

Philosophizing Globalizations

Philosophy may be understood as an attempt to think things in a unified way, either by getting at the root of things, or by trying to think the processes that link them. Philosophy is also history captured in thought, as Hegel put it, and thus, it is a particular historical period's portrait of itself, with all of its hopes and prejudices painted in philosophemes. Since Vico, and much later Hegel, we have not been able to escape the cul-de-sac into which this dual move of philosophy has corralled us: the quest for the absolute, but from a particular standpoint; the attempt to think the immutable, but seen through our narrow conceptual telescopes. We cannot escape our historical singularity. This singularity is in fact our only point of entry into the universal. We cannot jump over our historical shadow. Nor should we want to, for it is this historical singularity that grants us a unique insight into the universal, without which that universal would itself be the poorer. Globalization is one of these philosophemes with which we have attempted to paint our historical period, and by means of which we have tried to access something fundamental to the human experience. Several decades of research, writing, and debate, have resulted in a rich, variegated, and unwieldy literature on "globalization." As we have already suggested, globalization has become as important as, if not more important than the philosopheme of "modernity." In later chapters of this book, for instance, I will discuss the relationship between globalization, modernity, postmodernity, and postcolonialism. In this chapter, however, I will focus only on the questions of whether we can define globalization in a unified way and whether it has any philosophical relevance. The key affirmation in this chapter is that in order to think globalization from the standpoint of globalization—not as observers but as participants, not as unperturbed gazers but engaged and affected agents in and of globalization—we can only do it fragmentarily and by way of fragments. Globalization, like historicism, localizes us in space and time. For this reason, we must speak of globalizations in the plural. We must speak of globalizations in the sense of the

plurality of processes and conditions that form part of this new planetary and human condition. We must also talk about it in the plural, for our view and insight into those processes can but only be local, circumscribed, and thus, plural and fragmentary. At any given time, as participants in globalization, we experience and witness only aspects of it. As agents conditioned by it, we may be acted upon by planetary forces and tensions, but differentially. The planet is globalized, indeed, but not all in the planet are globalized in the same way. Some are more globalized than others, some are affected more than others, and some are globalized adversely while others beneficially.¹ We are all globalized but under conditions not of our choosing and not to the same degrees.

Since we will trade in fragments, I will now lay out three large segments that in turn must be further fragmented. When we speak about globalizations, we face, at the very least, three main areas of contention and problematization. First, we face the problem area of *description*. If we are to differentiate globalization from other similar philosophemes, then at the very least we must offer some chronologies, or periodizations. When did globalization get to be inaugurated as a new global consciousness? As with all historical events, such periodizations can only be formulated postfacto. Perhaps we are not yet ready to look back and attempt to baptize the moment of inception. But this much is clear, so long as the very nature of globalization is under contest, that is, so long as we continue to debate whether it is primarily a political, economic, social, or technological event, then we will not be able to point to a historical juncture that served as the moment, or moments, of release, inauguration, or departure. Along with the issue about temporal descriptions comes the question of geography. History has a geography, both actual and imaginary, real and figurative.² Just as with modernity, which was about a geopolitics of knowledge and a putative teleology of history that localized all truly modern knowledge in Europe and that thus centered the historical vanguard of progress in the heartland of Europe, globalization also traces geopolitical maps.³ A map of technological globalization, for instance, drawn by tracing the lines of internet links, will show how the world is hardly globalized: Africa, part of central Asia, and South America will figure in this map as dark regions, not lighted by the blinks of computers and cell phones. Yet, if we draw a map of the world in terms of epidemics, AIDS for instance, Africa and Central Asia, and parts of the American continents light up as through they were wired by the same circuits. Maps help us move around and find places we want to reach, but for that we need the right kind of maps and we need to know where it is that we are going. Still, chronological tables and global maps must be drawn up, then layered upon each other. Like a palimpsest, these spatiotemporal maps will give us a sense of the nonsynchronicity and unfathomable distance among societies on the same planet, which are all nonetheless held together by the grip of the same global embrace.

Second, we face the problem of what I will call inelegantly the *epistemological* challenges that globalization presents. When we think about globalization we must think about whether we are using a normative, and thus evaluative, category, or whether we are seeking to be merely descriptive. The issue concerns the nature of the cognitive, or epistemological, categories that we must use when theorizing the global condition. The parallels with the philosophemes of modernity and postmodernity are obvious and not to be circumvented. Modernity was used to describe, to evaluate, and to offer normative standards. In this way, it came to operate invidiously. To modernize was good, to be premodern was bad. Furthermore, as a normative standard, it fixated our attention on what were presented as exemplars of modernity, generally central European nation-states, and rarely non-Western societies. And while postmodern criticism sought to unmask this overt epistemological Eurocentrism, it reinscribed it by also localizing the origin of the crisis of modernity in the West. Postcolonial criticism has corrected much of the Eurocentrism and epistemological provincialism of the theorizing on both modernity and postmodernity. Today, to be globalized is good, and not to be is bad. But what are the standards and indexes of globalization? These are epistemological or conceptual questions that must be discussed prior and concurrently with the questions about how to describe the global condition. Epistemology is by no means the last bastion of philosophical naivete. On the contrary, it is one of the most contested dwellings of the philosophical edifice. At the most elemental level, we must acknowledge that knowledge is not just about what can be known, but also not known. Epistemology is simultaneously a positive and a negative science. Just as there are epistemologies of knowing, there are epistemologies of ignorance. The former is always parasitic on the latter, and thus there is an asymmetry. What is claimed to be known may draw on what is suppressed, but once we address how the unknown or unknowable is rendered such, we will know more about knowledge itself. Standpoint epistemologies, such as feminist epistemologies, make this asymmetry productive.

