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The Allure of Race: From New Lefts to New Times

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Abstract *This article examines conceptual obstacles to emancipation which have emerged historically within Left theory on both sides of the Atlantic, concerned primarily with “class versus race” debates spanning from the post-war Hegelian moment to the post-structural present. While the “cultural turn” promised to give voice against structuralist silencing, the critical subject of emancipation has been defaced, eradicated such that we currently have no theoretical place from where to build an emancipatory project. We must clear an analytical space through which a renewed subject of liberation can be founded. In drawing out theoretical continuity and change across varied temporal and spatial locations—Fanon/Sartre and the French-Algerian encounter; Gilroy/Miles and British urban unrest—the article explores how the Left imaginary has lost its theoretical integrity, especially in its Foucauldian gaze, and is currently unable to provide a robust vision, beyond self-other interplay, of emancipatory change.*

Masters and Slaves

In 1971, American linguist Noam Chomsky and French philosopher Michel Foucault engaged in the now infamous Chomsky–Foucault debate in which each presented and defended antagonistic positions on questions of human nature and politics.¹ Chomsky sought to liberate what he saw as the essential human need for creative work repressed by the structures of multinational corporate capitalism. This notion of “emancipatory politics” required the belief in an ideal human condition to be attained against which the present human condition could be measured. Notions of justice and injustice demanded this prior foundation. Foucault differed. He argued that critique which invoked an ethical vision based on transcending the present social condition could never represent more than a claim conceived within that condition, and could not therefore bring about its fundamental overthrow. Notions of justice grounded on a foundational human subject, whether the subject is viewed as liberalism’s individual or Marxism’s collective, were implausible, historically derived from the culturally specific project of Enlightenment—the age of reason.

¹ The televised *Chomsky–Foucault Debate*, 1971, can be watched on YouTube: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvelvgmPz8>>. See also Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault with Foreword by John Rajchman, *The Chomsky–Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: New Press, 2006).

Chomsky–Foucault reflected a post-1968 world gripped by aftershock, instability, and lament and captured an embryonic but crucial schism. Despite the specifics of anarcho-syndicalism, Chomsky’s retention of a human ethical foundation was at that time dominant, reflecting post-Holocaust Enlightenment unity underlying the antagonistic projects of liberalism and socialism. Their mutual commitment to human advancement was based on competing individualist and collectivist visions of man; but it was ideological rivalry held in check, at least in the West, by social democratic commitment to reformism across the political divide. Foucault’s position, by contrast, was emergent. As a disaffected ex-member of the French Communist Party, Foucault derided Marxism’s foundational revolutionary vanguard, its elevation of the working class as historical agent of change. For Foucault the modernist orientation of proletarian theory was underpinned by a bankrupt humanism which it shared with liberalism. And this was a view held by many on the French Left.

Louis Althusser’s erasure of humanism from Marxism was emblematic. Althusser contended that Marx broke with the Hegelian/humanism evident in his early works, turning later towards a scientific approach. The posited “break” informed Althusser’s theory of the human subject as mere ideological effect. Through the Ideological State Apparatus, “*the individual* is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself.’”² This attack against human centeredness presented a seductive challenge to foundational determinism—no one factor such as the economy or class could be held as a foundational determinant of all other phenomena. This would prove to be attractive to Marxists who lost faith in the industrial working class, creating a space for their later privileging of new social movements. But the move enabled a decentering of economic determinism which did not dismantle any positivist concept of class, much to E.P. Thompson’s consternation.³ As Žižek explains, Stalinism shared Western sociology’s positivist orientation when it

reduced the class struggle to a struggle between “classes” defined as social groups with a set of positive features (place in the mode of production etc.). From a truly radical Marxist perspective, although there is a link between “working class” as a social group and “proletariat” as the position of the militant fighting for universal Truth, this link is not a determining causal connection, and the two levels must be strictly distinguished: to be a “proletarian” involves assuming a certain *subjective stance*... which, in principle, can be adopted by any individual [...] The line that separates the two opposing sides in the class struggle, is therefore not “objective,” it is not the line separating two positive social groups, but ultimately *radically subjective* ...⁴

In de-privileging a determining human foundation, Althusser relativized class but left the Stalinist conception of class intact thereby enabling him to remain

² Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 123.

