

Projet : « Lire (depuis) *Le malaise dans la culture* »

II/ « Malaise dans la théorie culturelle »

Colloque interdisciplinaire international

« Culture, espace, violence : l'imaginaire néolibéral »

Co-organisé par :

Groupe de recherche « Culture/cultures » - Centre de Recherches Anglophones (CREA, E.A. 370)
Université Paris Ouest Nanterre

UCI Humanities Collective - Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI)
University of California, Irvine

Ce projet a été élaboré conjointement par des chercheurs de Paris Ouest Nanterre et de UC Irvine. La réflexion collective, menée depuis le printemps 2010, a abouti à la rédaction d'un argument général (cf. annexe II), à l'élaboration d'une liste de problématiques et d'invités de renom pour les porter. Cet échange scientifique se poursuivra lors des deux volets d'un colloque interdisciplinaire et international.

Il trouvera des prolongements dans la publication bilingue des actes du colloque (interventions et débats).

Dates :

Le premier volet du colloque aura lieu les **20-22 octobre 2011 à l'Université de Californie, Irvine.**

L' **Université Paris Ouest Nanterre** accueillera le deuxième volet du **29 au 31 mars 2012.**

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Argument

Ce colloque international et interdisciplinaire est co-organisé par le groupe de recherches « Culture/cultures » (CREA, Paris Ouest Nanterre) et le *Humanities Center* de l'Université de Californie (Irvine).

Il s'inscrit, à Paris Ouest Nanterre, dans le cadre du projet « Lire depuis *Le Malaise dans la culture* » du pôle 'Tout-monde'.

Il s'agit de rassembler un groupe de chercheurs internationaux, divers par leur discipline mais aussi par leurs positionnements théoriques, afin de mener une réflexion approfondie sur l'imaginaire néolibéral conçu comme vision du monde dominante. Le néolibéralisme n'y sera donc pas envisagé seulement comme une théorie économique et une idéologie politique mais plus largement comme un système de « représentations », une « culture » au sens large du terme.

On cherchera non seulement à déconstruire, d'un point de vue théorique et éthique, les socles sur lesquels repose l'imaginaire néolibéral, mais aussi à ouvrir un débat, que nous souhaitons novateur, sur les théories critiques contemporaines, à explorer les façons dont celles-ci doivent se renouveler et forger des outils d'analyse appropriés, capables non seulement de dire la violence de l'hégémonie néolibérale mais aussi de lui résister.

Le colloque se déroulera en deux temps : un premier temps à Irvine, en octobre 2011, plus spécifiquement consacré aux théories critiques du pouvoir, et un second, à Nanterre, en mars 2012, centré sur les notions de subjectivité et de communauté.

Chaque partie du colloque comprendra deux ou trois demi-journées de tables rondes, encadrées

(en ouverture et clôture) par deux conférences plénières. Le texte des conférences sera distribué à l'avance afin de permettre une discussion plus riche de tous les participants.

L'événement sera enregistré et podcasté. Des médias sociaux seront utilisés pour sa promotion. Une publication bilingue est prévue qui regroupera les interventions mais aussi les discussions qu'elles ont suscitées.

Culture, Space, Violence: The Neoliberal Imaginary Critical theories of today's dominant worldview

"Culture, Space and Violence: The Neoliberal Imaginary" is an international and interdisciplinary conference, taking place in two phases: the first will be convened at UC Irvine and the second at University of Paris, Nanterre. Costs will be shared by UC Irvine and the University of Paris, Nanterre. We are applying for funding from the Centre de Recherches Anglophones of the University of Paris, Nanterre.¹ Six colleagues from each campus will travel to the partner campus to give papers and participate on the roundtables. The UCI Humanities Collective is committed to contributing funds as well. "Culture, Space, Violence: The Neoliberal Imaginary" will bring together a diverse group of international scholars who will be engaged in groundbreaking and robust discussion of historical tendencies, new trends and the political contours of contemporary cultural critique. We plan on editing a bilingual publication that will anthologize the papers and the discussions resulting from both gatherings. Plans are in place to apply for an NEH summer seminar, as well as a Residential Research Grant at UCHRI in order to facilitate the continuation of our collaborative venture.

Transatlantic both in its organization and invitations, this symposium will consist in two interrelated, successive stages: first a three-day conference held at UC Irvine in October, 2011, focusing on the workings and representations of power, and second a two-day conference held at University of Paris, Nanterre, in April, 2012, and putting forward new analyses of individual identity and the global community. A wish list of plenary speakers include Naomi Klein, T. J. Clark, David Harvey, Ken Pomeranz, Arjun Appadurai, George Marcus, Wendy Brown, Mike Davis, Srinivas Aravamudan, Etienne Balibar, Alberto Moreiras, Catherine Malabou and Wang Hui. Each conference will offer three roundtable sessions framed, on the opening evening and before concluding remarks by two plenary lectures -- the text of which will be handed out in advance so that other speakers and the audience can feel free to comment and discuss it. For the roundtables, we will draw on the local strengths of UC and University of Paris scholars, while setting their work in a robust intellectual framework in what we hope will be

a groundbreaking publication. We will record and podcast the event and use social media to publicize the conference.

