Dialogues on Cultural Studies

INTERVIEWS WITH CONTEMPORARY CRITICS

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Cultural studies as a discourse emerged in the early 1960s. What implications does it have for cultural studies that Thatcher, Reagan, and Mulroney set out to destroy social service, and democratic forces, dismantling social democracy? How should the project of cultural studies change for the twenty-first century?

Foucault suggests about postmodernism that history breaks free of the highly meagre idea of referentiality. Indeed, postmodernism undermines the idea of referentiality or the much maligned referent. How does referentiality need to be rethought? Is it time to have reconstructed referentiality after the undermined referentiality?

How can we recuperate or mobilize counter-hegemonic agency or human praxis in a world so penetrated by capital? Is it possible to form an alliance or historic bloc against the dehumanizing total system?

As many critics have pointed out, postmodernity is distinct from postmodernism as modernity is divergent from modernism. Can we say modernity and postmodernity are more comprehensive concepts which denote something close to what can be called Zeitgeist, or a pervasive mood, whereas modernism and postmodernism designate styles of representation or specific doctrines? According to Jameson, postmodernism does not refer to specific stylistic features, but to the cultural logic of late capitalism or the Althusserian mode of production. This seems contradictory with the above-rehearsed difference between modernity and modernism, and between postmodernism and postmodernity. How would you define the relationship between these terms?

The issue of modernity again. Are postmodernism and modernity incompatible or do they coexist in the same time slot? When Habermas relaunches modernity as an incomplete project, this seems especially pertinent to non-western countries. As Terry Eagleton recently remarked, debates between modernity and postmodernity are of immense moment in non-western cultures, which
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on cultural studies

Are dragged into the orbit of a postmodern West without having
fully undergone a European-style modernity themselves. Jameson
makes similar comments on the forming and disintegration of civil
society in The Seeds of Time. In light of some further facts of the
world, although postmodernism is the dominant cultural logic in
the West and multinational capital is increasingly penetrating the
former Third World with postmodern ideology and mode of pro-
duction, postmodernism has not become the dominant mode of
production yet in most peripheral countries. Can we say those cul-
tures are closer to modernity or more urgently need modernity? Is
the world only allowed one version of modernity? Can the previ-
ous third-world countries achieve what is best termed non-western
forms of modernity catalyzed by their contact and confrontation
with western modernity and postmodernity?

QUESTION 6 Why did modernity begin and still remain to be defined in terms
of western history, while every country has its own trajectory of
movement from past to present, from old to new, and every nation
has distinct terms for what it means by modernity?

QUESTION 7 How would you define countries, like China, on the margins of
modernity and postmodernity? In Conrad's Heart of Darkness, in
Marlow's eyes, with its uncanny primitiveness, Africa constitutes
Europe's temporal as well spatial other. This implies what we call
Eurocentric historicism. And this Eurocentric gaze informs many
western historiographic writings. In what terms do we label a cer-
tain culture primitive or backward?

QUESTION 8 Would you say something about China's engagement with mod-
nernity? If, as has been generally agreed, China has not fully undergone
western-style modernity, then how would you define the period in
China since 1911, or at least since 1949 with the advent of socialism in
China? Is socialism a phase of modernity? Is Mao a modernist or not?

QUESTION 9 Why does revolution always end in tragedy, and why do all revo-
lutions fall short of their goals? Do we still need revolutions? How
should we evaluate revolutions? Can we say that revolution's fail-
ures contribute to historical progress as much as to its successes?

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Is theory translatable or not? We mean does theory have general application or not? If theory is not translatable, then how can people of different cultures understand and communicate with one another? If theory can be translated from one historical reality into another as meaning can be translated from one language into another, then why is there the dilemma that when a certain people apply an imported theory to their own history, they would be either forcing violated history to fit theory or forcing violated theory to fit history?

Ideology is one of the key terms in present cultural studies. Since the times of Louis Althusser and Raymond Williams, it has been defined differently than in traditional Marxism. Ideology is no longer used to designate a set of wrong ideas that we can fall subject to or transcend; it is ubiquituous, pervasive, and, as part of the social process of material production (Williams), ideology is a major component of culture, and as re-polarized to history as the absent cause (Althusser), ideology becomes a kind of cognitive mapping of that unrepresentable history. The questions here are: When did ideology become an inescapable “prisonhouse”? Are all truths ideological in class society? Is the proposition that history absolutely rejects representation not an ideology in itself as well? If it is, then what terms apply to the true history that stands prior to that ideology? To proceed to politics or polemics of and in ideology, by what criteria do we judge one ideology as superior to another, or truer to history than another?

Postmodernism is an “end of ideology” world, just as it has been declared to be the end of history. But as Terry Eagleton argued, this of course is true only for postmodern theorists. It is hardly true for American evangelicals, Egyptian fundamentalists, Ulster unionists, or British fascists. Some ideologies (neo-Stalinism, for instance) may have crumbled, while others (particularly racism, neocolonialism, free-marketeering) remain as virulent as ever. How do you see the extraordinary irony that, in a world gripped by powerful, sometimes death-dealing, ideologies, intellectuals have decided that the ideological party is over? If power, desire, and sectional interests are the very stuff of reality, why bother to speak of ideologies as though there was anything beyond them, or as though they could ever be changed?
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QUESTION 13 Jameson says, in The Seeds of Time, that the precondition of the politics of difference or micropolitics is the universal weakening and levelling of real and objective difference on a global scale. But if the binary boundary between identity and difference has been collapsed, how do we determine whether late capitalism is weakening or erasing difference or identity? In addition, is gender, class, or minority oppression a result of ideology of identity or ideology of difference?

