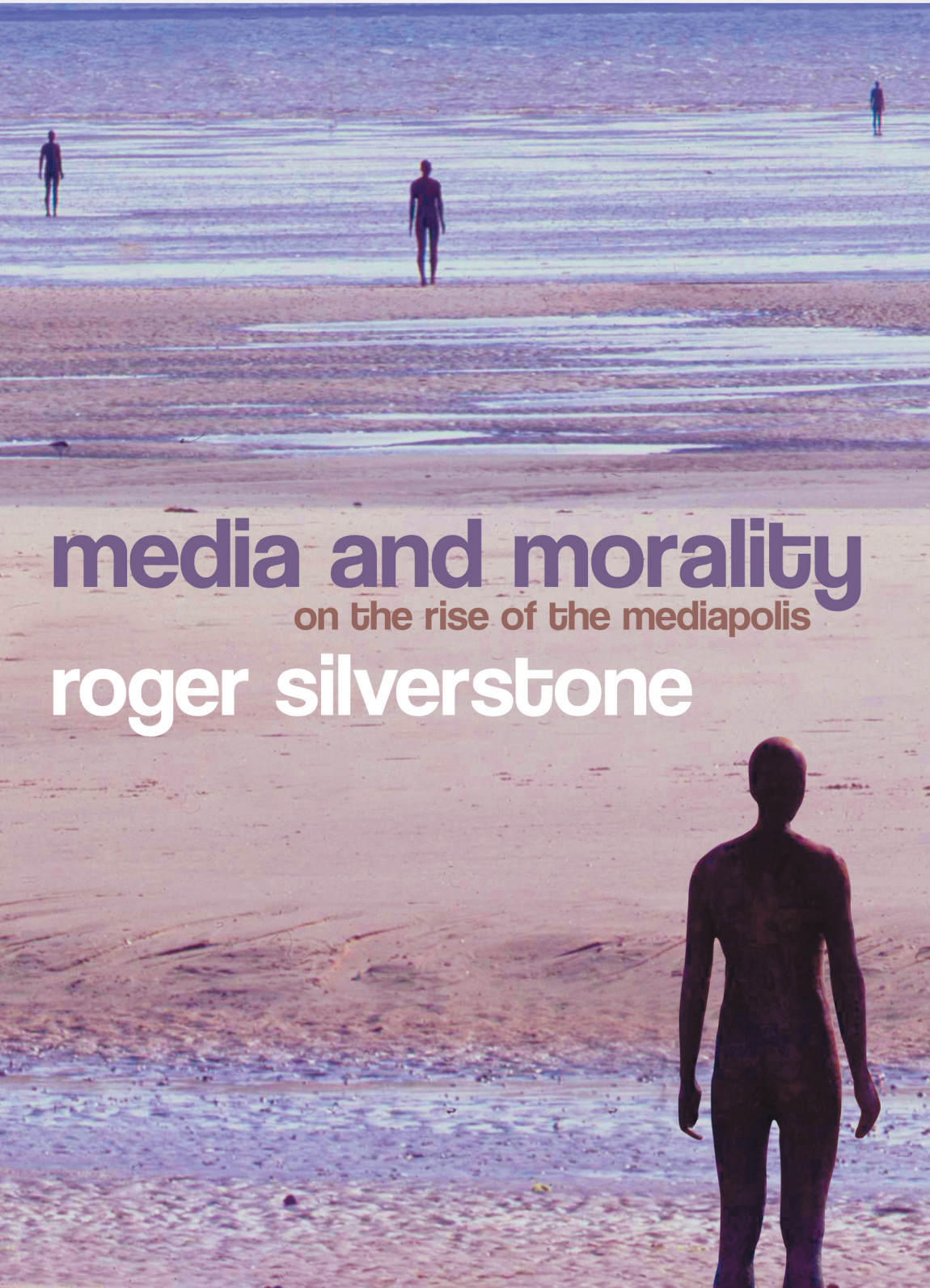

media and morality

on the rise of the mediapolis

roger silverstone

Media and Morality

This book is dedicated to my grandchildren both present and future.

