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Justifying the New

Editorial for the inaugural issue

The question that all new endeavours face is perhaps one that can only be answered in retrospect: why? Why launch a new journal into an already crowded marketplace of intellectual production? And moreover, why launch a journal under the rubric of 'critical globalisation studies' when it is the case that as scholars we are always already compelled to be self-consciously 'critical' and frame our observations within a global scope? Is there not a sense that a saturation point has already been reached; a sense that the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity and globality has already been well accommodated within the mainstream; and is there not a certain 'turn' that would say that the truly radical move nowadays is to reject the game of post-modern fin-de-siècle and return back to matters of national sovereignty, classical I.R. theories and traditional political institutions? If conservatism is the new radicalism, does not a journal like the one being launched here already strike us as a bit passé?

Of course, the answer to all these vexing questions is that we have no easy answers to them. If we were to think about our motivations for launching this journal beyond a loosely articulated conviction that there is, to put it in economese, a 'gap in the market', then it would have to come down to a roll of the dice; a belief that out of no-thing can come some-thing, with no a priori guarantees – much like life itself. We come to the question of launching this journal, then, in the belief that we can do better what others do now: no point shying away from it. But still, it is not just a decision entirely subtracted from its conditions. To present it as such would be to see in ourselves – and excuse the aggrandisement – a reflection of Carl Schmitt's sovereign, and in the field of global studies the new nomos of the earth. Rather, there are a number of emerging trends that we seek to drop ourselves in the current of, by way of which to flow in the something like the stream of global consciousness to better approximate the truth of our current global problematique.

To wade into the problematique of contemporary globalisation – underscored by the persistent ambiguity as to what globalisation actually is – requires us to not only look within the academy, but also to more general debates within mainstream global politics and the media. For example, within academia there are many critical scholars of globalisation for whom globalisation is often, but not necessarily always, theorised as multiple, uneven and something that is experienced

differently by groups and individuals all over the planet. More importantly this kind of scholarship seeks to uncover the oversimplifications of dominant paradigms. The very foundations upon which mainstream academic claims to truth rest (often reached through overly positivist and empirical methodologies) are necessarily questioned here. The journal thus wishes to bridge the gap between the academy and what lies beyond academic borders.

In terms of the form of the journal, to mark what makes it distinct: most obviously, it follows the positive trend in being presented and distributed online (in addition to a limited run print edition), and openly accessible to everyone in the world with access to the internet and a grasp of the English language. Following ground breaking e-journals such as *Cosmos & History* we hope that this will break down the institutional barriers of access to knowledge and, to use a term well past its sell-by date, democratise the medium. Notice, however, there is nevertheless a bind to this aspirational universalism. To use the famous terminology of Deleuze and Guattari in *Un Mille Plateaux*, in the same gesture we both de-territorialise and re-territorialise. The universalism of open-access online journals further colonises the linguistic terrain on which global universalism realises itself. Or even if we were to invert this proposition into concern for *difference*: if as Heidegger proposed we essentially *are* our language, then as we add to this global trend to render the zero-institution of the global space of communicability in English, at the same time we also constitute the global subject in the process; a subject rendered increasingly homogenous. The important point being that it is not just that this supposed democratic utopia turns into something remarkably prescriptive and binding – the globalisation that we want to be ‘critical’ towards is already constituted and presented to us by our acting – but that it is also exclusionary, in that with English as our zero-institution the Other, the ‘native speaker’, essentially vanishes from our globalisation and is only re-presented through the translator or conduit of the ‘native informant’. Given all this it might therefore seem anachronous that we should choose the stuffy, old English spelling of globalisation, instead of the more ubiquitous (and phonetically correct) American spelling with a z. “Justify that?” you demand. We can but appeal to a certain stubborn resistance to globalization. All apologies.

