

Globalisation - the greatest achievement of civilisation or the greatest delusion. Discuss.

To grasp the mystery of appearances as they unfold in front of us... 'practical knowing' arrives through following networks, connections, surprises, absences, and above all, through disclosure (of what lies before us), and incomplete knowledge; not through any discovery of essences, totalities, and rational orders... The surface is not superficial, and at the same time knowing is practical, and always partial. (Thrift, 1994)

Globalisation, according to Held (1995) signifies 'the stretching and deepening of social relations and institutions across space and time', that is, 'a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions assessed in terms of the extensity, intensity, velocity and impact generating transcontinental flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.' Dominant globalisation discourses posit the subsequent emerging/emergence of a distinctive spatiality characterised by deterritorialisation and the emergence of a 'borderless world' (Scholte, 2000). Fundamentally, this essay explores the contestation between globalists (globalisation achieving) and skeptics (globalisation deluding) over the ontological and normative assumptions of this globalised space. I engage critically with the question itself and suggest that there is little use in framing, or observing, globalisation in static terms, epochally and relativistically. I thus propose a subtle yet vital rephrasing of the question to 'Globalisation - the greatest *achieving* of civilisation or the greatest *deluding*? that recognises globalisation as inherently formational and active, 'deepening and stretching with intensity and velocity', existing in space-times and 'always becoming(s)' (Thrift, 2000). Through this non-representational lens, we can begin to critically evaluate globalisation, its present ontologies and materialities. Most fundamentally, any critical engagement with globalisation is ongoing, processual, and riveted by fallibilities, that is to say our perceptions of it are often neatly moulded by individual contexts and experiences (both in actual and hyper-real, mediatised sense).

For the purpose of this essay, I thus engage predominantly in a non-contextual evaluation of the terms of the question, one that attempts to observe the *causes* and *consequences* of placing one's belief at either extreme (i.e. believing globalisation to be the greatest achieving of civilisation or the greatest deluding). In doing so, I relate globalisation skepticism - or more precisely, the resolute belief in its delusion - with rupture and the cessation of 'becomings', or as Sen writes, 'misdiagnosis' and the regressive pull. Such rupture, however, is not to suggest that the arguments of skepticism/delusion are fictitious, many have very real and affecting geographies. I reference three in particular: (i) the Marxist idea that globalisation, rather than a 'stretching and deepening' to the peripheries, is a continuation of the production of capitalist spaces and core-peripheral tensions; (ii) Rodrik's 'Globalisation Trilemma' that posits deep globalisation and democracy are incompatible; and (iii) the limitations to a further expansion of the free market (globalisation) by 'jurisdictional discontinuities' and the relations of embeddedness between market and non-market agents/institutions. Rather I suggest that courting these skepticisms, whilst maintaining the belief in globalisation (achieving) signifies a dialectics of progress and a healthy flexing of the muscles of an organic, global consciousness.

Furthermore, I propose that if globalisation is both an experiential phenomenon *and* an ideological framework to progress in, then there are certain limitations to its present theorisation, and thus to any critical evaluation of its achieving/deluding. Amin (2000) courts skepticism in the intellectual purchase and reach of the present framework, proposing a radical reappraisal away from the 'language of spatial change [that assumes] organisation along scalar and territorial lines: reterritorialisation follows deterritorialisation, all spatial scales...relativised.' Instead he observes the

multiple, mobile geographies and temporalities of globalisation as produced through practices and relations of different spatial stretch and duration, a 'world of a billion encounters' (Thrift, 2000). Ironically, this novel, non-scalar approach, both shrivels (deluding) and strengthens (achieving) the belief in globalisation as a productive reference and ideological framework: (i) it dissolves the fixity of place - core and periphery, Occident and Orient - and re-replaces humans as the central agents of, and within, globalisation and (ii) cognitive dissonance, or the holding of belief and skepticism simultaneously, constituted and produced intellectual progress. Such struggle and contradiction - both metaphysically, as decoders of symbols, and physically, as bodies moving through these symbols and globalised space - represents the condition of modernity and 'a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity', or as Berman writes, '[that] mode of vital experience - of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils' and all that is solid melting into air (Berman, 1990).

