

**Case Study: American Neo-Imperialism, Interdisciplinarity and Identity**

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Third, the question of subjectivity. The domain of subjectivity understood as sentimental, personal, and individual horizon as opposed to objective, universal, social, limitless horizon is often attributed to both women, the other of man, and natives, the other of the West.<sup>1</sup>

Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider — two entities. They are also at work within the outside herself, or the insider, herself — a single entity. She who knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to and fro movement of life.<sup>2</sup>

Trinh T. Minh-ha

As we can see in England, large landed property has cast off its feudal character and has taken on an industrial character to the extent that it wants to make as much money as possible. It gives the owner the highest possible rent and the tenant farmer the highest possible profit on his capital. Consequently the agricultural workers are soon reduced to the minimum level of subsistence, and the farmer class establishes the power of industry and capital within landed property... Ultimately, the wages which have already been reduced to a minimum must be further reduced, in the face of new competition; and that leads necessarily to revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Karl Marx

Going to マクドナルド had become a normal routine for me by the time I was a high school student in Japan. Born and raised in Japan, it had never occurred to me that McDonald's was in fact a dominant American corporation with its symbolic value as a manifestation of American neo-imperialist ideology. There was no reason for me to question what McDonald's was, where it was from, what it represented or what it meant for the Japanese people. When I did not feel like てりやきマック Burger with salty ポテト and Coke, I went to KFC and had three pieces of tasty greasy extra crispy chicken with mash potatoes and coleslaw.

I was very far away from even thinking about revolution. Revolution for what? I loved McDonald's. I dreamed about eating a KFC bucket filled with fried chicken. For "Christmas," I wished for a pair of Nike Air Max sneakers (yellow ones), which everyone seemed to want in my

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<sup>1</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not You/ Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference." *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c. 1997), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Trinh, 76.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, "First Manuscript," *Karl Marx: Early Writings*. T. B. Bottomore (trans., ed.) (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 118-9. Originally published in 1844.

high school. We knew they were not made in America, but we didn't care where they were made nor under what circumstances. Nike was still "American" for us, therefore, "cool."

The moment the inside steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/ outside opposition, her intervention if necessary that of both not-quite an insider and not quite an outsider.<sup>4</sup>

Trinh T. Minh-ha

When I was in the eleventh grade, my father was transferred to a factory in Fresno, California. I lived in Japan for my entire life up to that point and never questioned the issue of identity. He worked for a Japanese company called Nisshinbo Industries, Inc., and this 100-year old company had been operating "globally" since the 1980s, having one factory in Brazil, two in China, two in Indonesia, one in Korea, one in Thailand and two in the United States. Although I had a choice to stay in Japan, it took me only a few seconds to decide that I wanted to move to America with my father. Coming to America seemed like a dream come true, even though I had never considered it. I arrived in California when I finished high school in 1992, and realized for the first time in my life that I was Japanese.

It is interesting to see how American neo-imperialism and globalization of capital are infused structurally into our everyday lives. These are characteristics that we don't even recognize until we step aside and make careful observations. I am a product of the American neo-imperialism and globalization. My existence depends upon capitalism, and it seems very difficult to operate outside of its system. Just as one is born into the world of "language," I too was born into the world of global capitalism and American neo-imperialism. Neo-imperialism creates institutional structures that are designed to be foundations of social and cultural mechanisms for economic gain. I have to be confined within these structures to survive.

It is clear that the common driving force behind colonialism, imperialism and neo-imperialism has been the desire for power and money. The current neo-imperialistic condition

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<sup>4</sup> Trinh, 76.

reflects the financial expansion caused by globalization since the 1970s, which resulted in the idea of “capital accumulation on a world scale.”<sup>5</sup> Within the neo-imperialistic framework, there is a race to create an institutional framework in order to “invent” a new “land.” It has become necessary to target non-capitalistic communities as new markets and economic opportunities in order to maintain and improve the profitability of existing business operations under the structure of international finance. Worldwide capital accumulation has facilitated globalization along with neo-imperialism, and the United States has been the dominant force in realizing this ideology. The focus of this paper will be the economic discourse within the neo-imperialistic framework and its relationship to the notion of national identity under globalization of economic and cultural institutions.<sup>6</sup> Neo-imperialism is responsible for a shift from modernist to postmodernist economics and has created institutional structures to export “culture” as a commodity within the capitalistic framework.

The roles of institutions have become important in the neo-imperialistic environment. John Campbell describes institutions as “the foundation of social life,”<sup>7</sup> and he further explains what the notions of institution are:

They [institutions] consist of formal and informal rules, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, and systems of meaning that define the context within which individuals, corporations, labor unions, nation-states, and other organizations operate and interact with each other... They reflect the resources and power of those who made them and, in turn, affect the distribution of resources and power in society. Once created, institutions are powerful external forces that help determine how people make sense of their world and act in it. They channel and regulate conflict and thus ensure stability in society.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*. London and New York: Verso, 1994, 276. Arrighi is Professor of Sociology at SUNY-Binghamton.

