

# On Critical Globality

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**I**N RECENT SCHOLARSHIP in the humanities and social sciences, there has been a move to comprehend processes of globalization as they impact on culture and society. Indeed, according to some, “a major paradigm shift [is] taking place in the way that the scholarly production of knowledge is being rethought at the close of the second millennium” (King ix). One of the major indices of this shift is the prevalence of the term “global” itself within an array of scholarly discourses, particularly — and most important for our purposes — in the currently fashionable invocation of the notion of “global culture.” The phrase is repeatedly employed in a host of recent popular publications, journal special issues, and essay collections.<sup>1</sup> Institutionally, this shift has been reflected in the rise of international studies centres and degree programs, as well as in the self-stylings of several of the major nation- and discipline-centred scholarly organizations in the US (for example, the American Studies Association and the Modern Language Association), which have professed their intent to “go global” in terms of a shift in the range of literatures addressed in conference programs, a new emphasis on international organizational exchanges, and a revised pedagogical orientation.

These developments have fostered original and productive arenas of intellectual inquiry, and have simultaneously catalyzed debate about the methods, geographical contours, and political implications of transnational work on culture and society. A number of individual scholars have taken it upon themselves, for example, to become front-line critics of “global culture,” hoping to usher in new analytical frameworks adequate to the task of keeping pace with globalization. Here we make no pretense of offering a comprehensive overview of the great variety of this work but instead devote ourselves to the definitional and conceptual problems that emerge from the at-

tempt to meld economic and communicational discourses of globalization with those of cultural studies and literary criticism. In particular we are concerned with the often slippery meaning of the term “culture” within this theoretical edifice, as elaborated by scholars including Mike Featherstone, Anthony King, Henry Schwarz, Roland Robertston, Benjamin Lee, Fredric Jameson, Masao Miyoshi, Geeta Kapur, Bruce Robbins, Pheng Cheah, Aihwa Ong, David Lloyd, and Lisa Lowe, among others. In addition to the proliferation of newly minted terminology, this work raises a number of pressing questions: what is the object of study being identified by those who purport to study the cultural representation of globalization? What is the relationship between the “internationalism” espoused by many critics, and the processes of globalization? And what is new about the scholarly methods used to identify and then analyze this object?

Those of us who write as Americanists are especially concerned with attempts within American Studies to become attuned to the complex legacies of US imperialism in the world. The most striking example of this trend is the work of the so-called “New Americanists,” who have attempted to study US cultural formations in relation to “the more inclusive project of global imperialism,” as Donald Pease has put it. The contributors to collections like *Cultures of United States Imperialism* “intend the restoration of heterogeneous cultural histories” in contradistinction to the monohistory of US nationalism (Pease “New Perspectives” 23). The difficulty with this project is that the form of analysis represented by the New Americanists claims to be “global” in scope, but maintains the US as its centre. And thus we ask: What is “global” about the new trend in American studies? What is its methodological innovation? And what does it mean to do putatively internationalist work from the vantage point of a national literature project?

In offering a critique of the problems that have arisen in the scholarship that makes American studies conversant with globalization, we hope to clear space for a more sensitive and politically nuanced reading practice in an age of capitalist expansion, hyper-exploitation, and uneven development — in

a context in which the retention of the American literature project and the turn to "global culture" constitute two sides of the same coin.

### I. What is the "Culture" in "Global Culture"?

As Fredric Jameson and others have observed, "globalization falls outside the established academic disciplines as the sign of the emergence of a new social phenomenon" ("Preface" xi). The term "globalization" thus poses particular problems of definition that have required scholars trained in a variety of disciplines to grapple with creating new interdisciplinary languages, approaches, and frameworks. Some have attempted "philosophical" approaches to globalization, or have sought to resuscitate old lexicons of transnational culture (for example, "cosmopolitanism"). Several have refused a focus on cultural production in favor of theories of globalization exclusively posed in terms of economics, space, and geopolitics. Still others, on the contrary, have brought anthropological and/or sociological theorizations of "culture" to bear on more conventional economic analyses of globalization. For us, the value of this work depends on its ability to elaborate a relationship between the new analytic languages and the political uses these languages are designed to serve. We will read two of these salutary undertakings, not as representative, but in order to illustrate their complexities and pitfalls.

