

## The "Globe" of Globalization

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**Abstract:** In this article, we will scrutinize what globalization actually means when you look at its praxis, not from a socio-political perspective but from a philosophical stance. This stems from a point of view that the debate and scholarship on globalization is still too often protruded by ideological and idealist arguments. These arguments posit the world as an object to think about or act upon. This thought of globalization remains stuck in formal conceptions or in a *Bildungsideal* rather than referring to the praxis of our being in the world. We will turn to the critical philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy to assess the condition of our existence in and forming of a global world. Following Heidegger, Nancy argues the world cannot be considered as an external object we can interpret or gain knowledge about. We will investigate what this means for a thinking of globalization.

**Key words:** Nancy, globalization, alterglobalization, empire

### Introduction

It has been 10 years since the media first spoke about the alterglobalization movement. Dubbed as such during the aftermath of the so-called *Battle of Seattle* in 1999, the name more or less covers the central issue of its participants' claims: an alternative way to globalization.<sup>1</sup> Its meaning ambiguous and difficult to grasp in scientific models however, at the turn of the century, alterglobalization became as much as a buzzword as its counterpart. Even today, both still seem to remain catchall words that – be it each in a specific way – want to capture the essence of what is going on in the world. Although these concepts first and foremost seem to live a life of their own, various actors do try to claim their interpretation of the matter as the single reality. Rightfully the tenability of the meaning of the concepts is assessed in contemporary social and political theory. Most theorizing has focused on a descriptive or prescriptive account of the state of affairs of the contemporary world. Analysts have tried to frame the significance of globalization as a description of reality. Living in a globalized world would

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<sup>1</sup> Initially the media spoke of the anti-globalization movement. Since December 2001 however, the neologism alterglobalization becomes increasingly common as it describes more accurately the underlying idea of 'another globalization' and the importance of constructing alternatives. See Geoffrey Pleyers, *Alter-Globalization. Becoming actors in the global age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

mean we live in a world that is characterized by the interconnectedness between nations and people all over the world. The world turned into a *global village* in which the World Wide Web serves as a meeting place. However, this description has been criticized because of the contested global nature of the phenomenon. Furthermore, globalization has been repudiated in another way as well. What is at stake in this second sense, is not inasmuch a description of current international affairs, but rather the world and its future as a normative place in which we live. Globalization thus, as a normative way we view our global living together. As such, globalization rather refers to an idea that indicates the contours and the limits of the way in which we think, understand, act upon, and relate to the world. It refers to a prescriptive account of reality.

In this article, we will scrutinize what globalization actually means when you look at its *praxis*, not from a political or sociological perspective, but from a philosophical standpoint. This stems from a point of view that the debate and scholarship on globalization is still too often protruded by ideological and idealist arguments. These arguments posit the world as an object to think about or act upon. This thought of globalization remains stuck in formal conceptions or in a *Bildungsideal* rather than referring to the praxis of our being in the world. We will turn to the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy to critically assess the condition of our existence in and forming of a global world. Following Heidegger, Nancy argues the world cannot be considered as an external object we can interpret or gain knowledge about. It rather is the space where this interpretation takes place. Interpretation of being becomes the being of interpretation. In this article, the being of the world as the space of our existence will be of key importance. We will investigate what this means for a thinking of globalization.

## Globalization

‘Today, with the culmination of discussions on cosmopolitanism, global human rights and other claims to universalism, globalization remains an important topic. At its heydays in the last decade of the 20th century, globalization was claimed as the irreversible fate of the world.<sup>2</sup> It was an irrefutable fact that the inhabitants of the world would be absorbed in a process that would make them all citizens of a *world society* or of a *global village*. No longer bound by traditional frontiers, the whole world came into reach due to the rise of new information and communication technologies, scientific innovation and the global restructuring of capital. Globalization was thought to be a fundamental shift in the spatio-temporal constitution of human existence and made many people believe – politicians, activists, academics and alike – in a new form of interconnectedness and a multi-layered system of ‘global governance’. It would bring the world a global unified world, pregnant with multilateral international institutions and organizations and a renewal of global

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<sup>2</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization. The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 1.

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human rights. The idea of globalization implied (and maybe today still does) a suggestion of a certain unity.

