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AFTER GLOBALIZATION

Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman

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Contents

A Précis: The Argument

1. Globalization was generally understood to be about transformations in economics, politics, and culture – in other words, a change in *everything* all at once, a paradigm shift or system change produced and/or represented by specific elements (i.e., global markets, a 24-hour culture, instant communications, increasing levels of immigration, etc.), with technology as the key enabling force.
2. Globalization was also, from the very beginning, an ideological project – one that served to naturalize capitalism under its name. Globalization made capitalism invisible (or as invisible as it ever can be) behind a set of changes that were treated as quasi-natural phenomena about which little could be done by human beings. All of the things that happened as part of globalization were real enough. But the big, overarching narrative of globalization into which they were placed was a fiction – an effective one, but a fiction nevertheless.
3. When capitalism returned following the economic crisis of 2008 (as a speakable discourse and an all-too-visible mode of social organization), there was a recognition that globalization's ideological project to make capitalism disappear was over. With capitalism confronted by its mortality and globalization revealed as a fiction, many anticipated a political reawakening on a worldwide scale.
4. But there has not been a serious confrontation with what comes after globalization because globalization rested on a more

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fundamental ideological project, one unrecognized at the time of its constitution, even though it was essential to its effective operation. *Globalization involves a certain configuration of time – one that cannot imagine an "after."* Modernity could have a post-modernity to follow it. But globalization? Post-globalization sounds like some dystopian coda to everything, not a new phase of human existence.

5. Our project is to understand the construction of this "time limit" that works in the name of globalization even when globalization's over. After establishing seven theses that challenge this ideology of time (theses that negate the standard assumptions about education, morality, nation, future, history, capitalism, and common sense), we examine four popular thinkers (Richard Florida, Thomas Friedman, Paul Krugman, and Naomi Klein) and show how their influential work is dulled by these assumptions. These thinkers not only mobilize these assumptions, but also produce and reproduce them. The overall effect of such assumptions is to preclude the capacity to think an "after" to globalization, and to rely on older narratives of how to deal with capitalism, regardless of the contradictions obviously contained within them.
6. Of course, the ideology of globalization and its time limit is also found outside of the work of such liberal thinkers. We investigate this through conversations with students from around the globe who tend to understand the world differently than the way it is popularly represented, and who seem unconvinced and uninterested in the false promises of the seven assumptions and the "time limit" they sustain.
7. In both cases – that of the liberal popularizers of globalization and the children of globalization – we find that there's "something missing." Something's missing between these two groups, as well as in the way that they both understand that something's missing in the world.
8. It is valuable to understand these limits and gaps, and to consider what they mean for imaginative possibilities. But we also need to be conscious of something else that is missing: a true capacity to think an "after" to globalization. This is the beginning of politics today.

Part I

The Afterlife of Globalization

a. Nothing Can Save Us

Nothing can save us. Not the schemes of government planning committees. Not the triumphant spread of liberal democracy to the four corners of the world. Neither sudden scientific breakthroughs, nor technological marvels. Neither quick fixes, nor golden bullets. Not the Right turning to the left, the Left turning right, or everyone coming to their senses and occupying an agreed-upon center. Neither vigilantes, nor vanguards. Not the nation. Not NGOs. Not common sense. Not capitalism. Not the future. And certainly not a smart, articulate, young politician able to fuel the hopes of realists and idealists alike.

If nothing can save us, why even wake up in the morning?

To understand that nothing can save us is far from throwing up our hands and closing up shop. Rather, it's the first step in grasping the real limits of where we are and what is required to overcome these limits. At present, we continue to act within these limits, accepting them as the way things are and the way they have to be. We cede to governments the rationale and logics by which our societies are planned and organized. For all manner of impending crises – the end of fossil fuel,

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the proliferation of disease, the rise in the earth's temperature – we await the abstract entity called "science" (or the market, or God, or compassion) to save us in the nick of time. We imagine politics as an arena in which a happy (however tortured and difficult to get to) middle ground is reached through intelligent debate among competing parties – or at least, enough of a common position that it manages to allow things to limp along for another day. Even if we still meekly cast ballots, democracy has become associated with the bizarre practice of voting for politicians of different parties with the exact same world-view. We prefer to catch our thieves red-handed, content with discovering the pleasures of exceptions rather than having to confront the hard facts of the rule, so that we can continue to invest in the market and believe in the sanctity of our social systems. We imagine that our families and economies break down not because of how they are structured, but because of covetous, greedy, or weak-willed individuals who cause them to go awry. We continue to mime incredulity and shock in the face of crises and scandals, however much such events are dialectically integrated into how things work.

