

AGAINST GLOBALIZATION

Against globalization

In order to understand globalization, we need to consider what globalization is not. That is, in order to understand the mechanisms and elements that work toward globalization, we must, in a sense, read *against* globalization, highlighting the limitations of the concept and its inherent conflicts. Only by employing this as a critical practice will we be analytically able to gain a dynamic understanding of the forces of globalization as they unfold today and as they have developed historically.

The talk of globalization is everywhere, and the concept has been at the forefront of theoretical and methodological discussions within the fields of cultural studies, sociology, arts, and the humanities in recent decades. Roughly speaking, these discussions take place on two different levels.

On one level, the fields mentioned here analyse concrete cultural artefacts—such as film, art, literature, and so on—and show how these artefacts thematize globalization by specifically addressing long-distance migration, forces of transnational capitalism, political cause-and-effect mechanisms across continents, and other cross-geographical dimensions. In this sense, globalization has become an analytical focus that to a large extent detects such themes, which earlier may not have played profound roles as themes in works of art or, at least, were not given the kind of analytical attention that they have received today. On another level, cultural studies, sociology, arts, and the humanities investigate how cultural artefacts are themselves institutionally globalized in the sense that they circulate internationally to a larger extent than they did earlier. This flow influence the modes of production and distribution of these disciplines—and sometimes their contents, too, in the sense of what critics might speak of as self-censorship in

order to please other cultural codes, or submission of artistic integrity to the mechanisms of an international market.

What unites the two different levels, of the specific work and its institutional framework, is that the descriptions of globalization tend to have a self-fulfilling nature: Globalization is all around us, because we look for it everywhere. Whereas in the 1970s, there was a tendency to analyse works of art and their institutional settings in terms of material modes of production, and in the 1980s there was a tendency to critically investigate the role of gender in relation to the works, the perspective of globalization has played a significant role in academia since the mid-1990s, thanks to a number of theories that have enabled us to articulate and comprehend the mechanisms of globalization. Scholars like Arjun Appadurai, Ulrich Beck, John Tomlinson, and Robbie Robertson have provided us with important and highly relevant concepts, tools, and methods to consider globalization, and this has helped us to grasp not only globalization as an actual cultural fact but also globalization as a field of study within academia.

In this broad spectrum of theory, one can, however, detect a tendency not only to emphasize the positive aspects of globalization but also, and perhaps more precisely, to treat globalization as an all-encompassing and inevitable force. Globalization is described as complex, networked, opaque, or fractal. It is defined as deterritorialization, as compression, or as interconnectedness—all terms that make it very difficult to designate something as being outside of, or unaffected by, globalization. These descriptions and definitions are of course necessary and important for any meaningful discussion of the cultural and historical changes taking place, but as a consequence of such a focus those

phenomena and cultural artefacts that do not fit the theories of globalization tend to be treated either as pertaining to the past or as exceptions that, precisely through their exclusion, affirm the totality.

The present theme section consists of a cluster of articles that challenges these tendencies by addressing some of the aesthetic issues that are disguised by such a logical bind. The aim is, on the one hand, to reflect on the nature of the sociological descriptions of globalization and the cognitive and sometimes aesthetic categories that lie at the basis of these descriptions. On the other hand, the articles point toward some of the dimensions of aesthetic practices that refine the universalizing forces of globalization: the body, emotions, material and technological matters, localizations, and nationalism. These themes are discussed and positioned in relation to theories of globalization by the leading scholars of globalization mentioned here. All articles take a work of art as their vantage point, asking the question of how the aesthetics of the specific work might challenge academic discourse of globalization. How do works of art go against the grain of theories of globalization, and how do they delimit and nuance our understanding of globalization?

Lotte Philipsen investigates how a work like *The Free Universal Construction Kit* by F.A.T. Lab can be seen as circulating not just among different geographical cultures within the framework of a global art world, but also among different epistemological cultures, such as science, economy, and so on. By arguing that the latter kind of circulation offers a wider field of potential aesthetic experience, the article reveals some paradoxical and conflicting aspects within a globalization paradigm that focus on bringing together works of art from various geographical cultures. Similarly, Camilla Möhring Reestorff urges us not to conflate globalization with global capitalism, emphasizing how globalization must be understood as a conglomerate of global structures interacting in different constellations all over the world. She takes as her example the Danish journalist Mads Brügger's documentary *The Ambassador*, which focuses on the global realities of the diamond trade in Liberia and the Central African Republic.

Philipsen's and Reestorff's contributions highlight how critical investigations of the intricate connection between the reflection of the concepts

of the global and the universal in works of art and the placement of these works in actual cultural circuits are a prerequisite for any description of the globalization of art. In her contribution, Karen-Margrethe Lindskov Simonsen adds a historical perspective to this figure by investigating similar relationships between the singular and the universal in earlier global structures. On the basis of the human rights discourse of the sixteenth-century Spanish historian Bartolomé de las Casas, she shows how the global, and the discourse of universal human rights, are at once interdependent and in opposition in this early phase of globalization.

These contributions point toward the topic of the last two contributions, namely, the way in which works of art can highlight globalization as a force of delimitations as well as of openness. Svend-Erik Larsen considers the role of the body in the South African novel *Tsotsi* to designate a conflictual crossroad between "a universal body," which unites us across cultural difference, and "a singular body" that individualizes us in a globalized world. In the same vein, Mads Anders Baggesgaard studies the materiality of the cinematic image as a conflict between the most intimate, the peeping in, and the possibility of a global view in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*, suggesting that it may in fact be this very conflict that constitutes the global.

By presenting a diversity of thematic, geographic, theoretical issues, the articles at hand aim at initiating an important discussion on how we address artistic and cultural globalization in different ways. The idea is not to promote a new theory of globalization but to point out that globalization and theories of globalization establish a framework for understanding how cultural artefacts exist in the world and relate to the world. Therefore, the articles do not represent a univocal move toward globalization. Instead, we invite you to join us in reading against globalization.

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