However, critical voices in social sciences argue the era of globalization is over.<sup>3</sup> Globalization as a description of what is happening in international relations today seems no longer to be valid. According to the post-globalist argument, it was nothing more than the *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s, naturalizing and dramatizing a “tiger-leap of capitalist expansion, representing it as the unstoppable, uncontrollable climax of a universal human destiny”.<sup>4</sup> They hold against it its so-called epochal and teleological nature and claim the events, despite of their vast social and political changes, as *epiphenomenal*. In this view, the global aspects of globalization are overestimated. Globalization is seen as a consequential description rather than a causal fact and as such as nothing more than a sign of the times in the 1990s, but now hopelessly outmoded. Furthermore, the claim of a decline of globalization considers the catastrophic attacks on New York and Washington of 9/11 of crucial importance in world politics and economy. If, during the last decade of the 20th century, there was any form of multilateralism and increased interconnectedness, the events of 9/11 and especially its consequences shattered this globalist idea of unity “that all societies are bound, sooner or later, to converge on the same values and views of the world”.<sup>5</sup> National geopolitics, territorial power and its security have become primordial again and bring forth other descriptions of the global constitution, ranging from internationalization to *empire* or imperialism, now dubbed as *new* or *lite*.<sup>6</sup> Rather than multilateralism, the driving forces in international politics and economy seem to return to a national, unilateral *modus operandi*. In this view, the significance and topicality of globalization is not only outdated, but also exaggerated.

In other words, globalization as a description of a political and social reality first and foremost is an ambiguous concept.<sup>7</sup> Its factuality is complex and as a consequence its reality equivocal. However, this doesn't mean that the process of globalization is without influence on our everyday life. The discourse of globalization not only is a preoccupation of academics that try to frame reality in concepts and ideas. Politicians, journalists and activist also claim their account of globalization. In this case the power of globalization to

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<sup>3</sup> See Justin Rosenberg, “Globalization Theory: A Post Mortem,” in *International Politics*, 42 (2005), 2-74 and John Gray, “The era of Globalization is over,” in *International Progress Organization* (2001) <<http://www.i-p-o.org/globalization-gray.htm>>, 03 May 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Rosenberg, “Globalization Theory,” 51.

<sup>5</sup> Gray, “The era of Globalization is over.”

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite* (London: Vintage, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> In globalization literature, this discordance on the meaning of globalization has brought forth three overlapping but distinctive waves in globalization theory: the (hyper-) globalist, the sceptical and the post-sceptical or transformationalist perspective. See Robert Holton, *Making Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 6-12 and David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

understand reality lies in political or normative force. Held and McGrew understand this multidimensional nature of globalization by means of two principle axes of disagreement.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, they distinguish a descriptive, analytical and theoretical approach, resulting in a continuum of globalists versus sceptics. On the other, the second axis “concerns values and normative attachments: whether on ethical grounds globalization as political project or ideal is to be defended, transformed, resisted or rejected.”<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this paper, the power of globalization to understand reality does not lie in its descriptive abilities but rather in its prescriptive or normative force. At first sight then, it might seem this paper primarily focuses on the second axis. Although the heuristic of Held and McGrew offers a clarifying tool to identify and map the contours of globalization, we believe the descriptive is always already hold in check by a certain normative claim to legitimation and vice versa. As such, the differentiation into two axes fails to address the idea that the description always already bears prescriptive values within itself. It overlooks the implicit assumptions transversally present in both continua and as a consequence ignores the world as the space of globalization.

It is our conviction that these implicit assumptions and an approach to the world as the space of globalization are of fundamental importance to grasp the phenomenon of globalization. In terms of Held and McGrew’s axes, this would mean an investigation into the intersection of the two axes. It implies going beyond the everyday givenness of descriptions and prescriptions and look for a philosophical horizon that exceeds these concepts. This epochal movement exposes the intertwining of the descriptive and the normative and the world as the space of globalization. This way, globalization has not as much to do with attempts to clearly map global reality or ideology, but has everything to do with everyday experience and the way we view the world, descriptively as well as normatively. In this sense, globalization rather refers to a *praxis* that produces meaning to understand, analyze, advocate and legitimize contemporary change. Praxis here is not understood as the opposite of theory, but as the taking place of theory. It is in this way globalization may have been of greater influence in shaping everyday life than its factual reality. What is of interest here, are the aspects and consequences of the praxis of globalization, not of its theory. Globalization as a theoretical account of reality as such isn’t repudiated, but loses its primordial claim of a truth of reality. It comes down to denouncing the claim of objectivity on a theoretical account and rendering its implicit assumptions visible. Globalization is conceived as a mode of living in a *global world* (but what does that mean?) rather than as a theory of today’s reality. Considered in this way, the age of globalization seems to be far from over. As praxis, globalization only seems to gain relevance. Attempts to consider certain social, economical, ecological and political concerns as global issues show this topicality. Take for example the Climate Council in Copenhagen in 2009. The issue of global warming has only gained increased global attention over the last

