restaurants within a franchise; it took no inspiration on the part of the person who created it, and it is not recognized as special by those who partake in it. Located on the glocal-grobal continuum, the homemade meal is characterized by glocality because it is an individualized example of what may be a larger cultural culinary tradition. The chain cheeseburger is part of a grobal phenomenon because the larger corporation from whence the burger originated has imposed its business into a local environment from whence it did not originate.

Ritzer and Appadurai’s ideas of the two continuums and the five -scapes have been synthesized in a way that hints at their possible cohesion. In a section of his book, Ritzer calls Appadurai’s five -scapes enabling factors of the “grobalization of nothing.” (2007:133). By Ritzer’s analysis, the -scapes act as conduits for the spreading of nothing across the world. Mediascapes, technoscapes, and financescapes are all implicated as being channels of nothing to the world, while ethnoscapes and ideoscapes both can be associated with either nothing or something. I find his analysis to be mostly true to

Appadurai's intention and believe that Appadurai can further Ritzer's analysis by paying attention to how each of the flowing -scapes interacts with the others. For example, while Ritzer points to financescapes in the European Union and the introduction of the Euro as an example of a phenomenon characterized by nothing (the Euro has a much wider geographic issuance and much less culturally-ascribed value), Appadurai can extend that notion by noting the speed with capital travels, the decentralization of its use, and the transitory nature of its cultural significance.

Though a relationship between the theories of Appadurai and Ritzer is present upon initial analysis of the two sources side-by-side, this level of cohesion cannot be called a "complete model of global movement" by any means. To facilitate the development of such a model, I will employ the work of six different theorists of varying backgrounds who have interacted with the work of Appadurai and Ritzer across four pieces. Two are critical readings (which will hereafter be referred to as *critical sources*) of the primary texts of Ritzer and Appadurai, while the other two are written by theorists who apply Appadurai's and Ritzer's works to the U.S. education system and the annual Singapore Arts Festival, respectively. These final two sources will be referred to as *applied sources*. I will utilize the critical sources' understandings of the theorist they are attempting to analyze in order to examine how the other primary source theorist appears through a lens designed for the other. In simpler terms, I will use the lens developed to understand Appadurai to analyze Ritzer and vice versa. I will then evaluate the analysis by each application source of its respective primary theory and then compare how I see the other primary theory interacting with the same application. Again, in simpler terms, I

will show how Appadurai would understand a situation that Ritzer's theoretical work has been applied to and vice versa. These cross-examinations will give me a more thorough picture of how the theories of Appadurai and Ritzer can be synthesized to form a much more cohesive view of globalization than either could develop independently.

The critical source focused on Appadurai and his essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (also published as the second chapter of *Modernity at Large*) is "The Anthropology of Global Flows" by Josiah McC. Heyman and Howard Campbell of the University of Texas at El Paso (2009). Though quite amenable to Appadurai's ideas, Heyman and Campbell's analysis takes issue with some facets of Appadurai's theory. They argue that Appadurai's understanding of world history "takes the form of an epochal change from a simple, static, localistic past to a radically mobile, complex, global present" (Heyman and Campbell 2009:135). In their understanding, Appadurai's analysis does not represent historical reality, but instead a necessary new model for the investigation of socio-cultural units. In arguing this, they recognize the value in a multi-faceted approach such as the five -scapes, but hold that he has not made clear to what extent those factors have existed in the whole of human history, as he claims. Probably the most prominent of their challenges to Appadurai is their assertion that "flows do not necessarily obliterate the territories that they cross, and indeed may help constitute and reproduce them" (Heyman and Campbell 2009:140). This is in direct response to Appadurai's idea that the spurring on of global flows has started to erode the boundaries of nation-states.

The theoretical lens that Heyman and Campbell utilized in their analysis of

Appadurai can be just as aptly applied to the theory of Ritzer. Ritzer would also earn a wary eye from Heyman and Campbell when it comes to his understanding of the timeline of globalization. Almost all of the examples he presents in *The Globalization of Nothing* 2 relate to products or phenomena of the 21st century: credit cards, fast food, Nike athletic shoes, etc. Unlike Appadurai, Ritzer doesn't trace a historical lineage of the phenomenon he presents earlier than the industrial revolution. However, while his argument may not include grand claims of historical universality, Ritzer's sole focus on contemporary examples would be seen as fault by Heyman and Campbell.

Ritzer is more closely aligned with Heyman and Campbell when it comes to their other points of analysis. In his approach, he recognizes the dual capacity for destruction and reconstitution of social boundaries through his glocal-grobal dialectic, stating that "grobalization, especially the grobalization of nothing, often leads to counterreactions that inevitably involve that which is unique about the local" (Ritzer 2007:119). The theoretical perspective employed by Heyman and Campbell to understand Appadurai yields salient theoretical differences when used to analyze Ritzer. The aspects of Ritzer's analysis allow for a nuanced approach to understanding how global movements play out uniquely in the reality of different situations, whereas Appadurai's analysis may ignore the individual factors of each situation where forces of globalization are present.