QUESTION 14 If micropolitics, in theory, is a result of the universal weakening of real and objective difference on a global scale, then it seems to possess a radical counter-hegemonic thrust against the late capitalist process of commodification. Terry Eagleton comments on contemporary theory that is hard to reconcile with what Jameson says here. According to Eagleton, theory is one major symptom in our time of commodifying intellectual life itself, as one conceptual fashion replaces another in the intellectual stock market, to use a phrase from Northrop Frye. How would you comment on this? Do we see a real divergence between Jameson and Eagleton on the same phenomenon?

QUESTION 15 Mouffe and Laclau admonish us that we have often “moved from an essentialism of the totality to an essentialism of the elements.” If this is true, then it seems that every discourse risks being guilty of essentialism, overt or covert. Gayatri Spivak has made this clear again and again that we cannot but be essentialists, advocating “strategic use of essentialism.” Do you agree with this? Under what circumstances is the use of essentialism justifiable, productive, liberatory?

QUESTION 16 Is it true that any act of theorizing involves totalization, explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious? If theorizing always involves totalization, then can we say that totalization is a kind of “original sin” and that de-totalization is not to undo totalization indiscriminately, but to deconstruct the totalization of a targeted discourse and reinvoke totalization in constructing our own arguments and narratives? If totalization as such is inescapable, then is it not more pertinent and more politically consequent to see whom the act of totalization serves, what does it repress and violate? Can we say that there is nothing wrong with totalization itself, but the purposes it is made to serve?

1 See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (London: Verso, 1985), 103.

We are often puzzled by ironic reversals that crisscross contemporary debate. The politics of difference is also frequently called the politics of identity. Group or collective identity that is set against hegemonic structures is based on difference and oppression as well as on identity or solidarity. How would you comment on such baffling phenomena?

Can you talk about the relationships among gender, race, and class?

Can you talk about the relationship of postcolonialism and postmodernism? Is postcolonialism a progeny of postmodernism? If postcolonialism owes its emergence to postmodernism, do other contemporary discourses such as feminism, queer theory, and even neo-Marxism owe a similar debt to postmodernism?

Has the western world moved beyond Orientalism or is it still influenced by orientalists' stereotypes and assumptions of the Orient? Is neo-Orientalism arising in the world today?

Due to historically uneven development in the world, there is still a sharp contrast and disparity between East and West, the First World and the Third World. It seems that previously colonized and semi-colonized countries still remain ideologically and culturally subaltern to the West. In other words, the West is reconquering the East or the Third World, but this time it is not through military coercion, but through multinational capital, western technology and through the former third-world countries' own consent or their uncritical acceptance of western culture. Given this metamorphosed imperialism, is it justifiable to say that we live in a postcolonial age? How can we reconcile the postcolonial with facts of neo-imperialism?

What is the role of the intellectual in neo-Gramscian cultural politics? Is there a significant distinction between an intellectual and an academic? It seems that an adequate academic knows the rules of scholarship well in his/her own discipline and proves productive in disciplinary knowledge, analysis, and writing; but an individual cannot be regarded as an adequate intellectual unless possessed of a broader sense of justice and responsibility to knowledge and culture and critically responsive to social life. What would an individual have to do to be an academic and an intellectual at the same time?
there are many academics who fail to possess the intellectual qualities defined above, what do you think accounts for this failure? Are there institutional as well as personal reasons?

**QUESTION 23** The last three decades have witnessed an overgrowth of postmarked discourses. The shared prefix "post" seems to confer a kind of continuity on all these parallel or derived counter-hegemonic movements, and their continuity is registered by the targets of critique or objects of investigation such as logocentrism, phallocentrism, ethnocentrism/Eurocentrism. Can we say that what has emerged is a new grand narrative except that it valorizes fragmented, discontinuous, local strategies of narration and argumentation? Lyotard says that postmodernism is marked by its incredulity toward grand narratives or grands récits, but can we say that postmodernism is weaving its own grand narratives as well?

**QUESTION 24** If ideology in general is always a reduction or violation of reality, then is it not of urgent necessity to critique the postmodern ideology of difference or differentiation?

**QUESTION 25** Terry Eagleton has noted that it is not wrong to trust the possibility of such universal values, but that the material conditions that might allow them to flourish have not yet come into being. How would you respond to this? If you agree with Eagleton, could you sketch the kinds of material conditions that would foster universal values?

**QUESTION 26** What is the task of cultural theory and cultural studies? If it is to question and unsettle the traditional ideas and values of culture, then what cultural and social alternatives does it have to offer?

**QUESTION 27** What is the role of the university in the age of finance capital? If a university has been an autonomous space of thinking and knowledge, a space of liberal education not directly affected by capital, how can it maintain such autonomy when affiliated with corporations and business or, as Masao Miyaoshi says, when information and knowledge in a university is bent to lucrative purses?

Transnational corporations serve and are paid by (as op and funding by it) tend to the university in transnationalism and managed professions transforming the nature of adapt to globalization? Will happened in the nineteenth century?

We would like to discuss Dialectically, again, national in character. At certain mop progressive discourse, and, a of the state or religious ide internationalism as well. In c exchange, dialogue, and unc of multinational capital. In internationalism literary: circumstances are these disc:

As Benedict Anderson sugge in the world to discover an stituted in theory—which shifts marked in the most rec recognition that it both has of being only documented. ment? We hope you would question of nationalism.

