

Introduction to The Monstrous Global: the Effects of Globalization on Cultures

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Ju Young Jin and Jae H. Roe,

"Introduction to The Monstrous Global: The Effects of Globalization on Cultures"

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Abstract: This special issue on "The Monstrous Global: The Effects of Globalization on Cultures" explores representations of the monstrous effects and products of globalization. The monstrous (as in *The Monstrous Feminine* by Barbara Creed) in this sense alludes to the ways in which local or national displays of fear and anxiety about the Other are embedded in struggles and tensions of global scale; the inability to cognitively map the effect of such global forces on local/national problems produces monstrous representations of the global. Global forces such as neoliberalism and reactionary nationalism, technology, climate change, migration and displacement lead to accelerating instability and proliferating problems without local solutions, thus leading to growing fear and anger in search of targets. The term "monstrous" also implies that the unruly and uncontrollable forces of globalization can generate zones of undecidability that can precipitate formations of new identity and solidarity across race, class, and gender. This special issue is organized around monsters, both symbolic and literal, whose representation makes visible the changes, anxieties, and political responses generated by invisible global forces.

Ju Young JIN and Jae H. ROE

Introduction to The Monstrous Global: The Effects of Globalization on Cultures

Globalization is a process that cannot be explained and understood by any one theory. In every location, global forces interact with different economic conditions, political structures, cultural traditions, historical continuities and discontinuities, etc. The result of these interactions is what we call globalization. A comparative approach to representations of globalization would investigate the ways in which texts that depict specific locations reveal such interactions and geographically, culturally, historically specific forms of globalization. The term "globalization" tends to conjure an image of something colossal and immeasurable, a totalizing force that connects and integrates people across nations; yet the concept is also placeless and deterritorialized in the sense that it refers not to a specific place but to abstract conditions and processes. Understood as a dematerialized space of transnational interactions and cultural flows, or "cyberspace" (Jameson 154) as Fredric Jameson calls it, the global becomes a monstrous abstraction. The monstrous in this sense alludes to the ways in which local or national displays of fear and anxiety about the Other are embedded in struggles and tensions of global scale; the inability to cognitively map the effects of such global forces on local/national problems produces monstrous representations of the global. Global forces such as neoliberalism and reactionary nationalism, technology, climate change, migration and displacement lead to accelerating instability and proliferating problems without local solutions, thus leading to growing fear and anger in search of targets. On the other hand, the term "monstrous" also implies that the unruly and uncontrollable forces of globalization generate zones of instability and fluidity in which formations of new identity and solidarity across divisions such as race, class, and gender can emerge. Ironically, then, globalization can also produce spaces for marginalized groups to contest dominant discourses and the limitations imposed by local traditions and political structures.

The monstrous global is an organizing theme for this special issue exploring the effects of globalization as the uncontrollable and unruly forces that disrupt and defy boundaries and borders as well as produce fear and fascination at the same time. Inspired by Barbara Creed's coinage of the term "monstrous-feminine," which is meant to highlight "the importance of gender in the construction of...monstrosity" (Creed 3), the monstrous global seeks to delineate the ways in which globalization plays a pivotal role in configuring or animating monstrous effects in sociocultural terrains across the globe. The essays included in this special issue explore, from various disciplinary perspectives, representations of the monstrous effects and products of globalization. The texts analyzed in the essays, ranging from art and literature to film and television, locate globalization in specific geographies, histories, and sociopolitical contexts. The analysis of these texts offers new perspectives on the anxieties produced by global forces and the politics of resentment produced by the failure to cognitively map such forces, but also on the potential for local populations or marginalized groups within those populations to utilize the effects of globalization to refashion individual and collective identities. Because globalization is a complex, evolving, and deterritorialized process that seems intangible and impossible to map but has profound material consequences, specific cultural texts and localized phenomena must be explored to make the uneven and destabilizing effects of globalization visible. This special issue is organized around monsters, both symbolic and literal, whose representation makes visible the changes, anxieties, and political responses generated by invisible global forces.