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, the term “economics” is used as it is within the field of Institutional Economics. Geoffrey Hodgson provides a concise definition of the discipline: “In contrast to the traditional equilibrium and steady-state orientation of much of economic theory, institutional and evolutionary economists place much greater emphasis on processes, changes and structural transformations. The recognition of the historical specificity of socio-economic systems itself points to the process of evolution and system change through time. While much of economic theory attempts to focus principally on that which is common to all socio-economic systems, institutional and evolutionary economics also emphasizes the differences and the changes in socio-economic systems.” From Geoffrey M. Hodgson, “Introduction.” *A Modern Reader in Institutional and Evolutionary Economics: Key Concepts*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002, xix.

<sup>7</sup> John L. Campbell, *Institutional Change and Globalization*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1. Campbell is Professor of Sociology at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, 1.

The concept of institution can be categorized not only as “the foundation of social life,” but also as the foundation of economic, political, cultural, ideological and environmental spheres of society. Under neo-imperialism, the boundaries of these inter-related disciplines become blurred, requiring complex mechanisms for analysis and theorization. It has become impossible to separate economics from politics and culture from ideology. For this reason, it is essential to look at current economic discourses and their relationship to cultural production.

This raises specific questions: How does conventional mainstream economic theory deal with neo-imperialism? Is it possible to apply existing modernist methodologies into conditions of global capitalism? What are the elements causing shifts in the discipline of economics? Or, is it a paradigm shift? How does this shift influence cultural “output”? Comprehending these ideas and concepts seems to be an impossible task under postmodern conditions. However, it is necessary to attempt to re-evaluate existing discourses and see alternate possibilities.

The mainstream economic discourse is currently also termed as modernist economics, and its intent is to construct a “universal model,” which can be applied to any situation, in any period of history, and in any culture by using a series of mathematical equations.<sup>9</sup> Arjo Klamer argues that it has become obsolete in terms of theorizing global capitalism while modernist economics remains a dominant economic discourse.<sup>10</sup> He points out that one of the characteristics of modernism that might have caused this obsolescence is an institutional structure exists in the culture of academia, and he draws an interesting parallel to modernist art practice:

One characteristic of modernism, revealed in the disciplines of the arts as well as economics, is the conscious separation of the discipline from others. Painters historically separated themselves from sculptors; they also separated themselves from the “public” and continue to consider other painters their main audience... A similar trend is discernible in economics. Along with professionalization, the language of [modernist]

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<sup>9</sup> Arjo Klamer, “Late Modernism and the Loss of Character in Economics.” *Postmodernism, Economics and Knowledge*. Stephen Cullenberg, Jack Amariglio and David F. Ruccio. (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 87-8. Klamer is currently Professor in the Economics of Art and Culture at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>10</sup> Klamer., 77.

economics has become more complex and difficult. When the mathematical strategy took over from institutional, empirical and discursive approaches, academic economics got out of reach for non-Ph.D.s or those Ph.D.s who work outside academia or the major research institutes. Thus communication turned inward.<sup>11</sup>

This reference to the notions of modernity and postmodernity in the disciplines of the arts requires us to address how these notions are constructed. Madan Sarup suggests that the term “postmodern” is used and discussed in many artistic, intellectual and academic fields in contemporary Western societies.<sup>12</sup> The author claims that in understanding of a group of terms including “modernity,” “postmodernity,” “modernization” and “modernism” it is necessary to talk about the term “postmodernism.”<sup>13</sup> According to Sarup, the term modernity “implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and differentiation of the social world.”<sup>14</sup> The notion of modernity was originated in the Renaissance period and was “defined in relation to Antiquity,” establishing social, economic and political structures in the West.<sup>15</sup>

Postmodernity is defined as the fragmentation of these social, economic and political systems that are associated with modernity.<sup>16</sup> It is also considered to be a movement towards a post-industrial era. This poses a question: is postmodernity a continuation of modernity or a radical shift away from it?<sup>17</sup> Sarup explains that postmodernity focuses on diversity in terms of individual and social identity, suggesting that “the autonomous subject has been dispersed into a range of plural, polymorphous subject-positions inscribed within language.”<sup>18</sup> Other conditions that are associated with the term postmodernity are “a pluralistic and open democracy,” “an awareness of contingency and ambivalence,” “universal consumerism,” and “pleasure principle.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Campbell, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 129. Sarup (1930-1993) was a Lecturer in the Sociology of Education at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

<sup>13</sup> Sarup, 129.

<sup>14</sup> Sarup, 130.

<sup>15</sup> Sarup, 130.

<sup>16</sup> Sarup, 130.

<sup>17</sup> Sarup, 130.

<sup>18</sup> Sarup, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Sarup, 130.