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Transnational corporations that research universities increasingly serve and are paid by (as opposed to traditional service to the state and funding by it) tend more and more to have an influence on the university in transnational scope. As a result, academic capitalism and managed professionals become an important phenomenon, transforming the nature of a university. How should a university adapt to globalisation? Will a university change its institutions, as happened in the nineteenth century?

We would like to discuss nationalism and internationalism. Dialectically, again, nationalism and internationalism are not fixed in character. At certain moments of history, nationalism has been progressive discourse, and, at others, it has been deployed as a part of the state or religious ideology. The same relativity is true of internationalism as well. It can refer to the process of international exchange, dialogue, and understanding, but it can also be the logic of multinational capital. In what situations are nationalism and internationalism liberatory and politically progressive, and in what circumstances are these discourses repressive and reactionary?

As Benedict Anderson suggests, nationalism is not only an “object” in the world to discover and investigate but is, in some way, constituted in theory—both negatively and affirmatively. One of the shifts marked in the most recent investigation of nationalism is the recognition that it both has theories and must be theorized, instead of being only documented. How would you respond to this argument? We hope you would give some theoretical accounts for the question of nationalism.

According to the concepts of Althusser’s “overdetermination” and Bloch’s “nonsynchronous contraction,” can we say contemporary nationalism develops a residual (modern) subjectivity within a dominant (postmodern) mode of production in the era of multinational capital?
QUESTION 32 In analysing aesthetic production, Jameson finds “cognitive mapping” of the world situation: the nation-state continues its non-synchronous existence; films from different parts of the world are symptomatically slanted from their respective positions. By combining the perspectives from a range of the world’s cultures, Jameson achieves a larger sense of the totality of the world system and points to one reason for the form of relational study: a study of third-world culture “necessarily implies a new view of ourselves, from the outside, insofar as we are ourselves (perhaps without fully knowing it) constitutive forces powerfully at work on the remains of older cultures in our general, world-capitalist system” (“World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism,” 140). Is Jameson searching for something beyond “Eurocentrism” or revealing strains of anti-first worldism? With the expansion of global economy, in what sense does cognitive mapping remain an important tool for understanding the “odd anachronisms” of nationalism?

QUESTION 33 The rapid development of new communications technologies has been changing the texture of our daily life. Would development lead to new forms of constructive and potentially powerful social organization, new kinds of communities?

My take on this question is that to practise history not just be an important consideration value and meaning to history the arbitrary magisterial judge in contemporary literature; seems to legitimize: since we speak about everything. The in intellectual life, a reliance iconic intellectuals. For all the standing of power, Foucault’s were often oblivious to quest and historical context.

All along I have taken his two things: something that the past, and something that (I do not mean just professors). It is the irreducible gag two that makes history into interpretive activity. Histori known that they do not k directly, but only through d from the past, and that the but themselves are interpr involves the interpretation interpretation that may distingui edge in the natural scien because there is a similar gi is known. But natural scien uncertainty of their “docu through replication of the torians seem to be condemn the perennial problem of duments to come up with d sors in graduate school, a c named Sidney Monas, was lectual history.” I think this

Not everyone would a drawn. Postmodernism insi
Let me begin by stating that I think your questions are often awfully loaded, so that I have to address the embedded premise before I get on to the reply itself. As I see the interview develop, though, I am aware that you are doing a lot of devil's advocate argumentation here. So don't take my querying of the premises behind various questions as a direct attack on you; I think I see what you are up to here.

In questions 3 and 4, you refer to an “Althusserian mode of production” and to postmodernism as a “mode of production.” Neither of these statements makes much sense to me. Let me start off by stating unequivocally that I reject the notion that we are in a qualitatively different historical phase. Late capitalism is, if you will, still capitalism, and not something else. In fact, more people—relatively and absolutely—are now proletarianized than ever before in global history. The fact that the economies of various highly developed nations are in a somewhat different configuration than previously does not mean that we have entered into a “post-industrial” phase, that “knowledges” are more central to capital accumulation than commodities, or any other such argument for the notion that “postmodernism” corresponds to a qualitatively new and different mode of production. Clearly I depart from Jameson—and needless to say the whole crew of post-Marxists from Laclau and Mouffe onward—when I make this claim.

As for what you ask about “counter-hegemonic agency,” “alliance,” “historic bloc,” and so on. In question 3, these terms imply strongly that there is no longer a proletariat in need of self-liberation, but instead a congeries of interest groups, defined via their identities, that must do the job of what Lukacs called “the identical subject-object of history.” I don’t agree. Exploitation—in the Marxist sense—still forms the backbone of the various oppressions that warp and destroy human life, and the movement for human liberation is pre-eminently a movement for the abolition of exploitation. I reject the totalizing premise of question 9, which strikes me as idealist and fatalistic in the extreme. Does revolution always end in tragedy? Do all revolutions fall short of their goals? I think not. But perhaps those goals need to be scrutinized. Let me make the provocative suggestion...
here that, to the extent that the major socialist revolutions—that is, those in large countries—have imploded because of their internal contradictions, we need to scrutinize whether the formulation of "socialism"—which entails retaining wages, money, and essentially capital—may not be what is flawed. (Messora is useful here.) Perhaps the next revolution—because, yes, I do believe there has to be a next revolution, and if that one does not work out, then one after it—needs to be not for socialism, imbricated as it is with "stages" theory, but communism. In this context, I agree with the thought in the final sentence of question 3: if we can learn from the failures of past revolutions, lessons that will enable us to do the job better next time, then these failures are indeed important contributions to the historical process.