In *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*, David McNally argues that the monsters proliferating in popular culture today are historical products of capitalism, and that their global proliferation is symptomatic of the increasingly global reach of the destabilizing effects of, and anxieties caused by, capitalism. He illustrates how Marx used "the language of monstrosity" (McNally 15); Marx believed that such language is the most effective and also most accurate way to describe capitalism because it is, quite literally, "a monstrous system" (McNally 3). Monsters give concrete form to a system whose workings are so complex and contradictory that people often cannot grasp how it affects them or envision how they can affect it. McNally uses examples from literature and popular culture to demonstrate how stories about monsters like vampires and zombies "have appeared at a number of compelling moments in the global rise of capitalism" (McNally 16). In the contemporary moment, the stories that most directly and evocatively depict the monstrous effects of, and anxieties about, global capitalism are coming from Africa; McNally introduces mythic stories set in modern Africa in which credit cards "provide instant commodities without registering debt," coins "turn people into zombies," and currencies "leave cash-registers and return to their owners after every purchase" (McNally 176). And Marx's vampire appears as "a man who acquires riches after sacrificing his wife and drinking her blood"

(McNally 176). Obviously, such stories are more likely to be produced in environments where the workings of capitalism, and the ways in which capitalism affects interpersonal relationships and communities, "are still experienced as strange and horrifying" (McNally 2); the power of money and credit cards are more likely to be imagined as magical in societies where the destructiveness of their power can still surprise. And Marx's vampire is more likely to return in societies where the destabilizing effects of global capitalism are experienced as a pervasive and tangible violation; in countries where "seventy percent of the people live below the poverty-threshold" and where "life-expectancy" (McNally 221) keeps falling while the presence of global corporations keeps growing, it is not too surprising that people can imagine those corporations sucking their blood and demanding rituals of human sacrifice.

The economist Chris Harman argues that the global economy has become "a zombie system" (Harman 12). With the expansion of global networks of increasingly deregulated financial transactions, and the development of increasingly sophisticated technologies and complex profit-generating formulas, "all sorts of speculative, non-productive activities flourished" to the point where the global economy is reduced to "a mass of capital wandering around the world looking for any opportunity where...there might be profits to be made" (Harman 283). This is a zombie system that has ceased to have any productive function; any growth in the global economy comes not from "processes of production" but from financial speculation involving "chains of lending and borrowing" so complicated that investors at one end of the chain may not "have the remotest idea where interest [is] coming from at the other end" (Harman 286). And once such deregulated and reckless speculation has taken over the global economy, it cannot be stopped, no matter how un-productive and self-destructive it becomes. Governments are inextricably involved in these chains and cannot do more than provide "life support systems...to keep the system from complete collapse" (Harman 326), as when the U.S. government bailed out financial institutions like Lehman Brothers and AIG in 2008 to prevent national and international economic collapse; this is when economists and journalists started using the term "zombie banks" to refer to financial institutions "incapable of fulfilling any positive function" (Harman 12) but kept alive artificially by the government. Harman extends this analogy to the overall economic system to which those banks contribute; like zombies mindlessly overrunning everything, global capitalism is a "runaway system" that cannot be regulated no matter how destructive it becomes, even if it threatens "the very possibility of sustaining human life on Earth" (Harman 328). Zombies appeared everywhere during this period, not just in American popular culture but globally, in apocalyptic narratives about people turning into monsters and destroying their own communities and societies.

Zombie narratives are also stories about walls. In *The Walking Dead*, for example, Rick Grimes is excited to find an abandoned prison; it appears to be a maximum security prison that has a guard tower and is surrounded, twice, by very high fences. It is, as Rick says, "perfect." The series began in 2010, in the aftermath of the financial crisis that led to terminology like "zombie banks" and growing economic insecurity and anxieties about the future. Like the survivors in zombie narratives, desperately trying to keep out the zombies overrunning and destroying everything, many people rely on walls for protection or to feel protected, as Wendy Brown illustrates in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. The walls that countries build, or that politicians promise to build, "respond in terms of both state policies and the anxieties of their subjects to a growing lawlessness lapping at the edges of nation-states and streaming across them" (Brown 83); the more anxieties people feel and the less control their governments seem to have over the global forces that produce their anxieties, the more they support such wall-building. No wall can be built that would keep out the global forces that affect their lives and communities, but the actual wall is less important than the psychological protection that it provides; the walls that have been built or promised in recent years are symbolic and psychological walls that "contain" fears and anxieties produced by "an increasingly unbounded and uncontrollable global order" (Brown 118) and provide an "illusion" (Brown 133) of protection and security. The danger of these walls is that they also produce or reinforce "a collective ethos and subjectivity that is defensive, parochial, nationalistic, and militarized" (Brown 40), because they "cannot block out without shutting in" (Brown 42). This is why the prison in *The Walking Dead* is a perfect symbol of the consequences of relying on psychological walls. The only way to keep out the destructive forces that we are afraid of is to shut ourselves off from the world outside, as the double fences of the prison are designed to do; the fears that we want to contain become a wall that reinforces our fears and our sense of fundamental difference from those that we want to keep out, who increasingly become reduced to monsters. This reaction to the destabilizing effects of globalization is another aspect of the monstrous global, a reactionary nationalism that seeks to restore stability and economic security by identifying targets to blame and promising a return to "an idealized past" (Brown 133) that requires the exclusion of, and directly or indirectly promotes violence against, those who are targeted.