Ritzer's work gets its own critical deliberation by Douglas Kellner in "Dialectics of Something and Nothing: Critical Reflections on Ritzer's Globalization Analysis" (Kellner 2005). As the title would suggest, Kellner's analysis of Ritzer's work is centered around the something-nothing continuum that comprises a significant portion of

The Globalization of Nothing 2. His primary critique is Ritzer's choice to focus on consumption (as previously referenced) and his ignorance of the realm of production. Kellner argues that "production and consumption are so tightly and importantly linked that one needs a dialectic of production and consumption to adequately grasp the general processes of globalization" (Kellner 2005:264). Kellner agrees with Ritzer that "to some extent consumption has replaced production as the US's prime export," but he continually emphasizes that the movement of production from locality to locality (i.e. Los Angeles, Indonesia, China) is essential to understanding globalization (2005:266). By Kellner's analysis, Ritzer's theoretical standpoint is useful with a few modifications, mainly regarding the inclusion of the full consumption-production dialectic, instead of a singular focus on the realm of consumption.

When applied to Appadurai's five -scapes, Kellner's critical analysis of Ritzer takes on a much more mutually constructive nature. The relationship Appadurai sees between his ethnoscaples, technoscaples, and financescaples is much more closely aligned with how Kellner views globalization as manifest in the consumption-production dialectic. According to Appadurai, "the global relationship among ethnoscaples, technoscaples, and financescaples is deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable because each of these landscapes is subject to its own constraints and incentives" (1996:35). While technoscaples and financescaples are so heavily based on production of commodities, ethnoscaples can be used to track the movement of people from one locality to another. While this does not necessarily mean all the way from Los Angeles to Indonesia, it does mean that there will be a growth of population and rise in migrant labor

when an industry moves into a new area. Ritzer can only account for the nothing produced by a Nike factory, and this is where Kellner finds fault in his theory.

Appadurai's framework is able to track the origin of the personnel, financing, and technology of the system in order to develop a more holistic image of the forces at play on the global stage.

A cross-examination of critical analysis of both Appadurai and Ritzer has proved effective in revealing how one theorist could possibly compensate for the perceived shortcomings of the other. To continue this development of a dialogue between the theories of Ritzer and Appadurai, I will employ a second method of cross-analysis that applies each theory to a piece utilizing the other theory. This analysis should once again expose shortcomings of each theory as well as possibilities for how the other may compensate for those inadequacies.

To better understand the state of the U.S. education system, specifically as it applies to urban, economically disadvantaged areas, Greg Dimitriadis and George Kamberelis employ a thorough application of Appadurai's five -scapes. They systematically apply each of the five flows to specific case examples with the intention of developing plans for educational reform. When looking at ethnoscaples, they see how education responds to global shifts and schools begin teaching from a more multicultural perspective. The technoscape aspect they find apparent in schooling is the underlying meaning of technological efforts and curriculum changes as reflections of the larger economic situation that surround inner-city students. When growing up in the housing projects and going to a public school, keeping track of the technology that is "necessary"

for the students can be revealing, as will be discussed below. Technoscapes, as is often the case in applications of Appadurai's theory, segues into the role of financescapes, which Dimitriadis and Kamberelis see as directly affecting the student populations they researched. They argue that "shifting financescapes have eroded the middle class, dividing the country between the haves (those able to be mobile in this shifting economy) and the have-nots (those who are unable)" (1997:145).

The theorists' analysis of mediascapes moves beyond the lived experience of their subjects to the film industry's representation of the young, black, economically disadvantaged male. According to Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, now classic films such as *Lean on Me* sustain the story that inner-city, majority black schools are violent and do not facilitate learning. To continue their theme of education facilitation, Dimitriadis and Kamberelis discuss Appadurai's ideoscapes in terms of different theoretical standpoints: Conservatism, Liberal Pluralism, and Critical Pedagogy. Dimitriadis and Kamberelis then discuss at length how all five -scapes can be synthesized to facilitate better understanding of each individual instance. For example, matching the technoscape-based idea of the project school and what technology "needs" to be present in the school can be illuminated by an analysis of what ideoscapes dominate that school.

Ritzer's continuum of something and nothing is especially applicable when it comes to this sort of analysis of the U.S. school system. Ethnoscapes, technoscapes, and mediascapes are all characterized by nothing in Ritzer's eyes. What he sees as positive, however, is the promise that ideoscapes seem to be variable from one individual school to the next. While Dimitriadis and Kamberelis seem to be looking for a single ideology of

education to apply to all cases, this is a move toward education characterized by nothing in Ritzer's eyes. He would advocate a more glocalized ideoscape that takes each individual locality into account, such as those present in charter schools.