**QUESTIONS 11-13**  
**Ideology**

In relation to questions 11-13: ideology remains a key Marxist concept. Actually, I don't think it is deployed much—nearly enough!—these days: discourse seems to have substituted for it in ways that are injurious to any genuinely political study of culture. Ideology is indeed in the air we breathe. But I don't think it wholly a "prison-house." There is still a "standpoint of the proletariat" from which it can be assessed and combatted. And if that standpoint is itself "ideological," then it is so primarily in the Leninist sense of the term.

I think you concede entirely too much to Foucault when you say that "power, desire and sectional interest are the very stuff of reality," and that "gender, class or minority oppression" are the "result" of ideology in one form or another. Nor do I think that the intellectuals' enlarging mass of talking "the ideological party is over." Certain self-announced postmodernists and post-Marxists do not—thank goodness—define the intellectual and political terrain for the rest of us!

**QUESTION 16**  
**Totalization**

Yes, any act of theorizing involves totalization, and yes, one of postmodernism's biggest sins is its lack of self-consciousness about its own totalization of fragmentation, pluralism, decentredness, textuality, and so on. The way that Marxists are frequently dismissed as reductive, logocentric, even "Stalinist" or "neo-Stalinist" (whatever that means!) is effectively little more than a red-bait. If we are all inevitably totalizers, let us at least be materialist about it, dialectical about it, and self-aware.

This is big one! I think surplus value—provides gender-based oppression. If not make people of colour logical second-class citizens: agreed evidence for the ca racism—are relatively receive should I say barbarism! (Lot farther. But I think Eng Eleanor Leacock and Gerda the oppression of women ponents of the "multiple ("actually existing socialism existing socialism") with respect racism and sexism. I think flaws cannot proceed with of socialism—principally! Only in a society where all there are no monetary and abolition of gender- and "re" abolition of gender- and "re"

The role of the university what it has always been: to all, if you're involved in the careers of graduate students as ad positing some kind of "golden" itself and were not at the ruling-class) interests.

As for nationalism and is complicated, and one interrogation is needed among the "progressive" nature of a that colonial national liber in the imperialist chain. But have been manifested the third-world liberation strug consolidating the hold of cauously reactionary variety of.
This is big one! I think that exploitation—the expropriation of surplus value—provides the “real foundation” of class, race, and gender-based oppression. Furthermore, I believe that saying this does not make people of colour and women into epistemological or ontological second-class citizens. I think there’s a good deal of commonly agreed evidence for the case that “race” as we know it—and hence racism—are relatively recent arrivals on the scene of civilization (or should I say barbarism!). Gender oppression obviously goes back a lot farther. But I think Engels—especially as updated by scholars like Eleanor Leacock and Gerda Lerner—basically had it right in linking the oppression of women with the rise of classes. I know that proponents of the “multiple oppressions” model point to the flaws of “actually existing socialism” (I suppose we should now say “once existing socialism”) with regard to the continuing of various forms of racism and sexism. I think that the analysis of these (often egregious) flaws cannot proceed without a critical analysis of the shortcomings of socialism—principally its entailing the maintenance of capital. Only in a society where all productive labour is equally valued—and there are no monetary measures of such value—can there be the full abolition of gender- and “race”-based oppression.

The role of the university in the age of finance capital is primarily what it has always been: to reproduce the existing hierarchical relations in class society. While it is critical that left-minded academics be fully involved in the current activism about the super-exploitation of graduate students as adjunct labour, it is at our own peril that we posit some kind of “golden age” when universities pursued truth for itself and were not at the behest of “corporate” (or, more broadly, ruling-class) interests.

As for nationalism and internationalism (questions 29-31): this is complicated, and one of the zones where some serious self-interrogation is needed among leftists. I know that Leninism posed the “progressive” nature of anti-colonial nationalism, on the grounds that colonial national liberation struggles would weaken the links in the imperialist chain. But I think the flaws of this formulation have been manifested throughout the century. Didn’t all the third-world liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and so on, end up consolidating the hold of capital? Nationalism—whether of the obviously reactionary variety or the putatively progressive variety—is...
inherently class-collaborationist. It is linked to the "stages" theory of revolution in ways that have been shown to be antithetical to the needs and welfare of the exploited workers and peasants of the world. As for internationalism, I think it is imperative for leftists not to endorse neo-Kautskyite notions of transnationalism that are premised upon a rejection of the Leninist view of capitalism, in its imperialist phase (where we still, alas, are!) can be anything other than competitive and headed, sooner or later, to war. "Globalization" is essentially an ideological concept designed to paper over the reality that most capital remains nation-based, and that organs such as the IMF and World Bank, while temporarily facilitating capitalist division of the spoils, are ultimately linked to the imperatives of the U.S. capitalist class. So the "internationalization" of capital denotes not cooperation, but a stabilization that is at best temporary. In my view, proletarian internationalism—despite the contradiction built into the term—is still the kind of internationalism that leftists need to elaborate theoretically—and strive toward—in our practice.