Anthony King's introduction to the 1997 *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*, an anthology containing essays by many of the major theorists of globalization (Stuart Hall, Immanuel Wallerstein, Janet Abu-Lughod, Robert Robertson, Ulf Hannerz) explicitly argues for the necessity of conjoining the insights of cultural studies, as developed by Hall and members of the "Birmingham School," and the world-systems theory elaborated by Wallerstein and others. "Just as Cultural Studies has represented its object without reference to the rest of the world (whether through the 'world-system,' the 'international level' or the 'global')," King writes, "so the world-system perspective has represented the world, until relatively recently, without much reference to culture" (10). In situating the question

of “global culture” at the intersection of theories that can address “culture” and the economy, King raises a number of inter-related questions: Does “global culture” imply a state of worldwide inter-connectedness? What forms does this inter-connectedness take? Does “global culture” imply cultural homogenization, synchronization, or proliferation?

In answering these questions, many of the papers collected in the volume struggle with the definition of culture itself, especially in relation to the universalism implied by the frame of the “global.” In many respects, the definitional problems remain unresolved, or perhaps — put differently — are revealed to be constitutively unresolvable. As Janet Wolff argues in her closing response to the conference, “the papers are ‘pre-theoretical’ with regard to developments in cultural theory. None of them is able to recognize the nature of culture as *representation*, nor its constitutive role with regard to ideology and social relations. They operate with a notion of ‘culture’ as an identifiable realm or set of beliefs, objects and practices, more or less determined by social and economic relations, with more or less independence from and effectivity on the social process” (170). Wolff’s main point is that despite the attempt to bring the insights of cultural studies into social scientific definitions of globalization, much of the work on globalization continues unsuccessfully to fall back onto an “undifferentiated notion of ‘culture,’” moving freely among a number of loosely connected levels of connotation: culture as “way of life,” culture as “arts and media,” and political and religious culture (167). Wolff notes that only Hall’s contributions to the volume (presented on a separate occasion) offer “a theory of culture at the level of the international, which is sensitive to the ways in which identity is constructed and represented in culture and in social relations” (172).

While it is true that “culture” emerges as a slippery — or as Wolff puts it, “pre-theoretical” — concept in many of the essays in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*, several of the contributors to the volume demonstrate an awareness of the difficulties of defining “culture” as a unitary concept. Immanuel Wallerstein, for one, begins his essay by exploring a



seemingly irreducible definitional dilemma: “the very concept of ‘culture’ poses us with a gigantic paradox. On the one hand, culture is *by definition* particularistic. Culture is the set of values or practices of some part smaller than some whole . . . . But on the other hand, there can be no justification of cultural values and/or practices other than by reference to some universal or universalist criteria” (91). For Wallerstein this paradox implies that the formulation “global culture” — meaning culture purely at the level of the universal — is problematic if not oxymoronic. In terms of our analysis here, this observation is instructive. Culture, as a representation, is not an “attribute” (as Anthony King claims in his Preface) that you would possess like the color of your hair; rather, culture is a process that is always situated in history, in language. In this sense, it is difficult, if not simply contradictory, to envision a “universal” or “global” culture, because culture is by definition situated in a field that is mediated through difference.

In another context, Jameson has also suggested that culture must be understood as contradictory and relational. He writes, “culture is not a ‘substance’ or a phenomenon in its own right; it is an objective mirage that arises out of the relationship between at least two groups. This is to say that no group ‘has’ a culture all by itself: culture is the nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with and observes another one. . . . Culture must thus always be seen as a vehicle or a medium whereby the relationship between groups is transacted” (“Cultural Studies” 34). Such a relational conception of culture mitigates against any easy invocation of “global culture” as universal, and begins to function as a lever that helps to pry open the political pretenses and philosophical contradictions that inhere in the work of those theorists who invoke the notion.

If culture is necessarily a representation of difference, then it is clearly a mistake to attempt to ground a “global culture” in terms of a comparative relation among discrete cultures thought to be capable of entering into pluralistic exchanges. Another prominent theorist of transnational cultural flows, Benjamin Lee, clearly misses this point in his recent call for “critical internationalism,” which prescribes transnational cul-

tural exchange through the model of a liberal pluralism. Lee's proposed methodology calls for a "decentered vision" (575), a "comparative perspective" that could go "beyond multiculturalism and international studies" (579). He believes firmly in the benefits of comparativist work, particularly work that crosses disciplines as well as national boundaries. He writes: "if there are universal values, they can only be discovered through comparisons. Such a methodology contrasts sharply with approaches which derive universal values from a view from nowhere. . . . A comparative approach does not assume either the existence of normative universals or the unlimited critical power of universalism" (579). Lee can invoke comparison, but is unable to see that culture is always already relational: it is not a possession brought to the table of collaboration in the quest for some "shared" or "sensitive" values, but a constitutively differential concept. Consequently, Lee's model of international criticism imagines that the academy exists in a vacuum, radically disconnected from the globalization processes that purportedly produce the forms of "global culture."