Epistemology, furthermore, concerns knowing subjects and subjects that cannot know. Epistemology, thus, concerns the genealogies of epistemic subjects, or more precisely the genealogy of a type of subjection that enables a certain type of knowing while disallowing other forms of knowing. Globalization, as a philosopheme, is also rooted in these debates.⁴ How does globalization aid or hinder our knowing the world? Who, or more precisely what type of epistemic subjects, and more generally what kinds of societies, are enabled or disallowed to make claims about the global condition? In the end, globalization is an epistemic matrix that maps the world in such a way that particularly placed agents can read that (mis)translated palimpsest that is the "global order." As ever, and ineluctably, the plural haunts us. Globalization is a conceptual matrix, made up of other matrices: *When* and *where* are you *in* global space/time? There are only globalizations.⁵

Third, the next problem area has to do with what I will call the question of *processes and conditions*. In this book I also refer to this problem area in terms of a *phenomenology of globalization*, by which I mean that insofar as we are already agents in and of globalization we have existential evidence of what it means to live the global condition. Globalization is a worldview, but also a way in which the lifeworld is structured in a particular way. Before we can discuss the obvious question of how this new structuring of the lifeworld conditions our worldview, we must discuss how the global lifeworld has been destructured and restructured by those processes that have given rise to new horizons of experience and expectation. In discussing these processes and conditions we face a challenge not unlike that Jorge Luis Borges sought to express with his parable of the *Aleph*—a point, sphere, a region in space, without dimensions, in which everything in the world could be seen at once. Not just a theory of globalization, but a phenomenology of globalization, would have to include all the processes and conditions arising from those processes, if it were to be in accordance with the global condition. But even when looking at Borges's *Aleph*, which like Leibniz's monad is a window into the entire cosmos, we can only look at it from where we stand. I will now discuss some processes that appeared to be distinctly unique to the global condition, processes in fact that have given rise to new existential conditions. The following ought to be conceived as portals to a phenomenology of the global condition.

Megaurbanization is without question one of the new processes and conditions of the global experience.⁶ Over the last century we have finally crossed the threshold where more humans now live in cities than in the countryside. For most of its history humanity has been predominantly rural and agricultural. In the twentieth century, after two centuries of industrialization and the introduction of industrial and biotechnological techniques in agriculture, humans have for the most part ceased to be farmers. Yet this momentous shift in the human condition has taken place under different and differentiated conditions. If the twentieth century was the century of European and North American metropolis, the twenty-first century will be the century of the non-European metropolis. The largest metropolises in the world today are in what has been called the developing world.⁷ By the year 2015 there will be at least 550 cities with a population over one million, in contrast to only 86 in 1950. Circa the dawn of the twenty-first century, 3.2 billion humans lived in cities, more than the total world population in the 1960s. By the year 2050, world population is projected to top at approximately 10 billion, with most of this growth being adsorbed by cities and urban centers. About 95 percent of this growth is projected to take place in the so-called developing world.⁸ What this means in terms of social arrest, ecological crises, struggle for resources, and the demographic flows, as well as the exacerbation of global pandemics, cannot be discussed properly in this overview. Yet, there is one aspect to the megaurban dimension of the

global condition that needs to be underscored, and that is the *detranscendentalization of alterity*. Cities are the place for the encounter with the other. It is the locus where all are strangers. Cities, indeed, are the locus for a phenomenology of the foreign and alien. Yet, insofar as all are strangers, alterity is deflated, and detranscendentalized.

Modernity, to establish a parallel, was the phenomenological and epistemological condition in which the other—as a religious, racial, sexual other—presented limits and challenges. This other was a transcendental other precisely because it remained so alien, so distant, so new, so unexpected. Globalization has reversed this condition: the other, the foreign, is the most intimate, the most immediate, the most frequent. If alterity is detranscendentalized, deflated, demetaphysicalized, then what happens to modernity's alibis? One of the possible consequences is that alterity will cease to be an epistemic and metaphysical condition and will become a function of regimes of the production of alterity. In other words, the global condition of megaurbanization will force upon humans the realization that since all are foreign and strangers in the megaurbe, we decide under what conditions difference is inscribed. The detranscendentalization of alterity turns into the productivity of difference. Detranscendentalized alterity is alterity routinized, and as routine, it becomes part of the regimes of quotidian existence.