Media and Morality

On the Rise of the Mediapolis

ROGER SILVERSTONE

polity

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book picks up where my previous one, *Why Study the Media?*, left off. It deals with what I am beginning as see as the second of the great environmental crises with which global societies are increasingly having to deal: the crisis in the world of communication. This is a moral and an ethical as well as a political crisis, and I argue in this book not only that the pollution of this mediated environment is threatening our capacity to sustain a reasonable level of humanity, but that it is only by attending to the realities of global communication, but also and even more so to its possibilities, that we will be able to reverse what otherwise will be a downward spiral towards increasing global incomprehension and inhumanity.

Many individuals have helped me along the way both directly and indirectly. Some indeed have had the dubious privilege of reading portions of the manuscript way before they should have been released for any kind of consumption other than my own; and I thank Lilie Chouliaraki, Richard Sennett, Steven Lukes, Nick Couldry, Maggie Scammell, Tom Hollihan and Helena Bejar for undertaking what none of them reasonably should have been asked to do. Terhi Rantanen was the first to read the whole of the manuscript in near final draft and made a huge number of helpful suggestions for its improvement. Otherwise, and it is not at all an otherwise, thanks are due to my many students, colleagues and friends in the Department of Media and Communications at the LSE, whose intellectual presence has been, and indeed remains, constantly invigorating.

Thanks are also due to my colleagues, especially Dean Geoffey Cowan, at the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Southern California, who generously hosted a period of sabbatical time in the spring of 2004, which was sufficiently calm and stimulating to enable me to undertake the research which led to the writing of chapter 3.

The last year of the manuscript's writing was by no means straightforward. Many doctors, both in London and Mexico City, are owed immea-

surable gratitude for keeping me alive. But beyond anything, I want to record the extraordinary care and devotion of my wife Jennifer, my children, Daniel, Elizabeth and William, and their partners, and my brother Anthony for supporting me (and each other) at moments and indeed periods of great stress. Let this book, in part, be a token of my love and thanks to them.

Parts of the book have involved significant rewriting of previously published material, as follows:

– Chapter 5 substantially develops arguments in my 'Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life', *New Literary History*, *33* (4), 2002, 761–80.
– Chapter 7 does likewise with respect to 'Regulation, Media Literacy and Media Civics', *Media, Culture and Society*, 26 (3) 2004, 440–9.

1

Morality and Media

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.

Robert Burns, To a Louse

I have a memory of an interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on *The World at One* during the height of the war in Afghanistan which followed hard on the heels of the attack on the World Trade Center. It was with an Afghani blacksmith who, having apparently failed to hear or understand the US airplane based, supposedly blanket, propaganda coverage of his country, offered his own account of why so many bombs were falling around his village. It was because, his translated voice explained, Al Qaeda had killed many Americans and their donkeys and had destroyed some of their castles. He was not, of course, entirely wrong.

There is much that is striking in this otherwise insignificant piece of reportage. And much of what is striking goes to the heart of what I want to explore and argue during the course of this book.

The first point of note has to do with the blacksmith's mere presence in the British media. The second has to do with what he says. In one sense presence is all – a certain kind of presence that has transcended geographical, social and linguistic distance; a certain kind of presence which brought this voice into the living rooms of suburban England, not just from a war zone, a soon to be replicated war zone, our war zone which is almost by definition, now, somewhere else, but from another age, distant in time as well as space. This was a real voice, but an unfamiliar voice. And its unfamiliarity had everything to do with, was overdetermined by, the blacksmith's capacity to offer an account *of* us as well as *to* us: we, in the West, with our donkeys and our castles, we with our losses, we in our equivalence. His understanding, his misunderstanding, was touching, naive, easily patronized. Yet it was true: a translated truth, a cultured truth, and

a truth meaningful for him. Just as we had and have our views of what life might be like for a blacksmith in Afghanistan, he has his views of what life, and death, might have been like in downtown Manhattan on the morning of 11 September 2001. In both cases those views are, at best, filtered through the prejudice of ages and the immediacy of images. At worst they enter into judgements and through judgements into actions which, for those who have the power, are likely to be consequentially misinformed and fatal in their consequences.