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

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years. It is said the future of our planet is at stake and this calls for vigorous corrective policy measures on a global scale. As such, climate change is not merely a matter of temperature and greenhouse effects, but permeates the ontological conditions of our existence. Sloterdijk strikingly captures the ontological aspects of our climate in the third part of his Spheres-trilogy: *Foam*.<sup>10</sup> Starting with the invention of chemical warfare of 1914-1918, he describes a history in which the problematical situation of human existence in its climate becomes ever more fundamental. Sloterdijk refers to *airdesign* to designate the modern technological method to condition the climate in favor of its 'consumers'. As such, it comes, as no surprise that *climate-war* is a paragon of our capitalist society in which we try to secure as much as fresh air for ourselves. The importance of self-interest of the different stakeholders is probably an important reason why Copenhagen didn't result in an agreement. However, the intention of the conference to deal with climate change globally or internationally indicates the global tendencies of the policy makers. It is global, not in the sense of multilateralism, but stretching over the full-scale world. Globalization in this way refers to a view of the global world. It has to do with the way we consider the world, act upon it, and relate to it: *practice* it. Globalization in this sense is nothing more than the ambition to provide a way of thinking and forming the world. Evidently, the question arises what this globalization means. How do we globalize? How are we to think and form the world? What does the world as such mean? Which world is trying to be made by the different actors at play? In what world do we live today? Or in other words: which *globe* is becoming global?

### **A world . . .**

Globalization is mostly claimed as a discovery of the world by modernity. The world as an intelligible object did not only come into reach in recent history however, for already in ancient Greece and Rome there was some sort of orientation towards a global world. Whether these global tendencies were a direct consequence of the conquests of Alexander the Great in the East or if they predate the Alexandrian empire is disputable, but at any rate the expansion of the Hellenistic empire helped spreading them. According to Polybius, historian of the Roman Empire, the idea of interconnectedness between different states became more and more apparent in the second century BC.<sup>11</sup> As such, a *global animus* penetrated Greek and subsequently Roman conceptualizations of socio-political and historical reality: there were empirical signs that point to the world as an organic whole and that a consciousness of the world "was changing in the direction of increasing geophysical, economical, political, social and cultural compression and

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Sferen: Schuim*, trans. by H. Driessen. (Amsterdam: Boom, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. by I. Scott-Kilvert. (London: Penguin, 1979).

interdependence of hitherto unrelated peoples and places.”<sup>12</sup> The idea of a belonging to the world as a whole was a tendency initially found among ancient Greek philosophers. Although the cynic Diogenes of Sinope was probably the first to express he was a “citizen of the world” when asked what countryman he was, the classic example of this global consciousness usually is ascribed to the theory of Stoicism.<sup>13</sup> Zeno, founding father of the Stoic school and influenced by Diogenes, was the one to theoretically elaborate the important concept of *kosmopolites* (*kosmos* meaning ‘world’ and *polis* meaning ‘city’): world-citizenship. In contrast with and even as a disgrace to the traditional Greek idea of citizenship, Zeno proposed a form of identity in which the state as a constitutive aspect would disappear. Central to his belonging to the world was his wish that all the inhabitants of this world should not live differentiated by their respective judicial system, but that we should consider everyone to be of one community and polity, with a common life and law. For Zeno, belonging to the world-city was a moral and ethical matter rather than a legal one and as such a challenge to the conventional law and customs of the polis. This changed with the rise of the Roman Empire. Stoic cosmopolitan philosophy had become very influential among the Roman rulers but rather than an ethical code, they saw it as an ideology for the rising empire. The way of the world became captured in a global Roman empire and its policy. It means the law of the polis was elevated to the status of the law of the cosmos.<sup>14</sup> What is of importance here is not in as much the physical expansion of the Roman Empire and its law, but rather the increasing metaphysical impact as a consequence of this expansion. What happens, is a world that becomes more and more captured by the empire, and as such subjected to a specific meaning and set of signs. The world is no longer simply a wide world. It becomes Roman. A view or consciousness of the world first and foremost refers to a Roman belonging of the world. It provides the way in which the world is to be thought and formed.