The *acceleration* of space-time, leading to what some theorists have called the collapse or bridging of space-time, is certainly an undisputed dimension of the global condition.⁹ The proliferation and increasing sophistication of telecommunication devices has led to the experience of a global simultaneity. The almost global ubiquity of the television, the fax, the portable phone, and the internet has made simultaneous communication across the globe both inescapable and indispensable.¹⁰ Global financial networks and markets would be unthinkable without the information and telecommunications revolution. Distances, both spatial and temporal, seem insignificant, and we appear to live in a perpetual now in which before, later, and tomorrow are just a matter of minutes and seconds, a click of the mouse. Revisionism is the order of the day, as events get written and rewritten in the span of minutes and hours. Most importantly, televisions and computer screens become windows into either the affluence of the few or the squalor of the many. The collapse of space-time, due to the simultaneity of information sharing and communication across the world, has made us more intimate, even as this intimacy does not translate into the equal sharing of the blessings and curses of globalization. Or rather, our "horizon of expectations"¹¹ are guided by the imaginary of an intimate proximity, while our "spaces of experience," the worlds we actually inhabit, are remote from each other, progressively slipping away in to unbridgeable distances.¹²

The *symbolic* deconstruction of time, partly a result of the information revolution discussed above, has led to a rethinking of the differences among

natural, historical, and social time.¹³ Social time is the time in which and at which societies experience their lifeworld. Or rather, just as Henri Lefebvre spoke of the “social production of space,” we must also speak of the “social production of time.”¹⁴ This socially produced time is social time; it is the time that punctuates the rhythms of social existence. This is the time that ticks at the sounds of seconds, minutes, hours, days, months. This is the time that keeps track of workdays, academic calendars, and leisure time. This time, however, is *timed* by clocks and timetables that have been arranged in terms of assumptions, beliefs, and ideologies about how much time constitutes a workday, a work week, how long should persons work in their lifetime, and so on.¹⁵ Like maps, clocks clock only what they have been arranged to clock.¹⁶ The rhythms of social existence, however, intersect with historical and natural time. Historical time has to do with the time in which historical events, forces, processes, and transformations take place. Historical time is the time in which societies and civilizations live and mark their transformations. Historical time, one may say, is punctuated by political revolutions, wars, elections, and technological revolutions that may have accelerated the rhythms of social time. Finally, natural time is the time of nature, of tectonic plates, of seas, of weather patterns, of draughts and floods, of freezing or melting polar ice caps, and other such forces that are punctuated in millennia, in cycles whose regularity or patterns are not discernable because their time span is beyond human time.

What is distinctive about the global condition, at the phenomenological level, is that these three times have begun to merge, or seem to have collapsed into each other. Social time has accelerated to such an extent that it has caught up with historical time. Revolutions are lived within decades. Major social transformations occur where entire societies are uprooted and restructured in the blink of the eye. What took centuries, now takes decades, and sometimes a score of years. History is being televised at any given moment, even as its revisionism is aired and posted that same evening. By the same token, historical time seems to have caught up to natural time: The El Niño weather pattern is now part of pedestrian speak. The greenhouse effect is melting the ice caps, and sea levels are rising, regions are turning into deserts, while deserts are turning into irrigated gardens. The cumulative effect is that time has to be symbolically reconstituted. The self-assurance of Cartesian and Newtonian thought that operated on the dependability and seeming immutability of natural and world historical time have to be traded for a type of thinking that will set out from the social productivity of temporality.

The symbolic reconstitution of time has been accompanied by a parallel *symbolic reconstitution of space*. This reconstitution has been elaborated under the spatial turn of social theory. Indeed, there is an entire canon of thinkers who study the social production of space. The global condition, however, has unsettled the boundaries between many spaces, and in the

process has made the very notion of space malleable. Personal, social, and natural space have been rearranged. “The personal is the political,” and “the private is a matter of public concern,” were watchwords of the sixties. In the age of telecommunications and almost complete transparency due to the digitization of personal identities, the private and the public, the personal and the public are now matters for daily negotiation. More than ever the boundaries between bodies and personal identities have been unsettled by the pervasiveness of electronic filters. We move as if through a digital matrix that registers and maps our every move. Personal space is not a matter of a space contained and demarked by inviolable boundaries, but a region or horizon within which mobility is allowed or disallowed. Personal space is not inert but a kinetic and expandable net. At a more macro level we find that while national boundaries exist, these are less important than we may at first expect. Nation-states are hooked up into global networks that make the notion of national boundaries almost risible. In any event, national territories, or national geographies demarked by political boundaries, were a function of the political will of political sovereignties.