FURTHER EXCHANGE BETWEEN FOLEY AND THE INTERVIEWERS

Xie and Wang Your answers are very provocative and inspiring. Since it's the first go-round, we'd like you to expand on some of the issues you brought up or help to bring up in your answers. It is indisputably true that more people are becoming proletarianized than ever before and that late capitalism is still capitalism, but don't you think the emergence of finance capitalism, multinational capital, IMF, TNCS, computer technology, and electronic media have radically changed the organization, operation, and management of capital as well as the manufacture, management, distribution, and consumption of commodities? Former third-world countries are being turned into manufacturing bases as well as suppliers of resources. The boundaries between centre and periphery, culture and economy, high culture and mass culture, are collapsing. Under such circumstances, don't you think capitalism has entered into a new phase and therefore deserves to be defined and conceptualized in terms that distinguish it from its previous phases? Do you agree with Ernst Mandel that late capitalism is a purer form of capitalism—the much maturer and more sophisticated phase of capitalism that is more fitting for Marx's analysis of capital?

Despite the pressure of your "d quite a bit here. Finance capital "emerged"; Lenin was writing this century. Multinational cap sure, but as I stated before, just a and nation-identified. To the ex new. What we call "multination to be sure—but it's even "capital" needs, finally, the milit develop as it wishes. Not to see the threat of major inter-imperial peculiarity blindness/denial syndr.

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When you say that "globalizati cept designed to paper over th nation-based," do you mean th ization? Your implied position i are not in a "qualitatively" diff would you respond to critics l that globalization means Amer standardization of culture, the s and production spheres into a s
Despite the pressure of your “don’t you think” phrasing, I’ll demur quite a bit here. Finance capitalism, for one thing, has not just “emerged”; Lenin was writing about it during the second decade of this century. Multinational capital is here with a vengeance, to be sure; but as I stated before, just about all of it is primarily nation-based and nation-identified. To the extent that it is not, this too is nothing new. What we call “multinational capital” has its internal contradictions to be sure—but its essence is that preponderantly any given “capital” needs, finally, the military backup of one or another state to develop as it wishes. Not to see this is to dangerously underestimate the threat of major inter-imperialist rivalry leading to world war—a peculiar blindness/denial syndrome on the “left,” loosely conceived.

As for computer technology and electronic media—yes, they have changed many things—most crucially the speed with which transactions can be done and undone, as we have witnessed in the recent “Asian flu” (horrible phrase that!). But essentially, no. I find it disturbing that so much of the academic postmodernist left adopts such a totalizing view toward contemporary capital—as if it is some kind of black hole into which everything—economic, political, cultural, and so on—gets sucked willy nilly. This sort of technological determinism, ironically, recapitulates the most deterministic aspects of the mechanical materialism/“vulgar Marxism” that this grouping continually derides. You commit some of this error yourselves, I think, when you crush together the “manufacture, management, distribution, and consumption of commodities” into one category. Each of these facets of the movement of capital needs to be investigated in its particularity before it is thrown into the pot. The “manufacture” of commodities in the periphery has been going on for several decades now; for instance, witness Korea and Mexico.

When you say that “globalization” is essentially an ideological concept designed to paper over the reality that most capital remains nation-based,” do you mean that there is no such thing as globalization? Your implied position is in line with your remark that we are not in a “qualitatively” different phase of capitalism. If so, how would you respond to critics like Fredric Jameson who maintain that globalization means Americanization and the unification and standardization of culture, the assimilation of nation-states’ market and production spheres into a single sphere?
DIALOGUES on cultural studies

Foley My comment above addresses some of your concerns here. I think that there is such a thing as globalization; but so too did Marx, who wrote about it quite presciently in *The Communist Manifesto*. He, of course, signalled that he was talking about what was then a developing trend, but he indicated that global integration was the very essence of capitalism.

So I agree that at present, globalization largely means Americanization precisely because of the U.S.'s current hegemony (note here that it is nation-based). I agree with what you say, too, about the unification and standardization of culture, though obviously this is a complicated and contradictory process. As for the "assimilation of nation-states' market and production spheres into a single sphere," though—not really, if you imply by "single sphere" some kind of fundamental non-antagonism. The automobiles that are continually being vastly overproduced in the world today all meet in the world market, to be sure. But the "single sphere" of that market is, by its nature, competitive and antagonistic. Any indications of the contrary are simply indications that the players are all using the same set of rules, that is all (which is not to say that no one cheats!).

Xie and Wang The issue here is not whether there is still a proletariat, but whether there is a combative proletariat with a self-conscious political agenda for abolishing capital and classes. After decades of cold war and the disintegration of the eastern European bloc, capitalism seems to be redoubtably empowered and self-congratulatory, and the total system of global capital has achieved unprecedented capacity for absorbing, subsuming, and neutralizing oppositional or counter-hegemonic energies. The university is transformed, as Masao Miyoshi puts it, into a service station for social segments including the state apparatus, and everything and everyone—certainly including the intellectual—has become commodified. The kinds of cultural studies and social criticisms from all kinds of progressive critics and scholars can in no way shake the foundation of the total system—actually they are assigned only to narrow and marginal symbolic realms. Have you seen any proletarian revolutions in the world over the last few decades? If there is still a proletariat, then how do we mobilize it into revolutionary militant energy?

I don't know what you mean by "re-political. Given the extent of reific can one imagine that the proletarian any other sector (including intelle) The key question—if not for you ti postmodern rubric—remains whe a class of exploited producers whe to effect their own self-abolition as tional puts it, the "human race." I said before, it is absolutely and re before in the history of the work of politics and consciousness. "Ol here, accompanied by the crucial ignored or dismissed—category c But much postmodernist (incl this as an operating premise. Tal and socialist strategy" or take Ro class," where it is argued that clo nown—hence Resnick and Wolf processes." I agree regarding thi that Ellen Meiksins Wood make recaptulate them here.