What is at stake then, is the meaning of the world. The crucial point here is the tension generated by the question ‘how do we live the world today?’. Surely, the Roman Empire collapsed in 1453, and no great ‘national’ (British, French, Austro-Hungarian, ...) empire seems to rule the world today. However, this does not mean that imperialism as such has completely disappeared. What did disappear is the locus of this imperialism. In describing an empire without an emperor, it might even well be that Hardt and Negri’s book *Empire* is probably the most successful work to depict our contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Robertson and David Inglis, “The global animus. In the tracks of world consciousness,” in Gills, B. K. and Thompson, W. R. eds., *Globalization and Global History* (London: Routledge, 2006), 45.

<sup>13</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), 240-241.

<sup>14</sup> Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire. The political philosophy of cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007), 159.

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global society.<sup>15</sup> And as such, regarding the question ‘how do we live the world today?’, with the question mark still referring to a politico-critical claim (worldview) instead of capturing a neutral theoretical curiosity, it doesn’t come as a surprise *Empire* is considered on the one hand as the ‘bible’ for those critical to the contemporary form of globalization and on the other hand as a crucial work to assess and understand the ongoing struggle of this alterglobalization movement. This is because the movement concords with Hardt and Negri’s appropriate elaboration of a new global form of sovereignty and wants to resist its boundless capitalist logic. According to Hardt and Negri, Empire’s new sovereignty exceeds traditional imperialist strategies and expands in all directions: “The space of imperial sovereignty, in contrast, is smooth. It might appear to be free of the binary divisions or striation of modern boundaries, but really it is crisscrossed by so many fault lines that it only appears as a continuous, uniform space. [...] In this smooth space of Empire, there is no *place* of power – it is both everywhere and nowhere.”<sup>16</sup> The result then, is the emergence of the world turning in a global (dis)order, a new logic and structure of rule, constituted through a capitalist system on a legal and governmental level.

However, Hardt and Negri have been criticized for their understanding of Empire, especially after the attacks on the World Trade Towers of 9/11. The critique addresses Hardt and Negri’s account of the decline of the nation-state sovereignty in contrast with the US gradually becoming a global superpower. For the purpose of this paper, the thoroughness of a contemporary critical theory of society is not to be found in the appropriate location of the (dis-)locus of sovereignty (whether it is imperial without an imperialist, American, international,...), but rather in the sense that it elaborates the interwovenness of a capitalist logic (a worldview) with the way in which contemporary society functions. What is important here, is not inasmuch the specific form or (dis-)location of sovereignty, but its primordial dependence on a certain worldview. Not the place of sovereignty as such is significant, but that what is at play within this sovereignty. It is rather a matter of the implicit (and explicit) content of a certain worldview; that what is waged within the manifestations of sovereignty. In other words, given the complex descriptions of the (dis-)location of sovereignty, the question here is: what is at stake in the context of globalization that makes sovereignty and its (dis-)location problematic in the first place? Or again: the question ‘how do we live the world today’ has a focus on the *what* rather than on the *where* of the sovereignty. It is a question for the meaning the world has today.

In everyday language, globalization is mostly depicted as an expanding economic process in which the free market plays an important role, either seen as a perverse fiscal discipline or as a developing-liberating power, the difference between the former and the latter simply reducible to a specific political stance

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

in the debate on (alter-)globalization. The central theme is the capitalist expansion that gradually spans every country. In this sense, globalization is mostly described by means of the three major official advocates of the liberal democracy: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). After the Great Depression in the first half of the 20th century, the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 led to the foundation of the IMF and the World Bank, as a way to prevent another global depression by means of market regulation. During the 1980s, this neoliberalism flourished under Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. The IMF and the World Bank became the missionary institutions of its ideology.<sup>17</sup> Together with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the transformation of the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) into the WTO in 1995, this not only meant the opening up of the international financial market, but also, and this is what is important here, that our contemporary form of democracy and the idea of liberal freedom were set as the advocates of this system and the necessary provisions for its existence.