³ See Edward P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory: Or an Orrery of Errors* (Suffolk, UK: Merlin Press, 1978).

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 226–227.

within the French Communist Party. Humanism's theoretical obliteration was not arbitrary; it had ideological roots in the legitimization of reaction *against* social transformation. The key can be discerned in relation to the Stalinist reading of Hegelian dialectics. The "negation of the negation" had entailed an intrinsically open-ended conceptualization of social transformation. Within the capitalist epoch, human beings are presented with the means over which the obstacles to (negation of) human advancement can be overcome (negated), but only once they have attained consciousness of said obstacles. Under the capitalist system of exchange and exploitative extraction of surplus, human beings are alienated from their ideal human condition. Free will, the expression of which can only truly be realized through the individual's de-alienated social constitution, is suppressed (negated) by the narrow individualism of competitive capitalism. As a historical subject, only the proletarian class as a human-determining class can negate this negation. The formulation was dropped from Marxist theory by Joseph Stalin. As Christopher Arthur has noted, Stalin relinquished this crucial element in Marxist dialectics because it "characterizes a certain structure of self-determination."⁵ To present a rationale for the USSR Stalin theorized that the Soviet working class did not present a negation of "socialism in one country"—the favored end point exported via Moscow-backed communist parties internationally. For Stalin, the realization of Soviet communism (and his own place within it) meant the proletarian subject of history was surplus to requirements. Stalin's theoretical manoeuvring provided justification for the quashing of all opposition to his iron fist, but it had far-reaching effects, especially in Western Europe where the working class had failed to deliver.

Althusser argued that the proletarian negation of the negation was an idealist leftover from Hegel's master-slave dialectic, divorced from Marx's later works, and he said of Stalin's position,

[o]ne further word on the negation of the negation. Today it is official convention to reproach Stalin with having suppressed the "laws of the dialectic," and more generally with having turned away from Hegel, the better to establish his dogmatism ... It seems to me that it would be simpler to recognise that the expulsion of the "negation of the negation" from the domain of the Marxist dialectic might be evidence of the real theoretical perspicacity of its author.⁶

In doing so, Althusser backed the idea that the *radical subjective* raising of proletarian consciousness was not a crucial or central component of social change. Any theoretical approach to history must now be one premised on history without a foundational subject.

It is within this climate that we need to situate Foucault. The working classes had supported the National Socialists in Germany, were complicit in the racist treatment of minorities in France, were nationalist rather than internationalist or anti-imperialist, were sexist and homophobic, and represented the inherent limitation of collective emancipation projects based on the liberation of an ideal human. Additionally, the "human" centrality of the collective subject of revolutionary progress complemented the so-called rational subject of liberal capitalism, the individual, such that radicalism could not help but appeal to the very currents which

⁵ Christopher Arthur, "Stalinism and Dialectics," *Critique* 20:1 (1993), p. 114.

⁶ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Penguin Press, 1969), p. 200, n. 41.

colluded in its own hegemonic suffocation. Foucault moved anti-subjectivism beyond Althusserian ideological interpellation through a reconceptualization of power: "Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application . . . it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects . . ." ⁷ On this formulation radicalism must be aware of its own immanence to the power in which it operates. Because radicalism could only function as immanent critique, Foucault redefined liberation as the radical shifting of all-pervasive power from within. The historical subject who could measure the current social condition against its ideal, a being imbued with a sense of overcoming historical forms of domination through the raising of consciousness, was in effect a degenerate project. Despite various nuances of position, and even where Hegel and dialectics were retained, the contemporary disavowal of foundational human subjectivity came to exert a seminal influence on the theorization of race.