Which brings us back to the political actors are. "Cultural st kind undertaken in universities, and will never shake the four fact, I am surprised to hear th who, as Chinese (though I al individual politics are) surely that "the masses" have played; I know that what I am about the notion of left parties bein a no-no (logocentric authority academic left. But I think th the world is at present so in to do with the hegemony of
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I don’t know what you mean by “redoubtably empowered”—clarify?
The problem here is that you are giving insufficient attention to the
political. Given the extent of reification under late capitalism, how
can one imagine that the proletariat would be a victim of it less than
any other sector (including intellectuals—I’ll get there in a second)?
The key question—if not for you then for many operating under the
postmodern rubric—remains whether there is a proletariat—that is,
a class of exploited producers who have it in their objective interest
to effect their own self-abolition as a class and become, as the interna-
tional puts it, the “human race.” If the proletariat is such a class (as
I said before, it is absolutely and relatively more numerous than ever
before in the history of the world), then the problem remains one
of politics and consciousness. “Objective interest” is the key notion
here, accompanied by the crucial—and, as I said before, far too often
ignored or dismissed—category of ideology.

But much postmodernity (including post-Marxist) theory rejects
this as an operating premise. Take Laclau and Mouffe’s “hegemony
and socialist strategy” or take Resnick and Wolff’s “knowledge and
class,” where it is argued that class can only be an adjective, never a
noun—hence Resnick and Wolff’s insistence on talking about “class
processes.” I agree regarding this issue with most of the arguments
that Ellen Meiksins Wood makes in the retreat from class, so I won’t
repaatulate them here.

Which brings us back to the political, and who the meaningful
political actors are. “Cultural studies” and “social criticisms” of the
kind undertaken in universities, past and present, have never shaken
and will never shake “the foundation of the total system.” And in
fact, I am surprised to hear this coming from you and Fengzhen,
who, as Chinese (though I make no presumption about what your
individual politics are) surely know the incredbly formative role
that “the masses” have played and can play in the historical process.
I know that what I am about to say is unpopular with some since
the notion of left parties being agents for revolutionary change is a
no-no (logo-centric/authoritarian/reductionist/Stalinist!) on the
academic left. But I think that the reasons the working class of
the world is at present so incredibly disempowered has a lot less
to do with the hegemony of multinational capital and universal
DIALOGUES
on cultural studies

reification than it has to do with the failures of the left to build communism in the twentieth century. Now that is a huge can of worms to open up, I know, but I think if we stop wasting time talking about "oppositional or counter-hegemonic energies" and start talking about the kind of communist movement that needs to be rebuilt (among all sectors of the population except the ruling class!), we might get somewhere sooner.

Xie and Wang
When we pose the question about why revolution always ends in failure, we, first of all, have in mind the major revolutions of the twentieth century, such as the revolutions in Russia, China, and other countries in Asia and Africa. Do you agree with Williams that revolutions against human alienation always produced new forms of alienation, their institutions constantly breeding disorder and violence? Does history, as Jameson sees it, inexorably reject individual as well as collective projects to shape or represent it, ironically defeating their declared intention to change history to their own interests?

Foley
"Always," "always," "inexorably"—note your loaded language. Although the "red line of history" (a wonderful concept; more people should invoke it) extends back to ancient slave rebellions, the potentiality for there being a society actually run by the producers on the basis of egalitarianism has existed for only about 150 years (the date explains itself, I am sure). That's not a lot of time, though those of us who want to see "the change" in our lifetimes are understandably impatient (smile). During the past century and a half, some heroic and not so heroic attempts have been made to construct such societies, often under terribly difficult external condition (though to cite the external is not to evade the truth that socialism imploded primarily because of its own internal contradictions, especially in the large countries). It seems to me the utmost folly (and a kind of arrogance, though I mean this as no personal charge) to propose that, because of the failure of the relatively few experiments that had even a chance of surviving, there is no hope for success in the future. Again, I cite Meszaros here. It's also worth reading Charles Bettelheim on the Soviet experience and various left-oriented discussions of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Eduarda Masi for starters, though I won't wholly endorse her politics). I think the main lessons we need to draw from these past failures (for they were indeed failures) is that those who we communism had far too little offer to grasp and act on an egalit

Let's talk about the role of the ent view of the role of the unbelieve that the university was cism of corporate and state pposition. I guess the issue here capable of radical, oppositions state policies in the age of n explicit in Jameson is the argur tual in the day of postmoderni that capacity for independent, i social and political realities. Do the conceived difference betw If the university is, as in you the existing social relations, th most of the radical counter-he cally consequent criticisms of the university? Has the univers ing negative critical energies ov

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university. Most of what can b up sustaining capitalism in va of the radical counter-hegem
The failures of the left to build a new world. Now that is a huge can of worms if we stop wasting time talking about the ‘hegemonic energies’ and start movement that needs to be taken except the ruling class!

...revolution always ends in failure. Major revolutions of the twentieth century in Russia, China, and other countries with Williams that revolutionaries produced new forms of alienating disorder and violence? rably reject individual as well as social interests, ironicaly defeating their own interests?