His appearance in our mediated space, albeit in this case his audible appearance only, represents the appearance of the other, the strange and the stranger, in the familiarity and comfort of home. He appears to us as a representative, a rare representative, of the doubly distant: the proverbial man in the street, or in this case the man in the smithy, and as someone as far away from us, perhaps in time as well as space, as it is possible to conceive. Ordinary and usually unheard. But now speaking about our misfortune as well as his. And his appearance represents a life, too, when we might otherwise only see – indeed we normally do only see – a body. A silent body, a body perplexed, a body in pain, a dead body. A victim.

So here is the blacksmith speaking, and he is speaking, albeit briefly, about us. Here he is talking about us in his terms, through his view of the world. Are we going to listen? What are we going to hear?

His appearance is only an appearance. And it is his only appearance. For one lunchtime only. His forty seconds of fame. It is, of course, a mediated appearance. The voice, because it is radio, is disembodied. It is translated. It is heard somewhere else, somewhere where he is a stranger. We can try and imagine what he looks like, where he is sitting. We can try and imagine, and will indeed imagine, because we have a stock of images and sounds on which to draw, the setting. The bombing, the dust, the children, the distant women. But can we imagine him imagining us? What will he have seen or heard about the attack? And can we imagine ourselves to be his strangers?

This unnamed blacksmith is a double, and his appearance, his representation, involves a doubling. Actually it involves many doublings. The sound bite is a tiny shard mirroring the conventions of western media discourse, representing, misrepresenting, naturalizing us. Indeed his appearance involves representation in many dimensions. He is represented, characterized as an Afghan, as a blacksmith, as someone who can speak and, thanks to the BBC, can claim an audience. But he is also a representative. Chosen to speak on behalf of others: a minor synecdoche

within the western media's reporting of the war. And then he is represented. Taken out of context and put into another. Or put into many: the context of his framing in the narrative of the newscast; the context of the reception of that newscast in the homes and heads of British listeners at 1.20 p.m. on a weekday lunchtime. And then the fading context of individual memory and forgetfulness, as well as that defined by, and the property of, the juggernaut of relentless news.

It is these contexts and their complexity, the contexts most broadly of discourse and reception, which are of course the concern. And I should point out that the pronouns 'we' and 'us', and the possessive 'our' here and elsewhere in my text, are both singular and plural, expressing a shared or shareable, as well as a distinct and individual, entity and locus of understanding and participation in the world, both mediated and immediate. No presumptions should be made about an unreflecting, universal, generalizable, uncomplicated, *we*. The 'we' is not substantive, though it does inevitably reflect an orientation from the Anglophone western world. It is rather more an invitation, to invite the reader to join me in my space, but not to feel subsumed by it, nor to feel excluded from it. The 'we' here and in the rest of the book is, but crucially is also not, the plural of the 'I'.

The blacksmith's doubling is, of course, also unusual insofar as we do not often see, nor indeed do we often allow, others to comment on us on our screens. The continuing dismay with which Al Jazeera is received in western societies, most especially in the United States, is not only because of the graphic horror of some of its images (we provide those on a daily basis) or the ferocity of the political rhetoric (likewise). It is much more fundamental. It is based on the breaking of a media taboo and the reversal of the customary taken-for-granted nature of media representation, in which we in the West do the defining, and in which you are, and I am not, the other.

So in the massive inequalities of global media power, the blacksmith's appearance, and his version of the world, is relatively rare. But it mirrors, however faintly and briefly, the much wider representational culture of western media, whose gaze, alternately crystalline and cloudy, but always culturally specific, dominates the screens and speakers of the world. And for those in the West, or indeed for those in the UK, he is who he is only on those screens and speakers. He has no existence otherwise. He, in his unfamiliarity and distance as speaker, on the one hand, but in his familiarity and closeness as visible or audible presence, on the other, is a presence that those who hear him can neither touch nor interrogate. They

have no other link with him, with his experience, or with his world, not at least through the broadcast media. And he will disappear at the end of the programme. For ever.

