

Dr. David Bate

Course Leader of MA in Photographic Studies at University of Westminster

Nature/Culture: Again

In 2007 I gave a paper in Dublin at a photography conference on globalization. While globalization is now a hackneyed topic in other domains (like media studies) there has been little or no discussion of it in photographic criticism, history or theory either directly or indirectly. This is odd, given the obvious processes of globalization within the realms of the art photography market, photo-journalism and the wider popular distribution of photographic images via the www. The globalization of photography is perhaps so obvious that no one sees it as important to address. My paper, sandwiched between Allan Sekula and Steve Edwards was called 'The Antagonism of the Global Signifier'. The basis argument in it, drawing on the later work on ideology by Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe is that any 'global' signifier has a constitutive instability in its meaning due to the plurality of interpretive communities who are involved in constructing its signified. My chapter on Global Photography in *Photography: Key Concepts* develops this argument, although it is veiled by a more historical view of the globalization of photography.

On the basis of that talk and my existing photographic work, I was invited to an artist residency in Australia, based at Monash University in Melbourne. The 'theme' I gave for my residency was 'globalization'.

How to represent or signify globalization in photographic images? There certainly already exists a number of artist/photographers working to show the industries of globalization, the production of commodities in the south (what some call the 'majority world') for the consumption in the north, the global exploitation of mineral resources, and so on.

In this context, the project offered quite a challenge. It is not only that I came from the country responsible for starting the colonialization of that continent, the process of human migration to literally colonize the continent, but that the whole dimension of globalization is riddled with clichéd images. It is here that the politics of representation (rather than the representation of politics) must, for me return to primary place/position.

The potnoodled, KFC, McDonald, Subway, Burger King, ization, etc dimension of globalization fits into to right-wing criticism that citizens are not responsible enough to enjoy democracy (ref Ranciere) and talk of 'irresponsible consumers' shifts the problems of globalization onto those who had nothing to do with its implementation.

It is here that, I have argued there is a confusion between the representation of globalization and the globalization of representation.