Post-war Left liberation politics were underpinned by the force of anti-colonial self-determination movements. Symptomatic was the French Left's ambivalent reaction to black subjectivity, captured by the Fanon/Sartre Negritude debate. In *Black Orpheus* Sartre celebrated Negritude as the authentic antithesis of Western rationalism, but as a "weak stage" in the dialectical overcoming of a racist class society. ⁸ In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon vented outrage at Sartre's dialectical assimilation of the negro: a subject robbed of history, of past and future. The negro existed solely as negation in an abstract Eurocentric class question. ⁹ Azzedine Haddour notes that there are three available readings of the Fanon-Sartre debate. (1) Fanon's celebration of Negritude was transitional, rejected by the time he wrote *Wretched of the Earth*; (2) Fanon is read through Sartre's interpretation; (3) Fanon increasingly adopted Negritude as an ideological position. Haddour suggests Fanon came to accept Sartre's dialectical view; that a distinction should be made between what Fanon calls negroism as a cultural movement and Negritude as race consciousness. Though Fanon retained a concern with race consciousness this was not an ideological endorsement. ¹⁰ Haddour's distinction is helpful, but it does not tell us the whole story. For Fanon, the politico-economic domination of the colonized West Indian broke the pretension of a shared African mythical past to which Negritude appealed, because "what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact." ¹¹ The movement of the colonized to the appropriation of a new humanism could not be captured in Sartre's class dialectic; the European was ill-equipped to spontaneously countenance the dynamic of the colonial encounter. Colonized man was neither black nor white man, "black is not a man There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born." ¹² In searching for self through a unified negro cultural past, the West Indian is

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 167.

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus* (New York: French & European Publications, 1948).

⁹ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967).

¹⁰ Azzedine Haddour, "Sartre and Fanon: On Negritude and Political Participation," *Sartre Studies International* 11:1–2 (2005), pp. 286–301.

¹¹ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p. 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

confronted by non-existence (absent unified negro past), the naked truth that he is a colonized being in a post-colonized body. He is neither black nor white and must make himself anew from the knowledge of his nothingness, thus precipitating a new history of man. Sartre's dialectic obliterates this move.

Sartre was ambivalent towards Western humanism; it is after all this ambivalence which allowed for celebration of Negritude as a challenge to, "the strip-tease of our humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it's not a pretty sight. It was nothing but an ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggressions."¹³ The rise of the colonial subject as a radical figure for the Western Left can only be understood through this ambivalence. The French Left did make a space for non-class subjects, but on *their* terms. Sartre is genuinely thought of as a humanist; as sharing, some might argue, an anti-humanist humanism with Fanon.¹⁴ But in conceptualizing Sartre's dialectical position as humanist we are forced either to fit Fanon into the formulation or completely exclude the anti-colonial subject from humanism. Fanon's position lies neither outside of dialectics nor inside Sartre's "humanist" position. The characterization of Sartre or Fanon as anti-humanist humanist is a misapprehension both of how Sartre formulates the master-slave dialectic and how this affects Fanon.

Pivotal was Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel, delivered in a series of lectures in France in the 1930s. James Heartfield notes, although Kojève read Hegel's master-slave dialectic through a humanist lens, it was humanism more in keeping with contemporary suspicions of spirit and religiosity.¹⁵ In Kojève's dispirited reading of Hegel, antagonistic social positions as they appeared in capitalist society, conceptualized as master (self) and slave (other), were immanent to the unfolding of that society. Kojève *sociologized* master-slave so that *society* was thought of as a relational self-other form. By "humanising" Hegel, Kojève extinguished the underlying essence (the spirit) of subjectivity and hence its historical development from partial to fully self-conscious agent (the movement of consciousness). The transcendent quality of consciousness, the basis for overcoming divergent social positions vanished in theory, substituted with a dispirited humanism, a sociology where individual (self) was realized through, but separate from, society (other). Incommensurable self/other categories took the place of emergent consciousness, leaving no theoretical basis for the abolition of the entire capitalist social space. To paraphrase Žižek, "freedom of choice *within* the coordinates of existing power relations" was left intact, while precluding "... an intervention which undermines those very coordinates."¹⁶ It may seem heretical to group Althusser, Foucault, and Sartre together, but what unites them is their disavowal of the radically subjective condition of proletarian consciousness. The political basis for this was the defeat of the international working class. Theoretically, the transcendent moment had been replaced by immanent critique.