Meanwhile his life connects with ours because our forces have been bombing him, and in the global uncivil society in which we live, he is believed to be connected in some way to those who momentarily made us the victims. Briefly the BBC chose to reverse the usual framings and offer a western audience, otherwise far removed in reality and imagination from the conflict, an opportunity to connect with someone else's lived and sentient difference, with someone who mirrors, and therefore reverses, albeit only in a single sentence, the customary polarities of interpretation.

There are possibilities to identify with this man, and to engage with him on his terms, though in the inevitable absence of any shared interactive space, this would, perforce, be confined to the imagination. There are, however, many more possibilities to reject that identification. And the opportunities for rejection and denial are, as is the way of things, cultural, ideological and technological things, likely to be much easier to accept. Yet he represents the other, and in his speech, and in the journalists' decision to give him space to speak, there is an invitation to make a connection to someone who, in his humanity, and despite everything else, might have something in common with the rest of us.

Notwithstanding the blacksmith's distinctiveness, the mediated world is full of such strangers and such images. Indeed I can reverse the sentence and say, with increasing confidence, that the mediated images of strangers increasingly define what actually constitutes the world. The relationships that are made, or which are refused, with the other extend across social, geographical and indeed historical space in ways which would be unimaginable in the everyday lives of ordinary people (as opposed to elites) as little as fifty years ago. And since it is the relationship we have with others which defines the nature of our own being, then such links as we might have with these mediated individuals are increasingly becoming the crucial ones for us too.

Such images are not often so benign. Nor do they always or only represent otherness at a distance, from somewhere else. From time to time the consistency with which otherness, especially dark otherness, is kept at one mediated remove breaks down, and the horror of our own otherness appears. This is how the images from Abu Ghraib came home: not so much as faithful representations of real transgressions and real crimes, but more as a transgression of the norms of media representation. These

were people like us (at least if you lived in the United States), our sons and daughters, our defenders and our heroes, who seemed to see no problem in their behaviour or in its digital display. They were only following orders, or following the crowd, or following the increasing trend of personal publication, the publicity of the private.

Introducing morality and ethics

My argument in this book builds from this rather modest and unexceptional beginning. It concerns the role of the media in the formation of social, civic and moral space. And when I say media I mean media: the mass, the globalized, the regional, the national, the local, the personal media; the broadcast and interactive media; the audio and audio-visual and the printed media; the electronic and the mechanical, the digital and the analogue media; the big screen and the small screen media; the dominant and alternative media; the fixed and the mobile, the convergent and the stand-alone media. And this lack of discrimination, this inclusivity, is deliberate. Of course different media allow us to do different things; they provide different social and political affordances. But together, in the array of possible technologies, delivery systems, platforms, discourses, texts, modes of address, as well as in the patterns of our use of them, they define a space that is increasingly mutually referential and reinforcive, and increasingly integrated into the fabric of everyday life. As Marshall McLuhan might have said, we put the media on, like clothing, to hide our nakedness, to protect us from the elements and to enable us to leave home and explore the world.

The media are becoming environmental. Not in the Baudrillardian sense of the media as generating a distinct sphere, a separation of the symbolic from the realities of everyday life, a kind of more or less escapist excursion into the realm of fantasy and simulation. More a sense of the media as tightly and dialectically intertwined with the everyday. We have become dependent on the media for the conduct of everyday life. They have become the *sine qua non* of the quotidian. But they are also inexplicable and insignificant without the everyday, without in turn their being resources for thought, judgement and action, both personal and political.