Note your loaded language. (a wonderful concept: more to ancient slave rebellions, the actually run by the producers for only about 150 years, not a lot of time, though those in our lifetimes are understood. Past century and a half, some have been made to construct such an embroidery condition (though to truth that socialism imploded, contradictions, especially in the utmost folly (and a kind of personal charge!) to propose...)

I just don’t know what moment in the past (‘modernism’) you are invoking here. Surely not the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and so on. As I type each decade, I think of the political repression of leftists, the promulgation of reactionary views of the state and egregious racist doctrine, incredibly restricted (class/gender/race-based) standards for admission into the charmed circle of great presumably protesting minds. In the U.S., I think of the finest left scholars—Foner, Aptheker—never able to get university jobs at all. I just don’t know what ‘independent, intransigent oppositional criticism of social and political realities’ you are referring to! Universities have always preferred a kind of smorgasbord to those who come to partake at the table. But very little genuinely radical (that is, to me, pro-communist) thinking has emerged from the bourgeois university. Most of what can be deemed ‘progressive’ actually ends up sustaining capitalism in various ways. I don’t agree that ‘most of the radical counter-hegemonic discourses and most politically
consequent criticisms of the capital in the West have originated in the university.” In my view, the great majority of what has passed for critical theory is sufficiently embedded with anticomunist premises to make it relatively safe for capital.

Xie and Wang Thanks ever so much for taking the time to carry on the conversation with us. We’re sure our readers will benefit as much from the conversation as we do from our exchange with you. Yes, we would love to have another round of the interview. We feel strongly tempted to agree with you that, in some essential ways, we are not in a qualitatively different age than the time of Marx or than a hundred years ago. At least this is true in terms of the mode of production. But at the same time, we feel it hard to ignore the fact that there is much palpable significant difference about our age. You make us ask ourselves: What is new about our age? How would you, for example, conceptually grasp the changes that have happened to the world in terms of superstructure, of social relations, of lived experience of everyday life, and so on? Isn’t Marcusian “repressive satisfaction” a ubiquitous feeling or sentiment that has been experienced by ordinary people of industrialized countries since the Second World War? You are right, Marx has pointed out for us that global integration is the very essence of capital, but would you agree that this aspect of capital was only a potential in Marx’s time? It could perhaps prompt us to draw an analogy between the different stages of capitalism and the different phases of a person’s life. Indeed, capital is largely nation-based. But isn’t new technology making possible instant penetration of capital? To the same extent to which late capitalism has invented more sophisticated strategies of containment to repress oppositional culture, neocolonialism in the form of economic and technological revolutions possesses unprecedented capacity to conquer pre-capitalist spaces more easily. Would you acknowledge the distinction between, to borrow terms from Abdul JanMohamed, the dominant and hegemonic phase of imperialism? Hegemonic neocolonialism is reproducing Euro-Ameriocentric ideology both through multinational capital and the complicity of non-western acceptance of western culture. Don’t you think these changes partly define late or multinational capitalism?

I am still not willing to concede between now and the account for such a different of the political. If there is I’d see it more as the d realm. Most workers are and fundamental ways, e actively—at times avidly-roles as consumers. But twentieth century has be think that absolute pow sense—one of sell-out an sciousness is as ubiquitou (Actually existing social: many features of capital nearly rapid enough, eve the workers were more t distribution of goods. (t China, where—I gather, up at the brigade level w were far more advanced:) To make a large general tailed the masses” rather moved things in the direc What I see as qualitiv the world’s workers—the really change. This is a p battle to be fought here i are entrapped in consun am one of them!) is sec ev event, only be deal with An additional point, be before but I’ll make it aga ern-day theorists invoke there are many!) to the e dered non-functional as i the bath of consumeris
I am still not willing to concede the point about a “qualitative” difference between now and then, especially when the grounds invoked to account for such a difference fail to take into account the specificity of the political. If there is anything “new-new” about our moment, I'd see it more as the deep cynicism pervading the sociopolitical realm. Most workers are antipathetic toward capitalism in very deep and fundamental ways, even if, contradictorily, they also participate actively—at times avidly—in the realization of capital through their roles as consumers. But the history of communist parties in the twentieth century has been—albeit largely inadvertently, as I don’t think that absolute power corrupts absolutely, or any such nonsense—one of sell-out and betrayal of the working class. Reified consciousness is as ubiquitous as it is largely because it is filling a void. “Actually existing socialism,” I think we can now see, retained too many features of capitalism; the move toward communism was not nearly rapid enough, even when experience at times dictated that the workers were more than ready for the “big pot” approach to the distribution of goods. (I think here of the commune movement in China, where—I gather from what I’ve read—the party was hung up at the brigade level while, in many areas, the masses of peasants were far more advanced politically, if in a not wholly theorized way. To make a large generalization: the left has, far too many times, “tailed the masses” rather than offering leadership that would have moved things in the direction of egalitarian communism.)

What I see as qualitatively new, then, is the level of despair among the world’s workers—the deep doubt about whether things can ever really change. This is a political question, primarily, and the main battle to be fought here is ideological. The fact that many workers are entrapped in consumerism (and consumer debt! I know; for I am one of them!) is secondary to the political issue and can, in any event, only be dealt with through political struggle.