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface," in Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 24–25.

¹⁴ Moulard-Leonard Valentine, "Revolutionary Becomings: Negritude's Anti-Humanist Humanism," *Human Studies* 28:3 (2005), pp. 231–249.

¹⁵ James Heartfield, *The "Death of the Subject" Explained* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Hallam Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, "What Can Lenin Tell Us about Freedom Today?," *Rethinking Marxism* 13:2 (2001), p. 7.

Through Kojève, “Hegel dispirited” had a monumental impact on French thought and beyond: categories of self and other were established as absolutes. For Simone de Beauvoir the sexes were irreconcilable, for Sartre it was the colonized and colonizer. What is missing from interpretations of Fanon/Sartre is that white Western working-class man by virtue of his racialized whiteness and barbaric superiority over black non-humans was not man, but an anthropological being devoid of the humanness denied to blacks. As we will go on to discuss, the latter point was never clearly developed, and hence remains unarticulated as a potential movement maker or breaker. The dialectical abyss spanning Fanon and Sartre could not be crossed by a theoretical bridge built on the diminished subjectivities of colonized and colonizer, and their incommensurable forms are clearly evident in the Left’s theoretical appropriation of Black Power, to which we will now turn our attention.

P.O.W.(ER)

Just four years prior to Chomsky–Foucault, C.L.R. James spoke in London on Black Power, a resounding endorsement of the movement and of the then-leading role played within it by Stokely Carmichael.¹⁷ As James saw it, Black Power was the new socialist vanguard. He drew on Lenin’s insights into the Russian revolution of 1905 and the Irish rebellion of 1916 in order to counter workerist and positivist conceptions of class struggle. For Lenin, argued James, to be proletarian was a constant coming-into-consciousness of the barriers which stood in the way of transcending capitalism, not by standing outside and wishing for an inevitable outcome, but by engaging with the present so as to move forward to a new, albeit unknown, future. Being working class in the positivist sense adopted within the industrial workers and Stalinist movements was not the essence of radical subjectivity. Proletarianization invoked the coming-into-consciousness of an internationalist vogue which could connect oppression and the exploitative capitalist relation. For James, proletarianization made Black Power a banner for the universal emancipation of man, because, as Robin Kelly reminds us, “Black radicals forced the white Left to see and hear differently, and they and a few white rebels heard in the sounds and movements and writings the birth of a utopian future rising out of the abyss of racism and oppression.”¹⁸ For this reason, James applauded the following statement by Carmichael,

... we do not seek to create communities where, in place of white rulers, black rulers control the lives of black masses and where black money goes into a few black pockets: we want to see it go into the communal pocket. The society we seek to build among black people is not an oppressive capitalist society—for capitalism by its very nature cannot create structures free from exploitation. We are fighting for the redistribution of wealth and for the end of private property inside the United States.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cyril Lionel Robert James, “Black Power,” Talk given in London, 1967, <<http://www.marxists.org>>.

¹⁸ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 51.

¹⁹ Stokely Carmichael, speech given at OLAS Conference 1967, cited in James, “Black Power.”

But the invigorated radicalism of the post-war era was predicated on a renewed intellectual validation; their mutual strength built against a climate of post-war pessimism. Reflecting on her student experience and politicization in the 1960s, Angela Davis recently recalled,

In Frankfurt, when I was studying with Adorno, he discouraged me from seeking to discover ways of linking my seemingly discrepant interests in philosophy and social activism. After the founding of the Black Panther Party in 1966, I felt very much drawn back to [the United States]. During one of my last meetings with him (students were extremely fortunate if we managed to get one meeting over the course of our studies with a professor like Adorno), he suggested that my desire to work directly in the radical movements of that period was akin to a media studies scholar deciding to become a radio technician.²⁰