If sovereignty changes, the political will changes, and with it, the way it inscribes itself on space. The elevation of human rights to a supreme standard for civilized nations, along with the globalization of financial capital, the strengthening of the legal power of multinationals vis-à-vis nation-states, the unintended consequences of centuries of colonialism, the ready availability of global travel, the routinization and commercialization of tourism, and a whole host of other similar trends that are the signature of the global condition have destabilized the fixedness of social and national spaces. If cultural identities have been uncoupled from place, as we will discuss later on, political sovereignty has been uncoupled from geography. This is certainly one way in which we can conceive the establishment of human rights as global standard of legality. Human rights are a form of legal and political sovereignty that is beyond or above space. Something similar has happened with the space of nature, or so-called natural space. The unprecedented growth in the agrochemical industry and the expanding industrialization of agriculture in general, led to what has been called the “green revolution.” This green revolution was touted as a cornucopia that would extricate humanity from famine by means of a massive and complete biotechnologization of agricultural. The next step in this industrialization of the seed was already taken when genetically modified seeds were introduced and planted. This utopian green revolution, however, has now turned into the dystopia of ecological imperialism;¹⁷ in other words, the imposition of a homogenizing trend that depletes local biodiversity of its vitality and resilience.¹⁸ As the larger areas of the agricultural field become thoroughly biotechnologized, accelerating the homogenization of agricultural gene pools and exacerbating the risk of blights, genetic pollution, and depletion of biodiversity, there is a drive to preserve “hot spots” of biodiversity. The

planet has become a greenhouse, in the sense that whether cultivated or left so-called virgin, nature is under the care, or rapacious voracity, of humans. What is noteworthy about this condition is that even uncultivated nature finds itself in the provisional state of being a reserve, a garden, a nature preserve whose very existence is predicated on there being certain boundaries around it. Nature, thus, is what has been deliberately left untouched by humans, and as the untouched, it is already touched. It is not that nature pushes against the boundaries of civilization, as may have been true during most of the history of humankind. Now, human society pushes up against nature, draws a line, and says this will remain nature. This is not to suggest that this is the first time this has taken place. In fact, the encounters between the so-called Old World and the New World gave occasions for one of the most dramatic and intense biological exchanges in human history. The new world was transformed not just because its people were devastated by epidemics, but its flora and fauna were overtaken by the plants and animals introduced by the colonizers. And while there was an element of planning and deliberation in the reseeded and repopulating of the New World with new animal species, and the relocation of peoples, what we have witnessed in the twentieth century has been an intensely planned and orchestrated gardening of the American continent.¹⁹ Wherever we go on the American, Eurasian, and to a certain extent the African and Australian continents, there is little that has not been touched by humans, and when it is untouched, it is because it has been cordoned off from human touch. The experience that all spaces, be they personal, social, national, or natural, have been touched by human technology and design has contributed to the recognition that all space is always socially constructed. In this way, we have gone from Cartesian and Kantian dual ontologies, for which space is inert, a mere receptacle, a tabula rasa, to a postmetaphysical perspective in which space is fluid and intricately entwined with temporality. From the space of ontological fixidity, we have moved to the space of flows, a dynamic metaphysics in which space temporalizes and time spatializes.²⁰

The *collapse* of universal history has been one consequence of the symbolic restructuring of both time and space.²¹ Universal history had already begun to be dismantled during the twentieth century, with the appearance of “world historians” such as Arnold J. Toynbee and William McNeill, who began to dislodge Europe from the center of world history. Universal history is the secular version of divine history. Both share in common the assumption that history has a telos, and that this telos can be discerned from the standpoint of those societies that are alleged to be at the vanguard of history, at the most forward point in historical time. Universal history, like divine history, assumes that history is driven by a logic, a logos.²² Indeed, universal history is the manifestation of a logos, a logic of social existence. Again, some societies have been assumed to epitomize this logos, while others have failed to live up to it. Modernity may be thought of

in terms of universal history, that is, as a twentieth-century version of it. Partly as a reaction to two world wars and the crisis of European societies induced by these wars, historians began to call into question the privileged place European societies have been accorded in universal history. In addition, history, as a discipline, has undergone many transformations that have led to the abandonment of universal history. Two new forms of historical research illustrate poignantly the ways in which universal history has become untenable. On the one hand we have the proliferation of social history, or what has been called *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday history) with its attention to detail, to the everyday, the quotidian and mundane. This type of history focuses on microsocial agents: women, slaves, immigrants, workers, gays, and so on. On the other hand, we have the emergence of macrohistory, of the sort that the Annales School practiced. This type of history chronicled long-term processes, the *Longue Durée* of slow but decisive historical time. Thus, Annales historians kept track of farming policies, harvest productivity, mortality rates, land parceling, road building, the time it took to go from one village to the next, migrant worker routes, and so on. Between these two schools, the directionality and univocity of universal history was replaced by complexity and causal overdetermination. In this way, world history has come to the forefront, and with it a type of *dialogic cosmopolitanism* of the type that was discussed in the introduction has become indispensable. This type of cosmopolitanism not only demands respect and tolerance of others, but above all it cautions a type of humility about the accomplishments of one's culture. Evaluative and hierarchizing labels or constructs, such as medieval, premodern, postmodern, developed, underdeveloped, and globalized, have been replaced by more self-consciousness categories such as imaginaries or modernities, in the plural and without metaphysical baggage.