All of these boundary markers, these limits, are at the very heart of our social imaginings – especially when they function unconsciously. But they are at the center of the political in a direct way, too. For all of the celebration of a new global order, we continually fall back on the nation – that old standby of a political form we once thought we had (or were on the verge of having) successfully outgrown, and yet which remains the awkward jigsaw puzzle of geopolitical space in which most of us are content to live. We know that the nation is a fiction that arbitrarily matches space and belonging. And yet, the nation still structures everything – from our most intimate desires to the armies that defend it. Even the most hopeful dreams of a post-national world – whether we imagine it taking the form of rooted locals or as rootless cosmopolitans – are refracted through the lens of the nation. Globalization was supposed to mark the withering away of the nation; instead, in the twenty-first century we witness nations asserting their identities and fighting over the last scraps of the earth's resources. The struggle to address the problem of climate change – a global problem if there ever was one – has been repeatedly sandbagged by national

interests that were supposed to have been transcended. In what was imagined to be the post-national era, the nation is stronger than ever.

What is true of the nation is doubly true of capitalism. Capitalism is now everywhere, which seems to confirm not only its permanence and effectiveness, but also its legitimacy. Without any competing system against which to now measure it, capitalism is no longer up for debate. This doesn't mean that everyone is satisfied with it, or that we can't analyze its problems and failures, but that its reality as a system has disappeared into the background of everyday life. Problems that one might expect would shake its veneer of permanence merely confirm its necessity and power as a social and political (not just economic) system. *As such, capitalism itself now constitutes a very real limit to thought.* When economic crisis produces unemployment, for instance, the longing is no longer for some new system. Rather, the hope is for capitalism to once again start operating "properly" so that everyone can get back to work – that is, get back to what we have come to take as normal life. Perhaps uniquely, capitalism's greatest quality is that it is a system that allows everything except the rigorous consideration of its own logic. It has become impossible to think beyond, even though we know there was a time before capitalism and that there almost certainly will be a time after it – unless we truly are living at the end of human history.

Crisis, the nation, capitalism: it's all so much *common sense* – that same common sense we said above couldn't save us. What do we mean by invoking common sense, this concept that speaks of received wisdom (of the kind that grates on the nerves of youth) and of a pragmatism that imagines itself to occupy a space outside ideology? The ready-to-hand vocabulary of the way things are and the way they should be that we all carry around with us, the accepted narratives that we reach for to explain the nature of things – that's common sense. A theoretical and practical miscellany comprised of (among other things) inherited beliefs about political structures, ideas about how one should spend one's days, and those things for which one should strive and struggle. More often than not our most intimate and unconscious desires are not at odds with common sense, but in perfect coordination with it. Common sense establishes those decisions and acts which are rational and normal, and those that are not. Not mere belief, not something that

is an outgrowth of human nature (whatever that is – too often an empty vessel that can be filled with all manner of ideology), it is a product of the social and political systems we inhabit. And, in a reciprocal fashion that should surprise no one, common sense establishes the imaginative limits of these systems, safeguarding their structures in almost territorial fashion in order to perpetuate the sealed logic of common sense and prevent outside ideas from challenging its axioms or principles. Common sense is that paternal voice that stops us in our tracks, reminding us that we've strayed beyond the reasonable and will soon make fools of ourselves if we don't abandon our childish wanderings. It is what we appeal to when we say "It's just human nature" or "It's just how things are," and when we insist that things will always be as they are now (only maybe faster) because they always have been so.