I am aware that such a starting point, and such a position, opens me to the challenge of media-centrism, that I am presupposing what needs to be demonstrated, and that if I assume and insist on the media's importance *a priori* then I will be in no position to challenge or to test it. Indeed,

in simple and commonsensical empirical terms, it is quite clear that the media are not, cannot be, everything. Life is lived outside the media and for many, if not statistically most, around the world, the media, at least many of them, are absent, unavailable, irrelevant. And even in advanced industrial societies personal and political decisions are often made away from microphones and cameras. Life is lived, in families, organizations and states without reference to the media. We live. We die.

My argument presumes all this. But it also insists on the significance of the media for our orientation in the world, in a world that is available to us, within reach, albeit only symbolically, in ways unimaginable before the electronic age. Indeed my argument does not need an exclusivity clause. I can insist, as I already explicitly have begun to do, on the salience of the presence in our world of such figures as the Afghan blacksmith, and others like and unlike him, simply because without that appearance, the world which includes them would not exist at all, at least not for us. And I can ask, as I will now and for the remainder of the book, what the significance of that appearance might be, without insisting that it is the only thing of significance. The media are both context and themselves contextualized. They both construct a world, and are constructed within and by that world. And of course the world is plural not singular. The world as it appears on Al Arabya is different from that on CNN. My world is different from yours. Experience, both mediated and non-mediated, is culturally specific.

At the core of my questioning is the nature of our mediated relationship to the other person. And my question, consequently, concerns ethics. Isaiah Berlin defines the term:

> Ethical thought consists of the systematic examination of the relations of human beings to each other, the conceptions, interests and ideals from which human ways of treating one another spring, and the systems of value on which such ends of life are based. These beliefs about how human life should be lived, what men and women should be and do, are objects of moral enquiry: and when applied to groups and nations, and, indeed mankind as a whole, are called political philosophy, which is but ethics applied to society. (Berlin 1990: 1–2)

Berlin here deliberately elides ethical thought, moral enquiry and political philosophy. In doing so he begs a number of questions as to their distinctiveness and prioritization. While I am aware of the significance of these questions, I do not intend to dwell on them, though the relationship between the ethical and the political will continue to be troublesome. For the most part I will use the terms the *ethical* and the *moral* as synonymous,

but I will tend to distinguish, and hope to do so in a consistent fashion, ethics from morality in the following, no doubt oversimplified, way. I am taking the moral to apply to first principles; to the judgement and elucidation of thought and action that is oriented towards the other, that defines our relationship to her or him in sameness and in otherness, and through which relationship our own claims to be a moral, human, being are defined. Implicitly and explicitly such morality assumes an idea of the good, a set of values to which one will aspire, and in their unlikely achievement, would define those who do so achieve them as themselves good. The moral refers to the generality of principles, and to the possibility of their justification. Ethics, I intend, is the application of those principles in particular social or historical, personal or professional contexts.[1]

In the context of the present discussion, then, the morality of the media refers to the generality of orientation and procedure within which the world is constructed by the media and within which the other appears. Or to put it the other way round, it is because the media provide, with greater or lesser degrees of consistency, the frameworks (or frameworlds) for the appearance of the other that they, de facto, define the moral space within which the other appears to us, and at the same time invite (claim, constrain) an equivalent moral response from us, the audience, as a potential or actual citizen.

Media ethics, on the other hand, relates to practice and procedure: to the ways in which the journalists go, don't go, or should go, about their business; and to the ways in which the relationships between reporters, film-makers, storytellers and image producers and their subjects and their viewers and listeners are constructed or assumed. Whereas ethics can be, and maybe should be, codified, morality can only be argued. And which of the two takes precedence: whether morality has to be seen as the product of ethics, as a distillation of practice, or whether judgements of morality take precedence as a precondition for ethical behaviour, the ethical life, is a question that I cannot, philosophically, begin to judge. The answer will be presumed, as I have already suggested, in the latter's favour, without too much, I hope, hanging on that presumption, at least in the current text.