The obsolescence of universal history and, with it, the deconstruction of its supporting metaphysics of history has also led to *rethinking* of science, or what counts as science. The decoupling of science from an Augustinian-Hegelian-Kantian metaphysics of history, in which the evolution of societies is directly linked to an evolution of science, has led to a rethinking of the unity of society.²³ Science, like societies, does not transform in incremental or progressive ways. Science, in fact, is not one but many, and like societies, it is deeply determined by its materiality. Already since Thomas Kuhn, we have been aware of the discontinuity and noncumulative aspects of scientific knowledge. Over the last two decades, science studies and the philosophy of technology have led to more variegated insights into scientific practices and the production of knowledge. Instead of talking about science, as though science were not touched by technology, and in parallel, talking about technology as though technology were not already a form of science, thinkers have been urging us to talk instead about "technoscience." The philosopher of science and technology, Peter Galison, has articulated masterfully the

critique of the unity of science and the dependence of science on technology when he differentiated among the conditions of experimentality, scientificity, and instrumentality.²⁴ If we must make these differentiations in order to acknowledge the dependence of technoscience on the materiality of theory and scientific objects, then we must also acknowledge that a series of “intercalated periodizations” emerged that debunks “positivist periodization.” In this way, all technoscience(s) does not move at the same rate or in the same direction, and one theory or scientific paradigm is not abandoned just because it has been refuted or its defenders have died off. Instead, at any given time many different theories and paradigms are in contestation. Factors internal and external, having to do with whether appropriate experiments can be conducted, whether enough theoretical work has been done that can help theorize that model, and whether what evidence could be adduced would count as forming part of science—all of these factors are at play in nonreductivist ways.

This blow to the mythology of the supremacy of Western science has been dealt not by political pundits, irascible critics of Eurocentrism, but scientists and philosophers of science, many of them from the West itself. The disunity of science partly contributed to the science wars of the nineties. But these wars have muted what may be more serious debates about the future of science in the globalized world. One major area of conflict has to do with biopiracy and the patenting of forms of life and genetically modified organisms. Claims to ownership and intellectual ownership of such entities and organisms is predicated on the univocity and stable understanding of what counts as science and technology. Yet, it is the very work by philosophers of science and technology that has so thoroughly dismantled this unified and stable understanding of science. Indeed, the more what is admitted as science increasingly depends on economic treaties and legal sanction, rather than on the merits of the science itself, the more the question about the political nature of science becomes a point of reflection and debate. As globalization augments the exchanges among cultures, what counts as knowledge, as opposed to mere folklore and local practice, becomes more pressing. In the end, the dissociation of technoscience from a metaphysics of history has led to the realization that both science and technology are determined by a political economy of the production of knowledge. This political economy turns out to be a geopolitical economy, in which many agents, traditions, and forms of local knowledge enter in tension with global forces and agents. Science is no longer an alibi for the alleged superiority of one society over others. Technoscience contributes to the further dismantling of the ideology of universal history.

This abandonment of universal history and the rise of micro and macro-histories, has resulted in the *provincializing* of the West.²⁵ Postcolonial historiography and theory have contributed greatly to the task of dismantling the sacrificial totems of Occidentalism and Orientalism.²⁶ Edward Said

taught us to unmask the myths about the Orient and how fundamental they were for the self-definition and self-presentation of the West. Orientalism, like Occidentalism, is an ideology that disfigures the other, while projecting mirages of an allegedly unified and developed Western world. Purported Western superiority and exceptionality is predicated on its derogation and denigration of other cultures. But to the extent that Orientalism disfigures others, Western societies and Western culture is also disfigured and misrepresented. Occidentalism is the myth that Western culture's others project upon the West, with the same goals, even if not with the same kind of effectiveness.²⁷ While Orientalism and Occidentalism operated on the basis of the same type of mystifying, distorting, occluding, and subalternizing matrix, there is an asymmetry between them. While Orientalism aided and legitimated Western imperial projects throughout the world, and in particular the Arab and Islamic worlds, Occidentalism has been a reactive mythical construction. Indeed, a more detailed analysis would reveal that Orientalism projects its own form of Occidentalism, one in which the West is seen as towering above all cultures. It is part and parcel of these differentiating and derogating ideologies to bolster the prestige and self-regard of one's culture. Ideologies seeking to counter these dual moves—of putting down the other and elevating oneself—would reverse the logic; what is a virtue turns into a vice, what is a value is a negative quality. Globalization, and in particular cultural globalization, which entails the abandonment of grand universal history narratives, has led to the provincializing of the West and, concomitantly, to the deprovincializing of the East. But the historical and spatial provincializing of the West is not only a lesson about epistemological humility and cosmopolitan respect, it is also and perhaps primarily about the internal heterogeneity of the West that was concealed and denied by the need to project a flattering and imitable image of the West. Provincializing, thus, within the context of globalization, means respect for and solidarity with the difference of the other and the difference among ourselves.