However, contemporary society is no mere result of the last 50 years. The premises and implicit assumptions of our liberal democracies are rooted in the Enlightenment, a crucial event in the history of modern thought and for the foundation of the modern state. Still, the assumptions of the Enlightenment discourse are interwoven in our contemporary worldview and influence the way we live. Grasped in the concepts of subjectivity and objective knowledge, the central idea of this so-called modernity is best described by Kant's aphorism "Sapere aude!" ("dare to be wise").<sup>18</sup> To the Enlightenment thinkers, being wise referred to reason: rationality became the foundation of knowledge. Rational knowledge would (and is still believed to) liberate people from their self-inflicted immaturity, stimulate politico-moral self-liberation and -realization and improve scientific progress. Influenced by the dawn of the scientific era in the 17th century, with Galileo's discoveries in physics and astronomy and Descartes's method in logic and epistemology as its most prominent advocates, rationality and its techno-scientific method became important pillars for everyday life. Habermas, probably the most famous defender of this project of modernity, describes it as follows: "The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic. At the same time, this project intended to release the cognitive potentials of each of these domains from their esoteric forms. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of daily life – that is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life."<sup>19</sup> These hopes and promises rational knowledge combined with individual liberty

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by M. J. Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 17.

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – an incomplete Project", trans. by Seyla Ben-Habib, in Foster, H. *The anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Bay Press, 1983), 9.



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and universal morality and law still fits within the prevailing liberal worldview today. It fosters the belief that, given enough time, rationality and its technoscientific method can ease and control everyday life. This is why, today, we live by a creed of makeability with the aim of a better life by means of an increasing power of man over his natural environment and socio-political evolution. It is this modernist evolution the values of the free market and of the free individual thrive upon.

### **. . . becoming global**

Globalization is more than the mere growing importance of a certain economic system. Above all, it is the becoming global of the world, a world encompassing the whole world. This strive to know or grasp the world is incorporated within the aspirations of the Western logic or worldview. As already mentioned above, together with the liberal discourse these aspirations have their roots in the scientific discoveries and evolutions of the Enlightenment. Since the 17th century onwards, people have tried to systematically and rationally know and map the world. Every inch of the world (physical as well as meta-physical) has been surveyed. As a result, today, it doesn't seem to be possible anymore for something to be new under the sun. Everything has been explored and inspected. In this sense, globalization not simply is a discovery of the world, but truly means *the* dis-covering of the world.

A critical understanding of the contemporary form of globalization should be nothing other than this combination of the dis-covering of the world, together with the expansion of a neoliberal ideology. What matters, is the deep interwovenness of the expansion of the liberal world with the encompassing of the world. It is in this way globalization has to be understood: it is not just the *globe* that becomes globalized, but it is a *certain* globe that is being globalized. Today, this globe is undeniable neoliberal, modernist, and arguably maybe even Western. Up until 1989 there was no such global world, since it was clearly divided in a bipolar system of the capitalist West versus the communist East. This division disappeared with the fall of the Berlin wall, symbolic for the end of the Cold War and the collapse of a totalitarian utopia, and meant the end of the Westphalian idea, "that we live and act in the self-enclosed spaces of national states and their respective national societies."<sup>20</sup> With the capitalist wind blowing increasingly from the West, no longer tempered by the former literal and symbolic wall, and development agendas dropping the focus on state-centered policies, the neoliberal ideology stretched out nationally and internationally. Accompanied by an expanding *third wave* of democratization in newly 'freed' states, a thorough institutional reorganization of international politics and economy (e.g. the GATT was replaced by the WTO in 1995) found its way onto the international and supra-national level of decision-making. The Western (neo-)liberal worldview, advocated by the supra-

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<sup>20</sup> Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 20.

national institutions and enforced by liberal democracies, spread out over the world, penetrating every inch of the surface of the world.

It is for this reason, globalization has sometimes been declared to be Westernization or even Americanization. Arguably, the world has not become Western as such, but surely Western and capitalist (but are they not the same?) discourse does lie at the basis of the anonymous system that today has come to penetrate every segment of the world. In this sense, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy correctly grasps the crucial point of globalization when he remarks a connection between the evolution of capitalism and the capitalization of views of the world.<sup>21</sup> For Nancy, the predominance of the Western logic in the course of history and of globalization seems evident. He considers globalization as the Western process to discover the world. And today, there is nothing more to be globalized, nothing more to discover. The discovered world has become global. It stretches out *urbi et orbi*.<sup>22</sup> This formulation refers to the papal benediction and today means everywhere and anywhere. The West has made the entire world – everywhere and anywhere – *its* discovered world.