An additional point, both political and epistemological (I made it before but I’ll make it again in this context) is that, whenever modern-day theorists invoke Marcuse (and his descendants, of whom there are many!) to the effect that the working class has been rendered non-functional as a historic subject because of its immersion in the bath of consumerist, reified capitalism, I am always struck by
the spontaneous assumption built in here—that is, the notion that somehow the working-class, if it is the real McCoy, should be able to assert its “working classness” in the absence of deliberate, class-conscious political organizing to that end coming “from the outside,” as Lenin theorized in *What Is to Be Done?*

You are right in claiming that, according to Marx, global integration is part of the logic of capital, but don’t you think that this aspect of capital was only a potential to be realized at a later time? This fact would perhaps prompt us to draw an analogy between the different stages of capitalism and the different phases of a person’s life.

I’d agree that Marx’s statement was both a description and a forecast. No real difference of standpoint here. I think we should dispense with the metaphor of the lifecycle, though, because it implies that that old geezer capitalism will some day drop dead just because it has run out of steam. Capitalism will always be in a state of “crisis,” if only because its ways of getting out of old crises inevitably precipitate new ones. But it will also never be gotten rid of—reach its crisis of life and death, as it were—unless until it is overthrown by revolutionary communism.

**Xie and Wang**

Indeed, capital is largely nation-based, but it is imposed on other spaces. Isn’t new technology and renewed capitalist ideology (rhetorically renewed, please correct me if I don’t make sense) making possible instant penetration of capital? Globalization is undermining or weakening nation-states’ ability to protect their economies and industries. Take, for example, Latin America, where much of the economy and culture and even media is manipulated or controlled by U.S. capital and government.

**Foley**

It is true that in much of what used to be called the Third World (an inadequate term but better than the ubiquitous “South,” which is worse by far), the nation-state has been weakened. (This is not the case at all in the industrialized countries, where control and repression are on the rise, and frighteningly so.) But, as for the “third-world” nations, I am bothered by such formulations about weakened nation-states because they imply that the good thing to do would be to somehow empower those stomped-upon regimes. Here is where neocolonialism is such a crucial concept, and I’m glad you use it.

Ruling classes are ruling classes brown.” The last thing that would-be progressives and le of supposedly progressive thi a good fifty years to watch in for a moment that the natic immeasurably more horrible Vietnam war. The “nation- it papers over class differences The workers of the world # subordination to their own h

As mentioned before, because sophisticated strategies of cu ture, neocolonialism (if yo in the form of economic an unprecedented capacity to co borrow terms from Jameson scious—much more easily.

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Would you acknowledge the Jan Mohamed, the domi Hegemonic neocolonialism ideology both through mult plicity of non-western acce you define these changes? D ent phase of capitalism?

I have nothing new to add hegemony does. It’s there u ally keep in mind is that th for many, many of the wor those who have escaped the words, always a potential wi
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line?”
ing to Marx, global integra-

As mentioned before, because capitalism today has developed more sophisticated strategies of containment to repress oppositional culture, neocolonialism (if you don’t mind the use of the term) in the form of economic and technological revolutions possesses unprecedented capacity to conquer the pre-capitalist spaces—or, to borrow terms from Jameson, the realms of nature and the unconscious—much more easily.

Ruling classes are ruling classes, whether “white” or “black/yellow/brown.” The last thing that the workers of the world need is for would-be progressives and leftists to hitch their wagons to the star of supposedly progressive third-world nationalism, which we’ve had a good fifty years to watch in disas trocity action (which is not to deny for a moment that the nationalism of the “big guys” has not been inmeasurably more horrible; I cut my teeth as an activist during the Vietnam war.). The “nation-state” is not a seamless concept/reality; it paper over class differences and struggles of a very sharp kind. The workers of the world need freedom from all capitalists, not subordination to their own home-grown class-based regimes.

but it is imposed on other red capitalist ideology (they don’t make sense) making globalization is undermining protect their economies and nerica, where much of the manipulated or controlled
d called the Third World (an biquitous “South,” which is weakened. (This is not the s, where control and repres-so.) But, as for the “third-formulations about weakened g good thing to do would be upon regimes. Here is where pt, and I’m glad you use it.

I don’t know how “nature” and “the unconscious” are commensurate entities. Nor do I grasp how the unconscious is a “pre-capitalist space.”

Would you acknowledge the distinction between, as argued by Abdul JanMohamed, the dominant and hegemonic phase of imperialism? Hegemonic neocolonialism is reproducing Euro-Ameri

centric ideology both through multinational capital and through the complicity of non-western acceptance of western culture. How would you define these changes? Do they contribute to portraying a different phase of capitalism?

I have nothing new to add here, except to say that hegemony is as hegemony does. It’s there until it isn’t. What leftists must continually keep in mind is that the contradictions of capitalism are brutal for many, many of the world’s workers, and dehumanizing even for those who have escaped the worst of the brutality. There is, in other words, always a potential wedge in the consciousness of the average
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It is a pertinent question, but is dependent on an assimilation. When I say that I don't want to stylistic features, I merely features of some contemporaries of the type that have been postmodern in architecture coloration, the use of classics, the general decorativities found in Michael Graves' works. But this postmodern style is really only one of the possible manifestations of postmodernism as an underlying culture. By that I want to name something deeper than any empirical works with their historicism. Modernism represents cultural and social, and economic spatiotemporal dynamics. we could say that postmodern technology and every production and all the place for this kind of distinct place that we would make for something.

To be sure, there is a sense of modernity. But, if so, it is a ferences rather than by way. I once said that modernity is a partial completion. We can unthinking about agriculture there is, alongside element, a peasantry, particularly one. are still, I think, in something characterized by the reduction of production as a whole and peasantry into farm worker.