The applied source that deals with Ritzer's continuum of glocalization and grobalization is an analysis of the annual Singapore Arts Festival by William Peterson entitled "The Singapore Arts Festival at Thirty: Going Global, Glocal, Grobal." This is a reflective essay on the nature of a cutting-edge arts festival that is held annually in Singapore. The National Arts Council, which controls the festival's program and events, is a branch of the Singaporean government that has fulfilled a preexisting goal of the government to use arts as a force to boost the economy of the country. This approach first was outlined in a government report issued in 1988 which purports that "strategizing for a potentially vibrant performing arts environment in Singapore is no different from the strategies successfully applied to Singapore's high-tech economic activities" (Peterson 2009:114). From this economic starting point, the festival grew to include an increasing number of international artists and to attract a growing number of international tourists. Peterson explores a phenomenon he argues has been a growing trend of the festival as it has developed into a more notable and expansive event. A prominent Singaporean artist that Peterson interviews purports that "while the festival has fulfilled the objective of forming an integral part of the Singaporean lifestyle 'no different from its greenness and cleanliness,' [a quote from the above government memo] '[i]t happened at the cost of the indigenous artistic development'" (Peterson 2009:115).

Peterson's piece engages well with Ritzer's idea of globalization, but has a complicating factor. It is clear that outside influences have come in the form of foreign tourist dollars and sponsor investment, and Peterson makes it clear that the local Singaporean artist is at a disadvantage. The complicating distinction, unlike most cases of globalization, is that those disadvantaged by the globalization are the citizens of Singapore when the institution promoting the globalization is their own Singaporean government.

By providing Singaporean artists with the opportunity to reach a global audience while simultaneously controlling all aspects relating to funding, housing, and presentation of the work, Singapore's National Arts Council may be inadvertently creating a large body of work, performed thrice before a limited local audience, that will never reach its larger global audience because of its diffuse and generically "global" quality. (Peterson 2009:130)

Appadurai engages with this idea in a dramatic way through his five scapes. The movement of international artists to Singapore for the duration of the festival is a good example of ethnoscaapes; but an even better example is the flow of thousands of paying international tourists that patronize the festival every year. Through Appadurai's perspective, the financescaapes of the entire operation are under the watch of the federal government. The heavy funding of international headliners that prevents small local theatre groups from putting on shows is designed singularly toward the aforementioned purpose of economic growth. This government influence is again reflected in an analysis of the festivals mediascaapes which are controlled completely by the government through television, marketing, and other publicity outlets. All three of these factors culminate in the control of what Appadurai calls "the imagination of a social practice" (1996:13). To

develop a utopia-like situation of economic prosperity, the state of Singapore has developed strong control over what their citizens know and feel, creating a sense of duty to support the arts (even if they are not personally patrons) because they know it is promised to play into economic prosperity. In this sense, the Singaporean government has firm control over the ideoscapes of its country and is bringing globalization to its country at the expense of its own citizens.

The two methods of cross-examination utilized to analyze the benefits and shortcomings of the globalization theories of Appadurai and Ritzer have revealed a multifaceted dialectic that was not readily present in the initially loose association of the two theories. The distinction between the two theories of globalization examined above is one of perspective and intention. If one intends to gain a more thorough understanding of the processes that move different global phenomenon, Appadurai's -scapes have proven more effective. When Kellner called for Ritzer's continuum of something and nothing to engage with the dialectic of consumption and production he thought was missing, the understanding of production implicit in technoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes complements the something-nothing dialectic's understanding of consumption.

In a similar way, Ritzer's concepts of glocalization and globalization bolster the limitations of Appadurai's -scapes in reconciling the destruction of borders Heyman and Campbell were analyzing. Across all the analysis of Appadurai's five -scapes above, the same theme of missing endpoints was explained by Ritzer's something-nothing continuum. Dimitriadis and Kamberelis were at a theoretical stand-still by the end of their piece because Appadurai's theories were not able to describe the current situation well

enough to facilitate informed decisions on schooling policy. The -scapes explained who was implicated in the struggle to understand the technological, ideological, and financial woes of inner-city schools, but application of Ritzer's something-nothing continuum in the above analysis is what allowed for the conclusion that the ideoscapes of the school system had the most potential as an opportunity to prevent the spread of nothing through the school system.

Synthesized as two parts of one theoretical framework, Arjun Appadurai's analysis of the disjuncture and concert of ethnoscaples, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes along with George Ritzer's theories of glocalization-grobalization and something-nothing dialectics, have the potential to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of a wide range of phenomenon in the study of globalization. The two parts of this framework complement each other, and though seemingly conflicting upon first analysis, make up for the shortcomings of the other half. To ensure the most thorough understanding and fair representation of the countless players in contemporary society's ever-growing global networks, such a comprehensive framework is preferable and necessary.

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