These conditions are the results and/ or consequences of “modernization.” The term refers to the stages of social development under industrialization in the West, generating socio-economic changes through scientific and technological advancement.<sup>20</sup> Modernization is driven by the expanding capitalist global market, which effects movements of capital and labor, urbanization, the formation of national states and mass political movements.<sup>21</sup>

According to Sarup, modernization has to be distinguished from the term “modernism.” Modernism refers to the artistic movement consisting of “a particular set of cultural or aesthetic styles” originated around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Sarup describes the term as follows:

Modernism developed in conscious opposition to classicism; it emphasized experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind surface appearance... The basic features of modernism can be summarized as: an aesthetic self-consciousness and reflexiveness; a rejection of narrative structure in favour of simultaneity and montage; an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain, open-ended nature of reality; and the rejection of the notion of integrated personality in favour of an emphasis upon the Freudian “split” subject...<sup>23</sup>

As Sarup mentions, the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is rather unclear because these characteristics of modernism are shared with definitions of the postmodernism as well. The term postmodernism is associated with an art movement under advanced capitalist conditions<sup>24</sup>. It originated in the 1960s among artists and critics in New York, and became a concern for European theorists in the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> For example, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by Jean-François Lyotard, French philosopher and cultural theorist, was published in 1979, questioning the notion of “the grand narratives,” which has supported the idea that “progressive liberation of humanity through science, and the idea that philosophy can restore unity to learning and develop universally valid knowledge for

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<sup>20</sup> Sarup, 131.

<sup>21</sup> Sarup, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Sarup, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Sarup, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Sarup, 131.

<sup>25</sup> Sarup, 131.

humanity.”<sup>26</sup> Postmodern theory questions and critiques the notion of universal knowledge and foundationalism.<sup>27</sup> Lyotard also questions the source of knowledge itself—“who decides what knowledge is? Who knows what needs to be decided?”<sup>28</sup>

How did postmodern theory affect the visual arts? One of the consequences was “the deletion of the boundary between art and everyday life.”<sup>29</sup> With the emergence of Conceptual Art, enabling the idea itself to be artwork, artists started exploring the outside of the “art world,” expanding the discourse to social, cultural, political, historical and economic issues. Another dominant critical theory within the postmodern paradigm is postcolonialism, which investigates the notion of the “other” in a historical and social context. It is also a critique of the power relationship between the West and “non-West”, tracing back what was left out in relation to the notion of the grand narrative. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a leading postcolonial critic, points out not only the importance of investigating what is left out in the narrative, but also the importance of understanding functions of narratives in general:

...I think what they [Jacques Derrida and Lyotard] are noticing is that we cannot but narrate. So, it's not a question of waging war on narratives, but they're realizing that the impulse to narrate is not necessarily a solution to problems in the world. So, what they're interested in is looking at the limits of narration, looking at narrativity, making up stories that tell us, “This is history,” or making up stories that tell us, “This is the programme to bring about social justice.” They're looking at that in a certain way as symptomatic of the solution. We must work with them, but there are also problems. But the other problem also is that in a narrative, as you proceed along the narrative, the narrative takes on its own impetus as it were, so that one begins to see reality as non-narrated. One begins to say that it's not a narrative, it's the way things are.<sup>30</sup>

Spivak provides insightful understanding for the nature and function of narratives from her deconstructivist perspective. This is a distinctive characteristic of postmodern discourse, which separates it from that of modernism.

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<sup>26</sup> Sarup, 132.

<sup>27</sup> Sarup, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Sarup, 134.

<sup>29</sup> Sarup, 132.

<sup>30</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Post-modern Condition: The End of Politics?” (Geoffrey Hawthorn, Gayatri Spivak, Ron Aronson, Johan Dunn). *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Sarah Harasym (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1990), 19.



How about in the discipline of economics? Klamer's argument suggests the necessity for alternatives in economic discourse. As in contemporary art discourse, the shift from modernism to postmodernism within the discipline of economics has been argued, and its validity has been debated. Also pointing to the necessity for alternatives, Sheila Dow describes her approach to modernist economics and lists methodological characteristics that contribute to the concept of modernity in economics. Dow calls an attention to the "unifying method," conflicting with contemporary economic conditions, which are characterized as fragmented rather than unified as a result of globalization. According to Dow, the complexities of the contemporary economic system have led economists to introduce the pluralistic methodology as an alternative, requiring us to examine its validity.<sup>31</sup>

One has to question the term "validity." What does validity mean? How is validity going to be validated? By whom? For what purposes? Although Klamer's research focuses on modernism and postmodernism within contemporary economic discourse, he suggests that this debate is a pure construction by academics for academics, in this case, economists:

The buzz about modernism and postmodernism seems to indicate that there are real presences of "modernisms" and "postmodernisms" out there. Use the terms a lot and they become real. In the meantime they are characterizations that are meant to capture elusive and complex "realities." In line with the postmodernist stance, we come to think of them as social constructions that serve as tools to sustain endless conversations in support of mainly academic communities.<sup>32</sup>

Klamer's argument leads to another question: how do modernism and postmodernism "exist" in contemporary economic discourse? As in critical literary theory, conditions of modernity and postmodernity seem to coexist within economic discourse. "Post" in postmodernism is used to mean continuous "reactions against" modernism rather than "after" modernism. Postmodernist economics reflects certain characteristics that have become prominent due to the globalization of capital through the neo-imperialistic economic model. The

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<sup>31</sup> Sheila Dow, "Modernism and Postmodernism: A Dialectical Analysis." *Postmodernism, Economics and Knowledge*. Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio. (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 67. Dow holds a Personal Chair in Economics at the University of Stirling, Scotland, UK.

