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The Visual Regime of the Globe: Revaluating Invisibility in Global Modernity

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Author

Kim, David D.

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Visibility should—not be visible.

—Jacques Derrida, “Living On”

The question for us now would seem to be not just, What is an image? But, How do we transform images, and the imagination that produces them, into powers worthy of trust and respect?

—W.J.T. Mitchell, “What Is an Image?”

If the visible is not trustworthy and what seems immanent is actually far from being graspable, how might we want to envision our navigation through the constantly transforming networks of equality and difference in the twenty-first century? Aside from the empirical challenge of approximating cosmopolitanism, recent debates have highlighted this conceptual difficulty in imagining the very idea of being cosmopolitan because the task is, at first glance, a necessary, yet impossible one.¹ To be cosmopolitan—what does it mean after all and how does it look? Perhaps, being so skeptical toward the imaginary sounds untimely, if not inconvenient, at a time when the democratic forum of new media offers unprecedented opportunities for transcending the post-Babelian age of mistranslated and untranslatable forms of communication between cultures, languages, nations and religions. By blurring boundaries between the virtual and the real, social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter engender second, parallel lives that have previously been unimaginable; and they show no signs of favoring the oppressor or the oppressed. Yet, the intensity with which political struggles are currently being

¹ In a brilliant essay on contemporary discourses of cosmopolitanism, Bruce Robbins points out that there is a certain lack of understanding about the multilayered connections we have to a variety of places. Cosmopolitics, as a neologism, thus serves to “introduce intellectual order and accountability into this newly dynamic space of gushingly unrestrained sentiments, pieties, and urgencies for which no adequately discriminating lexicon has had time to develop” (9). Without disagreeing with Robbins, I would argue that the new terminology is a significant index of the ongoing struggles with epistemological clarity. I will return to this point below.

waged in mass media raises urgent questions once again about the role of images in making sense of global modernity, questions that redirect our attention to the volatility of our emotions in a fast-paced, visually attuned world.² What image captures our delicate relationship to the foreign without effacing the difference between self and other? How do we translate it into an imagination that is indicative of cosmopolitan aspirations? The aim of this essay is to respond to these concerns about the visible and the invisible by interrogating the production of ambiguous fantasies on the basis of a predominant image of modern worldliness: the globe. It is to evaluate the deadly attraction that the visual regime of planet earth poses to viewers whose genuine engagement with matters of climate change fails to grasp the truly translocal, highly complex challenge in locally particular terms since the planetary gaze is unable to differentiate what is visible from how the visible is manipulated, and what the visible is literally from what the visible represents metaphorically.

That pictures are worth a thousand words or that they create powerful linkages to what is out of sight, and thus out of mind, is surely meaningful in a world where difference no longer appears black or white. Now, self and other go hand in hand; the division between friend and foe is less clear than it has been before. This explains why translocal challenges, ranging from immigration and terrorism to climate change and global hunger, are often condensed into mythical conceptions, which manifest themselves as ongoing revelations of “the pictorial turn” in public consciousness. As Roland Barthes argues, the mythical is that which requires little clarification, is taken for granted and goes without saying. It presents the world “without

² In his most recent book on the multiplication—or “cloning”—of verbal and visual images in contemporary biopolitics, W.J.T. Mitchell begins his iconoclastic narrative with the note “that, in our time, both the things done and the things said are filtered through mass media, and the role of images and imagination...is much expanded” (xi). Like Mitchell, I am concerned with the medial confusion of the virtual and the real in the twenty-first century and this article shall be teasing out an environmentally inflected version of this biopolitics against the backdrop of images of planet earth.

contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident” (*Mythologies* 143). Since myths conceive of far-reaching actions and distant systems in all-too-familiar, almost-cliché-like images, working through globalization in mythical terms supplements the deep dystopias of complexity, inequality and non-equivalence around the globe with superficial utopias of equivalence, openness and transparency. Consequently, the term globalization becomes a fuzzy trope, looking uncannily same regardless of spatiotemporal particularities. In fact, it connotes none of the plurality of localizations that is deeply inscribed in translocal interactions. Hence, more questions arise: What happens to self and other when the globe functions as a myth of *global* interactions, which is to say, as a free-floating metaphor of feeling and thinking beyond Here and Now? And how can we save ourselves from falling victim to its intuitive appeal to superficial cosmopolitanism?

