

“POLAR TV”
Public Forum of Critical Analysis and Discussion
On Cultural Globalization and Democracy

Project Description

This project seeks funds to create an Internet television program that presents an anthropological perspective on “circumpolar cultural change.” It is increasingly clear from our work as anthropologists that the Arctic is undergoing a transition in which communities are becoming interconnected through myriad economic, political, and technological changes. It is also clear that most of these changes are being induced from several centers, especially “the West,” and that this process affects people’s lives and cultures around the Arctic in new and often unpredictable ways.

Today computers, the Internet, cellular phones, cable TV and cheaper jet transportation are increasingly accelerating and complicating these connections. Multinational corporations, financial markets and free-trade agreements are producing global flows of merchandise, capital, movies and advertisements on a scale and speed as never before. The global movement of images and ideas is no longer impeded by the maintenance of a costly infrastructure that once separated the “developed” from the “underdeveloped” worlds. On the one hand, people all around the Arctic are getting “plugged-in” to the latest Wall Street stock prices, communication technologies, and Hip Hop poetry, and which may create a circumpolar community of stock market investors, internet communities, and youth popular culture. On the other hand, however, these changes are creating new forms and areas of privilege and disadvantage, leading to new forms of affluence and poverty, domination and resistance, exploitation and violent responses. In other words, local cultures, ecologies, and people’s lives are being affected by “globalization” in multiple and not necessarily positive ways.

We believe that our analytical program on polar cultural change has profound implications for the issues of human rights and democracy in various parts of the world, including the United States. Because the media today mostly ignores a holistic and critical analysis of global shifts, they are often misrepresented in trivial and irrational terms. As a result the American public is often unaware of the true challenges that democratic ideals in various parts of the world face as a result of “globalization” and becomes increasingly left out of the democratic participation in the social and political process.

While the diversity of the types of media in the United States may be increasing, no one has yet thought of creating a television or radio program devoted to a *critical* analysis of the different ways in which people and places on the Arctic map are increasingly interconnected and affected by the process of global change. Occasionally, a television documentary will point out the Inuit teenager who “wears a T-shirt emblazoned *Titanic*” or offer the statistical fact that Greenlandic women every month read *Cosmopolitan* magazine. But programs and articles such as these tend to treat the changes in different places independently from the global processes that induce, mediate, and connect them. And when they do, they tend to gloss over the political and social implications these changes have for people’s lives, presenting them instead as a simple, inevitable, and even progressive advancement of “Western liberal democracy” and “free markets.”

As anthropologists, we are aware that there exists today a broad, increasingly intellectual and politically active audience in America and Europe that yearns for a more complex and critical understanding of the changing world. The presence of this audience is demonstrated, for example, by a proliferation of new journals offering sophisticated articles on science, art, architecture, gardening, travel, politics, literature and finance. However these forms of mass media tend not to analyze globalization critically. The audience of these publications, we believe, is interested in finding out about global change not as a simple movement toward Western cultural homogenization, but as a complex process wrought with both contradiction and potential. At the same time, the place where processes of globalization have received a much more critical attention is academia (especially social sciences). However, academia is disadvantaged by its limited access to broader American audiences. There has not yet emerged a mass media forum that links two elements of one chain: first, critically analyzes the experience of globalization by people in the Arctic and, second, addresses this analysis to a broader American public.

A monthly television program that we propose to launch will provide precisely such a link: it will provide a critical view of globalization across the Arctic developed in academia, presenting this view in a language that is accessible to broad American audiences. We believe that such a program is not only missing today but is of a pressing importance.

Format: *Polar TV*

We want our program to provide a regular public discussion between several anthropologists, who participate in the analysis of each new TV episode, and the audiences who watch it. The media format of this program will utilize the new personalized and interactive environment of the World Wide Web. Today a broad spectrum of the American public has access to the Internet from their homes, public libraries, schools, and workplaces. At the same time, the new technology today allows to transmit and watch broadcast-quality video programs on the Internet. We plan to launch our TV program “Polar TV” on the Internet in order to have an interactive discussion among a large audience. More specifically, the Internet technology will allow our audience to log-on on our site and watch our TV program at any time. New programs will be added to the TV archive once a month. Each program will be assigned a “discussion room” for the audience. There will be a calendar of scheduled events when anthropologists and other social scientists will be available for live discussions. The impact of this project will be measured in part by audience participation in the discussion of the raised topics and analyzed problems of cultural globalization.

We have already made arrangements with a New York-based Internet Video company *ON2.Com* who agreed to provide access to one of their Internet TV channels for the broadcast of our program and an interactive discussion with the audience. Each program will be prepared by the partners of StudioPolar.