

Professor Immanuel Wallerstein: The World System & Capitalist Modernity

Programme

28-29th June 2012 University of York

5.15pm 28th June 2012

Public Lecture in PX/001 (Physics, York University, Heslington Campus)

**The structural crisis of the capitalist world-system:
How serious? How Long? Endpoint?**

10.30am-5pm 29th June 2012

Research Response Day in Bowland (Berrick Saul Building, York University, Heslington Campus)

World Systems Research Day

These events have been sponsored by:

The Centre for Modern Studies; Department of English and Related Literature; and the Sociology Department at York.

York's Distinguished Visitor's Fund, the Pump Priming Fund, and the Festival of Ideas.

Plus: Middlesex University, University College Dublin and Warwick University.

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The Visit of Professor Immanuel Wallerstein (Yale) 28-29th June 2012 University of York

5.15pm 28th June 2012

Public Lecture in PX/001 (Physics, York University, Main Heslington Campus)

The structural crisis of the capitalist world-system: How serious? How Long? Endpoint?

Followed by a wine reception and book signing

This public lecture will examine the structural crisis of the capitalist world system, especially as it has been experienced in recent years. It will place this within a historical and sociological understanding of the capitalist world system. Finally, it will look at how long such a crisis can continue and what may constitute and bring about its end point.

Professor Wallerstein is a globally renowned academic currently at Yale as a Senior Research Scholar in the Department of Sociology. Since the 1970s he has become a crucial critical commentator on the development, expansion, and form of capitalist modernity. His work has been foundational to the development of world systems analysis and his primary areas of expertise are:

- the historical development of the modern world-system
- the contemporary capitalist world-economy
- structures and systems of knowledge

On 28th June Professor Wallerstein's lecture will be followed by Will Gompertze (BBC) interviewing John Lanchester about his new novel *Capital* - 7.15pm in P/X/001.

All listed speakers for 29th June (below) have had tickets booked for them to allow entry into both the lecture by Immanuel Wallerstein and the follow up session with John Lanchester.

Additional Free tickets for the Wallerstein public lecture can be obtained online from:
<http://immanuelwallerstein.eventbrite.co.uk/>

Dinner in York City Centre for Professor Wallerstein and invited guests

World Systems Research Day

29th June 2012

10.30am Welcome – Dr Claire Westall (University of York)

10.40am-12noon

PANEL 1: Inter/Trans-disciplinary Responses to The Wallersteinian World System

Chair: Dr James Graham (University of Middlesex), who will also be acting as discussant and bringing issues of parochialism and the world system into the debate.

Dr Jeremy Gilbert (University of East London), 'Anti-capitalism and the world system'

Professor Stephen Shapiro (University of Warwick), 'Occupy and the world system'

Dr Benjamin Selwyn (University of Sussex), 'Uneven and Combined Development and World Systems Theory: Synergies, Disjunctures and New Roads Ahead'

Dr Aaron Pitluck (European Central University and Illinois State University), 'Voice, Exit and Ventriloquism: Our capacity to reshape finance'

This panel will include a set of short papers, each 10 mins, on the topics identified, and a more open discussion across the panelists and chair that relates these areas, ideas and debates to the work of Professor Wallerstein, his public lecture, and the implications of world systems analysis.

LUNCH 12 -1pm

1pm-2.10pm

PANEL 2: WReC Round Table – Three Questions for World-Systems Literary Analysis

Chair: Dr Sorcha Gunne (University of Warwick)

Professor Neil Lazarus (University of Warwick), 'World-System and Literary World-System: Theoretical Problems and Possibilities'

Plus, round table discussion with **Professor Benita Parry**, **Professor Stephen Shapiro** and **Dr Nick Lawrence** from Warwick University, responding to three key critical questions:

- 1) What is the relation of world-systems history to world-literary systems?
- 2) How does the specificity of capitalist history inflect the disciplinarity of world literature?
- 3) In what ways does 'combined and uneven development' augment and/or challenge world-systems analysis as applied to literary-cultural studies?