Suffice it to say that this article does not pretend to be exhaustive in its iconoclastic inquiries into the globe; nor are its iconoclastic observations restricted to matters of what Ursula Heise calls “eco-cosmopolitanism” (61). Rather, it takes critical account of the visual hegemony whereby cultural differences are reduced to empirical, normative and totalizing conceptions. It demonstrates how much of the globalization talk, which becomes evident in Al Gore’s award-winning docudrama *An Inconvenient Truth*, resonates with a wider range of modern European discourses on civilization and conquest. These include cartographic illustrations of the world in early modernity and in the Age of Goethe.

Before turning to these globalizing sights, I want to say a few more words about what it is that is at stake here. On the one hand, this project is informed by the belated postcolonial recognition that visible differences in class, ethnicity, gender, language, nation, religion and sexuality are derived from arbitrary or essentialist observations about self and other, as well as

from non-equivalent interactions in a postcolonial world. As Frantz Fanon proposes in *Black Skin White Masks*, with “two camps: the white and the black,” metaphysical inquiries into postcolonial politics reveal that “they are often quite fluid” (8). Therefore, what postcolonial studies highlight are the contrasts between biological, ecological, ethical, moral, sociopolitical and technoscientific relations instead of the old Manichean system of persons and things. In what follows, I put the globe to the test for the same reason, that is, to investigate the fluid multiplicity of translocal connections around the globe.³ On the other hand, this essay is an attempt to register the various affects that have come to be associated with the transitory present in terminologies like cosmopolitics, *mondialization*, postmodernity, late capitalism, postcolonialism and the New International, affects that are sweepingly confounded in the image of planet earth. If Heidegger is right to note that producing a *Weltbild* as a praxis of modern truth-making is not to come up with a visual replica (*Abklatsch*) of planet earth, but to grasp the world as image (*die Welt als Bild begreifen*), it seems to me that what the globe calls forth is a planetary gaze whose visibility is determined in invisible terms (89). To produce a *Weltbild* is to be attuned to mobilizing emotions as immaterial conditions of earthly politics. In this article, I elucidate the affectivity of this global supervision.

This is not to say that translocal imaginations are categorically flawed. On the contrary. I raise questions about the globe as an irresistible, yet problematic coordinate for imagining a productive engagement with equality and difference and ultimately they have to do with the more general sense of orientation vis-à-vis the rest of the world. In this regard, it helps to see how B. Venkat Mani and Emily Apter have probed the navigation through global neighborhoods in strikingly different ways. At the center of Mani’s investigation of Turkish-German

³ Postcolonial ecocriticism has emerged as a vibrant multidisciplinary forum. For a helpful overview of its beginnings, I would like to refer the reader to the groundbreaking studies by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, listed in the bibliography.

