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## World into Globe I: Introductory Remarks

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**Abstract:** “World into Globe – History for the 21st Century” was the title of a symposium held in honor of Professor Bruce Mazlish at MIT on May 11, 2011. These opening remarks review the career of Professor Mazlish as an innovative historian, prolific scholar, dedicated teacher, and outstanding MIT faculty member since 1955. Dr. Mazlish’s skills as sports writer, dancer, and tennis player are duly noted, as well as his mentorship of junior colleagues and patronage of the MIT faculty club.

**Keywords:** Bronowski, Columbia University, humanities, MIT faculty club, new global history, psychobiography, Toynbee Prize



Bruce Mazlish in his study with cat, Friday, 1 June 2007. Photo © Wolf Schäfer

- 1 It took seven long years to convince Bruce Mazlish to allow the MIT History Faculty to honor him properly with a symposium. When he was on the verge of retirement that many years ago, Professor Harriet Ritvo and I approached Bruce about holding a symposium in his honor but he flatly turned us down. He was not angry at us or anyone else but he simply did not want an intellectual celebration of his career at the time. Harriet and I and others were genuinely disappointed by his decision back then, but we knew Bruce well enough not to challenge him on such a delicate matter.
- 2 Then several months ago Harriet and I were having our annual lunch with Bruce at our favorite Cambridge restaurant, the Harvest, when Bruce raised the idea of a symposium we had hoped to hold in his honor seven years ago. We do not know what possessed Bruce to bring it up. Harriet and I had long ago given up on the possibility of getting him to reconsider and we certainly did not wish to needle Bruce about an opportunity missed. But, much to our surprise and delight Bruce said, “Do you think it

is too late to do something?" He asked: "Is there a statute of limitations on such celebrations?"

- 3 After that pleasurable lunch, Harriet immediately broached the matter of holding a symposium with the History Faculty head, Professor Anne McCants, who leapt at the idea. She agreed to fund the symposium, and the rest, as they say, is history!
- 4 Bruce, our great hope is that we do right by you on this occasion. We picked a general theme or framework of interpretation that we know is dear to your heart and to a number of us present here today. In so many ways you are the person who put Global History on the map.
- 5 And while I am not here to recount Bruce's long professional career as a historian – as a humanist and social scientist – I do want to say something about his career and about him, for he has always been a pioneering scholar and teacher. He has never shied away from taking on risky challenges or topics to pursue – from cultural history, to psychobiography, to those blurry intersections between the sciences, technology and the humanities, to global history, and to much more.
- 6 Bruce Mazlish has been connected with MIT for 56 years now, and I would have to say that the fit has been an excellent one. MIT is a curiosity-driven community of scholars and students, and Bruce is truly a man curious about so much connected to the life of the mind. In the best sense, he has always been a restless intellectual interested in pushing back the frontiers of knowledge in the wider worlds of the humanities and social sciences. And although not every direction Bruce has taken has paid the intellectual dividends he had hoped to gain, many have paid generous dividends and continue to do so.
- 7 Bruce Mazlish received his entire university education at Columbia where he worked mainly under Shepherd Clough and Jacques Barzun. Rumor has it that Bruce put his way through Columbia by teaching dance at an Arthur Murray Studio in New York. True or not, anyone who has had the privilege and pleasure of watching Bruce on the dance floor will know that he is a truly graceful dancer. And he is no more graceful and elegant than when he and his wife Neva dance together. Breathtaking I would say! I assume Bruce's dancing abilities helped to make him the excellent tennis player he has been for decades. It is all in the footwork. I have had the occasion to play tennis with Bruce, in this case doubles, and let me say he is about the steadiest back court player I have had the privilege to play alongside. Nothing, I mean, nothing ever got by Bruce on the tennis court.
- 8 Bruce came to MIT in 1955, the year he finished his PhD, where he remained until his retirement in 2004. He did get some time off for good behavior during his 50 year career, thanks to some opportunities that came his way, including the MIT sabbatical system.
- 9 He taught courses that graduates still remember with tremendous fondness and appreciation: "Marx, Darwin and Freud"; "Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Capitalism"; and "The New Global History," to name a few. Bruce also spent five years as Head of the then Department of Humanities, under which all the humanities at MIT were grouped until the mid-1980s.
- 10 Among his many honors are membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Toynbee Prize, which he received in 1986-87. The Toynbee Prize is an international award in social science; others who have held the prize include George Kennan, Ralf Dahrendorf, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Natalie Zemon Davis, Albert Hirschman, and William McNeil. That's company we should all wish to keep.
- 11 Bruce would later become President of the Toynbee Prize Foundation, from 1992-2007, and on whose board Harriet and I have had the pleasure to serve. That foundation's very revival and success today we owe largely to Bruce's commitment to its vision and in particular to the new global history.
- 12 Bruce has been a prolific scholar throughout his long career, and his pen has hardly run dry. In many ways he is still best known for *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, on which he and Jacob Bronowski collaborated. It is an early synthesis that fuses the insights of the humanities and sciences. It was received with tremendous fanfare when it first appeared in 1960. Bruce once told me that his royalties alone paid for his sons' educations and then some. Other books he penned are *The Riddle of History*; *James and John Stewart Mill*, which received much acclaim; biographies of Richard Millhouse Nixon and Henry Kissinger; and *The Revolutionary Ascetic*. Many of his essays in psychohistory were collected in *The Leader, The Led, and The Psyche*. Let me also mention some of his other books: *A New Science: The Breakdown of Connections and The Birth of Sociology*; *The Fourth Discontinuity: The Co-Evolution of Humans and Machines*; and *The Uncertain Sciences*.
- 13 More recently Bruce has produced *The Global History Reader*, with Professor Akira