In erasing a relational understanding of culture, Lee eliminates the insight that attends on becoming conscious of the place from which one speaks — the location from which one articulates a vision of "global culture." In his case, such insight would necessitate coming to terms with the fact that he speaks from within the US academy, and that it is not by coincidence that the US is so often the unavowed ground for articulating the idea of the "globe." Indeed, Lee's invocation of "global culture" covers over the fact that any enunciation of a universal is always better understood as the articulation of what Hall has termed the "dominant particular." Hall instructively notes that "what we call 'the global' is always composed of varieties of articulated particularities," and adds that "the global is the . . . way in which the dominant particular localizes and naturalizes itself and associates with it a variety of other minorities" ("The Local" 67). Although it is true that transnational corporations, the United Nations and its agencies, and many members of the world of finance, speak the language of "global culture" in a variety of locations in both the North and the South, in the case of Lee

and a number of other critics, speaking the “globe” obscures the historical specificity of the US academy, and naturalizes the coincidence of globalization and “Americanization.”

## II. We are the World: Globalization as “Americanization”

As mentioned previously, there have been a number of attempts to track the forces of globalization within American cultural criticism, especially among the “New Americanists.” *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan, is often considered the representative anthology of this group. Their two introductions to the volume offer programmatic statements about the methodological aims and political orientation of this work.<sup>2</sup> As Kaplan expresses it, the New American studies redresses “salient absences” in the traditional approaches to the study of American culture: the absence of an analysis of culture within the history of US imperialism; the absence of an account of empire in the scholarship on American culture; and the absence of a consideration of the US within the postcolonial study of imperialism (11).

In her opening essay, for example, Kaplan demonstrates how “imperialism has been formative and disavowed in the foundational discourse of American Studies” (5). She rereads what has been regarded as one of the foundational moments of American Studies, Perry Miller’s legendary preface to his 1956 work, *Errand into the Wilderness*. She notes that Miller’s “epiphany” about the “pressing necessity” of studying “the meaning of America” for the twentieth century occurs not in the US, but in Africa, where Miller had gone during the 1920s, a college dropout working in West African shipyards. As Kaplan expresses it, “the field of American Studies was conceived on the banks of the Congo” (3). For Kaplan this fact demands an understanding of the interdependence of European and American colonialism, and an analysis of the manner in which Miller’s discovery of America in the “fabled ‘Heart of Darkness’” has a historical context and ground (4). As she explains, “Miller’s apparently random and quixotic arrival in Africa could only have been made possible by the long-standing economic, politi-

cal, and cultural involvement of the US in European colonialism, of which the Congo is a major case in point" (8).

In focusing on locations other than the US, the contributors to *Cultures of United States Imperialism* purport to expand the purview of American Studies geographically, focusing on "European colonization, slavery, westward expansion, overseas intervention, and Cold War nuclear power" (Kaplan 4). As Kaplan explains, the New Americanists "draw out the international and spatial dimensions" of what constitutes the scope of American Studies (5); or, as Pease expresses it, they introduce "a global analytic dimension" that places the US within an international theater ("New Perspectives" 25). This necessitates situating the US within a broader framework of Western imperialism, something that cannot be accomplished if American Studies "concentrates its gaze only narrowly on the internal lineaments of American culture and leaves national borders intact instead of interrogating their formation" (Kaplan 15). Although such "interrogation" is a crucial project, our difficulty with such a foundational critique is that it does not necessarily result in an internationalist purview. By failing to focus on the international dynamics of empire-building (for example, the relationship between Belgian colonialism and US imperialism), it ultimately emerges as a revised history of national expansion, albeit a critical one.<sup>3</sup>