Notwithstanding the importance of these both subtle and significant distinctions, the baseline of my argument is that the world's media are an increasingly significant site for the construction of a moral order, one which would be, and arguably needs to be, commensurate with the scope and scale of global interdependence. Insofar as they provide the symbolic

connection and disconnection that we have to the other, the other who is the distant other, distant geographically, historically, sociologically, then the media are becoming the crucial environments in which a morality appropriate to the increasingly interrelated but still horrendously divided and conflictful world might be found, and indeed expected. In short, any ambitions for a genuine, meaningful and ethical civil society that might extend beyond states (but not only beyond states) and to include an idea of the global citizen, must take how that world is represented in the world's media seriously.

There is one further philosophical issue to be addressed. It is the problem intrinsic to any proposal which involves judgements that extend beyond the self to include the other. This is the universalist–relativist problem. There do not appear to be any conclusive arguments for defending either relativism or universalism. Relativist arguments fail, logically, on the basis of their own relativism ('I am not able to persuade you to accept the argument that all thought is relative to a given society, because you live in a different society from me, and the relevance of my thought is by definition confined to my own'). Universalist arguments fail, politically, because they fail to recognize that socially distinct and incommensurate values and positions can be genuinely and validly held. Any attempt to specify a generality or universality of position therefore involves an imposition, a violence, which undermines even (or especially) any claims, for example, for tolerance or mutual understanding.

It follows that the proposal both to investigate, and to establish the possibility for, a morality for media, at any and every level of its manifestation, can be seen to be, in its otherwise faded liberalism, at best ethnocentric and at worst an expression of precisely the kind of cultural imperialism that it seeks to redress. I don't think there is any simple way out of this. But as I shall now argue, social, political and cultural terms and conditions are changing in such a way as to suggest that there may be life beyond the incommensurable. And those changing terms and conditions can be characterized quite simply: as globalization.

Globalization

Globalization has become an essentially contested term. Palpably useful in identifying many of the distinctive characteristics of late modernity, distinctive perhaps more in their convergence than in their singularity, globalization, from one particular and somewhat dominating perspective, characterizes a view of the world which privileges the interconnection

and integration of networks and capital flows, of corporate control and commercial exploitation. Here globalization is constructed as a phenomenon of rampant capitalism, arguably benefiting all those who, however weakly, are drawn into the global market economy, but clearly also benefiting the few at the expense of the many. In political economy the globe has become a single, competitive, productive, consuming, self-consuming, marketplace. Globalization is seen therefore as both a precondition for the production and distribution of increasing global wealth (and therefore a good thing) and the *deus ex machina* of increasing inequality, the economic repression of global populations and the destruction of the environment.

Globalization is also seen as a social phenomenon. Here the dominant metaphors are also of networks and of flows. The globe is seen as being constituted through the intense and endless movement of capital (as above), people, technology, ideas and media, a rhizomatic structure of multiple connections where individual quantities on the move become liquid, fluid, sticky, solid, in their convergent and divergent passages across political, natural and cultural boundaries. Indeed such is the scale of these movements that they appear to congeal into a new whole: post-modern rather than modern; palpable but ineffable; a whole which is abstracted from the tangible materialities of territory, nationality, identity and power; a whole which exists only in the substantial insubstantiality of post-modernity.

And globalization is, necessarily, a political phenomenon. The almost infinite range of neo-imperial power on the one hand, and of terror on the other; the emergence of covenantal institutions with global remits and global reach (Held 2004); the interdependence of states with each other and with transnational organizations; the dreams of a global civil society and the nightmare of a global civil war; the emergence of environmental and human rights, and anti-globalization, movements; the struggles of states to maintain control of populations, markets, national culture. Each of these dimensions of the politics of globalization registers one aspect of what many see as the tectonic shifts in the exercise of, and struggle over, power in a post-Cold War globe.

Finally, globalization is a cultural phenomenon. And this too involves struggle. From one perspective culture, as meaning, value, experience, has become disconnected from the chains of the immediate and the local. Time and space are compressed. New media, new technologies, have extended the range and reach of communication, and access to information is infinite. The result is a quantum shift in the homogenization of

cultures, in the undermining of the traditional, and in the disembedding of culture from locality and particularity. But the globalization of culture also involves reaction: fundamentalism, localism, the emergent cultures of diasporas, lifestyles, genders and sexualities: the tensions between roots and routes; proximity and distance.