Discussants: Professor Derek Attridge & Professor David Attwell

(English & Related Literature, University of York)

DRINKS BREAK

2.25pm-3.40pm

PANEL 3: World Cities and World Ecologies

Chair: Dr Malachi McIntosh (University of Warwick)

Professor Peter Taylor (University of Loughborough), 'Cities in World-Systems Analysis'

Prof Ted Benton (University of Essex), 'Ecological historical materialism and world system analysis'

Dr Michael Niblett (University of Warwick), 'World-System, World-Ecology, World Literature'

3.50pm-5pm

PANEL 4: Games, Risks and Neoliberalism

Chair: Dr Claire Westall (University of York)

Dr Nicky Marsh (Southampton University), 'Consenting Adults?: Risk and Sex in the Financial Economy'

Dr Jane Elliott (Kings College London), 'Game Theory of Thrones: Fantasy, Destiny, Neoliberalism'

Dr Sharae Deckard (University College Dublin), 'Mapping the World-System: (Ir)realist Aesthetics and Neoliberal Crisis'

Close & Thanks

Dinner in York City Centre

Abstracts

Professor Peter Taylor (University of Loughborough)

Cities in World-Systems Analysis

The modern world-system can be considered a great 'social machine' for taking peasants off the land and depositing them into cities to become urban workers. We are seeing the last major episode in this mega-process in contemporary China. This paper focuses upon the pull factor in rural-urban migration. The attractiveness of cities can be reduced to one word: jobs. In other words cities are loci of economic growth. This argument leads us to the oeuvre of Jane Jacobs; like Immanuel Wallerstein she eschewed the notion that there are 'national economies' but she replaced them by city-economies rather than world-economies. I report on my efforts to bring Jacobs' ideas into world-systems analysis through investigating historical city networks.

Professor Ted Benton (University of Essex)

Ecological historical materialism and world system analysis

Neoclassical economics, in the shape of 'environmental economics', seeks to integrate environmental costs into economic analysis by way of the notion of 'natural capital', and various more or less ingenious ways of assigning economic value to environmental goods and bads. Despite the conceptual incoherence of this cluster of ideas, the outcome is a set of reform measures that promise to moderate the environmental damage imposed by capital accumulation to some degree. However, the record so far is very limited, both in terms of the depth of the reforms and their geographical scope.

Alternative approaches conceptualise ecological degradation in terms of dynamics endemic to capitalist economic, social and political relations. Drawing, with more or less revision, on Marxian critical political economy, these approaches tend to see intensifying ecological crisis as a necessary feature of the current phase of capitalist 'development': 'sustainability' implies a transition beyond capitalism. O'Connor's concept of a 'second contradiction' of capitalism, and the idea of a 'metabolic rift' (Foster and others) endemic to capitalism are two very fertile developments in this tradition.

However, it is arguable that the exponents of these developments have so far not fully linked these ideas to a thoroughly worked-out account of the global-scale dynamics of capital accumulation and geopolitical divisions. Proponents of world system analysis have, in recent years, paid increasing attention to ecological degradation and a dimension of global political economy. This talk will consider the relationship between these convergent bodies of thought.

Dr Michael Niblett (University of Warwick)

Building on Immanuel Wallerstein's assertion in *The Modern World-System* that the rise of capitalism involved the radical alteration of the global environment, historian Jason Moore has developed the concept of "world-ecology", defining it as "a perspective that joins the accumulation of capital and the production of nature in dialectical unity" ("Transcending the Metabolic Rift," 2011). For Moore, the world-system is at once both a world-economy and a world-ecology. Extending Moore's argument to the level of cultural forms, this paper argues that if, as scholars such as Neil Lazarus and WReC have suggested, world literature is the literature of the capitalist world-system (Lazarus, 2011), then we must simultaneously grasp world literature as the literature of the capitalist world-ecology. On the basis of this understanding of world literature, the paper will examine how periodic transformations in the worldwide production of nature have been registered in a selection of texts from across the globe. Its specific focus is on fiction from those peripheral regions forcibly integrated into the world-system and subject to the violent imposition of capitalist modes and structures as a result of colonization and/or imperialism, a process that inevitably caused massive disruption to local ecosystems. The paper considers how ecological ruptures and the cyclical exhaustion of commodity frontiers imprint themselves on the aesthetics of works from China, Nigeria, and the Caribbean.

Dr Nicky Marsh

Consenting Adults?: Risk and Sex in the Financial Economy

The speculative languages of finance capital are highly figurative: financial trading is frequently represented through a dyadic hypermasculinity that simultaneously militarises and sexualises its practices. This language evokes the dialectic of crisis and risk: capital's immediate, inevitable and ongoing state of crisis finds its counterpoint in the language of risk, in the fantasy that rational quantitative judgements can discipline the irrational sexual energies that successful speculation depends upon. Such a fantasy has, of course, been laid bare in the last four years as it has become clear that risk is a leveraged source of profit and loss – a gamble – rather than a site of proper control.