This is of crucial concern, because in Pease's codification of Kaplan's insights both in his contribution to their volume and in his introduction to a second anthology of New Americanist work, *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*, he proposes the awkward and misleading identification of the New Americanists as representing a "postnationalist initiative," and as producing "post-Americanist narratives" ("National Identities" 24). Pease defines "postnational" narratives as those that "dismantle" the dominant national narrative, which sets up an opposition between a universally abstract and disembodied American subject-citizen (understood to be white and male) and "other peoples (women, blacks, 'foreigners,' and the homeless) . . . understood to be constructed of a 'different nature'" (4). Ahistorically, Pease asserts that this odd assortment

of disenfranchised figures acquire narrative agency by revealing the artificiality of an opposition between native and Other. Pease neither specifies the function of the prefix “post” within his analysis, nor grapples with the fact that “post” implies a spatio-temporal structure in which the “performative” narrative agency mentioned above might be “beyond” or “after” the nation. Instead he confusingly concludes that the original national narrative is itself “post-ed” in the process of being denaturalized: “the national assumptions that had been understood as preconditions for the constitution of a coherent national identity became *postnational*, provisional strategies, subject to the ongoing revisions of movement politics” (6). This of course begs the question: if the “pre-” conditions of national identity somehow become “provisional,” how is the nation thereby “post”?<sup>4</sup>

The paradox of revising a national literature project such that it becomes “postnationalist” is that it can no longer be self-reflexive about its national grounding. If, as Kaplan argues, American Studies, like America, acting as a world power, is predicated on the repression of US imperialism — and this is constitutive — then can one still be doing American Studies when one focuses on such imperial practices and their “global” implications? To rephrase the question more pointedly: can American studies ever be anything other than a national pastime, a form of knowledge production that reinscribes the nation even as it reveals its construction?

Answers to these questions are of pressing political import for members of the US academy in an age in which globalization is elaborated as “Americanization.” In the current conjuncture, “Americanization” may be nearly synonymous with globalization (as many have observed), and yet this is not a completely accurate representation. It is only from the vantage point of being in and of America that one speaks of “global culture” and “globalization.” From anywhere else globalization is often tellingly called “Americanization.” “Americanization” is not the infinite expansion of US cultural hegemony outwards (that is, US imperialism); rather it is a name for an unequal process of global development in terms of the economy and civil society

both among nations and inside nations, including the US. In other words, translating globalization as “Americanization” suggests that “globalization is not a neutral process in which Washington and Dakar participate equally,” nor is it a process that the US simply benefits from (Readings). The unequal international dimensions and unequal intra-national effects of globalization comprise a structural blind spot in recent scholarship on globalization produced within the US, in analyses of “global culture” launched from within the US academy, and in new moves within American studies, especially those that claim that the New Americanist scholarship is somehow “postnational.” In our view, the only way to account for this blind spot is to articulate “globality” as an expression of the dominant particular, which means keeping track of the contradictions inherent in the notion of the “global,” while at the same time developing a method for understanding globalization as it impacts on “culture.” In the next section, we elaborate on the reading practice that constitutes this alternative critical posture.

### III. Critical Globality

More than any other body of critical work, that which falls under the heading of postcolonial theory and subaltern studies has often been a site for thinking about imperialism in a “global” frame, and more recently has been used by a scattering of scholars working in the US academy who have begun to discuss the applicability of these approaches to the US.<sup>5</sup> In her work, for example, Jenny Sharpe asks whether the idea of postcoloniality can be used to understand the situation of diasporic communities within the US, especially South Asian ones. Sharpe answers her own query by noting the danger of collapsing the discourse of postcoloniality into that of multiculturalism such that the transnational dimensions of the former are obfuscated, and its radical edge elided. Instead, she proposes to retain the term postcolonial to interpret the “neo-colonial relations the United States entered into with decolonized nations,” while recognizing that Third World diasporic migrants who have come to the US in recent years occupy a distinct position (184). Such migrants, she claims, are

commonly termed “postcolonial” in the US, but are situated in globalization differently from US “minorities,” and thus must not be conflated with them. For Sharpe, only vigilance in drawing distinctions among contexts will allow us to understand the “historical specificities” of migration from the ex-colonies to the metropolitan centres (190). “What is the relationship between the diasporic identities we are calling ‘postcolonial’ and the globalization of consumer culture?” she asks. She warns that an equation of Third World diasporas with racial marginalization closes down questions of this kind, for “when racism against diasporic communities becomes the primary focus of critical attention, a discussion of the workings of transnational capitalism is foreclosed” (185).