The underlying chronology, or modern timeframe, attributed to globalisation is often disputed upon with its normative assumptions of change and an evolution *from* the capitalist modes of production and governance that pre-existed it. Hirst and Thompson (1995) suggest that rather than change, globalisation is a continuity of capitalism, dominated by uni-directional flows and 'accumulation by dispossession' between the core and peripheries (Harvey, 1990). The idea feeds particularly off of Sassen's analysis of the world city as locis or nodes that exercise and distribute power. The spatial ordering of globalisation, she writes, has involved the 'global decentralisation of production simultaneous to the centralisation of command and control' within the major cities. This reorganisation of production associated with dispersion makes possible the access to peripheralised labour markets, whether abroad or at home, without undermining that peripheral condition. Hardt & Negri (2004) place this dispersed globalisation a step further, suggesting the emergence of an 'empire of global capitalism' but a normalised and decentred one. As such, globalisation in its most recent 'becomings' (Thrift, 2000) knows no boundaries or limits, not only in the geographic, economic and political sense but in terms of penetration into the most remote recesses of social and cultural life, 'even into the psyche and biology of the individual.'

With Foucauldian undertones, the 'amorphous empire' holds a ubiquitous and diffuse power structure that reinstates the imaginaries of places as territorial economic spaces, in contrast with the global as the realm of distanced links, fast flows and surplus extraction/accumulation. From the ultra-skeptics' position, this global economy might even be said to be mythical (Zysman, 1996), particularly as purportedly 'global' companies are in fact deeply embedded in their respective jurisdictional homelands, and their actions, thoroughly enmeshed in the 'logic of interstate relations' (Kapstein, 1991). The spatial hierarchies that these marxist and structuralist ontologies of globalisation elicit, dispel the idea of an evolving, globalised space; they suggest an epochal, skeptic doubt. Yet to observe, and rationalise the 'becomings' of globalisation in purely territorial ways, and to render the agency of multiple actors to meta-narrative, or the whims of an 'interstate logic', jars when observed against the burgeoning developments and growths in the emerging world/markets over the past decade. Instead, a non-spatial and non-representational formulation of places 'as dynamic and taking shape only in their passing' is required., Massey (2000) uses the analogy of a car journey to express these un-preordained and forever 'becoming' rhythms and *achievements* of globalisation: the car experiences a 'simultaneity of trajectories' rather than a crossing of a single, surface space: 'simultaneity composed of the practices and thoughts of those travelling, the histories of the places crossed, and the trajectories of the places left now different without you.'

To critically engage with globalisation and its complex, multitudinous 'stretching(s)' and 'deepening(s)' between the local, national and global, is to observe the expression of space and place in dialectical tension with one another. Skeptic arguments often indict globalisation over its swallowing and flattening (McDonaldisation) of once diverse cultures and practices - an overwhelming of (local) place by (globalised) space. Taylor (1999) defines this space in modernity as the realm of abstract principles, rules, rationality, science, administration, bureaucracy, and institutions, [of space] as politically disabling. In contrast he sees place as the substantive, politically enabling, lived realm involving intimacy, experience, belonging, feelings.

However rather than concluding in a politics of delusion, Taylor suggests the techno-social space of the one-world (capitalist) system is *becoming* a place through developments such as the rise of a global consciousness (for, example in global ecological fallibility) (Amin, 2001). As such, these dialectical tensions of place and space - deluding whilst achieving, swallowing while structuring - reveal the mechanism of globalisation, and its innate possibilities and future(s) for benefit and progress. Sen (2004) incites upon these disabling, expansive logics upon the developing world: 'it is not the central issue of contention [to lambast] globalisation itself, nor is it the market as an institution but the inequity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements' - those preconditions for engaging in this positively disabling, space - which produce unequal shares of the benefits of globalisation' and the metaphor of the 'missed boat'. Hirst and Thompson (2002) wrest the limits to economic globalisation thus far, suggesting that the persistence of interest rate and asset-price differentials/non-parity and the correlation between national savings and investment well into a period of financial liberalisation, deregulation and supposed global integration, testify to the relative autonomy and separateness of financial systems.