Gastarbeiter in contemporary German literature lies the thoughtful proposition that scholars need to move beyond the outdated methodology of intercultural, multicultural and minority studies, which work “through the sole focus and reliance on visible difference, through the accentuation of difference alone, or through the resolution of difference through fusion” (22). If difference is to be assessed as a variegated working of spatiotemporal manifestations, Mani shows how scholars have to pay attention to the colorful range of cosmopolitical claims: “These include assertions, declarations, and agreements, but also accusations, allegations, disputations, refutations, and contentions” (33). Apter presents another pedagogical model, one that seeks to be a “distinct symptomology” of translocal disjunctions (587). According to her, “geographically emptied names” like Kant’s “cosmopolitanism,” Goethe’s “world literature,” Pascale Casanova’s “world republic of letters,” Spivak’s “planetary” and Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein’s “world-systems” resonate with “different political valences” because their “neoimperialist cartographies” marginalize minoritarian, unofficial life experiences (582, 583). They elicit localized universalisms—“imagined communities, parastates, translanguaging, diaspora, majimboism, postcolonial deterritorialization, silicon cities, circum-Atlantic, *îles-refuges*, the global south and so on” (583). In this highly contested, continuously transforming wor(l)d(s)cape, Apter identifies two reasons for tracing “the Untranslatable.” First, it stands for “words that assign new meanings to old terms, neologisms, names for ideas that are continually retranslated or mistranslated, translations that are obviously incommensurate (as in *esprit* to *mind* or *Geist*)”; second, only “collaborative labor” is capable of registering these shifts in “mistranslation, neologism, and semantic dissonance” (597). I believe that these two studies demonstrate a great sensitivity to the urgency of recognizing the plurality of differences around the globe. While Mani points to subtle forms of cosmopolitics, Apter maps out the deliberate, as

well as coincidental, ways in which singular experiences and parallel imaginations enter into what is considered to be common. Whereas cosmopolitics manifests itself in distinct performances across time and space, “the Untranslatable” conjoins the thought and the unthought on a collective level. These indexes of difference do not claim some kind of adequacy, completion or transparency; nor do they reduce emotions, images and words to indifferent forms of translation. Instead, they indicate a communal site of thinking, reading and writing. Now, does the sight of planet earth attract a similarly open-ended collection of comparisons, revaluations and translations across time and space?

In one of the most iconic scenes of his much-acclaimed film on climate change, Al Gore sheds light on this question without being fully aware of it. [See Clip 1.] He starts by taking viewers on a breathtaking journey into the universe, then looks back at planet earth and finally lifts up the object of his planetary gaze to a metaphor of universal history. At the end of this moving lesson in remembrance and imagination, Gore asks: “You see that pale blue dot?” “That’s us,” he immediately answers while pointing to the tiny flash of light that American astronomer Carl Sagan has popularized as a cosmological mirror-image of mankind. Then, he says:

Everything that has ever happened in all of human history has happened on that pixel. All the triumphs and all the tragedies, all the wars, all the famines, all the major advances. It’s our only home. And that is what is at stake. Our ability to live on planet earth. To have a future as a civilization.

As the camera zooms in on the indistinct dot, the former vice president translates the synchronic image of planet earth into a diachronic vision of world history, stirring up a colorful set of emotions; and in this chaos of feelings, including anxiety, fear, hope, pride, nostalgia and

urgency, spectators begin to care about the environment; they recognize the invisible kinship in which human and non-human beings are intimately bound together. Simultaneously, “that pixel,” surrounded by an unlimited mass of nothingness, demarcates the territorial limits to which earthly beings are necessarily bound for survival, the visible ends of their small habitat. Last but not least, the globe signals the anthropogenic nature of a new natural history after human beings have become transhistorical agents, powerful enough to determine the course of planet earth beyond the brevity of their own lives. The human being is “something much larger than the simple biological agent that he or she always has been” (Chakrabarty 203, 206).

Why environmental films screen spectacular images of planet earth to advocate for environmental activism and ecological advocacy is hardly mysterious, but what is less understood are the ways in which those screenings respond to what environmental philosopher Dale Jamieson has diagnosed as “the hope that poets, dramatists, artists, filmmakers, historians, philosophers, and other humanists might be able to succeed in overcoming this crisis in vision—to wake people who had been sleepwalking and animate them into action” (615). Gore’s planetary gaze draws upon the natural beauty of planet earth—the aesthetics of the globe, so to speak—to invite a heterogeneous set of emotions and thoughts. The globe is lifted up to a super-image of earthly responses that human beings have to the threatened future of mankind. J. Hillis Miller’s following self-observation makes clear how powerful and unsettling this image-making is on individual levels:

My singular response seems to need to be recorded, preserved, and circulated, made public, outed. One does not have to be a critic by vocation (or by calling) to feel the urgency of this demand. Many people, when they see a film, good or bad, want to tell other people about it: “Did you see the Al Gore film?” (60).