Similarly, Eva Cherniavsky has used postcolonial criticism to investigate the “dynamics of an intraterritorial colonialism in the United States,” including the genocide and displacement of indigenous peoples, the history of African slavery, and the importation of East Asian labourers in the nineteenth century (87). She invokes the history of racialized labour in the US (especially slave, Chinese, and migrant labour) in order to understand that it is produced as inherently non-national. Relying on the work of Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, Cherniavsky appropriates the insights of subaltern studies, and proposes a “global” model of postcolonial power dynamics which calculates not only the colonial roles of the “old” European powers, but those of the US (100-02). Cherniavsky intends to use subaltern studies to “benefit” the new American studies, to wrench it away from its predisposition to see US imperialism as solely extraterritorial. Refusing to conflate colonialism and capitalism — where colonialism would be just another figure for capitalism’s progress — she instead follows Guha and Partha Chatterjee in viewing colonialism as both an expansion of and a limit to capital’s logic (93). In so doing, she argues that racialized labor is exploited both inside of and outside of the US capitalist economy. In siting postcolonial studies in the US, Cherniavsky ultimately maintains the distinction between industrial capitalism and colonialism precisely *by* focusing on US intra-territorial colonialism.

This “Americanist postcolonial” work is suggestive because it focuses on both the inter- and intra-national dimensions of forces of domination, as at once asymmetrical and imbricated. Such work is welcome, because it recognizes that arguments that create analogies between US imperialism and colonialism are inadequate to the task of tracking the uneven impact of globalization. Such work is also rare. In order to contribute to the elaboration of a critical method that attends to “globality,” we will offer a reading of Toni Morrison’s critical work. Although Morrison is not often regarded as a scholar who focuses on questions of imperialism and colonialism, we will seek to show that she implicitly situates cultural productions as reflections and refractions of “residual imperialist propensities”<sup>6</sup> and the legacy of colonialism both within and among nations. In short, we will read her as a US scholar whose work can be shown to contain a postcolonial dimension when its global scope is identified.

At least one postcolonial critic, Edward Said, seems to have recognized a resonance between his critical project and Morrison’s. He opens the first chapter of *Culture and Imperialism* with an epigraph from *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison’s examination of the American literary canon.<sup>7</sup> Replicating this gesture, Morrison remarks on the affinity between her work and Said’s, stating that the questions she poses of US literature “have been consistently put by critics of Colonial literature vis-à-vis Africa and India and other third world countries” (“Afro-American” 211).<sup>8</sup> While this rhetoric might be read as creating a structure of analogy wherein the colonial and US contexts are conflated, our point is that on the contrary it is possible to read Morrison as a theorist whose work articulates the interwoven effects of systems of domination on cultural production in an international frame.

In Morrison’s analysis of American literature, she uses the term Africanism to name “the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (*Playing* 6-7). Indeed, her oft-cited *Playing in the Dark*



can be read as elaborating a vocabulary for the analysis of forces of domination within and across national borders. Her project is, as she puts it, a “critical investigation into the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanlike (Africanist) presence or persona was constructed in the US, and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence served.” In formulating her approach, Morrison searches for what she calls “the unspeakable things unspoken” that haunt the American literary canon — that is, for “the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure — the meaning of so much American literature” (“Afro-American” 210). As is immediately apparent, Africanism is defined in terms of neither a real nor imagined Africa, the continental space, but as an enabling trope that allows for the ontological construction of a “white” racialized Americanness. In explaining how Africanism is a rhetorical elaboration of the white American self, Morrison writes, “deep within the word ‘American’ is its association with race . . . American means white. . . . The American nation negotiated both its disdain and its envy . . . through a self-reflexive contemplation of fabricated, mythological, Africanism” (*Playing* 47).

The dialectic between whiteness and Africanism are most explicit in the interplay between the title of Morrison’s book, *Playing in the Dark*, and its subtitle, *Whiteness in the Literary Imagination*. Here, darkness is the background against which whiteness becomes imaginable, against which the white self can luxuriate in its own nonracial existence and ontological certitude. However, the title also contains another spin: the American literary establishment is “in the dark,” in that it is ignorant to the conditions of possibility of its own existence.<sup>9</sup> Morrison is clearly doing far more than examining a process of cultural identity formation relegated to the boundaries of the US nation-state. Rather, she is proffering a rich palette of readings that together reveal Africanism to be simultaneously an intra- and an extra-national process of othering.