Beginnings are always difficult, and this inaugural issue is no exception. Finding our feet is a matter of finding the correct field to place them on. The astute reader will notice our dissatisfaction with the exclusivity of the type of discourses one finds within global studies, and those of international relations and other fields. Thus, it will appear on first glance as if we have compiled a rather eclectic collection here: Hegel and cosmopolitanism next to discursive borders on off-shoring; a call for reflexivity in international relations scholarship next to an analysis of the gendering

dimension of the lyrics of radical punk band Propaghandi; and an argument against policy relevance in scholarship alongside a piece on conceptions of the state in the Islamic Republic of Iran! Still, even if this does not provide an example of synthetic interdisciplinarity, it provides a start to get these discourses talking to one another and finding the connecting threads.

In the articles section Manfred B. Steger opens with an expansive piece arguing that ideologies of the 20th century were all inexorably intertwined with nation statehood, and that now, in the 21st century, a broadly construed 'global' is coming to dominate the imaginary of the citizens of the world. Steger's piece puts forward the notion that any political articulation of the global imaginary by "neoisms" has to be increasingly understood as new ideational clusters. In a contradistinct tone, Pieter Meurs, Nicole Note and Diederik Aerts provide a close reading of Jean-Luc Nancy's text on globalisation, which he sees as the catastrophe of the realisation of the Enlightenment's quest for one world without another. On the other hand, for Shannon Brincat the search for a global cosmopolitan sphere in which a state of radical recognition can be attained is an as yet unrealised prospect, and one which can be understood through an immanent dialectical necessity in Hegel's thought. For Sanae Elmoudden, lastly, the reconstruction of space in the processes of globalisation should not just be understood territorially, but also as a discursive reconstruction. This point is illustrated by her with an extensive case study of a Moroccan call centre.

The next section, titled 'Polemics,' is not quite as polemical as one might expect. Our aim was to provide a space for shorter discussions or thoughts-in-progress that had not yet developed into fully fledged article length pieces – thoughts that by virtue of being able to take a position, and not rely so heavily upon the whole academic apparatus of exhaustive referencing etc., would be by their very nature more polemical. As it worked out for this issue, our Polemics are no less accomplished and polished than the contributions in the articles section. They could more accurately be described just as short articles. The first is the provocatively titled 'Fuck the Border' by Samuel Dwinell. It is informed by the burgeoning discipline of sophisticated philosophical reflections – I avoid the now poisoned term 'post-modern' – on the global. On the other hand, Matthew Eagleton-Pierce uses a reading of Bourdieu to ask for more self-reflexivity on the part of international relations and international trade scholars, and probes the lack of real world activism by those who take up the epistemic position of the poor and marginalised in their scholarship.

The aim of the comment section is to allow even shorter reflections, often hinged on recent events within a wider disciplinary and thematic remit. So whilst Lee Jones's critique of the need for 'policy relevance' in the field of international relations

follows quite naturally on from Matthew Eagleton-Pierce's piece; Siavush Randjbar-Daemi (a journalist and historian) looks at the post-election events of June 12th and beyond in Iran in light of the quest for the state in the Islamic Republic since 1979. Our comments section draws from comment posted in our rolling comment section on the website, as well as pieces specially commissioned or submitted to the journal.

And finally, in our book reviews section Pepijn van Houwelingen reads Mark Levine's *Heavy Metal Islam* and finds the question of the political potential, or not, of music a compelling theme. Pepijn's review reads well alongside Samuel Dwinells' discussion of the political efficacy of the music of punk band Propagandi in the Polemics section. Yasmine van Wilt finds Costas Douzinas' critique of 'Human Rights and Empire' compelling. Tyce Schideler, on the other hand, provides us with an extensive reading and critique of the upbeat assessment for Africa's future in Edward Miguel's book *Africa's Turn?* He questions the mainstream assumptions of Miguel that increased democracy necessarily leads to economic growth and finds that the increasing role of China on the continent is consistently downplayed.

All in all, a not quite eclectic mix of papers, we hope you will agree. It is also a selection that should bode well for future issues, where we hope to combine a mix of themed and unthematized issues exploring the most pressing issues today: war, migration, capitalism, democracy, and so on. Beginnings are never easy, thank you for taking the hard road and joining us from the start.

Nathan Coombs (on behalf of all the editors)
London, August 2009