In the name of civilization, human dignity, rule of law and human freedom, neoliberal economic theory was a critique of totalitarianism and social democracy. Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman offered a relentless critique of social democratic state institutions and their usurpation of individual identity by a bureaucratic elite. In 1947, an elite group of economists, philosophers and policy-makers gathered at a Swiss spa called Mont Pelerin to discuss how best to break down "big government" and promote private property and market competition on a global scale. Attendees included Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and Karl Popper. The Mont Pelerin Society was formed to facilitate the exchange of ideas between its members, who were concerned about the threats to liberalism and liberal society. The exclusive group would go on to give authority, prestige and eloquent language to the post-World War II neoliberal agenda. Its founding statement was dramatic, and well suited to the post-war intellectual climate, "The central values of civilization are in danger. Over large stretches of the earth's surface, the essential conditions of human dignity and freedom have already disappeared."² We propose building on David Harvey's analysis of spatialization and neoliberalism by examining the ways in which its political and economic program is supported by a compelling and even Utopian vision of cultural practices and cultural critique.³

On the surface, Hayek and Friedman seem to share concerns about the political and economic future of modern civilization as they were articulated by another famous Austrian, Sigmund Freud. In "Civilization and its Discontents" (1929). Freud approached modern culture or "civilization" as a machinery of collective conformity and repression of primary instincts, in the interwar context of a crisis of liberalism and the rapid rise of fascism: a powerful concept of "discontent" provided the foundational ideas for European cultural criticism, from Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process* to the collectively authored social science project on prejudice, *The Authoritarian Personality*.⁴ The Mont Pelerin brand of cultural critique identified moral relativism and Keynesianism as threats to civilization and individual freedom. The Frankfurt School cultural critique fingered instrumental rationality and authoritarianism as the most important enemies of autonomy and freedom from domination.

²<https://www.montpelerin.org/montpelerin/mpsGoals.html>

³David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. (Oxford, UK : Oxford University Press, 2005, 2007).

⁴Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*. Trans Edmund Jephcott. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994). Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Donald J. Levinson, *The Authoritarian Personality : Studies in Prejudice*. (New York : Harper and Row, 1950).

¹<http://anglais.u-paris10.fr/spip.php?rubrique4>

We believe that Freud's social theory of "discontent" has much to say to and about contemporary culture, including theories and critique of cultural theories in the context of contemporary neoliberalism and its mix of late capitalism and new forms of institutional violence. In a struggle for political legitimacy, culture, however, has played a critical, if confusing role for both Left and Right thinkers of the contemporary situation.

The cultural turn was hailed by Fredric Jameson as a particular feature of late capitalism and post-modernism: grappling with the groundbreaking work of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, American Left theorists confronted a radically reconfigured relationship between material existence and cultural production.⁵ The contours of "culture" as it was described by Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall remained vaguely shaped by class, but not in the classical Marxist sense.⁶ The new conception of culture as a critical set of forces suffusing the economic and everyday life of the subjects of late capitalism has finally reached French academia. Ironically, it was the work of Michel de Certeau and Roland Barthes, mobilized by Dick Hebdige that gave Anglophone Cultural Studies its intellectual framework for ideological analysis.⁷ One goal of the conference is to open up meaningful dialogues between young scholars on both sides of the Atlantic who have been up until now, hampered by a politics of translation and dissemination that have so often only highlighted the work of stars and academic celebrities.

Today, the overturning of base/superstructure relations has had even fartherreaching consequences for the practices and experiences of everyday life and operative conceptions of sovereignty and creativity. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's ideas of the multitude proposed a new conception of poverty and creativity.⁸ The fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of an authoritarian market based political economy in the People's Republic of China reduced our ability to imagine solidarity and equality in practice as well as in theory. The suffusion of the economic conditions and activities with cultural significance and vice versa did overturn modernist and classical Marxist conceptions of base/superstructure relations to which Fredric Jameson's writings of the late 1980s and early 1990s alluded. The cultural turn in ideological critique has obscured questions of

exploitation, violence, labor and uneven development, even as it has opened new spaces for imagining networked communication, expressivity, identification and difference.

The narrative behind imaginary representation of culture is based on four widely accepted grounds: 1) an individual's productive fulfillment and thirst for communication, self-expression and recognition; 2) an always-already global and media-filtered dominant discourse that tries to smooth out all unevenness of the material conditions of communication and reception; 3) an utter dissemination of power away from its traditional sources and identifiable mongers; 4) a disappearance of yesterday's "social" life (and struggles) in favor of a fatalistic oscillation between instant visibility and structural invisibility. While triggered by the urge to deconstruct, both theoretically and ethically, the aforementioned representations, this joint symposium and conference aims at offering a rich interdisciplinary exploration of today's neoliberal culture, understood as the weaving together of a new relation to violence, of a spatialized view of the human community, and of a globalized marketplace of entertainment and subjectivities.

In order to define the contours of neoliberalism's spatial, political and economic aspirations, we believe that we must try to understand it as a coherent worldview, a system of representations, a "culture" in the broad sense of a structured imaginary, grounded in specific historical and social circumstances that allowed for an elite group of free market visionaries to imagine themselves as the defenders of human dignity and human freedom against collectivism and relativism. We want to explore the ways in which neoliberalism has been able to accommodate extremely divergent forms of conservatism, all in the name of its own robust cultural critique, directed at a set of adversaries representing Keynesian, collectivist, social democratic or countercultural values.

Through this collaborative conference, we hope to offer a coherent, if partial historicization and theorization of the neoliberal imaginary and its pragmatic recourse to violence in imposing its program on uneven spaces of global economic activity. If neoliberalism's deeply flawed vision of freedom, community, identity and creativity has re-imagined the very fabric of social life, critical theory must renew itself in order to create adequate tools of analysis, capable of identifying and resisting neoliberalism's attempts to dominate every global space.

⁵Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 1991)

⁶Raymond Williams, *Keywords : A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. (London : Oxford University Press, 1985). Stuart Hall, et. al. *Culture, Media, Language : Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-1979*. (London : Routledge, 1991).

⁷Dick Hebdige. *Subculture : The Meaning of Style*. (London : Routledge, 1981).

⁸Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2001)