To take one example, in Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not*, Harry and Marie, two American tourists in Cuba, have a violent confrontation with a man in a park. This “all-purpose black man,” as Morrison notes, is both black and Cuban. In

Morrison's reading of the way Harry and Marie consolidate themselves as American citizen-subjects, it becomes clear that the "white" engagement with the Africanist presence is neither confined to the US as a nation space, nor to the national black population. Here and elsewhere, the implication is that the construction of an Africanist presence relies as much upon an imperialist move of the "American" self outside of the US — and an encounter with an Other that is subsequently "Africanized" — as upon a differentiation of subjects residing within the nation-state. In fact, this is so in nearly all of Morrison's examples, in which many of the wide range of figures that provide her raw material for Africanist Othering are situated outside the US, and are not always even "black": the "native" Nu-Nu accompanying Pym to the Pole in Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*; Catherine's obsessive "blackening" in emulation of an African woman in Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*; the multiracial, multinational crew in Melville's *Moby Dick*; Bon's octoroon mistress of Haitian descent in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*; the "Africans" Henderson meets in Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*; as well as the "milieu of the working poor, the unemployed, sinister Chinese, terrorist Cubans, violent but cowardly blacks, upper-class castrati, [and] female predators" (80) that Morrison enumerates in her discussion of *To Have and Have Not*.

Nowhere is Morrison's move outside the confines of the US nation-space more striking than in the example with which she opens the book. In her discussion of Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It*, Morrison observes as she concludes her reading that Cardinal is writing as a French woman brought up in Algeria, a *piéd noir*, a "colonialist, a white child, loving and loved by Arabs" (ix). Cardinal's experience of an "Africanist presence" — hearing the apparition of what she calls "the Thing" in Louis Armstrong's music while at a concert in Paris — is thus actually expanded by Morrison into a complex metonymic field that includes, as she explains, "black or colored people and [other] symbolic figurations of blackness" that become "markers for the benevolent and wicked" (ix). As in her readings of the other texts we have mentioned, here Morrison excavates an

Africanist field of figured “blackness” that is rooted not just in the history of US imperialism, but also in the European experience of colonial expansion and imperialist domination — in this case that of France.

The imaginary of othering in this passage is, of course, not confined by the borders of a colonial system, but is *flexible*. On the one hand, since Louis Armstrong is often considered a key early American “cultural ambassador,” hugely popular throughout the world in the middle of the twentieth century, this scene represents an early instance of US culture functioning as “global,” as an American commodity exported internationally. At the same time, the reception of Armstrong is by no means uniform or preconditioned: Cardinal, an Algerian Frenchwoman, consolidates her “whiteness” in the metropole in response to the sound of his black American music, molded by the particular contours of the European context as well. Thus, this example forces us to think of “globality” as an uneven dynamic shaped as much by the lingering contours of a French colonial system as by the ascendancy of US popular culture.

Hall, among others, has called for the analysis of cultural identity as just such a complexly elaborated alterity. Understanding that identity formation through difference does not simply imply an attention to a single colonial or imperial frame (“Englishness” cannot be thought without the history of colonialism in India, for example), Hall explores how it is instead what we have termed a flexible field of differential figuration, able to draw both on intra- and inter-colonial dynamics. He writes: “You go round the entire globe: when you know what everybody else is, then you are what they are not. Identity is always, in that sense, a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative” (Hall, “The Local” 21). To return to the example from Cardinal, it is evident that processes of othering are achieved through the narrow eye of the negative, and that these processes are relational — that cultures do not exist without each other, any more than do racialized individuals.

In turning to Morrison’s work, we hope to have opened up a reading method of *critical globality* that might be used for doing

cultural criticism in a US context in an age of globalization. We think of this reading practice as self-reflexive about the politics of the language that is used to analyze “globalization” and constitute it as an object. In other words, we see critical globality as both a definitional proposition and a critical practice that performs needed political work.

By “critical” we mean three things: first, that thinking of the “globe” destabilizes nation-based projects of cultural study and thus intervenes into the way in which scholarly inquiry reproduces various forms of national exceptionalism. Specifically this means thinking about structures of domination as confluent across national borders, and at the same time unevenly felt within them. Second, by “critical” we mean paying attention to the relationship of historical reciprocity between class and race in the context of western imperialism and overdevelopment, again, both within nations and among them. Third, by “critical” we mean being suspicious and questioning of the term “globality” itself.