If the nature of science has had to be rethought, so has the nature of nature. A central concept of Western thinking has been the binary nature and human, or nature and society. Nature is what is not social. The social is what is different from the natural—that is, what is learned and thus not instinctual, what is produced rather than found, what is engineered as opposed to uncreated, what is voluntary as opposed to inevitable. The social has been defined in contrast with that which is allegedly untouched, uncontaminated, and undetermined. Yet, the nature-versus-society dichotomy has begun to collapse not just because of the ways in which entire continents have been transformed through agriculture and the sustained intervention of urban and rural planning, but also because of the ways in which through biotechnology the boundaries between what is produced and what is merely found have begun to blur. We already noted how in the age of globalization nature is not what is untouched but what has been deliberately marked as

untouchable, as that which is not to be disturbed. In this way, what is natural is inscribed within the horizon of the social. Nature is not what is outside society, but rather what is dependent on society for it to be designated as such. Thus, regions labeled “hot spots” of biodiversity become preserves for the sake of future exploitation. In parallel, the growth in both preventive and enhancing medicine, the proliferation of lifesaving devices, the expansion of neurological and hormonal medication, has contributed to the expansion of the human lifespan. Another consequence has been the lowering of the threshold of what is acceptable as an illness or infirmity that must be corrected and eliminated. Pharmaceutical man (*homo pharmakon*), the figure of the medically transformed and enhanced human, has anticipated and overtaken the cyborg, or bionic man, the figure of the machine transformed and enhanced human. We have already touched on the growth of biotechnology and the transformation of agriculture, but as more and more of our produce as well as poultry, meat, and basic foodstuffs are made up of genetically modified organisms, and the more we continue to see genetic manipulations as a logical and necessary step in agriculture and animal husbandry, the less clear becomes where the line distinguishing negative from positive eugenics lies. When we look at the fauna and flora of the Old and New Worlds, we see the products of centuries of human intervention, or when we visit a park to be in contact with nature, nature that exists as if in a furlough from society, or when we take a drug that is produced by a genetically modified animal, we are witnessing the fading of the line between nature and society.²⁸ Nature, it turns out, is what is already produced, and if it is produced, then a certain political economy must guide its modes of production. The global condition that discloses the already produced character of nature places on a different level the task of preserving and cultivating the environment. This kind of reflexive environmental consciousness requires that we negotiate a path between the Scylla of new age, neopagan spiritualism and the Charybdis of neoliberal and corporatist instrumentalism. The end of nature may turn into the birth of a new democratic, reflexive, and deliberative environmental consciousness.²⁹

Glocalization is the English transliteration of a term coined in Japanese to refer to the process of the local adaptation and acculturation of Western products.³⁰ But it serves well, even if inelegantly, to describe precisely the experience that is fundamental to all cultures—namely that all cultures are always in the process of being cultivated, processed, transformed, localized, and exported. Glocalization refers to the process in which global products and processes take on local characteristics and, conversely, how local products and practices are exported and circulated through the global markets of both commodities and ideas. Glocalization could also be the name for that experience in which culture ceases to be the property of one specific community of society and appears to belong to global humanity.³¹ The appearance in every major global city of Starbucks, fast-food places, and

brand-name clothing outlets, seems to have led to a homogenization of the lifeworld. But, with each thrust in this direction, there is a similar counterthrust. Local forces and cultures counter by rearticulating its distinctiveness, its own uniqueness and intimacy. In the face of the threat from global cultures, local cultures affirm their identities. In this process, however, what is local and autochthonous recreates itself. The native and original are invented, woven with the new and imported. In this way, a new cultural product emerges. Traditions and practices that may or may not have existed are unearthed, rescued, reactivated, or if necessary invented. Yet, traditions are not so much invented as negotiated in the encounter with global forces. All culture is always already artificial and synthetic, always already fabricated and invented. Glocalization is the name for a process that makes explicit what has been going on at least since humanity began to trade. Yet, there is also something that glocalization makes explicit, and that is that cultures get to be either renewed and transformed in accordance with the will and initiative of their corresponding communities, or they are colonized and deformed under conditions not of their choosing. Cultural imperialism has always accompanied economic, political, and military imperialism. Yet, under the new global condition, which asserts the rights of the local precisely as a twin aspect of globalization, such imperialism is proscribed and rejected. Instead, we speak about “soft power.” This soft power is predicated on cultural persuasion and the ability of a global public sphere to facilitate a cultural dialogue that is not necessarily arbitrated solely by the West.

The *uncoupling* of identities from their localities has been a parallel consequence of globalization. If cultures are glocalized, that is uncoupled from their places of origins, identities, which are cultural markers on and of people, are de facto also uncoupled.³² This uncoupling could also be referred to in the affirmative as “traveling identities.” As mentioned above, one of the fundamental aspects of the global condition is the unprecedented “urbanization” of humanity. Part and parcel of this globalization is the massive demographic flow of peoples across the planet over the last two centuries. Peoples are moving from the rural areas into cities, and from cities to other cities. Indeed, nothing parallels the population shifts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, except perhaps the third- and fourth-century “barbarian invasions” from the Eurasian steppes that brought about the transformation of the Roman Empire. The comparison should not be allowed to suggest that population emigrations from the so-called underdeveloped and developing nations should be seen as “barbarian” invasions. In fact, over the last two centuries the primary beneficiaries of emigrations have been the British Isles and Europe.³³