Theodore Adorno's immanent critique laid open all minutiae of everyday life—from astrology to opera—to critical analysis while demanding that we do not adopt as our driving goal any liberationist universal project which seeks to transcend the present.²¹ The idea of man's liberation was dangerous; that proletarian consciousness was radically subjective and could break the process of reification, was, for Adorno, workerist fetish. By contrast, Davis's decision to study under Herbert Marcuse had a radicalizing effect. Marcuse retained the possibility of social transformation; utopian dissent infused his approach. In *One Dimensional Man* Marcuse outlined the forces of conformity unleashed in advanced capitalist society which diffused the revolutionary force of the working class, but he maintained a critical focus on capitalist contradiction represented by unprecedented wealth, poverty, racism, and imperialism.²² As Douglas Kellner notes, Marcuse may have begun from a position of despondency and pessimism, but this was transformed by the new social movements' "Great Refusal."²³ Utopian impulse was kept alive in the New Left's pursuit of an alternative society free from the forces of domination. By retaining the possibility of liberation through dialectical critique, Marcuse inspired radical movement beyond both Old Left workerism and the pessimism of theorists such as Adorno. Davis took this fusion of radical philosophy and political movement with her into the Panthers. The emancipatory vision of the Panthers inverted the Enlightenment promise of equality contained in the US Declaration of Independence in order to expose the exclusionary domination of anti-black oppression hidden within that declaration. The "self-evidence of Man's equality" symbolized American hypocrisy which eclipsed the totalitarian tendencies of the US state.

But in the four years which passed between C.L.R. James's speech and Chomsky–Foucault, Black Power was all but decimated as a political force. Nixon's incorporation tactics²⁴ were bitter icing on the cake of J. Edgar Hoover's

²⁰ Angela Davis, "Marcuse's Legacies," preface to Douglas Kellner (ed.), *The New Left and the 1960s* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. xi.

²¹ See Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998).

²² Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964).

²³ Kellner, *The New Left and the 1960s*.

²⁴ Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

COINTELPRO all-out assault on the New Left. As Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall note, by 1971,

“the chilling effect” on political dissent had been demonstrably achieved: the movement for social change, loosely described as the “New Left” had been shattered, its elements fragmented and factionalized, its goals and methods hugely distorted in the public mind, scores of its leaders and members slain, hundreds more languishing in penal institutions as the result of convictions in cases which remain suspect, to say the least.²⁵

The state’s all-out assault on the New Left, particularly the Black Panther Party (BPP), was nowhere more evident than against the US prison population, where George Jackson (imprisoned from 1960 until his death in 1971) and Angela Davis (imprisoned 1970–1972) connected incarceration with political oppression. Both figures were instrumental in drawing links between the internment of political prisoners and detention of the black poor; their critique of capitalism centered imprisonment as a function of colonial oppression that gave birth to a new revolutionary vanguard. But in a crucial respect, the assassination of George Jackson in San Quentin and the prison riots which followed at Attica State in which 179 inmates were killed and 1,289 tortured, signalled not only the extent to which the state could go in its attempt to forcibly obliterate opposition, but its “success” in doing so, and both events drew world-wide attention.

Brady Thomas Heiner²⁶ argues convincingly that the BPP had a significant influence on Foucault. While Nietzsche’s weight, via Heidegger, is unquestioned, Heiner unravels “the philosophies and struggles of the Black Panthers [which] led Foucault both to Nietzsche and to genealogy as a method of historico-political critique,”²⁷ marking a theoretical shift from 1970 to 1976, which included a move toward the power-knowledge couplet, biopolitics and genealogical method. Heiner locates Foucault’s radicalization with the establishment in February 1971 of *Le Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons* (GIP), a prison activist group of which Foucault was a founding member. Through his close acquaintanceship with co-GIP activist Jean Genet, the Panthers’ struggle and more specifically the plight of imprisoned Panthers, the place of race in the American class system, and the perpetuation of racism in the American penal system were brought into Foucault’s theoretical orbit. Heiner documents Foucault’s appropriation specifically of George Jackson and Angela Davis. In a series of publications throughout 1971–1972, GIP covered conditions in the French prison system, in particular focusing on prisoner suicide and its predominance among incarcerated immigrants and young people, and also on the life, work, and prison assassination of George Jackson. For the GIP, the prison system and the anti-racist struggles permeating incarceration in the US had opened a new radical front.