From African stories about the magical powers of money to enslave individuals or control their destinies to American television shows about survivors of a global catastrophe building and defending walls to keep out the monsters destroying the world or to keep themselves from turning into those monsters, we can see the wide range of representations of the monstrous global. These representations show us that globalization is a phenomenon experienced differently in different geopolitical locations and therefore produce different anxieties and responses as well. While many Africans may be experiencing daily the visible and tangible ways in which the economic growth promised by globalization means money leaving their pockets and their communities and accumulating in transnational corporations and banks, many Americans may not see or feel the global forces that produce their economic insecurity and anxieties. Consequently, workers in Africa may identify with characters who have to sacrifice their own families to gain favor from monsters that are draining their blood and destroying their communities, whereas workers in the U.S. may identify with characters trying to protect their families and communities from forces that they cannot understand by building walls that they know cannot save them and defending those walls as long as they can from the monsters accumulating outside. In such ways, monster narratives reflect the anxieties produced by globalization and envision ways to resist the forces of globalization. Even if resistance turns out to be futile, the monsters of these proliferating narratives make visible the destructiveness and expansion of global forces and the local/national variations of the anxieties and political responses generated by such forces. The essays in this special issue provide a comparative analysis of the forms that the monstrous global takes, the anxieties that it produces, and the political consequences of those anxieties.

In "Monstrous Accumulation: Topographies of Fear in an Era of Globalization," Robert Tally, Jr. discusses the increasing popularity of monster narratives in relation to globalization and Marxist theory, and argues that such narratives reflect contemporary anxieties about global capitalism but also help to make visible the processes and effects of globalization, which are increasingly becoming invisible or unknowable. Tally provides an overview of theoretical approaches to this articulation of the monstrous and the global. China Mieville argues that the genre of fantasy envisions the processes of exploitation and reification that are concealed in representations of human experience and historical reality. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen uses the term "Monster Culture" to explain how monsters help us to make sense of our cultures and generate a cognitive map of our social world. Fantasy and monster narratives are symbolic representations that make visible systems too vast to be conceived and global influences too pervasive to be understood. In this way, Tally argues, monsters are fundamentally ideological and simultaneously necessary for ideology-critique; they make possible a political or historical sensibility that makes visible the concrete realities that underlie pervasive anxieties and generalized fears related to globalization. David McNally argues that "the vampire and the zombie are doubles, linked poles of the split society" created by capitalism, and that these monsters of capitalism proliferate and take new forms as the global economy expands and complicates relations of power and renders class struggle nearly invisible. The accumulation of monsters and monster narratives in the era of globalization can be interpreted as an attempt to make sense of, to give concrete form to, global economic forces and the anxieties produced by them. These narratives enable a cognitive mapping that help us to see what seemed invisible and imagine what seemed impossible; even the post-apocalyptic worlds so common in contemporary popular culture serve to clear imaginative space for the possibility of a new global order. Monsters make possible what Tally calls a "fantastic Marxist critique" of a global order that is literally monstrous and makes social change difficult to envision, an alternative vision of critical theory and practice.

