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# THE SPACE OF THE WORLD

Globalization remains a significant research topic across the social sciences and humanities. Yet despite attention within geography, a coherent analysis of the relation between globalization, space, and territory remains lacking. At the same time, philosophers have attempted to think the notion of the world, particularly in terms of it being something that precedes the extension of economic, political, and cultural phenomena across the globe. These philosophical accounts, however, have often remained frustratingly detached from the global forces actively reshaping the world, its constituent states and territories. Where philosophical ideas have been employed in analysis, this has often been at the expense of sufficient nuance. One example would be the widespread adoption of the term "deterritorialization" to describe globalization, when at most what is being observed is a remaking of spatial relations. Continuities between the state-territorial modern world and globalization cannot be properly conceived because the conditions that made both possible are poorly understood.

This essay is the outline of a project that seeks to bridge these divergent literatures to undertake a philosophical investigation of the relation between territory and globalization. It is conceived as the third part of an informal "trilogy" of books on different aspects of the question of territory. The first part was an investigation of the question of territory in relation to the "war on terror": *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*.<sup>1</sup> The second, nearly complete, offers a broad-scale history of the concept of territory in Western thought under the working title of *The Birth of Territory*. The first is the political book; the second is the historical one. The book I will outline here is the philosophical study, which will interrogate the space of the world.

*The Space of World* orientates itself around a range of debates and thinkers within the European tradition of philosophy and political theory. The key authors that will be analyzed are Eugen Fink, Kostas Axelos, Henri Lefebvre, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Quentin Meillassoux, and Peter Sloterdijk. While Fink and Axelos have had some work translated in the past; they largely remain to be discovered in English-speaking scholarship. The central works are Fink's *Spiel als Weltsymbol* and Axelos's *Le jeu du monde*, which are untapped philosophical resources for thinking about the world, and the process of *mondialisation*, becoming-world.<sup>2</sup> Axelos rightly contends that that globalization is a kind of *mondialisation* without the world.<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre advances many of their ideas in a more explicitly political analysis.<sup>4</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy's important work has raised some key issues in such an account of the creation of the world.<sup>5</sup> Badiou is now a major figure in translation, with his *Logics of Worlds* translated in 2009 and his ex-student Meillassoux's book *After Finitude* the year before.<sup>6</sup> As yet the majority of scholarship on their work, especially within geography, has been overwhelming positive, not recognizing the problems of their mathematical ontology.<sup>7</sup> Sloterdijk is the subject of an extensive and ongoing program of translation, including his three-volume masterwork *Sphären*, forthcoming with Semiotext(e).<sup>8</sup> He has also been the focus of some critical attention.<sup>9</sup>

Key questions to be investigated include asking how the world became an object of thought. How was this related to its becoming an object of practice? What potential is there for rethinking the way the world is constructed without simply falling into mechanistic, technocratic ways of rendering? To think the world of globalization forces us to realize that this is not a transcending of spatial or territorial problems, but rather their reconfiguration. Territory – understood as the political corollary of calculative space, as a political technology – offers us insight into the world scale or the notion of the worldwide. In Lefebvre's terms, *l'échelle mondiale* is not the same as *le niveau globale*, the world scale is distinct from the global or general level. The process of globalization is an acceleration of the understanding of space and time as coordinates on a three- and four-dimensional grid. The determination of space and time as calculative, and extension as the primary characteristic of material nature, is to make it amenable to science through geometry and measure more generally. A difference of degree rather than an ontological transformation is thus the way to grasp the spatiality of globalization.

The planned book proceeds not through a thematic approach – globalization of politics, of economy, of culture – nor through thinker-based chapters, but is led by problematics. Taking up questions or issues – violence, fossils, earth, wound, volume, and play – it intends to raise a wide range of philosophical, political, and historical issues about how we think of the world, the globe, and beyond. It enables a thinking of such diverse themes as religion, relation, ecology, disasters and crises, the air and the subsoil, the pragmatic and the poetic. How do philosophical resources help to make sense of the global forces reshaping the world?