These massive migrations have not all been voluntary. Many have been occasioned by global conflicts, civil wars, ethnoracial genocide, and the growing destitution of societies in regions of the planet on the border of

ecological disasters.³⁴ With the expansion of travel routes and the cheapening of the means to travel, migration has become easier. Furthermore, one of the unintended consequences of Western imperialism throughout the world was to have created economic, political, and cultural links with their colonies in such a way that the former colonial metropolises have become refuge and sanctuary to peoples displaced from the former colonies. The colonies are now in the center of the former empires. What is to be foregrounded for our purposes here is that these population flows also mean the move of cultural identities. Thus, at any given time, in any major global city, you will find numerous but also plural cultural enclaves: little Chinas, little Italies, Japan towns, and so on. Cultural enclaves and identities that were born somewhere else now find themselves either freed or marooned in a global city, at the crossroads where many other cultures meet. The phenomenological experience of this uncoupling of identity from place, culture from geography, translates into the political and legal challenge of multiculturalism. All societies now, and not just the West, or even the United States for that matter, face the challenge of the rights of minority cultures. For this reason, over the last two decades, almost in parallel with the development of globalization theory, political philosophy and political theory have turned to the question of citizenship and the rights of minority cultures. This interest has not been a fashion, or something driven by so-called political correctness. Instead, it is motivated by the undeniable fact that all cultures find themselves in constant interaction and exchange with other cultures, in their midst and on a daily basis. A discussion of what this means in terms of rights, both in terms of human and citizen's rights, is beyond our scope, even as we can be certain that the rights of other cultures has become a fundamental, and not just temporary and artificial, political-philosophical concern.³⁵ What is within our scope, however, is reflection on the condition and process of demographic flows: the quotidian encounter with other cultures and their valid claim to acknowledgment and respect, on the one hand, and the further uncoupling of cultural identities from their regions and places of origin, on the other.

There is no factor, element, or dynamic that determines the logic of globalizations in as fundamental a way as does the growth in global inequalities. This is one of the most glaring aspects of both the global condition and growing interdependence—namely the massive, catastrophic, and accelerating exclusion of many from the benefits of globalizations. But, before we proceed, let's do some numbers. According to the World Development Report 2000/2001: "The world has deep poverty amid plenty. Of the World's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion—almost half—live on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion—a fifth—live on less than \$1 a day, with 44 percent living in South Asia." Or, to put it in terms of another index of comparison, "The average income in the richest 20 countries is 37 times the average in the poorest 20—a gap that has doubled in the past 40 years."³⁶ The growth

that has accompanied economic globalization has also been deceiving, and misrepresented. For instance, while in East Asia the number of people living on less than one dollar per day fell from 420 to 280 million in the decade between 1987 and 1998, in Latin America, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa the numbers reversed. In fact, a similar regression took place in former Soviet Union countries, where people living on less than one dollar per day rose by twentyfold.³⁷

Over the next quarter of a century the population will grow by a third of the present population, but 97 percent of this growth will take place in the so-called developing world.³⁸ The *World Development Report 2003* continues to draw more bleak and despairing picture. As so-called developing countries find it increasingly difficult to compete in the world markets, and their economies of importation are taxed and pillaged by interest on loans and tariffs, their base economic infrastructures are dismantled and destroyed by civil wars and proxy wars. Thus, during the 1990s forty-six countries were involved in some sort of military conflict, primarily a civil wars. "These conflicts have very high costs, destroying past development gains and leaving a legacy of damaged assets and mistrust that impedes future gains."³⁹ The stress to their environments due to poor industrialization policies and decades of civil war, coupled with urban growth, has meant a concentration of poverty in regions on the border of ecological disaster and almost complete civil and political collapse. As the rural areas of these poor nations became less productive, the number of cities in these regions with populations greater than ten million went from zero to fifty, while in developed and industrialized nations, the change was from one to four.⁴⁰ As Mike Davis has shown eloquently, with the convergence of neoliberal policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, combined with rapid demographic growth, civil wars, and ecological failure, most of the urbanization that has taken place in the last three decades has been a growth in shantytowns, favelas, and slums.⁴¹ As Davis put it, we are turning into a planet of slums.⁴²

Christopher Flavin, an analyst on staff at the Worldwatch Institute, which produces the *State of the World* reports, put it this way: "Per capita income has increased 3 percent annually in 40 countries since 1990, but more than 80 nations have per capita incomes that are lower than they were a decade ago. Within countries, the disparities are even more striking. In the United States, the top 10 percent of the population has six times the income of the lowest 20 percent; in Brazil, the ratio is 19 to 1. More than 10 percent of the people living in 'rich' countries are still below the poverty line, and in many, inequality has grown over the last two decades."⁴³ Still, as of 2004, the rich nations of the world, which constitute less than 15 percent of the world population, accounted for almost 80 percent of the world's income. This inequality becomes even more stark if we articulate from below: while 2.6 billion people in middle-income countries share 17 percent of the world's

income, 2.4 billion share in less than 3.5 percent of that global income!⁴⁴ These two inverse pyramids are the sacrificial pyramids of the affluent world that globalization has produced.

