

Theorizing (in) the Interregnum

An interregnum is most often associated with general uncertainty and fluidity, a lack of collective political will, and an opaque horizon concealing abysmal futures. Equally, an interregnum can offer radically new conditions of possibility. Such work is exemplified in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' 1978 volume *Policing the Crisis*, written in the period between the New Left and Thatcherism, between the new social movements of the 1960s and 70s and the rise of authoritarian populism in the 1980s. Work that addresses the interregnum both names an emerging period and aims to intervene in it.

Theorizing the interregnum does not produce simplistic historical teleologies. Homi Bhaba argues that periodization projects must be considered carefully because of the relationships they illuminate between past and present: "'New' national, international, or global emergences create an unsettling sense of transition, as if history is at a turning point; and it is in such *incubational* moments—Antonio Gramsci's word for the perceived 'newness' of change—that we experience the palimpsestical imprints of past, present, and future." And Christina Sharpe considers continuities across periods, particularly of the afterlives of slavery, as the foundation for "wake work...a mode of inhabiting *and* rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives." Though *interregna* are crises and broad in scope, at the same time they are radically contextual and experiential. Theorizing the current moment as a process of history tests uncertain possibilities and demands a future.

How do we understand "interregnum" and are we in one now? Additionally, for whom is the interregnum a concern? For example, what is an interregnum to subaltern groups, however identified, who live conditions that are exclusionary or sub-state? What continuities threaten to span the interregnum, and how do they persist or might they be countered? Or, what are the characteristics of the current interregnum define our present, and how can cultural studies conceptualize them? This call asks presenters to consider the intensive and complex array of contradictions and overdeterminations that populate the current moment, what led us here, and, perhaps, what lies ahead.

As a form of inquiry, cultural studies is distinctively situated to attend to history in process, to address both the organizing patterns of culture (such as in art, media, production, labor, finance, politics, affiliations, social movements, and norms) and the lived experience of those patterns ("structures of feeling"). Cultural studies' material interrogation of culture has a history shaped by its involvement with post-war labor struggles, new social movements, alter- and anti-globalization struggles, and contemporary uprisings against austerity, white supremacy, and impending environmental disaster. With focus on the relationships between system and person, field and habitus, and totalities and subjects, cultural studies employs a robust historical lineage.

We suggest two general approaches, separately or jointly, to our CFP:

1. Responses and reactions to the following theoretical prompts

Materialism that seeks to chart and even change systems as they are lived. “Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.”

– Frantz Fanon

“[T]here are no ‘absolute beginnings’ and few unbroken continuities....What is important are the significant breaks—where old lines of thought are disrupted, older constellations displaced, and elements, old and new, are regrouped around a different set of premises and themes.”

– Stuart Hall

“This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them.”

– Antonio Gramsci Notebook 13, §17

“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. N.B. this paragraph should be completed by some observations which I made on the so-called ‘problem of the younger generation’—a problem caused by the “crisis of authority” of the old generations in power, and by the mechanical impediment that has been imposed on those who could exercise hegemony, which prevents them from carrying out their mission.”

– Antonio Gramsci Notebook 3, §34

2. Contributions might read the interregnum through:

- Abolitionist organizing and transformative justice work;
- Global feminist and LGBTQ movements;
- New left publishing and publishers;
- Decolonization, land-back, and reparations movements;
- Big tech, platforms, and (digital) labor;
- The formal, informal, and survival economies of sex work;
- Trans materialities and modalities of existence;
- Disabled, mad, chronically ill, fat, and D/deaf and HoH representations, and Disability Justice organizing;
- Environmental racism and its counter-movements;
- Labor struggles, automation, and the gig economy;
- Mergers, monopolies, and cryptocurrencies;

- Mass incarceration and the Prison-Industrial Complex;
- State counter-organizing, surveillance, and policing;
- The changing conditions of anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Asian racism;
- National and international populist movements;
- Economic and financial crisis, crises of capitalism;
- Warfare, militarization, and its aftereffects;
- Theorizing the interregnum itself