In "'The Headwaters of a River of Failure: Detroit as an Icon of American Decline,'" Jae H. Roe analyzes films (*8 Mile*, *Gran Torino*, *It Follows*) and television series (*Hung*, *Low Winter Sun*) that use the setting of Detroit to depict characters who are dealing with deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and whose choices and relationships reflect their difficulties in, and anxieties about, adjusting to such conditions. While the familiar icons of Detroit's decline appear in all of these texts, the narratives evolve from working class realism to satire and ultimately horror, or from anxieties about white working class displacement to the displacement of such anxieties. Roe provides an overview of historical and sociological research that illustrates how Detroit exemplifies the complex ways in which global forces interact with specific socioeconomic conditions and political structures; on the other hand, Roe's analysis of the depictions of Detroit in American popular culture illustrates the difficulty of comprehending the complexity of these problems. The icons of Detroit's decline become simultaneously more recognizable and less graspable, their history evaporating and leaving behind only the vague anxiety and horror evoked by their familiar images. Earlier films like *8 Mile* and *Gran Torino* depict characters who are aware of the racial and class divisions of their city and attempt to adjust to their displacement or overcome their limitations, but the television shows *Hung* and *Low Winter Sun* depict characters whose

resentment reflects white working class anxieties about displacement, without dealing with the histories of race and class relations that produced those anxieties. This historical amnesia culminates in a horror film in which Detroit becomes the source of a monster that can only be referred to as "it," a monstrosity that cannot be explained or contained as it spreads from its "headwaters" (*Hung*) in Detroit. The protagonists of these narratives lose a cognitive map of their lives and their surroundings; the resentment and anxieties reflected in these texts become increasingly volatile and dangerous as the socioeconomic conditions that produce them become more difficult to map and seemingly inescapable.

In "A Thin Line between Sovereign and Abject Agents: Global Action Thrillers with the Sci-Fi Mind-Game War on Terror," Seung-hoon Jeong uses a range of theoretical approaches to analyze how recent Hollywood action and science fiction films, especially *Source Code*, reflect the destabilization and precariousness produced by globalization and neoliberalism. Jeong cites Giorgio Agamben's concept of "homo sacer" and relates it to Julia Kristeva's concept of "abjection," arguing that the global economy produces abject citizens who are denied sociopolitical rights and subjectivity and thus become targets of sovereign violence. In the Jason Bourne films and recent James Bond films, the boundaries between the sovereign (secret) agent and the abject terrorist become increasingly blurred; Jason Bourne, especially, reconstructs himself as what Jeong calls an "abject agent" who resists the institutions of sovereign power that expelled him and the suprallegal violence that they trained him to perform. In *Source Code*, Captain Colter Stevens' mission is to identify a terrorist through a time travel device that repeatedly sends Colter back into the last eight minutes of a passenger (Sean) on the train that was bombed. Colter was killed in Afghanistan, but his brain is connected to the "Source Code" machine; he has to repeat his mission endlessly, and each failure results in his simulated death (in Sean's body). Jeong sees Colter's mission as an allegorical representation of our socioeconomic condition; we are abject agents subjected to data overload and the daily repetition of digital multitasking, and neoliberal globalization has normalized such abjection. To survive until his next death, Colter needs to reboot himself with continuous upgrades, performing temporary work under intense pressure to adjust to unpredictable situations; this is agency reduced to functionality. Colter is allowed a moral victory of sorts by sacrificing himself to save others, but this self-affirmation requires his internalization of the system's values and the value of his function within the system; films like *Source Code* envision a world in which we are trapped in a global system that is both flexible and inescapable, that grants a functional agency that is always at risk of being abjected from a system maintained by productivity and self-regulation.