<sup>32</sup> Klamer, 78.

forces and consequences of neo-imperialism, manifested in the ideology of globalization, had led to a shift in economic discourse. Klammer's approach to postmodernism points out the difficult challenge not only for economists but also for academics in other disciplines and addresses the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to the understandings of the global world.

Postmodernism and postcolonialism have established the foundation for more "comprehensive modes" of art production and created the condition where it requires alternative means of cultural production—interdisciplinary approaches to art making. The notion of "interdisciplinary approaches" can be traced back to 1947.<sup>33</sup> "Area Studies" were established and funded by federal grants in order to develop the United States' military superiority during the Cold War with the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup>

To meet the demands of war, scholars of diverse disciplines were forced to pool their knowledge in frantic attempts to advise administrators and policy makers...The war also showed the need for trained personnel for most foreign areas...In these Army Specialized Training Programs and Civil Affairs Training Schools many professors had their first experience with curricula organized by area rather than by discipline, and many students made a real beginning in the study of foreign areas and in their languages...<sup>35</sup>

Area studies and cultural studies played a key role in the establishment of interdisciplinarity in postmodern critical theory, and this methodology is reflected in the works of a certain group of contemporary artists. In his article, "The Artist as Ethnographer," Hal Foster suggests a new paradigm, "the artist as ethnographer" within postmodern art discourse.<sup>36</sup> Foster mentions Anne and Patrick Poirier and Charles Simonds as examples of artists whose works reflect anthropological and archaeological approaches to art making.<sup>37</sup> Although Foster introduces the notion of this new paradigm within the framework of contemporary art discourse, he is skeptical about the validity of interdisciplinarity, which is an intrinsic element of the artist as ethnographer paradigm.

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<sup>33</sup> Spivak, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Spivak, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Spivak., 7. This passage is from the introduction to the "national conference on the study of world areas, which was held in New York on November 28-30, 1947.

<sup>36</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), 172.

<sup>37</sup> Foster, 182

Charles Gaines points out in his text “Note from the Editor” that the notion of interdisciplinarity has been misdefined as “a lack of discipline” in contemporary art criticism.<sup>38</sup> Gaines refers to the article, “Artforum-ism, or the Mythical Andy Warhol” (1999) written by Juli Carson, as a reflection of this confusion created by the new mode of art production stemming the merger of “two distinctive areas of academic discourse: interdisciplinarity and cultural studies.”<sup>39</sup> Gaines disagrees with Carson’s claim of interdisciplinarity as a lack of discipline:

Carson links cultural studies together with the new “interdisciplinarity”—lacking in discipline—and, by doing so, defines cultural studies as populist. But this conflation reveals a hidden agenda within her critique. Carson’s argument dismisses the idea held by many cultural theorists that issue of identity and differences are ideologically dismissed by those disciplines that traditionally control the production of knowledge. The defense of “disciplines” appeals to the interests of writers who are invested in “high art” and runs contrary to the interests of artists who wish to produce in a less fettered environment.<sup>40</sup>

Gaines points out a split within contemporary art discourse—practicing artists vs. the rest of the professional art world, including curators, critics and art historians. By defending their own professional territories, curators, critics and art historians are unable to obtain the proper tools to observe the complexity of artistic production in the interdisciplinary era. It seems that a formulation of the “new” art history is crucial. Otherwise, this gap will only be widen, and a “killing of the author” paradigm, suggested by Dave Hickey, will be the norm in art discourse.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, the complexity associated with art work produced in an interdisciplinary environment is even more complex now under globalization. Twenty-first century capitalism is escalating the speed of globalization to the point where it is no longer possible to distinguish between global and local. To put it in a postcolonial framework, it is an era of hybridity. In her book, *The Death of a Discipline*, Spivak quotes Toby Alice Volkman to address issues of hybridity and interdisciplinarity:

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Gaines, “Note from the Editor.” *Yard*. (Los Angeles) no.1. Fall 2004, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Gaines, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Gaines, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Based on a comment Dave Hickey made during his lecture for Art Symposium at UCSB on February 23, 2005. “Killing of the author” was defined as the deletion of any pertinent information about an artist and his/ her work in interpreting a work of art (by curators, critics and art historians).

Recent developments have challenged some of the premises of area studies itself. The notion, for example, that the world can be divided into knowable, self-contained “areas” has come into question as more attention has been paid to movements between areas. Demographic shifts, diasporas, labor migrations, the movements of global capital and media, and processes of cultural circulation and hybridization have encouraged a more subtle and sensitive reading of areas’ identity and composition.<sup>42</sup>

The notions of hybridity and interdisciplinarity have become fundamental to the discourse of postmodern art production in relation to social, political, economical and cultural conditions. They are also crucial concepts that provide a framework for my work as well. The second half of this paper will illustrate how my artwork could be placed within postmodern art discourse.