This paper contrasts two kinds of representations of this relationship between crisis and risk, specifically focusing on their metaphorical displacement onto a sexualised and/or bodily discourse. In the first instance I examine the ways in which the exuberant organic language of finance radically shifted following the financial crisis at the end of 2008, paying particular attention to how the discourses of financial regulation attempted to retrospectively distance themselves from their previous permissive attitudes. Secondly, I examine how these ironies and inconsistencies were pre-figured and critiqued in fiction published in the years leading up to the crisis. It examines two novels, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* and Lawrence Chua's *Gold by the Inch*, which both use metaphors of illness to explore the contradictions of contemporary finance. Both novels – in very different ways – use this metaphorical slippage in order to critique its implications, pointing to the very limiting meanings of risk in contemporary finance culture.

Dr Jane Elliott

Game Theory of Thrones: Fantasy, Destiny, Neoliberalism

'When you play the game of thrones, you win or die. There is no middle ground.' This trademark line from the TV series *Game of Thrones* highlights the series' combination of two ubiquitous elements of contemporary American popular culture: the genre of epic fantasy and the trope of the survival-game. As many critics have noted, fantasy has achieved an unprecedented ascendancy in Anglo-American popular culture since the turn of the 21st-century, with texts such as the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* series occupying terrain that in the 1990s belonged to sf blockbusters such as the *The Matrix*. The survival-game has risen to prominence over roughly the same period, beginning with the reality TV show *Survivor* (2000) and most recently taking shape in the fantastically successful *Hunger Games* novels and film; these survival-game texts all collapse of life-and-death situations with the abstracted environment and legislated consequences associated with game play. By analysing the intersection of these two trends in *Game of Thrones*—as well as the *Song of Ice and Fire* novels on which the television programme is based—I suggest that the survival-game depicts neoliberal subjectivity as a problem for which epic fantasy is then offered as a solution. Ultimately, I argue that the boom in epic fantasy points toward a complex relation between the perpetual prisoner's dilemma that is neoliberal governance and the world-changing choice that Immanuel Wallerstein argues inevitably results from structural crisis.

Dr Sharae Deckard (University College Dublin)

Mapping the World-System: (Ir)realist Aesthetics and Neoliberal Crisis

For novelist Rana Dasgupta, the paradox of narrating the totality of the capitalist world-system is that "the more the world becomes interwoven the less it seems possible to tell a single, representative story of it." Yet he also suggests that critical consciousness of capitalist crisis is more likely to emerge from the periphery, since it is "the periphery which allows the centre to become." The structural crises in accumulation that occur cyclically within the long-waves of economic expansion and contraction of the world-system pose particular challenges to fictional representation. At the end of every cycle, the overemphasis of financial speculation of money capital rather than the production of commodities in core hegemony leads to the collapse of the current wave and the rise of a new one, inaugurated through the violent extraction of land and resources and the innovation of new forms of plunder and accumulation by dispossession in the peripheries. Thus, the predominance of the most extreme and abstract form of alienated capital is accompanied by the most extreme forms of exploitation and the radical reorganization of social relations in the peripheries. "This fusion of spilled blood and evanescent credit," as Stephen Shapiro has termed it, poses particular obstacles to literary realist forms. If realism "requires a conviction as to the massive weight and persistence of the present as such, and an aesthetic need to avoid recognition of deep structural social change" (Jameson 2007: 263), then we must predict that realist modes will experience irrealist disruptions if taken up by writers at times of systemic crisis or radical reorganizations of peripheral social relations and formations in line with core demands. When pre-existing social unities are violently destroyed, the unified referent required by "realist" representation disappears—this violence coupled with the abstraction of fictitious capital presents a double challenge to representation. In this paper, I will compare three literary novels of neoliberal structural crisis by Joseph Montford, Robert Newman and Rana Dasgupta which attempt to map both the abstraction of ascendant fictitious capital and the violence of primitive accumulation, particularly as it impacts the South American and Latin America peripheries. In particular, I will contrast the varying success of their different representational strategies in conveying the conjoined sides of abstract and scarring capitalism, and speculate as to the extent to which their deployment of irrealist mixtures of the imaginary and the factual or reliance on more banal varieties of realist facticity is itself symptomatic of their own structural relation within the world-literary system, whether the semi-periphery or a core hegemon.