Iriye of Harvard, who is one of the contributors to this symposium; and *The New Global History*. I would be remiss if I did not also mention Bruce Mazlish's *Revolutions Reader*, which grew out of a famous class at MIT back in the 1960s and early 1970s. The classroom was an important test bed for Bruce's and other colleagues' ideas on revolution. Today the MIT History Faculty's flagship course is none other than "Revolutions." So Bruce's younger colleagues have revived a tradition that he and his generation of colleagues at MIT invented.

- 14 How has Bruce managed to write so much and so well for so long? Well he clearly has good genes. And he also has tremendous personal discipline and a facility with the English language. I should mention that Bruce cut his teeth as a sports writer, even before finishing his PhD, and so early on he learned how to meet strict deadlines. In fact, Bruce has a keen interest in professional sports, and especially NFL football. He has one of the best eyes for the game I know. One of my great treats as a young faculty member was to be invited to Bruce's house to watch his favorite New York Giants Sunday afternoons. Bruce always enjoyed a beer or two on those occasions, and so did I. Having grown up a Washington Redskins fan, I remember teasing Bruce about his Giants on the one occasion we watched the Giants and Skins go at it. Bruce predicted the Giants would win, and so they did.
- 15 MIT colleagues in my generation owe Bruce Mazlish many things. But let me mention just one. Bruce has always had a deep commitment to young scholars for whose talent he has a keen eye. He was always the first senior colleague to invite new junior faculty members to lunch. He certainly cared about getting our young faculty well socialized in an institution known first and foremost for its engineering and science. But, even more importantly, Bruce wanted to engage and be engaged by his young colleagues. And he did so because he understood that the most exciting, fresh ideas in a given field were likely to be in the possession of new young faculty. And let me say that Bruce never favored junior historians over other juniors in the humanities. Bruce was and still is ecumenical. He cares about the humanities in their entirety. It meant so much to me and to other juniors back then to have had an early mentor who actually wanted to know what we were thinking and writing about.
- 16 If it were not for Bruce, many of us in my generation would also have never discovered the MIT Faculty Club, when the club was actually a thriving institution, which it, alas, is no longer. Bruce, you probably contributed more to the extension of that club's life back then than any faculty member at MIT. — Thank you.