I want to extract the media, and the process of mediation, from these disparate arguments and positions. My argument will be that it is impossible to conceive – and I mean conceive in both senses of the word, that is to imagine and to bring into being – globalization without the media. This is not as wild a notion as it might appear, though it is one either overlooked, underplayed or taken for granted in many accounts. It is principally and predominantly through our mediated culture that it is possible, I am inclined to say as never before and as I have already illustrated, to be in touch with, to see or hear, to be informed about, events and circumstances, people and settings, far removed from those that are otherwise only experienced in the local neighbourhood. Whatever our views, whatever our responses, the globe *appears* on the world's screens, on a continuous if uneven basis: from the reporting of a motor racing grand prix, to the satellite broadcast of a world cup football match, to the live commentaries of crisis or catastrophe, risk or ritual; to the daily dubbing, drubbing and subtitling of soap operas, telenovelas and Hollywood movies. Otherness and sameness (of which more shortly) appear side by side, intertwined but constantly available as resources to construct both individual and collective global imaginaries: a sense of there being an elsewhere; a sense of that elsewhere being in some way relevant to me; a sense of my being there. But the global media do not just make the global appear symbolically; they are of course a material component of the infrastructure that makes the globe possible as a lived-in place, managed, travelled across, and crucially, relatable to the contingencies and uncertainties of everyday life.

The media have this unique role in global culture. They provide a technological and cultural framework for the connectivity, positive or negative, without which the globe would be merely a shadow. They provide the resources, productive as well as of course counter-productive, to lock the possibility and potentiality of connectivity into the fabric of the quotidian. It is within the media's framing, in image and narrative, home page and chat room, that increasingly the world is becoming global and liveable. It is at this interface, the interface of media and the life-world, where the media as a moral force becomes most relevant, where the world in its otherness is at its most visible. And it is here, in this role and with

this responsibility, where the world's media become, indeed must become, ethically constitutional.

There are a number of threads running through this argument, and it would make sense to identify them now, even though they will be developed more fully at various points in the chapters that follow.

The first is a matter of phenomenology. It concerns the relationship between proximity and distance. This is a relationship crucial to our very being as responsible and moral selves. There is a simple point to be made, and that is that the media, as indeed other technologies, enable the stretching of action beyond the face-to-face, and consequently undermine the expectation of responsibility and reciprocity that action and communication in face-to-face settings conventionally require. Technologies disconnect as well as connect. The distance they create between interlocutors, between subject and subject, is a precondition, as many have argued, for the erosion of any sense of responsibility that individuals would be expected to have for the other. The media function as technologies in this respect, but they do so paradoxically. For in establishing and maintaining a material disconnection they simultaneously create a symbolic connection. Distance and presence coincide in ways that fundamentally challenge the necessary proximal relations that are assumed to be a precondition for an ethical life. How the media choose to represent, or conventionally find themselves representing, the other, the other who is otherwise out of reach, becomes a fundamental issue for any kind of project seeking a more virtuous, more ethical, public space.

The second is more sociological. It concerns the status of the cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitan has emerged in recent sociological theory as the figure who represents the phase of late modernity that some call postmodern, and who emerges from the dynamics of the intensification of globalization processes. There have always been cosmopolitans, those who are as comfortable abroad as at home, those whose identities consist in their willingness to be both here and there, inside and outside, and those whose spheres of action and loyalty shift with setting and situation. The cosmopolitans have mostly been confined historically to elites; and where they were not (and sometimes when they were) the word cosmopolitan became derogatory, describing an individual not with two or more homes, but with none; and not with more than one loyalty to place or nation, but with no loyalty to any nation, and therefore a threat.