### Which other world is possible?

The evolution of the expansion of capital has been contested various times; even recently, by the protests against the top of the G-20 in Toronto. The so-called alterglobalization movement considers the economic policies of these world leading countries, together with the ideologies of the World Bank, the WTO, the IMF as a danger to fundamental freedom and development.<sup>23</sup> In lieu to this, they claim that people are more and more bound by networks of regulations and conditions set by the welfare state and its global market. Because of capitalism, the new points of reference have come into being that limit the horizon in which everyday life is situated: the contemporary space for self-realization gets systematically curtailed by the market. The content of personal freedom seems to be specified by means of supply and demand. Individuality is absorbed in the premises and prevailing values of the free market. As such, according to the alterglobalist argument, the capitalist system is not something an individual can partake of, but something that has penetrated the personal space and offers the parameters by which one can, or rather, has to choose its own life. Individuality and identity become consumable products or *lifestyles*, prescribed by the corporations with the largest share of the market. “*The world is not for sale*” is one of the alterglobalist slogans that express this perverse consequence of the ubiquity of neoliberalism that turns everything into a marketable value with a specific price. And what comes

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<sup>21</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> See James Arvanitakis, *The Cultural Commons of Hope. The attempt to commodify the final frontier of the human experience* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2007) and Tom Mertes ed., *A Movement of Movements. Is another world really Possible?* (London, Verso, 2004).

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with a price comes with a cost. In other words, there are people who win, and there are people who lose. Rather than attaining a form of mutual interdependence by making everything valuable or salable, the result is marked by dependence. Moreover, due to the preoccupation with profit, dependence turns into exploitation. The theoretically promised equality of shares for every stakeholder turns the real life market above all in the *haves* and *have-nots* of globalization.<sup>24</sup> Never before has the gap between the rich and the poor within societies and between the North and the South on the global level been so wide. The Western wish to eliminate trade barriers while having a more dominant position in the market only led to exploitation and consumption of the world.<sup>25</sup> “*People and nature before profit*” is another alterglobalist slogan that frames this well and that, opposite to the process of globalization of profit, proposes a world of solidarity and ecological responsibility. Although there is no single unifying *agenda for change*, and rather a *multitude* of alternatives, the “desire for global democracy and the opening up of non-commodified spaces or commons” seems to be one of its commonalities.<sup>26</sup> This means rolling back the logic of the market and its profit in favor of social justice.

If it were up to the alterglobalization movement, the world would be a different place than it is today. Their slogan “*another world is possible*” is probably the best expression of these hopes and beliefs. And it might even well be that this dictum is the most critical or fundamental inquiry in our contemporary global situation. What matters here, is not the concrete alternative the alterglobalization movement stands for, but rather the dictum being stripped down of its politico-ideological content and offering the power of inquiry into the sheer possibility of another world. As such, the question whether another world is possible means nothing other than the question for the meaning of the world. It is a reflection upon the essence of the world. However, the point here, is that the reflections or claims of the world made in the contemporary debate on globalization, do not refer to a singular reality that exists in itself, but rather indicate the expectations, hopes and convictions of the one who utters them. Within a description of reality always already lies a certain normative account that contains implicit or explicit premises of what is essentially true or false, and as a consequence the given description can not be but contingent. Thus, if there is one thing that the variety of contemporary rhetorics of politicians, activists, international institutions, ... makes clear, it is that in their aspiration to offer a description of the future or end of the world as the true reality, the world withdraws itself from these claims of truth. In itself, the meaning of the world has no entity, essence or singularity.

What became clear 10 years ago during the Battle of Seattle, is not inasmuch the birth or climax of protest against the expanding international race to profit, but rather, and this is primordial for the purpose of this paper, the fact that the rhetoric of globalization allows to be adopted by different

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<sup>24</sup> Noreena Hertz, *The Silent Takeover. Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (London: Arrow Books, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Arvanitakis, *The Cultural Commons of Hope*, 111.

