

WHITHER GLOBALIZATION?

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WHITHER GLOBALIZATION? AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME OR WHOSE TIME HAS COME AND GONE?

Globalization, which offers the promise of abundance for all in a world where cultures are respected and each contributes to the total knowledge of an ever more fruitful and bounteous planet, at this moment, as the shock-effects of the 2008 economic crisis continue to ripple through the now connected economies of the world bringing new cutbacks, sacrifices and loss of basic needs, seems always both further than ever from being fulfilled and just on the verge of delivering its promise. We used to speak about globalization from above and globalization from below, noting the uneven development of one against the other, with, for example, capital goods flowing unimpeded across national borders being produced for ever lower wages (and in some cases continuing to devastate indigenous economies), while the flow of workers to the more prosperous North from the still neocolonized South faces all sorts of restrictions as the multitude seeks not merely survival but their own versions of the promise that so far seems to exist fully almost exclusively for the now shrinking upper echelon of the financial industry's elites. Though, again, there is also now an alternative movement from North to South led by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), where those who produce the goods are demanding more and more equality and forcing themselves to the table as partners rather than simply being considered as platforms for the last stages of global assembly before products are shipped to the West/North. This is not even to mention the now institutionalized stronghold of a new alter-globalization that marks the multiple strands of resistance constituting the Latin America socialist bloc comprising Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil and Argentina, and the series of popular, labor-based and generational uprisings against comprador class rule in multiple countries across North Africa and the Middle East.

A primary producer, participant, partner, and sometimes antagonist to globalization has been media. This special issue of *Situations* thus attempts to rethink the contemporary role of one aspect of global media, cinema, and its relation to the uneven development that characterizes the process in general. To do so, we apply French sobriquets indicating the distinction, which may or may not any longer be relevant, between the art-form

employed solely for what used quaintly to be called “distraction,” or what Hollywood proudly dubs “entertainment,” *Cinéma Commercial*; and that kind of cinema which might lead us to rethink, reevaluate and reconstruct the world, holding globalization to its often deferred promise, *Cinéma Engagé*.

The articles included in this special issue argue variously that the two are merged in the global marketplace—as Brecht perennially reminded us, entertainment and education are never antithetical—and yet still this marketplace is always dangerously close to sealing itself off, producing aesthetic goods that serve mainly to ratify themselves and reify the system; and so these articles, while acknowledging the market imperative, search for ways in which that imperative is being challenged, modified, and in some cases overthrown.

Contributors to this special issue grapple with these matters in their respective descriptions of key areas and aspects of global cinema, raising pertinent questions about the nature, structures, and history of cinematic resistance to neoliberal hegemony, including alternative industrial models as well as models of independent, avant-garde, and experimental filmmaking that strive ideally toward the production, distribution, and exhibition of non- and anti-commodities instead of, or alongside, commodities which challenge the system and raise key questions about cinematic representation and media representation in general. For example, where and how is cinema working to transform oppressive social conditions, and what are its structural and ideological problems, limits, contradictions? Do transformative or formally experimental films and cinematic movements or tendencies work at cross-purposes structurally and/or ideologically to one another? Can radical connections between and amongst them be forged nonetheless?

Of course, one of the meanings of globalization is Americanization, and this meaning looms large both in the history of the cinema and at the contemporary juncture. The Hollywood hegemon often means a drive toward conditions in which the same multiplex films open across the globe at the same time, effectively cancelling out national, regional, and local cinemas. Deborah Shaw, in our lead article, dialectically examines Hollywood’s goal of portraying itself as the arbiter of a genre she calls “Global Cinema,” which, like *World Beat* in music, attempts to fashion a multi-character, multi-country narrative that sets various locations in proximity to each other. However, Shaw concludes that what instead is being fashioned is a Hollywood “global cinema gaze,” the concept of gaze itself summoning up Laura Mulvey’s canonical usage of the “male gaze” to describe patriarchal cinema. Dennis Broe’s recounting of Cannes 2010 and the film festival in

general also finds Hollywood in this area of film distribution, often seen as a haven from commercial interests, instead very much if not in control then often setting the terms around which the discussion ranges, be that how to compete in 3-D or how to erode state film financing.

