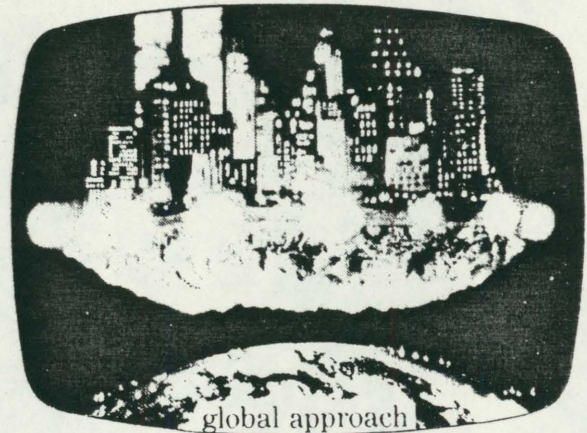


GLOBAL TASTE: A MEAL IN 3 COURSES. An installation by Martha Rosler, 1985.

# THE OPPORTUNITY FOR WORLD BRANDS



The installation GLOBAL TASTE: A MEAL IN 3 COURSES has colonization as its theme: colonization of the self and of other countries, by media and advertising. The central interlocking motifs in its three videotapes are children, food commercials, and language learning.

The left tape is composed mostly of ads showing kids or food, or both. Many portray the learning of adult language or product language, which in the advertising universe are indistinguishable. Language is the theme of two movie excerpts, Escape from the Planet of the Apes, with highly civilized chimps; and Teacher (a TV version of The Miracle Worker), about the integration of the child Helen Keller into civilization and society through language. The game show "Wheel of Fortune" also appears, linking simple language to the product universe.

The right videotape shows auditions for a Dr. Pepper musical commercial in which a young male baseball fan "becomes a Pepper."

Both the left and the right tapes link language production and product consumption, but the left portrays consumers while the right, by showing only auditions, shows producers—not producers of the products, which appear cut off from any process of production, but the theatrical production of the commercial's protagonists.

The center tape is built on the following premises:

- the growing centrality of media in the development of the self and its "imaginary" in Western society
- the extending of this media role to the rest of the world, including the developing countries, by a handful of sources in a few developed countries
- the metaphoric equivalence, to merchandisers, of the (Western) child and the Third World, in that each can be seen as a blank slate on which to inscribe the language of consumership
- the continuity of cultural, and especially media-based, imperialism with older forms of imperialism
- the continuing concentration of manufacturing and marketing in the hands of a few companies and the increasing homogenization of products, programs, and advertising worldwide.



the current saturation of a U.S. media with the figure of the child. This child-hero can be taken to indicate a further stage in the erasure of history by media-presentness and in the replacement of rational discourse by the discourse of desire.

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"Globalism" periodically seizes the public imagination; but globalism's fascination for Western manufacturers and merchandisers has been relatively constant since the triumph of industrialism.

There are 50 million people beyond the gateway to the Congo, and the cotton spinners of Manchester are waiting to clothe them. Birmingham foundries are flowing with the red metal that will presently be made into ironwork for them and the trinkets that shall adorn those dusky bosoms, and the ministers of Christ are zealous to bring them, poor benighted heathen, into the Christian fold.

--H.M. Stanley, to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, 1880

The latest version of global marketing is tied to the electronic media, whose hardware and programming are firmly in the control of the industrialized West (or North). This means, in practice, the blanketing of the globe by messages originating in a very few countries: among them England and France, to be sure, but especially the United States, the primary exporter of TV programming. The U.S. dominance in TV even exceeds its considerable share of the world film market. Further, most advertising is generated by a handful of Western companies or their subsidiaries. And in the increasingly important area of data banks, U.S. control is overwhelming.

In TV, the programs exported are those produced for the domestic market. These sell, along with the show, a way of life and a manner of representation--including themes, social relations, and an editing pace and show structure geared to commercial breaks. These shows provide foreign audiences with constant reminders of the desirability of highly finished, mass-produced, and mass-marketed Western goods, helping to create demands that reinforce the cycles of debt and dependency. Third World residents are encouraged--to paraphrase Frank Campbell, Guyana's information minister--to buy things their countries cannot produce. Of course, from the perspective of the developed world--I have used Theodore Levitt of the Harvard Business School, a vocal exponent of "global marketing," as the representative of this point of view--this is the desired result, not much different from the situation provoking H.M. Stanley's exultation in the quotation above.

Quotations from Professor Levitt in the center tape of this installation present his idea that economies of scale allow companies to creatively ignore local differences and "decimate" competitors by treating the whole world, or sectors of it, as a single market. Levitt's prime examples are products "ingested through the mouth": cola and cigarettes. Levitt traces this new world of possibilities to "The Republic of Technology"--the worldwide networks of communication and transportation controlled by the industrialized countries. Characteristically, he ignores the history and power relations of these networks, in which, as Frank Campbell of Guyana points out, the Third World's voice is rarely heard--and then only in distorted form.

Third World countries are now attempting to hold back the media domination they were "sold" along with the idea of development. Their attempts to regulate what is broadcast in their own countries is being fought by the West in the name of freedom. Developed-world marketers uniformly exempt themselves from responsibility for the unbalanced situation that continues to generate fantastic profits for them.