According to Miller, Gore's film engenders strong desires for social engagement because it shows pictures that are culturally coded and personally arresting.⁴ More specifically, the visual awakening to intersubjective communication works because the globe constitutes a "cultural imaginary," that is, a thick repository of "affect-laden images or utterances," whose circulation and consumption heighten the sense of solidarity across time and space (Bronfen 22, 23). In addition to representing the visually pleasing world as such, the globe stands for a borderless community that sets aside local interests and historical particularities in the name of past achievements and for the sake of unborn generations.

However, the globe is a predominant phantasm of modernity whose haunting superficiality calls for serious ecocritical intervention from humanists. There are at least two reasons for this need of exorcizing the uncanniness of the globe. First, the image of planet earth marks the death of the other insofar as its visual comprehensiveness disavows any of the irreducibility or unrepresentability of world systems. Nothing appears to be outside earthly boundaries; everything is on earth. In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak articulates this concern with virtual manipulation. For her, the globe is nothing more than a technoscientific product bereft of human essence: "The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it" (72). Global visions are imbued with misled fantasies about the other while difference remains invisible. Second, this death of the other does not come alone. Self and other die together the moment the seer meets the seen. While the globe elicits this death drive, which also overlaps with the life-producing Eros, the exhilarating sense of oneness invites apocalyptic visions of world history, confounding utopia and dystopia within the same imagery.

⁴ I am thinking of Roland Barthes's helpful definition of pictures in terms of a culturally coded *studium* and a personally touching *punctum* (*Camera Lucida* 26-27).

More concretely speaking, the globe serves as a widely used symbol of the technoscientific post-Cold War society. As environmental sociologist Sheila Jasanoff puts it, “in a secular, multicultural age, the image of Earth is the nearest thing we have to an icon, a universal common property with shared meaning and, for many, spiritual resonance” (49). This is the reason why Gore designates the “pale blue dot” as an imaginary copy of our communal being, a visual gateway to our emotionally laden past and to our sacred future. “That’s us,” as he says. But we need to be asking the following questions in response to Gore’s planetary gaze: Isn’t “the pale blue dot” too small for some of us? And whose past is he talking about, and whose future? To close the gap between the literal and the metaphorical, as Gore and Jasanoff encourage us to do, is to make the jump from what the globe is as an image of planet earth to what the globe is as a metaphor of universality, but not vice versa. It fails to interrogate whether some cultures do not represent worldliness in the same image of planet earth. To put it differently, the iconicity of the globe presents invisible challenges that are not immediately apparent to Western eyes. According to Susan Buck-Morss, the icon is “a key to political legitimacy in Christian society” because it “visualizes the Christian *nomos*” to legitimize “world domination” (180). Here, as she elaborates, the issue is not that “seeing is believing (the divine itself remains invisible),” but that “from within belief” the viewer “feels the presence of the Incarnation” and “needs no proof or reasoned explanation” (180). Consequently, catching sight of the globe as an icon of the twenty-first century overlooks the thick postcolonial negotiations between “the North” and “the South” or between First World environmentalisms and the so-called “environmentalism of the poor” (Thomas 48). Moreover, the visceral iconicity of the globe strives more for “reality-effect” than it does for “ecology-effect,” which results in a

profound ambivalence toward environmental issues (Buell 40).⁵ Environmental sociologist Wolfgang Sachs has described it as follows:

On the one hand, people talk about the earth in a language of sentimental trivialization in the following senses: Look how tiny and fragile it is! It needs our care and attention! On the other hand, human self-aggrandizement and claims to technological omnipotence are apparent: Look how easily comprehensible and manageable the earth is! It can be mastered and kept under control! Motives of ‘concern’ and ‘control’ may thus coincide. (113)

Caught between a patronizing attitude toward the natural environment and a blind faith in modern science and technology, spectators expedite their own demise without being conscious of their epistemic violence. Instead of imparting a differential judgment of environmental processes and earthly lives, their global visions celebrate a wholesome approach to environmentalist actions. This superficial transmutation, in turn, invokes a technoscientific mastery of the world that is ignorant of disjunctive translocal relations and rooted cosmopolitical interventions.