According to Klamer, postmodernist economic discourse also resists any single definition or label because of the fragmented nature of its pluralistic conditions.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, postmodern discourse produces inconsistencies and incompleteness, which cannot be explained by modernist or postmodernist economics.<sup>44</sup> Klamer states, “No characterization [of postmodernist economics] will withstand a well executed deconstructive move, certainly not a simple one like ‘postmodernist economics.’ So what are we talking about? The least we can do in the postmodernist spirit is to erase the concept as soon as we use it.”<sup>45</sup> This complexity associated with postmodern conditions prevents us from producing any stable and coherent answers that are desired within academia; therefore, postmodernist economics is often criticized for its inability to provide answers to its own questions.

In contrast, there are economists who are advocates for postmodernist economics as the solution for problems that are not answered by modernist economics. According to Stephen Cullenberg, Jack Amariglio and David F. Ruccio, the notion of postmodernity is a relatively new development within economic discourse.<sup>46</sup> The authors argue that postmodern economics

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<sup>42</sup> Toby Alice Volkman, *Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies*. (New York: Ford Foundation, 1999), ix.

Quoted in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> Klamer, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Klamer, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Klamer, 78.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Cullenberg, Jack Amariglio and David F. Ruccio. “Introduction.” *Postmodernism, Economics and Knowledge*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 5. Cullenberg is Chair of the Department of Economics at University of California, Riverside. Amariglio is Professor of Economics at Merrimack College, North Andover, Massachusetts. Ruccio is Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Notre Dame.

emerged when modernist economics was not capable of addressing the issues of “anomalies and fragmentations” caused by the globalization of capital.<sup>47</sup> The notion of “anomalies and fragmentations” requires diverse and interdisciplinary approaches that are moving away from the idea of “universalist science,” suggesting the necessity of emergence of postmodern economics as the dominant economic discipline.<sup>48</sup>

So, the question remains: what is postmodernist economics? What are its characteristics and properties? Although it is impossible to define the term, it is helpful to see and examine how postmodernist economics functions under neo-Imperialistic and global circumstances. In the discipline of economics, postmodernism can be categorized as “a particular stage in the life history of modern capitalist economies.”<sup>49</sup> In addition, postmodernism can be identified as a condition, or a state of existence, describing the cultural and social dominant structures within which we experience contemporaneous economic discourses.<sup>50</sup>

The process of understanding the qualities of postmodernism facilitates the re-examination of existing discourses. It forces us to critique the nature and validity of the notion of knowledge in comparison to the constraints of modernism.<sup>51</sup> Lyotard also makes a comparison in the characteristics between modernity and postmodernity and provides a framework for a postmodern condition that is applicable for various academic disciplines. Lyotard’s characterization of postmodernity is “the loss of *metanarratives*” which has been celebrated in modernist discourses.<sup>52</sup> Lyotard’s approach points out that the ideas of universal truth and monolithic methodologies are obsolete in the postmodern condition, allowing for plurality to exist.<sup>53</sup>

Has the shift from modernity to postmodernity caused a change in the fundamental premise of economics and economic thought? How can mainstream modernist economists

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<sup>47</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio., 5

<sup>52</sup> Klamer, 85.

<sup>53</sup> Klamer, 85.

analyze their discourse when postmodernist economists say that it is impossible to pin anything down? Or should we at least attempt to pin something down? According to Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, the use of postmodern critique within mainstream economic discourse is limited; however, it has been useful for economists “who seek more visibility for their approaches or who wish to displace entirely the long tradition of neoclassical economic theory as dominant within the field.”<sup>54</sup> Here, postmodernist economics is used as a tactic or tool against modernist economics, as an alternative rather than the investigation of the present.

Dow defines the term postmodernism within economic discourse as an advanced stage of modernism, critiquing the modernist idea of regularities identified by means of “unitary facts.”<sup>55</sup> In response to modernist ideology, Dow suggests that a postmodernist approach requires awareness of multiple perspectives creating different theories, which exist in context-specific environments.<sup>56</sup> The notion of context specificity is a crucial element in dealing with the postmodern condition. Its contrasting relationship with the idea of globalism is an important element in looking at the contemporary world today.

So, how does this postmodern economics, which has been driven by globalization of capital, relate to us, cultural productions and creation of identities in the twenty-first century? Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio connect the ideas between neo-imperialism and culture by pointing out characteristics of postmodernity that are foundations to their respective value structures. This connection between ideas of neo-imperialism and culture creates mechanisms of producing meaning in various disciplines:

Postmodern styles in music, art, architecture, literature, philosophy, and culture have brought to the fore the undecidability of meaning, the discursivity of the non-discursive, the inconceivability of pure “presence,” the irrelevance of intention, the insuperability of authenticity, the impossibility of representation, along with the celebration of play, difference, plurality, chance, inconsequence, and marginality... That is, postmodernism as style affects the fundamental determinations of “value” and “meaning” as they are encountered throughout the social and cultural landscape.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 34-5.

<sup>55</sup> Dow, 74.

<sup>56</sup> Dow, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 15-6.