The most stunning contradiction of common sense is not that it doesn't make sense. In fact, common sense *is* perfectly reasonable, rational, and sensible. This is why it is so successful at limiting our imagination. The elegant but brutal contradiction of common sense, rather, is that it does not attend to the *common* at all. It claims a quotidian, empirical. and utilitarian universality, but it delivers benefits for the *few* at the expense of the *many* – even though it is the many who are most comfortable repeating its claims. We want to argue for the other side of common sense. This other side is not the irrational (as one might presume from the standpoint of common sense!), but the rational within a different frame. According to common sense, the political and social configurations within which we currently live are more or less fine. They are adequate to addressing the needs and desires of the common. When and where they are not, all that's needed is some fine-tuning and fixing of broken gears – or at most, when a big and unexpected challenge arises, the addition of some new mechanisms to the old machine. We don't see things this way. The reason we face so many problems and challenges isn't because we haven't been paying sufficient attention to sticky gears and levers already configured in the best possible way; or that so many bad and evil people exploit the machine (if only they would disappear – or be disappeared – then everything would work as it should!). Either way, the whole machine, built piecemeal over centuries, continues to stumble along. But what it

creates and produces – its output, if you will – is fated to be as unjust as it has been in centuries past. And yet common sense tells us that time brings with it continual social improvements: we are better now than we have been in the past, and will be better still tomorrow.

Are solutions to our problems to be found in simple ameliorations of an unjust system? To be clear, we don't think that the system is flawed or broken; it works quite successfully, just as its rules and axioms have ingeniously designed it to. The problem is precisely that it *does* work, it continues to work; all of the corruption scandals and temporary system crashes not only fail to invalidate the system, but help to further prove its stability and integrity. Nothing can save us, but only if we adhere to the system of common sense that has brought us to where we are now.

b. From Globalization to Anti-Americanism

This book began its life as a project examining contemporary expressions of anti-Americanism around the globe. In the summer of 2004, we were teaching a course in São Paolo on the ways in which we understand, theorize, and make culture within the context of globalization. For us, it is important to insist that globalization was not only a vector by which cultural forms and practices were spread around the globe. The most common way of thinking about culture in relation to globalization, even today, is in relation to new hybrid forms of cultural expression that originate out of the mixing and matching of pre-existing local (usually national) forms. Academic and non-academic writing on contemporary culture seemed newly impressed that cultural forms, practices, and expressions come into contact with one another and are reshaped in the process, and that it makes no sense to imagine anything like cultural purity as a result. It does not take much reflection to realize that such cultural sharing is a feature of culture per se: Goethe was already late to the party when he wrote about global literatures in the 1820s.[1] Equally suspect is the initial premise regarding the spatial fixity of cultural forms and practices (again, usually linked to national cultures) which then become uprooted and turned into something else as they travel – a myth of origins if there ever was one. We wanted to

push our students to think more deeply about the relation between globalization and culture, but in ways that went beyond the standard narratives that more often than not were content to study the globalization of culture or the culture of globalization. In other words, we wanted them to think seriously about the meaning and significance of the two categories conjoined by the preposition "of," and to question the action of the preposition as well, which in the first instance identifies the result of a process (culture has been globalized) and in the second describes a form of belonging to a moment whose character has been determined in advance.

In the midst of the run-up to the US presidential election later that year, we could not escape the realization that the topic we were teaching felt curiously belated. For us, globalization was never just a way of naming those apparently objective developments which everyone now unthinkingly associates with it – mainly, the ever greater interlocking of national economies with one another through trade and finance – but was a new *narrative* of how the world works that needed itself to be analyzed, assessed, and criticized. Globalization was the name for a novel assertion of economic, cultural, and political power that wanted desperately to hide behind the veil of its claims to have identified, in almost scientific fashion, an actually existing phenomenon. At its core was an extension and expansion of US power – the bringing into being of the "new world order" announced by President George Bush Sr. and most effectively implemented by President Bill Clinton – in order to secure a position of global hegemony which was fast being chewed away by the economic and political rise of countries such as China, India, and Brazil. In São Paolo that summer, it seemed that everyone already knew the lie of globalization, and understood that it was more ideological project than the name for an objective historical process about which, like time itself, one could do nothing. We brought with us complex schemas and offered alternative theorizations to flash the spaces and places where globalization was confusing and complicating things, especially, but not only, with respect to culture. Our Brazilian students and friends had a much simpler way of framing things. Leaving globalization aside, they were offering a challenge to US power and the existing state of the