## VIOLENCE

How does violence relate to the world? Does it make sense to speak of a violent world or a world of violence? Is the violence a process directed toward the world, or the things that constitute it, or is violence inherent in the world or particular ways of grasping the world? Is the world itself violent? Is the violence to be understood in terms of brute force or some other degree? How does violence work in different ways at different scales or levels?

Max Weber famously defined the state as “that human community, which within a certain area or territory [Gebietes] – this ‘area’ belongs to the feature – has a (successful) monopoly of legitimate physical violence.”<sup>10</sup> Yet violence is not simply a possession of the state, something that it exercises, but one of its conditions of possibility. The modern state requires a whole range of calculative, abstracting techniques that are shot through with violence. This is no more so than in the question of its territory, where creating a bounded space is already a violent act of exclusion and inclusion; maintaining it as such requires constant vigilance and the mobilization of threat; and challenging it necessarily entails a transgression.

As Henri Lefebvre described it, sovereignty implies “a space against which violence, whether latent or overt, is directed – a space established and constituted by violence.” Yet Lefebvre argues that this is also found in its enthroneing of “a specific rationality, that of accumulation, that of the bureaucracy and the army – a unitary, logistical, operational and quantifying rationality which would make economic growth possible and draw strength from that growth for its own expansion to a point where it would take possession of the entire planet.”<sup>11</sup>

It is that relation between this specific rationality, its violence, and the things it makes possible that I want to explore under this theme. To what extent is the notion of the world itself a category of violence, before any mere extension of political, cultural, and economic phenomena across the surface of the globe? How does this help us to think the notion of the world, as something comprising, but clearly exceeding, the states into which it is divided? Are there ways of thinking of the world as something other than as scarred through violence, divided and partitioned? Should we understand the global system of capitalism, trade, and finance as itself violent?<sup>12</sup>

## FOSSILS

Next I want to take the problem of fossils as a means of thinking through two questions: religion and relation. First, I want to investigate ways in which the discovery of fossils forced a realization that the world was much older than previously thought, and that the biblical account of Genesis could not be literally true. Or did God plant fossils to provoke man into heresy? This provides an opportunity to consider global religions.

The more substantive part of the chapter takes up the challenge posed by Quentin Meillassoux in his book *After Finitude*. Post-Kantian philosophy has based itself, in large part, on the question of the relation between human and world: not simply that what we know about the world is always filtered through our experience of it; but that what we experience of the world is subject to the way we experience it. The world is as it is for us. Meillassoux articulates a radical problem with this: how to understand the problem of the *arche*-fossil, those radioactive traces that predate any life on the earth, but not its existence. Correlationism is described as the thesis that things we observe are dependent on the observer in some way, or, more fundamentally, that humans and the world coexist. There is a necessary correlation between what is observed and that which observes. Correlationism is flawed, Meillassoux suggests, because *arche*-fossils show that there is a world of which we can have objective knowledge without there being any mediation between the knowledge and the observer, except at a several-million-year interval. While the explicit dating is meditated, the existence of these phenomena is not. Meillassoux suggests that correlationism, in all its variants, is a convenient way of avoiding having to account for the world as it is, prior to human access.

Meillassoux is problematic because he ends up returning to a mathematical foundation for the ontology of the world – based in large part on the work of Alain Badiou. But the question he asks poses a fundamental challenge to phenomenological and poststructuralist accounts of the world and its relation. His work has been linked to the “speculative realism” movement that includes thinkers like Graham Harman and Ray Brassier.<sup>13</sup> The return of realism, of objects and encounters that can be understood aside from the human experience or mediation of them, raises fundamental issues in terms of our sense of the world.