Berch Berberoglu claims that globalization fosters cultural imperialism. The author argues that the global expansion of capital through neo-imperialism “involves the imposition of capitalist cultural values on other precapitalist or noncapitalist societies to integrate them into the world capitalist system.”<sup>58</sup> The notion of integration is important here so that proto-capitalists will have a framework provided by imperialists in order for them to sustain capitalistic economic activities. Berberoglu argues that the transformation of belief systems and cultural practices is significant in order to ensure capitalistic sustainability, and he makes a connection between economic interests of sustainability and culture:

The dominant values promoted by globalization become the new values that are adopted by societies around the world. Such values are easily translated into consumerism, private accumulations, and other individualistic practices, rather than cooperation and collective/communal values that foster socialism. Thus, the globalization of capital is able in this way to promote the globalization of capitalist values and capitalist culture to legitimize the capitalist system on a worldwide basis.<sup>59</sup>

The conditions of globalization and localized specificity under cultural imperialism are complex and ambiguous because concepts such as “culture” and “nationhood” have to be re-defined continuously. I vividly remember my experience of reverse culture shock when I went back to Japan for three months after spending four years in California. My “Japaneseness” stopped in 1992. I could not relate to my high school best friends anymore. I realized for the first time that I was no longer Japanese nor yet was I “Imperialist American.” I was in an “in-between” space of cultural identity.

However, one must question how one can define these terms, such as “Japanese” or “American” under the postmodern condition where Japanese people eat at Denny’s in Osaka, and American people drive Honda Accords in Tennessee. How do we understand what these terms are and what they mean? It seems that it is necessary to reconsider the concept of national identity. It is not a car that you are driving nor a meal that we eat, but it is a structure that is

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<sup>58</sup> Berch Berberoglu, *Globalization of Capital and the Nation-State: Imperialism, Class Struggle, and the State in the Age of Global Capitalism*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2003), 6. Berberoglu is Foundation Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology at the University of Nevada, Reno.

<sup>59</sup> Berberoglu, 6.

creating this condition that I am questioning. How does American neo-imperialism affect one's cultural identity in contemporary Japan? Are we really part of a global entity? Is the notion of "difference" obsolete in terms of nationality under globalization? Or does the existence of "the Other" accentuate the differences?

Fredric Jameson, the American cultural theorist, characterizes postmodern culture as a by-product of global economic activities, and argues that postmodernism is "the cultural form of the latest phase of capitalist development."<sup>60</sup> Jameson calls this phase "late capitalism," and there are three identifying aspects:

- 1) mass commodification,
- 2) a shift in the location and condition of global production,
- 3) the rise of new industries (mostly information technologies) that allow for the unbroken worldwide expansion of capitalist markets and, hence, profitability.<sup>61</sup>

Under the American neo-imperialistic economy, cultural interactions between Japan and America function within the parameters of capitalistic discourse. Culture is commodified and "exported" through mechanisms of neo-imperialism. Exporting culture to another country can be seen as part of a process of economic "natural selection," meaning that which sells stays in the market, and that which does not sell leaves the market. Although it seems like the modernist idea of "*laissez-faire*" doctrine at work, this equation exists in the neo-imperialistic condition. In addition, even though this *laissez-faire* ideology has helped Japan's economic success to the point of "Japan bashing" in the United States in the early 1990s, the current global economy is a neo-imperialistic market, which does not operate under the "invisible hand" that modernist economists suggest as a free market equilibrium. This "invisible hand" is nearly visible because it is instituted and controlled by the dominant neo-imperialist including the United States. Therefore, the hybridity of culture is also controlled under the neo-imperialistic model, and this

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<sup>60</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 6.



cultural hybridity seems to progress in increments of adjustments in subordinate countries, transmuting themselves under the neo-imperialistic conditions.

As one makes incremental cultural and value adjustments, is it possible to locate the hybrid cultural identity under current global conditions? What does it mean to be “Japanese” or “American” in the neo-imperialist era? Homi K. Bhabha establishes the framework for analyzing contemporary culture and society in relation to the notion of identity. Bhabha suggests that it is necessary to locate culture in the realm of the *beyond*:

The move away from the singularities of “class” or “gender” as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions — of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation — that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think *beyond* narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself.<sup>62</sup>

When I went back to Japan in the winter of 2006, I was ready to be an “outsider” because I knew I was no longer “Japanese.” I thought I was prepared, but it was harder than I thought it would be. Not only could I not relate to my friends from high school (once again), but, I had a difficult time dealing with my parents. What happened to this globalization of culture? I thought we were moving forward to this “global identity,” in which we share multiple cultures and understand differences. Suddenly, everything seemed “local” rather than “global,” and I started to question the validity of this dichotomy.

I went to Tokyo to visit my childhood friend, Morimoto Junko. We went to elementary school together. When we met up at a café on the 67<sup>th</sup> floor of a hotel complex (I think it was in The Four Seasons Hotel) looking out over the night view of Tokyo, of course, we were talking

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<sup>62</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

about boys and relationships. In the previous year, Junko had attended an English language school for one year in London where she met “Steve.” Having to return to Japan, Junko was having a long distance relationship with “Steve” who still lived in London when I was visiting with her. Junko kept saying how “Steve” was a フェミニスト. She talked about how he opened doors for her, carried her grocery bags and so on. I did not ask her what she meant by “feminist” because I could imagine reasons why the act of opening doors for women by itself made men “feminist” in Japan. The term “feminist” could be a “global” term, but the historical knowledge and meaning could be very culturally and context specific since cultural and ideological terms are adopted, transmuted and localized.