In "Making the Global Visible: Charting the Uneven Development of Global Monsters in Bong Joon-Ho's *Okja* and Nacho Vigalondo's *Colossal*," Ju Young Jin explores the entanglement of the global and the monstrous in two recent films that position Korea on the cusp between Cold War politics and global capitalism. By using the critical frameworks of postcolonial bildungsroman and Kaiju (Japanese monster films such as Godzilla) genre, Jin demonstrates the ways in which these films stage the broader tensions and radical discontinuities of globalization as well as demystify the notion of "Global Village." The formal disjunction in *Colossal* and *Okja* as evidenced by the two female heroines' modes of projecting the monsters and their uneven development and attainment of Bildung encourage us to view the global in terms of how the legacies of the Cold War and the American century at once interfere with and supplement each other. Analyzing the films with Heidegger's essay "Age of World Picture," Jin illustrates how they make visible the uneven and discontinuous terrains of global capitalism. Gloria in *Colossal* projects a monster in Seoul to counterattack Oscar's monster in small town America which is a trope for the Global Village imaginary. Mija in *Okja* makes a separate peace which is not dissimilar from a preindustrial, pre-globalization fantasy space: a monstrous anomaly outside its locality. Jin contends that Mija shows us a forestalled maturity that serves as an illuminating countertext to Gloria whose attainment of Bildung is made possible by the agency afforded by her first world privileges. Far from being assimilable to a discourse of Bildung or social integration, Gloria's and Mija's uneven developments show how the effects of globalization code and configure the radical Other, the cast-away: the monsters. It is precisely the system of global capitalism, the appropriation of Korea's physical geography (and the continued occupation of the space of *Okja* and *Mija* through the pervasive American hegemony), that hinders Mija's ability to achieve Bildung by denying her social agency. Mija occupies a pre-adolescent and pre-industrial pastoral space, a space specifically assigned to her by the logic of U.S. hegemony and global capitalism.

In "Performing the Global: The Mediated Mobility of Virtual Cosmopolitans," Hye Jean Chung examines how contemporary media art and digital technologies can express and actualize desires for global mobility; she analyzes two documentary films, *Born into Brothels* and *City of Photos*, in which marginalized subjects in contemporary India express their desires and imagine themselves as cosmopolitan subjects through media literacy and creative uses of photography, film, and digital media.

Chung calls these subjects "virtual cosmopolitans," expanding on John Urry's concept of "imaginative travel" in which the act of taking photographs becomes the evidence of, and in a sense a substitute for, actual travel. Chung's examination of such mediated practices also reveals the impact of global media networks and transnational exchanges on individual and collective identities. In *Born into Brothels*, the subjects try to overcome their marginalization through the cultural power of photography, but the limitations of the film's perspective tends to reinforce the immobility of its subjects by observing them from a position from which they are excluded; the film fulfills the desires of privileged viewers more than those of the marginalized subjects. Chung argues that *City of Photos* presents a more inclusive form of virtual cosmopolitanism through the theoretical frame of what Miriam Hansen calls "vernacular modernism;" the "amazing appropriative flexibility" (Hansen) of media images and products is demonstrated by Indian subjects who take photographs of themselves in front of painted backdrops and digitally manipulate those photographs to travel virtually and to construct cosmopolitan identities. The film embodies Arjun Appadurai's concept of "mediascapes" that navigate "between sites of agency and globally defined fields of possibility;" the appropriation of various forms of local and global media enable subjects who are excluded from conventional practices of cosmopolitanism to create an alternative global imaginary and enact their desires.

In "Rethinking the Monstrous: Gender, Otherness, and Space in the Cinematic Storytelling of *Arrival* and *The Shape of Water*," Edward Chamberlain analyzes the films *The Shape of Water* and *Arrival* through the lenses of American studies, gender studies, and Latinx studies to reveal how the depiction of what he calls "collaborative Otherness" challenges conventional notions of monstrosity and critiques the political ideologies of the Cold War and the current global order. Monstrosity becomes a means of commenting on the ways that the U.S. government and institutions have historically abused and silenced people of color, women, and people who identify as LGBTQ; on the other hand, the films present alliances based on shared experiences of exclusion and unbelonging. In *The Shape of Water*, Elsa and Giles are solitary outsiders who bond through their shared status but also through their compassion for, and identification with, a creature marked institutionally as a monster to be caged and studied. In *Arrival*, Louise Banks is able to prevent global war by learning how to communicate with aliens who are seen as threats to humanity by governments around the world. The fear of the unknown is linked in the film to the inability or unwillingness to communicate, and this linguistic barrier is reflected by the escalating tensions between governments caused by leaders who fail to communicate with each other. Chamberlain cites Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "border people" and Inderpal Grewal's concept of "transnational connectivities" to explicate how characters who share the experience of Otherness generated by discourses of gender, racialization, and monstrosity embody the possibility of collaboration and translation, bridging the institutionalized boundaries that divide individuals and cultures.