## EARTH

How is the Earth divided, reformulated, fractured, and ruined? Under this theme I want to understand the question of its environment, and political orderings. I first look at the book

published in 1950 by the fascist jurist Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*.<sup>14</sup> Drawing on the Ancient Greek meaning, Schmitt suggests that *nomos* means both a law and a division, arguing that “*Nomos* is the measure by which the ground and soil of the earth [*Grund und Boden der Erde*] in a particular order is divided and situated; it is also the form of political, social, and religious order determined by this process. Here, measure, order, and form constitute a spatially concrete unity.”<sup>15</sup> Schmitt contends that it was only with the explorations of the late fifteenth century that the earth as a globe actually became tangible. Of course, even the Ancient Greeks knew the earth was a sphere, but it was not demonstrably shown through circumnavigation until Magellan’s voyage of the early sixteenth century. Schmitt argues that “the new global image [*globale Raumbild*] required a new global spatial order,” an order of the earth-as-ball [*Erdenballes*].<sup>16</sup>

If Schmitt’s own ideas are indelibly stained with their political associations,<sup>17</sup> a number of thinkers coming in his wake have sought to understand these issues. These include Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri. I investigate Agamben through the category of life and work on animals, which shows how important it is to realize that in life on Earth, in a populated world, humans are a tiny minority. Agamben problematically understands a fundamental division between the Greek terms of *zoe* and *bios*, which he then sees as rendered separate when humans are reduced to animality, to bare, or naked, life.<sup>18</sup> Rather than follow Hardt and Negri’s call for an understanding of empire, a newly radical multitude or a resurgent commonwealth,<sup>19</sup> I want to go back to their other key inspiration, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The relation between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, especially as outlined in their book *A Thousand Plateaux*, requires much more careful investigation if we are to use it to understand a new world Imperium.<sup>20</sup> *En passant*, the question of the earth allows the examination of a number of related questions, including environmental security, and the almost inconceivably major challenge of climate change.

## WOUND

In one of his seminars on Freud, Jacques Lacan declared, “there is something originally, initially, profoundly wounded in the human relation to the world.”<sup>21</sup> How should we react to global events, to local occurrences that through the media appear to the world, or genuinely huge ones such as the Boxing Day Tsunami? How was the financial crisis from 2007 to 2009 produced as global? What about global health crises, pandemics of contagion? Rather than the overused notions of terror, fear, or tragedy, here I want to think about the notion of the wound through horror, and the horrific.<sup>22</sup> Faced with the void, a tear in the fabric of the world, what is our sensibility, our attunement? Although there have been some interesting philosophical studies of horror, notably Julia Kristeva and Noël Carroll,<sup>23</sup> to explore these issues I will turn to the recent reengagement with the early twentieth-century writer H.P. Lovecraft.<sup>24</sup> Lovecraft’s writings have received attention both within geography and philosophy, notably the issue of the journal *Collapse* on “Concept Horror,”<sup>25</sup> Lovecraft is an unpleasant writer – misogynist, racist, and deeply conservative – and his style of writing is often execrable. But he is interesting for a number of reasons. He discards ghosts, witches, and other stereotypes of horror, and instead puts humans as minor figures in a horrific world and universe.

Rather than the pale imitations of his style that can be found in countless writers, I want also to examine the contemporary writer who arguably shares more of his sensibility, China Miéville. Miéville offers alternative visions, other worlds. Two of his novels are particularly relevant here. In *The Scar*, the city is a flotilla of ships, a world that is detached and mobile, that has lost its bearings. In *The City and the City*, the place is one that folds back and over the other, where occupants of each occupy the same space, but different places, and where transgression is known as breach.<sup>26</sup> Miéville’s work helps us to grasp what is so profoundly unsettling about horror, a sense that our connection to the world is ruptured, that space is out of joint. The concept of wound is interesting for other reasons, because the Greek for wound is *trauma*, and, as is well known, the German word *Der Traum* means dream. The closing part of this theme would look at the interesting work in international relations on the question of memory, wounds, and trauma, focusing on the book-length studies of Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss.<sup>27</sup>