In similar vein, Rodrik (2011) expounds the limits of free-market expansion by proposing a 'globalisation paradox'. The paradox is three-sided, a country can choose any two between: (i) deep globalisation (strong integration), (ii) national independence and (iii) democracy (a welfare state and unionised labour market) but not all three at once. Rodrik theorises that presently, the globe is strung in Thomas Friedman's 'Golden straitjacket', of nation states (ii) operating in a stage of deep globalisation (i). The leftover, 'democracy' is undermined. He proposes an alternative therefore, of combining democracy with globalisation in a system of 'global governance'. However this ideal, of a single, global government is untenable. Thus the trilemma concludes that the only viable option is to arrest the movement of deep globalisation. Engelen and Grote (2009) however dispute the underlying methodologies in these conclusions, positing the problems of an epochal rather than conjectural focus. They write: 'vital to explaining the evolving and geographically uneven map of the financial system...are the considerations of temporality, institutional context and relationality.'

A present study of the global post-crisis world economy would, for instance, naturally benefit from the ideas of globalisation as 'always becoming' and of places as ephemeral and mobile materialities. Martin (2010) explores how the recent financial crisis, with its origins in the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage boom and house price bubble in the USA, makes for a striking example of 'glocalisation', with distinctly locally varying origins and global consequences and feedbacks. Furthermore he places the crisis within the shift from a 'locally originate and locally-hold' model of mortgage provision to a securitised, 'locally originate and globally distribute' model [such that] when the local subprime mortgage markets collapsed in the USA, the repercussions were felt globally. At the same time [however] the

subsequent, global credit crunch and deep recession have had locally varying impacts and consequences.’ In this aspect, Martin attunes to the mingling and perpetually co-evolving space-times of the local (place) and global (space) and, furthermore, recognises that spinning out the boomerang doesn’t guarantee its return the exact same path and speed. The ‘stretching’ and ‘deepening’ of these globalised (financial) spaces anchors in Thrift’s ontology of the unknowing, of a ‘world made up of billions of encounters consisting of multitudinous paths which intersect’ (Thrift, 1999) *and* affect, in this scenario, an ‘egging of [distant] baskets’ without the vision or longsightedness to watch over them (Wojcik, 2009). Thrift calls this a situated epistemology, that recognizes the very strong limits on what can be known and how we can know it.’ Such an epistemology reiterates the transience and inessentiality of physical place, and, the idea that globalisation itself is a ‘contingent and ever-shifting mesh of interactive processes¹’ (Olds and Yeung, 1999).

It is important to stress that acknowledging the partiality of ‘practical knowing’, does not advocate inaction, indeed our knowing (then acting) often improve substantially after happenings - the present regulation and restructuring of banks’ capital structures *away from* excessive (highly-leveraged) and high-risk credit creations - suggests this. Rather, ‘globalisation’ as an analytical framework is achieving by allowing us to embed these ‘situated epistemologies’ within it. Globalisation is a stew-pot, bubbling with the idea(l)s and unrealised potentials of civilisation. Within this idea, there are several proposals suggested for the future, Buroway (2001) calls for a global ethnography, mapping how local realities organically link to global processes, he writes: ‘ethnography’s concern with concrete, lived experience can sharpen the abstractions of globalisation theories into more precise and meaningful conceptual tools.’ Robertson (1992) furthers an ideal of a global, planetary consciousness, wherein individual phenomenologies...take as their reference point the entire world rather than local or national entities.’ Globalisation thus encapsulates a *phenomenology* - of lived experiences, affects and effects and an embedded *epistemology*, serving as an ideological and intellectual reference point. In essence, to engage with globalisation - to stretch and deepen, theorise and speculate upon its ‘becomings’ - is to be conscious and courting of the present.

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