Now, it is argued, globalization has brought with it an intensification of the condition of the cosmopolitan and an increasing legitimation of the cosmopolitan's status. The new cosmopolitan is assumed to be free from

the tying and oppressive loyalties of the singular community. In the ideal world such a figure is mobile, flexible, open to difference and differences. And such a figure is no longer seen as marginal but rather as central to the civic project (Beck 2003), and the construction of a global public sphere. The question this raises, of course, is the possibility of envisaging the media as enhancing a global cosmopolitan culture, one that might not require, indeed will not require, physical mobility, but mobility through the symbolic.[2]

The notion of the cosmopolitan is of course still problematic in a number of ways. It is romantic (in the sense of its wishfulness), anti-romantic (in the sense that it is precisely the cosmopolitan which was anathema in the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment); unsociological (insofar as it appropriately describes only a very small slice of the world's population)[3]; too singular (there are many cosmopolitanisms, and the cosmopolitan might be thought of rather more productively as being a condition rather than a status, and as such something one moves in and out of); and finally it is a particularly western, and therefore a somewhat exclusive, idea. It survives, like so much in this book, as an analytic and normative category, notwithstanding these weaknesses and as long as it is used with care, for it will stand as an actuality (for some), a possibility (for many) and as the basis for a plausible moral foundation of a global civil society (for all).

The third is political. The public space which reflects, expresses, as well as distorts the appearance of the global on the screens of both broadcast and on-line media, is a contested space. The presumption of uniformity or homogeneity within global mediated culture is palpably absurd. It is a cacophonic space. It is indeed barely a space at all. It is dominated by a few multinational companies who have managed to extend control based on their existing dominance within broadcast media into the otherwise open territories of the internet, one key dimension of the global commons.[4] Yet it is also full of alternative voices, minority presences and individual performances. It is expressive of public service agendas, state-sponsored and controlled agendas as well as commercial agendas. It is fractured by contradiction, as the footprints of national broadcasters are overlaid and compromised by the networks of communication which emerge from diasporic cultures and other transnational movements whose lines of connection transcend state boundaries. Fractious, disputed, imperial, repressive, unjust, the global media space is nevertheless the place where any viable framework for the culture of globalization will need to be forged and where, if at all, an ethical and moral infrastructure for the future of civil society will emerge.[5]

The final point to be made here is technological. Much of what I have been arguing over the last few pages presumes a particular model for media. And it does this, once again, with a descriptive as well as a normative intention. It refuses a model of the media which depends on influence and effects, and it proposes a model of media as environmental. One needs to be careful here, of course, for in unsophisticated hands such a presumption will lead directly to a kind of technological determinism unyielding to the social and to its construction. Yet, as I have already suggested, the media, the global media, albeit guided by the hand of global capital, increasingly have become a key component of the cultural infrastructure of contemporary society, one in which the conduct of personal and private life as well as public and political life increasingly depends. In this sense, and without expecting specific effects to follow from specific media or their intervention, I want to endorse the idea of the media as an environment, an environment which provides at the most fundamental level the resources we all need for the conduct of everyday life. It follows that such an environment may be or may become, or may not be or may not become, polluted.

Cosmopolitanism and pluralism

I need now to return to the philosophical: to the question of the way in which this discussion of globalization might enable a move towards approaching, if not actually resolving, the problem of relativism and universalism in media ethics.

Global interdependence is the setting. It is both the problem and the context in which the steps towards ameliorating the problem might be taken. For global interdependence, both conflictful and conciliatory, involves increasing awareness of, and interaction with, the stranger. In this late modern world of ours the stranger's otherness is constantly in our face: in the lived realities of urban spaces, in the imagined and communicated realities of mediated places. There is a huge debate emerging as to how this new world can be, and should be, lived in. By what, if any, general principles? Does difference condemn humanity either to indifference or to a fundamental refusal of its value? Can that difference be dignified (Sacks 2002) in a project of global or cosmopolitan virtue?

These are questions that go way beyond what it is possible satisfactorily to deal with here. So what I intend to do is to draw on, and try and summarize, a range of overlapping arguments, broadly speaking within the same liberal tradition, which provide a necessary, though certainly an insufficient, basis for the position I want to develop in my discussion of