## VOLUME

We all too often think of the spaces of geography as areas, not volumes. Territories are bordered, divided, and demarcated, but not understood in terms of height and depth. There are exceptions of course – Matthew Gandy’s *Concrete and Clay* on the subterranean spaces of New York City, or Peter Sloterdijk’s *Terror from the Air*, for which the original title is *Luftbeben*, “Airquake.”<sup>28</sup> Such concerns are magnified in his major book *Sphären*. Similarly the Israeli



architect Eyal Weizmann has shown how we must grasp the fractured spaces of the West Bank as three-dimensional, with tunnels, bridges, hilltops, and airspace as much as land, terrain, and walls.<sup>29</sup> There have also been a couple of recent books by geographers on the government of the air.<sup>30</sup>

In his philosophical theory of globalization, Sloterdijk offers a way of conceiving it in three registers, three epochs. The first was metaphysical globalization that can be traced back to Greek ontology; the second was the terrestrial, the globalization of imperialism and commercial trade routes, of Europe's conquest of the new world for markets and resources. It is the third that now needs to be investigated – what he calls the globalization of saturation, where technology and capitalism lead to the collapse of temporality into simultaneity, distance into proximity.<sup>31</sup>

How do questions of height change how we understand the space of the world? What happens if we think of the vertical as much as the horizontal? How does this work with the ideas of globalization that Sloterdijk investigates? Examples from below include resources of the subsoil, infrastructure projects, and tunnels. From above would include the importance of aerial photography in archaeology, surveillance and bombing in warfare, satellite images, and Google Earth. The world does not just exist as a surface; space is volumetric.

## PLAY

In distinction to globalization, *mondialisation* can be understood as a process of becoming, a "becoming worldwide." The world needs to be understood as a whole, but as a whole made up of fragments, an event in thought. In thinking this process, this becoming, Axelos regularly cites the comment from Marx's doctoral thesis that suggests that "the world's becoming philosophical is at the same time philosophy's becoming worldly, that its realization is at the same time its loss."<sup>32</sup> In its becoming worldwide, that is, in its actualization or realization, philosophy is transcended and overcome. If Marx forms one end of the tradition drawn upon here, a fragment of Heraclitus forms the other. This is the fragment, which states that eternity, or time, *aion*, standing as a cipher for the world, is "like a child playing a game."<sup>33</sup> How then can the world be understood as deploying itself as a game, a *jeu*? *Le jeu du monde* can be translated as "the game of the world" or as "the play of the world." Axelos works with these and other meanings to show how the world can be understood only on its own terms, or in terms of its own rules, rather than on the basis of anything exterior to it. It is a question of internal relations and interplay. The making-worldly of phenomena through a logic implicit only to itself, and the claim that the world can be understood only through this continual process of becoming, is particularly brought into modern thought by Heidegger's suggestion that "world never is, but worlds."<sup>34</sup> Play is a cosmic symbol and a symbol of the cosmos. The play of the world is between the fragment and the whole.

All too often globalization is understood as a political or economic process, most discussion of which fails to comprehend the world or the globe over which this is extended. This is the case in both material and philosophical senses. Globalization does not refer the end of geography, but rather to its reconfiguration within existing terms. Territory continues into the worldwide. In Leibniz we find the claim that "*cum Deus calculat... fit mundus*"; "as God calculates, the world comes to be."<sup>35</sup> Heidegger's retranslation is that "as God plays, world comes to be."<sup>36</sup> The challenge is one of rethinking the way the world is constructed that does not simply fall into mechanistic, technocratic ways of rendering it as a whole, an object for thought and practice.

## NOTES

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12. See Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso 2009); and Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, translated by Kristina Lebedeva (New York: Semiotext(e) 2010).
13. Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court 2002); *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court 2005); Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave 2007).
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15. *Ibid.*, 70, translation modified.
16. *Ibid.*, 86, translation modified.
17. See Stuart Elden, "Reading Schmitt Geopolitically: Nomos, Territory and Großraum," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 161, May/June 2010, 18-26.
18. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1998); *The Open: Man and Animal*, translated by Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004).
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