Historically the idea of the “globe” has been used within economics, social policy, area studies, and development discourses to smooth over real differences among populations, and to elide relations of domination, in a manner that invokes a universalism precisely to obscure and/or naturalize the historical role of US domination. Thus, in proposing “critical globality” we do not introduce the term “globality” as a description of capitalist worldwide expansion — much less as a celebration of it. Rather we hope to mark the mobilization of a new hermeneutic, a method of reading the idea of the “globe” against the grain, in order to posit a new axis around which a more critical cultural studies might be organized. This means thinking about the “globe” — not so much in terms of a world-devouring CNN or Nike, on the one hand, or the grand comparative literature traditions of Auerbach and Spitzer, on the other, but towards the end of becoming literate in the workings of capitalism and other forms of power.

To be clear, we are not thinking of evocations of a “world in unity,” the rhetorical positing of some vague “global sisterhood,” a “concert among the races,” a high universalizing

humanism or a transnational pluralism vacated of meaning. We have chosen “globality” rather than “internationalism,” despite the latter term’s deep political history within Marxist discourse. The choice of “globality” allows us to signal the historical shift in the constitution of the notion of class, and to understand the ways in which new class formations are precipitated by processes of globalization that disrupt the boundaries of nation-states as economic and political units in some ways, reconsolidate them in others, and in so doing catalyze new transnational alliances. To suggest this is not to imply that globalization has never before happened; as scholars such as Abu Lughod, Amin, and Wallerstein have suggested, such homogenizing processes have deep historical roots as far back as the sixteenth century. Instead, we invoke the term “global” to strip it down and then reappropriate it — to indicate a new relationship to the terminology that has been so widely adopted to describe new processes of capital’s expansion and homogenization. For we hope that the idea of “critical globality” will work to subvert the notion of “globality” from the inside — and then displace it. Of course, “critical globality” is not fully-formed, but in crafting it, we hope we have begun to *clear space* for other collaborative efforts able to come to terms with the cultural and historical repercussions of the ever-increasing transnationality of capital. The world-straddling ambition of the word “globality” is thus offered as a tool, a means to think both on the same plane as, and against the grain of, the neo-imperialist celebration of the “globalization” of culture and capitalist markets. After all, it is only by being ambitious in this way that we are able to take responsibility for the place from which we speak.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Here are some of the recent books, not mentioned in Works Cited, that invoke the notion of “global culture” (beginning with the most recent):

Aihwa Ong. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.

John Tomlinson. *Globalization and Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.

David Held et al. *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.

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- <sup>2</sup> Pease has edited another volume of "New Americanists" scholarship ("National Identities"). Also see, Pease "New Americanists"; Moon and Davidson; Fisher. Note that Pease adopts the phrase "New Americanists" from an article reviewing recent Americanist work published by Crews, in 1988.
- <sup>3</sup> This is neither to negate the importance of the historiography on US imperialism, nor to imply that all such histories are exceptionalist. Rather it is to note the paradoxes of claiming a "global" scope from the particular ground of the US.
- <sup>4</sup> Eva Cherniavsky has also offered an excellent though differently oriented critique of the "postnational" claims of some New Americanists.

- 5 The term "postcolonial" is employed here in shorthand and only with reservations. For an important consideration of the history and uses of this term, see Shohat; Dirlik; McClintock; and Hall "When Was the 'Post-Colonial'?"
- 6 The phrase is Edward Said's (xx).
- 7 Said uses the following passage from *Playing in the Dark*: "Silence from and about the subject was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by authors who lived with and within the policing strategies" (Morrison 51).
- 8 She refers in particular to the work of Said, Martin Bernal, and Ivan Van Sertima. This early essay formed the basis of the project that became *Playing in the Dark*.
- 9 For Morrison, this is not so much a blindness to the existence of African American literature as a blindness to the mechanics by which the "American" literary canon has been constituted. Thus she writes that "It is interesting, not surprising, that the arbiters of critical power in American literature seem to take pleasure in, indeed relish, their ignorance of African-American texts. What is surprising is that their refusal to read black texts — a refusal that makes no disturbance in their intellectual life — repeats itself when they reread the traditional, established works of literature worthy of their attention" (*Playing* 13).

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