stakeholders. Globalization appears to be nothing more than a discourse in which the world is caught up by essentialist theoretical constructs. If we want to interrogate the meaning of the world, we have to abandon these essentialist claims of the world. This is akin to the philosophy of Nancy, who criticizes the figure of a *cosmotheoros*, an observer of the world. According to Nancy, the world cannot be conceived of as a representation.<sup>27</sup> No theory can entirely grasp the world and as such, there is no possibility to ascribe it an essence or ideal. Nancy continues the Heideggerian critique on the modern worldview that, by means of its epistemological principles, frames the world as an image, picture or an idea. According to Nancy (and Heidegger), the world exceeds these images or pictures of the world. In *Le Sens du Monde*, he confronts us with this condition.<sup>28</sup> The world withdraws itself from every essentialist regime of representations, because we are living in an epoch that can no longer offer us all the necessary points of reference in order to manage our significations.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, Nancy even proclaims the end of the world. He does not mean the world no longer exists, but rather that there no longer is a concept or idea that can fundamentally grasp the reality of the world. Nancy contends that our present condition makes clear that the word 'world' is not the name of a substantial reality in itself, but first and foremost the name of an idea or concept, completely determined by a regime of sense. What is at play there, is a powerful illusion that equates words with things. However, there is no longer a truth of the world or an objective representation. These concepts have lost their sense. Words are not equated with things. Nancy's proclamation of the end of the world means nothing other than the end of the sense of the world or, the end of the world of sense. There seems to be no longer any sense in sense. This means we are left with a profound nihilism towards the great narratives and solutions claimed within the debate on globalization. Since there no longer can be a theory of the world, the idea that another world is possible, directs us towards the fundamental question of the meaning of that world.

### The sense of globalization

In *Le Sens du Monde* Nancy profoundly describes the contemporary crisis of sense as the lack of an outside with relation to which sense could be represented (the *cosmotheoros*). The loss of such an outside (be it God, the Subject, Science...) constitutes the loss of sense. However, Nancy suggests, sense is something that exceeds this inside-outside relation, since it always

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<sup>27</sup> The understanding that the world *no longer* can be conceived of as a representation refers to "a world without a God capable of being the subject of its representation (and thus of its fabrication, of its maintenance and destination)." Nancy, *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation*, 38, our translation. For Nancy, this clearly means the great times of religion are over and it is this that constitutes the *no longer* of our condition.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Sens du Monde* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> See also Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Jean-François Lyotard, *Het Postmoderne Weten. Een verslag* (Kappelen: Pelckmans, 1987); Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

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already is absorbed in being to the world. For Nancy, “if we are *to* the world, if there is being-to-the-world in general, that is, if there is world, there is sense. The *there is* makes sense by itself and as such.”<sup>30</sup> The question why there is sense is replaced with the answer that there is something and it is this that in itself makes sense. Nancy summarizes this aptly by stating the world no longer *has* sense, but that it *is* sense. Wittgenstein described this fact, that the being of the world in itself is what creates sense, strikingly as follows: “it is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.”<sup>31</sup> The world *is* nothing else than sense, its meaning is nothing other than the fact that it *happens*. It takes place and it is this taking place, its being, what constitutes its meaning, what makes sense. As such, the world is nothing other than the *praxis* of sense. It does not refer to a theory or an idea.

In *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation* Nancy continues this mode of thinking and elaborates in a very critical way what this confronts us with.<sup>32</sup> Together with this work, we would like to propose to consider the process of what we have described here as globalization in a similar way. In this sense, globalization implies the *becoming-world* of the world – or *la mondianisation du monde* as Nancy would call it – refers to a praxis, rather than to a politico-moral or economical theory of the world. Instead of referring to the content or elaboration of these theories, we believe globalization indicates a horizon that exceeds rhetorical reality and starts from its openness. This epochal movement is not derived from a transcendental position, but is a consequence of the impossibility to frame a totalizing or universal view of the world still too often found in contemporary politico-moral theories on globalization. It not only exposes the contingency, relativity and limits of these theories, but the being-world of the world as well. Nancy’s Heideggerian understanding of world clarifies this:

a world is not a unity of the objective or external order: a world is never in front of me, or it would be another world than mine. But if it were absolutely other, I would not even know, or barely, that it is a world. [...]. From the moment on a world appears to me as world, I already share something with it: I experience a part of its inner resonances. Perhaps this notion of “resonance” is adequate to suggesting what is at stake here: a world is a space in which a certain tonality resonates.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nancy, *Le Sens du Monde*, 18 (our translation).

<sup>31</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 2001), 88.