The next day, I went to the Mori Art Museum in Roppongi Hills in Tokyo. The exhibition titled, *Answer with Yes and No!*, by the Japanese artist Ozawa Tsuyoshi was on display, and it was the artist’s mid-career retrospective exhibition. I almost cried when I saw one of his video pieces about *できるかな*, which was my favorite TV show growing up in Japan. Ozawa’s video piece consisted of footage of the artist acting as one of two characters of the show, *のっぽさん*, and audio appropriating the show’s theme song. Although Ozawa actively shows internationally, his work is very culturally specific, and this piece was also generation specific. For example, my sister who is six years younger than I am and who left Japan when she was twelve would not have the same reaction and understanding as I did about this piece. So, what is the role of this specificity and its relation to globalism? How do we locate this specificity within the framework of locality? How does this locality function in the notion of nationhood in the neo-imperialist era?

When I lived in Fresno, I used the dry heat sauna and steam room at the gym. I would be sweating in my bikini, making me feel very vulnerable. This area of the gym was known as a hang out for middle-aged Asian women. I was often asked, “Are you Chinese?,” “Are you from Korea?,” and “Do you speak Vietnamese?” by these women who seemed very comfortable being naked in public spaces. When I had to answer, “No, I am not. I am from Japan,” I felt really bad for some reasons. At the same time, I thought it was a lame question. Why does it matter where

I am from or what language I speak? What if anyone asked “Are you Japanese?” instead? I don't care much about “Japan” any more, and am I supposed to feel guilty about it? Does the nationality matter anyway in this multinational/ racial environment? Just the fact that I and these women lived in Fresno, I had more in common with these women at the gym than my parents and my best friends from high school in Japan. How does the notion of collective memories operate in a process of creating nationhood in neo-imperialistic society? It seems the notion of nationality is obsolete, but can we totally ignore the concept of nationhood and nationality?

During his Sorbonne lecture in 1882, Ernest Renan, French philosopher and writer, described the concept of nation as the following:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in the undivided form.<sup>63</sup>

A century later, Benedict Anderson argues that we are at the “end of the era of nationalism.”<sup>64</sup> Anderson claims that although the concept of nation-ness is “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time,” it is very difficult to define and to analyze.<sup>65</sup> Anderson argues that the difficulty of defining the term originated from the following three paradoxes:

- (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.
- (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept — in the modern world everyone can, should, will “have” a nationality as he or she “has” a gender — vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, “Greek” nationality is *sui generis*.
- (3) The “political” power of nationalism vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. In other words, unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers.

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<sup>63</sup> Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” Lecture at Sorbonne, 11 March 1882. In *Discours et Conférences*, Paris, Calman-Levy, 1887, 1887, pp.277-310; also in *Becoming National: A Reader*. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny. (ed.) (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 41-55.

<sup>64</sup> Benedict Anderson, “Introduction.” *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1991), 3. Anderson is a professor emeritus of International Studies at Cornell University.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson, 3.

This “emptiness” easily gives rise, among cosmopolitan and polylingual intellectuals, to certain condescension...<sup>66</sup>

In spite of these paradoxes, Anderson has come up with a workable definition of the concept of the nation. The author illustrates that the nation is “an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>67</sup> He explains that it is “imagined” because the members of the nation create this imaginary bond of the community in their minds although they have not met nor known each other.<sup>68</sup> In other words, the bond does not exist other than in their imagination of camaraderie.<sup>69</sup> Ania Loomba states, “nationalism is also created by people, narratives and perspectives beyond its own imaginings, and more limited because, when placed within this larger context, its scope, ambitions and reach are revealed as severely constructed.”<sup>70</sup> In responding to Anderson’s notion of “Imagined Communities” as a nation, Loomba argues that nations are communities created not by forging bonds, but rather by fracturing or disallowing others.<sup>71</sup> Within the postcolonial framework, Loomba points out that the process of nationhood is forged not by “invoking and remembering certain versions of the past, but making sure that others are forgotten or repressed,” and argues that nations are “continuously being re-imagined.”<sup>72</sup> Under this circumstance, the notion of history and investigation of historiography become crucial elements in the never-ending questioning of the concept of national identity.

In this paper, I have argued for an evaluation of neo-imperialism as a cause in the shift from modernist to postmodernist economics and a foundation of cultural and national identities. It seems important to point out the vehicle that makes it possible for neo-imperialism to expand. Today, the military and political power of the United States expands through the world under the

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<sup>66</sup> Anderson, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Anderson, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, 6-7.

<sup>70</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 201.

<sup>71</sup> Loomba, 202.