How the globe has conditioned Western viewers to make such perverse claims of care and control in the past five centuries becomes clear when Gore’s planetary gaze is compared with that of early modern cartographers.⁶ Of course, this is not to say that there are no

⁵ Here, I am quoting Lawrence Buell, who describes Leslie Marmon Silko’s seminal article on Pueblo imaginations. In line with Heidegger, Silko calls for a reading of language and literature beyond its restrictive, realist function of replicating the visible world (30-42). Jasanoff highlights the same striking difference between Anglo-Saxon and Native-American imaginations of planet earth. While the former yearns for realistic pictures, which are as close to the original as possible, the latter depicts houses and trees, directing the human gaze further onto the inhabitants of planet earth. In light of the sociopolitical marginalization and the technological limitation with which many Native American communities are struggling, Jasanoff explains how essential it is to “invit[e] the United States (and perhaps the North more generally) to supplement its detached planetary gaze, and the global sciences of sustainability that it has usefully fostered, with a more situated, historical, and ethical understanding of human-nature relationships” (49-50). Buell also lists the following informative versions of the globe: “the earth as fragile eco-holism, the split image of the green Gaian ball of the 1969 Apollo moonshot, and the Whole Earth Catalogue vs. the dystopic image of the ruined, uninhabitable planet, rendered so by human mistreatment” (57).

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this essay to address how non-Westerners respond to the image of planet earth with different kinds or various intensities of emotions, but to give a brief example, the Korean language makes a careful

differences between cartography and digital media or between world maps and pictures of planet earth, but what has to be mapped out as an integral domain of planetary gazes is the visual regime that the globe has become since the end of the fifteenth century.

Around 1500, there were six intricately interwoven reasons for the unprecedented popularity of world maps: first, the rediscovery of Ptolemy's *Geographia*; second, the scientific measurement of human bodies and geographic landscapes; third, an aesthetic realism for representing the world; fourth, land measurements for demarcating private properties; fifth, the expansion of empires in overseas territories; and sixth, the emergence of a new subjectivity that was subsequently projected onto the world map (Conley 1-2). After Jacopo d'Angelo had translated Ptolemy's *Geographia* into *Cosmographia*, these developments facilitated a "leap from partial chorography to global cosmography" (Lestringant 5). Symbolic of "an upward displacement of one's point of view," they shifted contemporary geopolitical interests from the local or the regional to the global, allowing "the eye of the cosmographer" to become one "with that of the Creator," celebrating Hellenistic culture as the height of human civilization and transforming European spatial orientation according to divine supervision (Lestringant 5; Levenson 11). Additionally, cosmographic cartographies did not only attract scientists; missionaries made active use of them to venture into non-Christian—or what they called animalistic, barbaric, heathen or superstitious—lands in order to spread the Word of God; colonizers recorded new conquests on atlases and maps; diplomats, merchants, scholars and travelers authorized their laborious dispossession of non-Europeans on widely circulating world maps, such as those of Martin Waldseemüller, Johannes Schöner and Heinrich Hammer. Imperial politics was not considered official until it became visible on cosmographies, as it were.

differentiation between the world (세계, *saegae* or 세상, *saesang*) and the earth (지구, *jigu*). While the former refers to the earth including its inhabitants, the latter refers to the planet alone.