In "Sewing Lives: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Global Garment Industry," Sarah Garland combines discussions of the economics of the global fashion industry, the psychology of buying and wearing clothes, and the novel *Frankenstein* to explore the sociopolitical ramifications of "fast fashion" and its alternatives. Fast fashion is made possible by the global outsourcing of every element of the supply chain, producing clothes as cheap and disposable as fast food, and its growth is driven by increased consumption and lack of attachment to its disposable products. Garland reads Mary Shelley's novel as paradigmatic of our complex psychological relationship with intimate objects like clothes. Frankenstein's creature is stitched together from the bodies of the poor and persecuted, reflecting the global labor market that exploits the unprotected citizens of poorer countries; Mark Sumner argues that "fast fashion's overproduction and overconsumption...is based on the globalization of indifference" to the exploitation of workers and damages to the environment. The novel allegorizes how fast fashion depends on erasing the process of production and affectively devaluing its products. The economic power and affective influence of fast fashion companies might be seen as monstrous; in response, various movements have attempted to create environmentally sustainable alternatives to the global fashion industry. Jonathan Chapman proposes the idea of "emotionally durable design" and argues that "durability" is more about attachment than production techniques. Kate Fletcher argues that sustainability requires a post-growth model of fashion in which identity is no longer based on consumption. Sustainable clothing movements need, Garland argues, to understand the affective relationships that people have to clothes and to overcome the psychological barriers produced by the expanding influence of the global fashion industry.

In "Postinternet Art of the Moving Image and the Disjunctures of the Global and the Local: Kim Heecheon and Other Young East Asian Artists," Jihoon Kim analyzes moving image works by three East Asian artists whose images and perspectives reflect the postinternet condition in which digital technologies and media networks fundamentally restructure people's subjectivities. But rather than expressing such conditions as universal and homogenizing, these artists express the contradictory and

unstable ways in which the global and the local interact in contemporary East Asia; their representations of the postinternet condition reflect the varied impact of globalization on local cultures, politics, and environments. Kim refers to a number of theorists to describe the aesthetics of the three artists: Nicolas Bourriaud's concept "postproduction" (recycling, refashioning, and recombining existing media); Hito Steyerl, who argues that such postproduction techniques become strategies to intervene in the accelerating and massive circulation of images and ideas; and Jorg Heiser's concept of "super-hybridity." Taiwanese artist Chen Chen-yu explores the regional flows of culture, data, and fine dust, using clouds as a metaphor for the complex ways in which the circulation of digital data shapes our cultural and environmental conditions. Chinese artist Lu Yang juxtaposes Chinese religious symbols and ideas with contemporary images derived from Western medicine, anatomy, and neuroscience; Lu expresses the dissolution of the boundaries between science and religion by transforming herself into a virtual avatar using 3D scanning technology and embedding her avatar in a digital environment in which anatomy, neuroscience, and religion are hybridized. Kim Hee-cheon's video trilogy represents the collapsing of virtual and physical worlds in the postinternet condition. These videos can be read as an essay film whose textual hybridity reflects Kim's fluid authorial subjectivity; Kim uses such super-hybridity to represent the infrastructural, cultural, and affective dimensions of Seoul as a digital landscape that overflows with contradictory technological, global, and local influences. These young East Asian artists use digital postproduction techniques and the aesthetics of super-hybridity to invent worlds that allow us to explore the complex intersections of the global and the local through grotesque images of monstrous bodies and disorienting spaces.

These essays reveal, through the analysis of a wide range of cultural texts within multiple geographic and sociopolitical contexts, that the expansion of the phenomenon and discourse of globalization is linked to the simultaneous expansion of the seemingly opposing discourses of identity politics and the restoration of local/national identities, and also remind us that what we call globalization is inextricably linked to the historical development of cold war politics and neoliberalism. They also reveal that the multiple spaces and intersecting forces of globalization open up possibilities for imagining and creating new identities and communities, as well as possible ways to resist global economic forces and dominant cultures. Given the concurrent debates about urgent problems such as global economic crisis, environmental disaster, and illegal immigration and refugees, and the inability of national governments and international organizations to solve such problems or even envision viable solutions, a critical reassessment of globalization and its effects on cultures deserves our attention more than ever. And the urgency of these global problems demand that we make visible the monstrous forces of an expanding and increasingly destructive globalization; no solutions can be envisioned without first representing and analyzing the monstrous global.

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