Two points of significance must be drawn out. First, Heiner argues that the influence of the Panthers has been erased both by Foucault and by those who have

²⁵ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1988), p. 61.

²⁶ Brady Thomas Heiner, “Foucault and the Black Panthers,” *City* 11:3 (2007), pp. 313–356.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 314.

unpacked his methods. Heiner's aim is "to enable them [BPP] to oppose and struggle against the coercion of Foucault's appropriation of them."²⁸ Second, we contend that the silence is due to a *reversal* of the Panther's transcendent claim. Foucault did not share the Marcusian Great Refusal—the essence of Angela Davis's politics of liberation—emancipation beyond capitalism founded on a liberatory subject denied. For to do so requires acknowledgement of an idealized universal subject which Foucault rejects despite his later pronouncement that, "we must not conclude that everything which has ever been linked with humanism is to be rejected, but that the humanistic thematic is in itself too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection."²⁹ The death of a liberatory Enlightenment subject is a constant *goal* in Foucault's work and it is for this reason that, to quote Heiner, "Foucault symptomatically denies the actually existing race struggle that in fact motivated his method to begin with."³⁰ The will to truth: an institutionalized regulating system of constraint which excludes by its epistemic reproduction of what may legitimately be said or thought within a given social formation—in effect, that which ordains the immanence of all critique—may have been developed in the period from 1970 to 1976, but it can only be said to partially reflect the Panther's struggle. The revolutionary impetus for Davis and Jackson was the centrality of the black vanguard as a new universal subject of the abolition of capitalism as a system of oppression. The Panthers did not deny universal truth; rather, they were the objects of its denial and a movement of its making. Black incarceration had a politicizing and radicalizing effect. Attacking the US prison system was a political act aimed at the metabolic overthrow of the entire capitalist system. It is the shattering of this vanguard that comes to influence Foucault's theoretical development. The GIPs concern with prisoner self-annihilation in France fuses with the liquidation of George Jackson and the Attica repression—the death of the black revolutionary vanguard. The fusion comes through in Foucault's conceptualization of power without a subject. As we

²⁸ Ibid., 322.

²⁹ Michael Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Publishers, 1983), p. 44. While Foucault credited a debt to Kant, a charge of anti-universalism is, we believe, correct, even if an anti-modernist tag has been challenged as unworthy in part (Nancy Fraser, "Michael Foucault: A 'Young Conservative?,'" *Ethics* 96:1 (1985), pp. 165–184). In this respect Richard Bernstein has countered Foucauldian counter-accusation of "Enlightenment blackmail": "Foucault's rhetoric, even the attraction of a distinctive type of skeptical freedom he adumbrates, the appeal of 'the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, think' is itself dependent or parasitic upon an ethical-political valorisation. What does it even mean to say that some possibilities are desirable? Without thematising this question it is difficult to discern what precisely is critical about his genre of critique. It is *not* Foucault's critics that have imposed this problem on him—it emerges from Foucault's own insistence that there are changes that are desirable, and that critique enables us 'to determine the precise form this change should take.' A sceptical freedom that limits itself to talk of new possibilities for thinking and acting but heroically or ironically refuses to provide any evaluative orientation as to which possibilities and changes are desirable is in danger of becoming merely empty – or even worse, it withholds judgement from the catastrophic possibilities which *have* erupted or *can* erupt." See Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 162–163. See also Fraser, "Michael Foucault: A 'Young Conservative?'"

³⁰ Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers," p. 337.

will go on to elaborate, it is the extinguished radical subject that speaks (without voice) through Foucault.