“The Portuguese Crown,” Jerry Brotton thus writes, “utilized the global image as a particularly affective symbol of imperial authority” while expanding into the Americas (77). In the first half of the twentieth century, Carl Schmitt determined this emergence of European empires under the same sign. For the human being who was “ein Sohn der Erde,” cosmographic reorientations transposed existing paradigms of political thinking onto universal orders (“Das Meer” 396; *Nomos* 87). They changed conceptions of selfhood and otherness on the basis of claimed and unclaimed territories on the surface of the earth.

According to Karl Guthke, cosmographic representations of the world continued to play a major role in the eighteenth century when the ideal of “global *Bildung*” became flesh (183). Guthke recounts how, in a contemporary periodical called *Der reisende Deutsche*, “a huge globe with Europe, Africa, Asia and America clearly marked” becomes the unusual sight/site of a global spectacle:

In front of it, we see their inhabitants: the exotics to the right and left (a Turk, an African, an Asian and an American Indian), in the middle, and much larger: a rococo cavalier. Unlike the other figures, whose gestures are rather restrained, the cavalier spreads out his arms as if trying to seize the globe, taking possession of it. (183)

In this misrepresentative world community, only the European demonstrates a sovereign mastery over world affairs, whereas the non-Europeans simply give witness to the symbolic act of bodily possession. There is no question about who watches whom or who does what. Yet, Guthke oddly concludes that the cavalier “is not the conquistador so much as the philosophical traveler” (183). From Guthke’s perspective, the presence of another figure, “a writer, goose-quill at the ready,” implies that what is going on is a rather harmless, if not benevolent, transmission of travel

experiences “to a reading public eager to be globally educated by reading *Der reisende Deutsche*” (183). I argue that this reading is misleading insofar as it plays down the globalizing violence that is inscribed in the ethnographic scene. If the writer plays the triple role of observer, recorder and analyst, it is inaccurate to claim that he is neatly disconnected from the cavalier’s work of conquest. The writer and the cavalier are upholding, though surely in different ways, a “global *Bildung*” that is thoroughly Eurocentric. Their imperial functions are honored with the fake glory of universal education, while non-Europeans are relegated to the margins of a select community of conquerors, travelers, writers and readers. The birth of universal knowledge is marked by a visible discrimination against non-Europeans.

To probe the *nomos* of the earth for another moment, I would like to focus on one of the seminal texts of Enlightenment universality: Kant’s *Zum ewigen Frieden*. Of particular interest here is the last of the three *Definitivartikel*, which announces itself with the following subtitle: “*Das Weltbürgerrecht soll auf Bedingungen der allgemeinen Hospitalität eingeschränkt sein*” (21). Written shortly after the Treaty of Basel, which ended the War of the First Coalition between the French Republic and Prussia, the tentative *Entwurf* of perpetual peace envisioned a harmonious coexistence of territorial states on the basis of human commonalities, including the fact that everyone was originally a foreigner (*xenos*) on earth. For Kant, what this natural history suggested was that permanent demarcations of the private and the public, as well as those of origin and temporary living, were inhospitable rulings. World citizens were by nature entitled to the right of visitation, but they were not guaranteed the right of guests.

Es ist kein *Gastrecht*, worauf dieser Anspruch machen kann (wozu ein besonderer wohlthätiger Vertrag erfordert werden würde, ihn auf eine gewisse Zeit zum Hausgenossen zu machen), sondern ein *Besuchsrecht*, welches allen Menschen

zusteht, sich zur Gesellschaft anzubieten vermöge des Rechts des gemeinschaftlichen Besitzes der Oberfläche der Erde, auf der als Kugelfläche sie sich nicht ins Unendliche zerstreuen können, sondern endlich sich doch nebeneinander dulden müssen, ursprünglich aber niemand an einem Orte der Erde zu sein mehr Recht hat, als der andere. (21)

According to Kant, *Gastrecht* involves the drafting of a contract between people who wish to inhabit a common domain and make a home together, but since the surface of the earth is delimited, human beings need to conceive of world citizenship in terms of *Besuchsrecht*, which is alternatively grounded in social responsibility and universal morality. Instead of reifying the symbolic power of culture, language and ethnicity, they have to defer what happens locally to rational conceptions of *Sittlichkeit*. It is for this reason, and for no other, that Kant's vision of perpetual peace condemns the emergence of colonization and slavery in modern European history.