Globalization is also, of course, a name for a new stage of capitalism, often supplanting “Late Capitalism” and yet also containing that term, because, at the moment, rather than being in danger of replacement by a radical new order, this stage of capitalism seems at least as often hell-bent on the world’s destruction, on being the last economic stage. Noah Zweig’s article on Venezuelan cinema and its construction of the “Bolivarian Citizen” interestingly situates the Chavez regime and the cinema it has engendered in the framework of a neo-neoliberal moment by its challenging of liberal-order economic precepts while also in some cases deploying them. Jonathan Haynes’ pro-Nollywood polemic suggests that the particular formation of this Nigerian cinema, the second largest in the world (ahead of Hollywood and behind Bollywood), originates from a form of African capitalism not dominated by corporate interests, which itself grows out of the traditional African market and which poses all kinds of challenges for Western critics more inclined to distinguish class and cultural levels of aesthetic “product” than to describe a highly homogenous but vibrant market phenomenon. Finally, underlying Meta Mazaj’s description of a kind of vacancy at the heart of Eastern European cinema is perhaps a response which that cinema is making to the onslaught of global capital within the Eastern countries in the wake of the collapse of older forms of socialism in the region.

Indeed Mazaj’s article on popular Eastern European cinema demonstrates the erroneousness of mainline claims that contemporary global cinema is somehow thankfully beyond the reach of the national interests and state structures on which global neoliberalism continues to depend, and that they thus ignore its deleterious persistence, unilaterally celebrating cinematic “border-crossings” that are effectively pathways for cultural neocolonialism. As, under conditions of neoliberal transnationalism and the reorganization of global power blocs, the constitution and function of the traditional nation-state has shifted, so has the need and function for it in cinema. It has become commonplace among mainline film critics and scholars to proclaim the death of the nation-state and to celebrate ostensibly facile cultural border-crossings. Both in Mazaj’s analysis of recent Balkan films and in Gayatri Devi’s analysis of the Malayalam cinema of Kerala, a major Communist state in India, the material subordination and subjugation of popular filmmaking and cultures marginal to the nation-state and the

Western hegemon in the era of transnational capitalism is located and critiqued. Of primary interest to Mazaj are commercial films made locally that expose contradictions evident in the development of post-Communist ethno-nationalisms as they reformulate and reinscribe old East–West dichotomies onto and against longstanding European identities such as Muslims and Roma, creating new social divisions and exclusions nonetheless lucrative for a privatizing European Union and expanding U.S. military-industrial complex. Devi exposes Malayalam cinema’s tenuous negotiation with India’s dominant commercial Hindi (“Bollywood”) cinema, by illustrating how this popular Left cultural tendency retains conservative discourses on gender and the family that undercut struggles supposedly upheld by the state government against interrelated class, caste, and patriarchal oppressions through an ethno-nationally driven individualism, itself allegorized by anti-heroism and narratives of female martyrdom. Finally, Ping Fu traces the complex history of the ever-changing representation of the Chinese peasantry in Chinese cinema from their once privileged position as begetters of the Revolution to their disappearance from the screen in the early days of the capitalist conversion and its heightening of the urban, where their exodus from the countryside marked them as “runaways,” and, finally, to a more contemporary acceptance of them as a class in themselves. Though, ironically, this screen acceptance comes at a time when, through a process of global homogenization, the distinctions between the city and country are fading.

Similar contradictions are found by Hossein Khosrowjah in Western critical evaluations of Iranian cinema, in particular regarding the recent *Ten*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami. Faced with a film made for Iranian audiences but distributed largely on the international art-house circuit, Western reviewers easily read gendered allegories of national oppression where in fact, as Khosrowjah shows, distinct criticisms are levied against Orientalist feminism and its structural conditions, of which patriarchal promulgations of Islam form only one, and by no means essential, strand in the subordination of women within the Iranian arena. This Western, right-oriented appropriation of gender struggle also features, negatively, in independent Western, experimental and avant-garde works critiquing Zionism and the Israeli occupation of historic Palestine. While Terri Ginsberg remarks that such works rarely receive substantive critical attention, either in mainline or oppositional scholarship, she nevertheless illustrates their integration of feminism and queer theory with class and anti-racist struggles, and the ways in which their formal-compositional interventions may serve to displace and in some instances destroy the “world cinema” or “tourist” gaze powerfully refracted by *Ten* and other Iranian auteur productions.

Whether sad commentary or not, it does seem that the most radical cinematic rethinking is described by Paul Grant in his description of the French Workers Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, a cinema that was genuinely alternative (especially in its cineaste/worker collaboration), self-correcting, and pioneering in its gender concerns and as a way of articulating the unsayable for the workers as a whole. If we began our brief outline with the as-yet unfulfilled promise of globalization in the present, perhaps we end by suggesting that, at the present juncture, to move forward, we must recapture and relocate the radical activity of the past, even as the French workers—followed since by their E.U. compatriots in Greece, Ireland and Portugal, and in the Tea Party-riven U.S. states of Wisconsin, Ohio, and Indiana—find themselves in the streets, contesting the forsaking of their pensions to once again bail out their banker overseers, and in the process creating the conditions under which a radical *Cinéma Engagé* can reemerge—not only giving voice to those concerns, but also furthering their participation in the medium by moving it in new formal and thematic directions.