Foucault conceptualizes power as *rapports de force*: “a form of power which makes individuals subjects ... subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.”³¹ Force relations are those through which power flows, but power also includes the process by which force relations are stabilized or overturned, to the formation of patterns which occur via connecting force relations, and to the particular strategy which renders these patterns functional. Endemic changes within force relations produce shifts in the patterns of power—shifts which are resistible only in as much as sets of force relations can be amassed in opposition. “[T]he main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much ‘such or such’ an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power.”³² Configurations which appear as a central power (the sovereign state) are purely the overall effect of force relations. Law and domination are merely forms which all-pervasive power takes in a given society, but there is no possibility of a society *without* power. Power’s all-pervasiveness emanates from the power/knowledge couplet. Standard conceptualizations of power as repressive, which Foucault *rejects*, presuppose the possibility of social relations *not marked by power*, and Foucault denies this possibility most vehemently with regard to truth. “We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth ... [] ... true discourses ... are the bearers of the specific effects of power.”³³ Strategies of force are discursively ordered via the production of truth discourses. Power cannot be deduced from a mode of production as in the “Old Left” formulation; power patterns, for example, economic, sexual, and knowledge relations as, “the internal conditions of these differentiations.”³⁴ Nor are individuals the originating actors, for resistance requires discursively ordered *intent*. The subject is an effect of power and intentionality discursive, not individual or social in the classical sense attributable to an anthropological essence. Only in discourse are power relations “both intentional and non-subjective.”³⁵ Individualist accounts of agency and the assumption of class domination are discarded. It is not possible to conceive of subjects outside of discourse. Foucault’s denial of determining effects such as that of the economic structure provides no possibility for alternative action based on appeals to objective interests. Without objective interests, repression is reconceptualized as a “juridical-disciplinary notion” whose “two-fold ... reference ... to sovereignty on the one hand and to normalisation on the other” both “vitiates[s] and nullifies[s] from the outset” any “critical application of the notion of repression.”³⁶ Resistance is inscribed in power as an irreducible opposite: power neither comes from above or below.

³¹ Michael Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (1982), p. 781.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge* (Brighton, UK: Harvester, 1980), p. 93.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1, An Introduction* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p. 94.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 94–95.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge*, p. 104.

In an early perceptive critique Mark Philp³⁷ noted significant problems with such a conception. If the discursively determined subject carries its opposite within its discursive constitution:

1. Is the "other" of discourse automatically resistant, that is, *is* otherness resistance?
2. While the shape of the "other" is discursively determined, the shape of the resistant "other" is a function of force relations, but Foucault does not offer an account of force apart from specifying the determining existence of force relations.
3. On what basis would the "other" be welcomed as a liberator by the dominated subject? How would he/she recognize himself as dominated if no pre-discursive subject exists? And how would he/she know if the "other" was preferable?

The automatic inscription of otherness in discourse can neither offer a satisfactory explanation for resistance, nor justify it. As Philp observes, Foucault could argue that B's resistance occurs because of the conflicting demands that A makes on B's discursively constituted identity and interests. But as Foucault "...believe[s] that power is not built up out of 'wills' (individual or collective) nor is it derivable from interests," this would not seem possible.³⁸ Nor can it be justifiably claimed that a discursively constituted will could resist discourse. The will is *incarcerated* in discourse. If relations of force arise in relations of inequality then we could argue that the subject will resist inequality on the basis that it is unjust: the subject has an interest in equality because the right to equality is self-evident. But Foucault provides no basis for such self-evidence. It may be true that coercion or those congealed power/knowledge artefacts which dominate, once made visible, can precipitate instability and that by building a network of resistance we can surmount patterns of strategic domination, but such resistance would require at least a *justificatory* impulse on which the coerced can formulate a sense of interests. For Foucault, power does not arise out of interests or wills. Rather, inequalities are produced and maintained by force. This leaves Foucault's account of resistance wanting.