At the same time, Kant conveniently ignored the *nomos* of the earth, which had dictated European public law (*jus publicum Europaeum*) since Columbus's rediscovery of the Americas for European *conquistadores*. Not only did he oversee the deep history of cultures, languages, educations and myths, but he also drew upon reason to reform absolutist statism and to create a federation of enlightened states. Allen Wood defends this conception of cosmopolitan rights by alluding to "the tentativeness and open-endedness" of the treatise, which foresees the reader's active reconstruction, and by tracing the teleological transition from "natural discord" to "rational concord" in Enlightenment anthropology, but it is beyond reasonable doubt that Kant's bold cosmopolitanism leaves much to be desired (66, 71). Two readings suffice to illustrate this point. Samuel Moyn points out that it amounts to "a wholly minimal *Weltbürgerrecht* or 'world

citizen law' that envisaged no more than an asylum right for individuals out of place in a world of national states" (28). Jürgen Habermas explains that Kant shied away from defining the "legally binding character" or the "*moral* self-obligation" of an international alliance (169). Now, one would have to be specific about the changes that had occurred in "a surveyable public sphere shaped by literary means and open to arguments" before it transformed into "a semantically degenerated public sphere dominated by the electronic mass media and pervaded by images and virtual realities" (176). In these concrete ways, Kant's writing fails to provide twenty-first-century readers with a timely vision of cosmopolitics.

Needless to say, the globe is not unique in summoning an epistemically violent supervision—that is, supervision in the double sense of surveillance and oversight. For images have the tendency to lure viewers either to hate or to love collectively. Thus, the question is: How do individuals mount a collective response to deeply familiar, yet equally problematic images of world politics? "Becoming one with what we see is fatal," Marie-José Mondzain warns readers in this case, "and what can save us is the production of a liberating difference" (27). This kind of visual liberation, she explains, comes from "judgment and freedom" because sound words hold the promise of other, differential gazes: "Seeing with others, this is the question, since we are always alone in the activity of looking and since we can share only what is invisible" (26, 35-36). Since spectators are as much activated by what they see as by what they hear, Mondzain writes that it is "a political duty" to control desires in the interplay of what is visible and invisible (35). This is also the reason why following Gore's charming identification with the globe to the end—"That's us"—is not only narcissistic but also deadly. As Miller suggests, viewers look at Gore's environmental vision like an activating sight of individuation and exchange, one that has the potential of being a democratic site of communal sharing.

However, I disagree with the notion that judgment and freedom are sufficient for ensuring a safe distance between seer and seen. First, Mondzain does not consider the condition of those Enlightenment tropes in relation to translocal solidarity in late capitalism. If there is anything that Marxism has taught us about modern lives and letters, it is that freedom and judgment are idealist values of a liberal democratic elitism. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, authors of the seminal trilogy *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*, fittingly refer to this discriminatory global system as “elite aristocracy.” It stands for Eurocentric bourgeois predilections for reason whose visibility in words refuses to be reconciled with the invisible productivity of affective labor. No one has verbalized a more scathing condemnation of this hegemony than Lenin, who writes in *The State and Revolution* that “this democracy is always hemmed in by the narrow limits set by capitalist exploitation, and consequently always remains, in reality, a democracy for the minority, only for the propertied classes, only for the rich” (73-74). For Lenin, freedom is a privilege that only capitalists have while judgment is also only theirs to claim. Moreover, if political action is impossible without change—that is, without affect, movement and sensation, as Brian Massumi has shown in *Parables for the Virtual*—normative conceptions of what is present and what is absent or what makes sense and what does not do not respond adequately to the interpellations that are constitutive of political effectiveness. As derivatives of a universalizing ideology, freedom and judgment dramatize the scientific ethos of rational thinking as a perverse will for domination over difference. Meanwhile, those who are not privileged enough to cultivate these civil liberties in majoritarian communities and within national boundaries—immigrants, refugees and homosexuals, just to name a few examples—remain invisible from public spheres. Their cry for help falls on deaf ears not because it is somehow incomprehensible (such emotional pleas are understandable even across cultural,

