

EDITORIAL

This issue of *New Formations* had no initiating theme, no prior agenda. The articles published here are simply the most interesting of the many diverse articles that have arrived on my desk over the past year. My editorial comments then, will neither attempt to draw out the common theme in the articles, nor to articulate a unified project of the contributors. Rather, I want to reflect briefly upon the strengths of transnational and interdisciplinary work, and the potential dangers.

The contributors in this issue are geographically and disciplinarily dispersed: based in Australia, Canada, the United States, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Singapore and Hawaii; located in departments of women's studies, cultural studies, intercommunal studies, media and communication studies, English literature and philosophy. Most moved at least once between submitting the article and its publication, and many are in more than one department simultaneously ... A small reminder, lest we forget, that cultural theory debates are increasingly held at a global level, that academic disciplinary boundaries are becoming ever more hazy and that academics are increasingly mobile and flexible.

As we theorise the globalization of the economy – changing production processes necessitating flexibility, transience and mobility – so we ourselves are increasingly required to develop precisely these skills in order to compete in the international market-place of ideas. One recognises a deep uncertainty about the nature of departmental disciplines, doubt about the status of the 'canon', confusion over disciplinary methodologies, as symptomatic of wider social change and institutional organisation. The flexibility and multiplicity of the global economy are, for better or for worse, manifestly evident in the pages of the ever burgeoning number of academic journals.

The global economy is a given in our life now: transnational corporations cross borders to maximise productivity and transnational intellectuals cross academic boundaries to maximise knowledge. The academic discipline, along with the national state, is subject to powerful forces of change. And, as we might acknowledge the failings of the old model of state sovereignty and hegemonic nationalism but nonetheless remain deeply sceptical about the gains to be had from the free movement of international capital around the globe in pursuit of profit, so we must be attuned to the benefits of jettisoning the status of empirical area studies, the constricting patriarchal academic canons and oppressive hierarchical departments structures, but also the pitfalls.

The fear of course is that the undermining of disciplinary boundaries may simply produce blurriness; and that scholarly discourse, even of those deeply engrossed with the issues of postcoloniality, multiculturalism and difference is conducted within the insiders' globe. It is undeniably true that ideas rapidly circulate the globe, skimming the scholarly consciousness which is ever ready to invest resources if the return looks high, or to move on swiftly as the

intellectual return dwindles, and that articles are becoming increasingly self-referential, attention firmly focused on one another's footnotes. The time-space compression of academic life condenses the intellectual process, pressurising academics to begin publishing and editing ever sooner, to find niche markets, to attend and organise ever more conferences, to produce ever more journals. Recent developments within academia and current shifts in the production process are far from distinct: both are driven by the urgent need to erode barriers to the free circulation of capital/ideas and accumulate territory/knowledge in distant worlds in order to gain unhindered access to its raw materials.

If theorists of cultural and political studies are to avoid the narcissistic opportunism accompanying the fate of becoming just one more manifestation of the imperialist globalization process, it will surely be through the attempt to locate our theorising in the grounded sites of cultural and political resistance. Otherwise the global celebration of difference may prove to be little more than a western hymn in praise of undifferentiation.

In her article 'On Not Speaking Chinese', Ien Ang notes, reflecting on her diasporic identity: 'if I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent. When and how is a matter of politics.' Her point is 'to critique the formalist, poststructuralist tendency to over generalise the global current of so-called nomadic, fragmented and deterritorialized subjectivity'. Such 'nomadology' is rife in the pages of international cultural journals: decontextualising specific experiences of difference within a global analysis of the postmodern world.

In similar vein, Benita Parry has noted that the historical specificity of analyses of imperialism is increasingly sacrificed to the desire to produce accounts of empire's ubiquity, to map shared idioms across distinct periods. One consequence is that, whereas Edward Said has always been careful to 'delineate colonialism as one incarnation of a more extensive and variable process which he names "imperialism"', the terms imperialism and colonialism are increasingly used interchangeably. This is no quibble about terminology: it is symptomatic of the ubiquitous desire to find a unified discursive form in imperialist texts, disconnected from their social conditions of possibility. Whilst the strength of much recent post-colonial criticism has been to afford an understanding of how tropes of domination inflect each other and can be transposed from one situation to another, the dilemma is that at the same time, these interpretations divert attention from the singularities of colonialist and later imperialist enunciations. Hence the need to address the specificities of imperialist rhetoric, diasporic experiences, racist practices; to develop, what Ang calls a critical diasporic cultural politics which avoids 'the most facile forms of postmodernist nomadology' by remaining contextual and political.

Only by so doing can we celebrate the globalisation of intellectual debates and the erosion of disciplinary boundaries whilst avoiding the spectre of dedifferentiated blandness and an easy nomadology.

Judith Squires, November 1994