The costs of such global inequalities become even more stark and grotesque when we look at the actual effects on the environment. This is not to suggest that human poverty is not as catastrophic as the destruction of habitats. Rather, the point is to put in perspective the fact that this poverty is not only growing but can only continue to grow precisely because environments are being exploited beyond their ability to regenerate. In this way, poverty is not temporary but structural, with a long history and a long future. Citizens of the so-called first world not only consume the most but they consume the most at the expense of the future generations and the ability of other nations to ever extract themselves from cycles of enduring and entrenched poverty. One way in which these grotesque disparities of consumption are measured is by trying to index the ecological footprint of different societies. I will illustrate only four. (See Table 1.1.)

Table 1.1 Some Ecological Footprints in 1995.⁴⁵

Country	Available Ecological Capacity	Ecological Footprint	Ecological Deficit (capacity minus footprint)
Netherlands	1.2	5.9	-4.7
United States	6.7	10.9	-4.2
Japan	0.8	4.7	-3.9
Israel	0.3	3.7	-3.5

Table 1.2 Some Ecological Footprints, With Their Ecological Deficits, in 2001.⁴⁶

Country	Ecological Footprint in Global Acres	Biocapacity in Global Acres	Domestic Ecological Deficit/Remainder in Global Acres
Netherlands	11.9	2.0	-9.9
United States	24.0	13.0	-10.9
Japan	11.8	1.7	-10.0
Israel	11.0	1.4	-9.5
Kuwait	19.1	1.0	-18.2
United Arab Emirates	25.0	3.1	-21.9

In the November 2001 updated report by the Redefining Progress's Sustainability Program, the ecological footprints for some of the same countries, with two more additions, document some of the most egregious deficits in global acreage of biocapacity. But of course, this ecological deficit can only be sustained if some other society or nations are forced to underwrite it.

Still, we must look at these ecological footprints, with their insulting ecological deficits, in light of another major contradiction of the global world: the growing scarcity of water at the moment when the ice caps are melting and the level of the seas are rising. I quote from Vandana Shiva's recent book *Water Wars*: "The war crisis is the most pervasive, most severe, and most invisible dimension of the ecological devastation of the earth. In 1998, 28 countries experienced water stress or scarcity. This number is expected to rise to 56 by 2025. Between 1990 and 2025 the number of people living in countries without adequate water is projected to rise from 131 to 817 million [about 10% of the world population]"⁴⁷ Waterborne diseases are among the top ten global health risks, according to the World Health Organization. Approximately 1.2 billion people (one in every five, half of them in the so-called developing world) have no access to potable water. In addition, approximately 2.4 billion have no access to sanitation facilities. According to Peter Gleick of the Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security, it was projected in 2002 that by 2020 more than a one hundred million people would die due to some sort of waterborne disease.⁴⁸

The growing scarcity of potable water, rising populations and decreasing arable lands is matched by what has turned out to be one of the most disastrous agricultural policies in world history. I am referring to the so-called *green revolution*.⁴⁹ This revolution was touted as the answer to the population explosion and, above all, as a way to deal with the recurring famines in Africa and Asia. Yet, over the last five decades, all it has accomplished is the depletion of global biodiversity, the diminishment of the ability of developing societies to rely on their local biota, and just as importantly, has contributed to concealing the exorbitant costs of industrialized and biotechnologized agriculture. This so-called green revolution has made the world more dependent on megacorporations and has signaled the triumph of technocracy. Socially, it has driven potentially self-sufficient farmers from lands into cities, accelerating the rate of urbanization, and exacerbating the growth of urban poverty. Above all, it has dug a swath of biogeographically untenable monocultures that threaten the food basket of the world.⁵⁰ The green revolution—with its deluxe version in the biotech revolution of the last two decades—was predicated on a gamble that, once analyzed, discloses the staggering costs at which these revolutions have been enacted.⁵¹ The swaths of corn, wheat, and rice, sustained on a kind of biochemical bombing through the use of fertilizer, pesticides, and water, have been predicated on the availability of water and oil.⁵² In the end, however, these seeming technological

wonders of the green revolution “result only 25 percent as efficient as hand-and-hoe agriculture, and half as efficient as ox-and-plow farming. Indeed—notes J. R. McNeill—modern U.S. farming burns far more calories than it produces when one factors in the energy requirements of making fertilizer.”⁵³ If this is not clear enough, let me put it in Peter Manning’s terms: “All together the food-processing industry in the United States uses about ten calories of fossil-fuel energy for every calorie of food energy it produces.”⁵⁴ This type of energy deficit, which is accompanied by overconsumption, is sustained by subsidies, protectionist policies, and direct military interventions. Growing impoverishment, ecological decline, with asymmetrical consumption and waste, are two sides of the same growing global interdependence. Globalization has its promises, as well as its terrors. Thus far, most of the planet has been exposed to only the inhuman and rapacious face of globalization. It remains for us to make sure that the promises of globalization are realized and not squandered. For the moment, however, it is clear that the poverty of the world is not matched by the poverty of theory. There is a plethora of theorizing and philosophizing about globalization, but most of it is blinded by its own methodological hubris and insouciance. The world is one, but we have barely begun to make sense of what this means, when most humanity is not even sharing in or benefiting from the most minimal gains and promises of globalization.