linguistic, national and religious boundaries), but because they are believed to be unfit for democratic rights or because their visions of society do not resemble the predominant picture of world politics.

In Germany, Mondzain's normative adjudications proved their inadequacy for subduing destructive passions on June 30, 2009 when, in response to the Treaty of Lisbon, the Bundesverfassungsgericht declared that transnational solidarity could not infringe upon the "wirtschaftlichen, kulturellen und sozialen Lebensverhältnisse" of sovereign nation-states.⁷ The reasoning behind this judgment was that political action came with a legally protected set of "kulturellen, historischen und sprachlichen Vorverständnisse" while social life was strictly to play itself out within national boundaries. Therefore, the basis upon which collective transactions and regional affiliations could move forward was local tradition, including cultural upbringing, linguistic identity and historical familiarity. Otherwise, the court ruled, one would be mistaking affiliated subjects of a geopolitical network for unattached bodies in a common habitat. This neoliberal, rightist judgment, aside from exacerbating the semi-discriminatory, quasi-supportive *Integration* of multicultural immigrant communities into mainstream German society, renounced all responsibilities that the federal government had for other member states and third-country nationals. Inhospitable through and through, it brought the utopia of a cosmopolitan Europe a step closer to disillusionment.

So how do we envision our relation to the rest of the world when responsibility and response are predetermined by the visual parameters of planet earth? How do we maintain a critical distance from the deadly eroticism of the globe when our understanding of translocal relations very much relies on the image to grasp the fluidity of transnational corporate cultures,

⁷ Signed on December 13, 2007 by EU member states, the Treaty of Lisbon aimed at facilitating international policies across the union.

environmental protection agencies, aeronautical projects or even Christian mega-churches, perhaps beyond the point of no return? Censoring the image won't do even if such a secular aniconism becomes possible since what creates radically democratic assemblies is not prohibition, but the possibility of undermining predominant visions of the present future according to what is visible *and* invisible.

In conclusion, I would like to direct your sight for one last time to a film where the globe gives shape to a strikingly iconoclastic manipulation of imperial fantasies. In *The Great Dictator*, as is well-known, Adenoid Hynkel, Chaplin's Hitler stand-in, performs an unforgettable *danse fatale* until the delicate, air-filled globe blows up in his loving hands.⁸ What is eye-opening here—or better yet, sight-shifting—is not the fact that the dictator's hunger for world power comes to an amusingly ironic end, which makes for an entertaining film; rather, it has to do with the productive dissonance between what Hynkel sees and what we see. After all, we are not supposed to be watching him; he wants his privacy with a world that is easy to manipulate. But it is this uninvited intrusion into a paradoxically dark tenderness, a certain perversity of ours to keep on looking at that private performance, that enables us to recognize subtle differences between care and control, on the one hand, and between what is visible and what is invisible, on the other. In other words, our response to this excessive spectacle is determined as much by what we see (Chaplin's striking act) as by what is invisibly present (Hitler's physique, speech and uniform) and this ironic transmogrification renders the images, sounds and words of Nazi violence into public sights of critical individualism. And if we remember how passionately Chaplin appeals to our sense of democracy, love, humanity and reason at the end of the film—this time, as his own self, yet still in the body of Hynkel's *Doppelgänger*—it seems impossible

⁸ This scene is available on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJOuoyoMhj8> (last accessed on March 24, 2011).

not to feel the urgency of those demands even after seven decades. So, let me tell you, too: Did you see the Chaplin film?

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