<sup>32</sup> It leads Nancy to discern globalization from *mondianisation*. Although they might seem synonymous, the two words reveal very distinct meanings. For Nancy, the term globalization is an already established and tainted concept with a different tonality than that of *mondianisation*. See Pieter Meurs, Nicole Note and Diederik Aerts, “This world without another. On Jean-Luc Nancy and *la mondianisation*,” in *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies*, 1 (2009), 31-46.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy, *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation*, 34-35 (our translation).

The world outside representation exposes itself as the space of our existence, the site of being and of beings as a whole. It emerges as the place and actuality of being, exposing itself as a totality of meaning as opposed to something one can have a meaning about. It is exactly this what Nancy means with the world *being* sense, rather than *having* sense. In this sense, globalization reveals the world as an existential whole with a meaningful content. Using examples as the ‘hospital world’ or the ‘fourth world’, Nancy indicates that belonging to this meaningful ensemble consists in sharing, apprehending or understanding its codes, signs and texts, even when they not made explicit or exposed as such. The sense of the world is not something outside of that world. Rather, the two are the same. World always already means sense, being part of, sharing. It is this incarnation that reveals the becoming world of the world.

The contemporary discourse on globalization tends to forget that a world always already means this relation with its inner givens. The world is not something outside of us, something we can represent in one or another fairly objective economical or political theory. The world does not appear for us as a unity of the external order. There is no other (world) that can be the representation of our being. Out of the process of *mondanisation*, emerges the world as the *only* world, the space where being takes place. This is why the present understanding of globalization does not succeed in thinking the world: it does not conceive to be as always already being in a world. It forgets that the *globe* in globalization is the only space where being takes place.

## Worldviews and globalization

In the beginning of this article, we outlined the importance of globalization as praxis of the world that produces meaning to understand, advocate and legitimize contemporary change. We tried to indicate the globality of a certain worldview, the way in which the global world is considered or pictured. Together with the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy, we argued that this view with its mainly neoliberal, modernist, and Western tendencies carries within its core a hidden and implicit set of premises and assumptions of what is essentially true. It ascribes the world an essence or entity. It brings forth a specific interpretation of the globe in globalization and as such does not only give an answer to the question ‘in what world are we living today?’, but also outlines the premises and preconditions of that world. The world then, does emerge as a consequence based on the grounds or foundations of a certain view on that world. As such, the world stays captured within an image or idea of the world. It remains in the sphere of a *cosmotheoros*.

With Nancy’s philosophy it becomes clear that this is a sublation of the world as the taking place of being. In its contemporary hegemonic form then, globalization as a worldview seems to forget this ontological aspect of world. It is a view that makes up the possibility of a world, rather than a world that makes up the possibility of a view. In this sense, globalization *constructs* the globe rather than the opposite and moreover, this construction remains

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primarily theoretical and as such contingent and arbitrary. As a consequence, the contemporary forms of globalization as a worldview can not offer a foundation or ground for a specific world or globe. The world in itself is groundless. As Nancy argues, the world just *is*. Like the rose in the famous poem of Angelus Silesius, the world is without why. Its sense or meaning are not caught up in a certain entity or essence. The world is nothing other than the open space of our taking place and exceeds every theory that closes this space. This implies the world cannot offer a blueprint or an end of globalization. However, as this world is the only space where globalization takes place, at least it can indicate the confines or define a limit in the way in which we think about this process of becoming ever more global. It does not let itself to be constructed by a certain worldview, instead, it acts as a deconstruction of that view. It is nothing other than praxis.

There is a lot at stake in the discussion about globalization. With the claim of a certain worldview, the world gets reduced to a simple globe that leaves the *have-nots* of this world (no wonder one refers to the third or fourth world in this respect) deserted.<sup>34</sup> We believe our contemporary situation is clouded by such a worldview. It might as well even be that it is no clear, or even conscious view, but it certainly does not let itself be limited by the world as the space of our existence. This is why the dictum of the alterglobalization movement *another world is possible* is imminent and crucial at hand, now more than ever. However, the focus here then, is not on the otherness of another world, but rather on the world itself or on its being.

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<sup>34</sup> In *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation*, Nancy indicates that a world is a world where there is room for the whole world (tout le monde), for everyone: "A world is precisely that in which there is space for the whole world: but genuine space, that which makes things genuinely take place (in this world). Otherwise, this is not a "world": it is a "globe" or a "glome," it is a "land of exile" and a "vale of tears." Nancy, *La Création du Monde ou la Mondialisation*, 34.

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