<sup>72</sup> Loomba, 202.

propaganda of “antiterrorism.”<sup>73</sup> Since World War II, the United States has demonstrated that she could “grow rich and powerful” through global conflict.<sup>74</sup> One can observe the transformation of the nature of warfare over the past 60 years, in which war has been driven by neo-imperialistic intentions.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri address issues of globalization of war and provide a new meaning to the notion of war. The authors argue that war has become “the general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination” regardless of military involvement.<sup>75</sup> The authors define this condition as a *regime of biopower*, which is “a form of rule aimed not only at controlling the population but producing and reproducing all aspects of social life.”<sup>76</sup> This “form of rule” is closely associated and motivated with capitalistic intentions, and this condition must involve the “continuous, uninterrupted exercise of power and violence.”<sup>77</sup> Further research is needed to re-evaluate roles and functions of war in an era of neo-imperialistic capitalism.

Another interesting research in the area of neo-imperialism is to look into means of reinventing and legitimizing alternatives to global capitalism at both conceptual and practical levels.<sup>78</sup> Are there really alternatives? Is it a sustainable alternative? What are the motives behind alternate structures? After analyzing six hundred-years of capitalist history, Arrighi imagines a post-capitalist world as the following:

...it may well burn up in the horrors (or glories) of the escalating violence that has accompanied the liquidation of the Cold War world order. In this case, capitalist history would also come to an end but by reverting permanently to the systemic chaos from

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<sup>73</sup> Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela (eds.), *Postcolonialism Meets Economics*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1. Zein-Elabdin is Associate Professor and Chair of the Economics Department at Franklin & Marshall College, Pennsylvania. Charusheela is Assistant Professor of Women’s Studies at the University of Hawai’i.

<sup>74</sup> Arrighi, 276.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Hardt and Negri, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Hardt and Negri, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Liu Kang, “Debate about Modernity in China,” *The Cultures of Globalization*. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. (eds.) (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 183. Kang is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University.

which it began six hundred years ago and which has been reproduced on an ever-increasing scale with each transition. Whether this would mean the end just of capitalist history or of all human history, it is impossible to tell.<sup>79</sup>

Although it might still be impossible to tell how the end of capitalism will be framed, we have observed a paradigm shift since Arrighi wrote this passage in 1994. We have experienced this shift as a series of incidents which have occurred since the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. It not only reflects the idea of perpetual global war that Hardt and Negri address in their book, but also it seems beyond the objectivity of democracy and capitalism. In addition, the idea and consequence of global war seem to produce “life,” which can be defined as economic activities sustaining our everyday existences in capitalistic society. Under this circumstance, I must ask myself: How does it influence my work? What is my role in the postmodern era as a cultural producer?

Since the end of World War II, the notion of postmodernism has seemed to dominate contemporary art discourse. How can one “rethink” postmodernism now in the post “9/11” era? What are the roles of artists in postmodern interdisciplinarity? Within the realm of postmodern critical theory, one is required to re-define every aspect of life and place the notion of “present” in a context of historical development. The questioning and analyzing of cultural discourse in relation to society is one of the viable new roles for producers. It seems that questioning does not necessary lead to “the answer” anymore but poses new questions due to the complexity of the postmodern global world.

One month after the September 11 attack, on October 10, 2001, Howard Zinn gave a lecture at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. His lecture was titled *Artists in Times of War*, and Zinn spoke about critical roles that artists should play in society:

So, the word, *transcendent* comes to mind when I think of the role of the artist in dealing with the issues of the day. I use that word to suggest that the role of the artist is to transcend conventional wisdom, to transcend the word of the establishment, to transcend the orthodoxy, to go beyond and escape what is handed down by the government or what is said in the media...It is the job of the artist to transcend that [the perimeter of

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<sup>79</sup> Arrighi, 356.

power]—to think outside of the boundaries of permissible thought and dare to say things that no one else will say.<sup>80</sup>

Addressing the idea of oppositionality is one form of questioning and analyzing the existing discourses and institutional structures built around it. Judith Barry suggests, “For me, the question becomes not how to oppose the ‘dominant cultures,’ whatever they may be and however they may constitute their aims, but instead, how to effect and transform the institutions that shape these dominant discourses,” in order, presumably, to facilitate and create new dominant discourses.<sup>81</sup> It is essential to promote continuous critical dialogues not only within an educational framework but also through everyday decisions that we make. As a 21<sup>st</sup> century citizen of the world, our everyday life activities are strapped around global capitalism as a consumer. Long celebrated notions of Democracy, capitalism and individualism that are considered fundamental principles in pursuit of liberty and freedom must be re-examined and re-defined. We, the artists and content creators, have tremendous responsibility to our community and future generations as what we create should impact the present, inspiring change for the future.

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<sup>80</sup> Howard Zinn, “Artists in Times of War.” *Artists in Times of War*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 11-14.

<sup>81</sup> Judith Barry, “Critical Forums: The Organization of Oppositionality.” (Judith Barry, Papo Colo, David Deitcher, Isabelle Graw, Brian Wallis, Dan Walworth, Fred Wilson). *Acme Journal*. (New York) vol 1, no.2, 1992, 13.

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