The other option is that force and counterforce are essentially ahistorical and universally human attributes. Politics would simply be a means through which this ahistorical force moves. Not only would this undermine the relative stance underpinning Foucault's defiance of historically specific normative claims, it could not "provide the basis for a justification of resistance—like Hobbes's war of all against all, the account is completely naturalistic."³⁹ Hence Foucault's inversion of the Clausewitzian formula—politics is merely war by another name. We are left fighting within our own reified nature, in the face of which we must submit to our inherent limitations. Foucault's anti-universalist discursive position places wilful intent/action beyond "man," introducing self-other interplay at a micro-level. The radical move is symptomatic of theory without a liberatory

³⁷ Mark Philp, "Foucault on Power: A Problem in Radical Translation?," *Political Theory* 11:1 (1983), pp. 29–52.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon (Hertfordshire, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), p. 188.

³⁹ Philp, "Foucault on Power," p. 45.

subject or alternative course than to make the present liveable. The idea that man is a discursive technology of power in itself places social change beyond the capacity of meaningful human action. The adoption of such a position is surely problematic for theorists who seek to understand racism, and it was anathema to Black Power.

Race Defaced

If Foucault appropriated BPP struggles Eurocentrically, silencing their influence on his work on power and resistance, and if by doing so emancipatory politics were reconceptualized, appropriating liberation to an immanent framework which fitted with Western European intellectuals' experience of radical limitation, then how are we to think the contemporary re-appropriation of Foucault by theorists of race?

David Theo Goldberg's Foucauldian treatment of race locates its origination with "liberal modernity."⁴⁰ The discourse of race has force imbued with the presumption of reason and it is through the rationalist scientific gaze that the inner and outer worlds of human beings are first conceptualized, homologized and homogenized, the capacity for reason itself a signifier of civilizational accomplishment. Race developed as a technology for exercising the scientific gaze—a technology of power. We have no disagreement with the view that race became an empirical demarcation upon which human worth was evaluated. Our objection lies in the positing of an identity between internal and external worlds which extinguishes the value of *transcendent* critique—the existence of consciousness and the possibility of its raising beyond the present disappears if we are to take the identity between inner and outer worlds as given. The absence of an ideal subject makes this inevitable. Goldberg does not challenge this identification and therefore reproduces the substantive theoretical moment in which the conscious human subject is extinguished. This in turn has an impact on how state racism is conceptualized. Race is considered to be "irreducibly a political category."⁴¹ But the use of the "political" here equates to the all-pervasiveness of power, not of its overcoming by individual or collective action. Goldberg is therefore unable to conceptualize a project of freedom as a radically subjective dimension of social action that distinguishes itself from conservative state repressiveness. Rather, autonomy under Goldberg's schema must be a modern form which only gives the *appearance* of an external oppressive regime *imposed* on an *essential subject* of freedom. "The racial state ... strive[s] ... for a racial subjection ... usually perceived as externally imposed upon subjects," turning "imposition into self-assumption, assertive charge into autonomous, self-imposed choice, harness into hegemony." Indeed, "there is no clear-cut contrast between state and individual, between asserted institutional power and capillary governmentality."⁴² It is the unity which racialized discourse acquires in positioning the location of bodies in the body politic that "highlights the material force at racism's heart."⁴³

⁴⁰ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002), p. 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴² David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002), p. 106.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Just as Foucault argued that the discourses of the human sciences brought “man” into being, so Goldberg argues that “racial man” is a product of the same because “authority is established and exercised only by being vested with the force of discrimination, exclusion, and enforcement.”⁴⁴ Seduced, albeit indirectly, by Althusserian anti-humanism, he contends that it is because “[i]nterpellation is the process by which individuals are hailed or called to subjectivity by others” which “presupposes mutual recognition by individuals” and “individuals are interpellated as subjects in and by means of language,”⁴⁵ that discourses of race, as constituted in the modern age, are technologies of power which locate racialized bodies in time and space. Race is “a new technology for defining identity and otherness, for determining inclusion, and establishing entitlements.”⁴⁶ The use of machine metaphors underlies the theorization of the social as autonomous powerhouse without driver—with no subject. Power is complicit in the formation of the racialized subject as “[t]he drive to exercise authorial power—whether out of the pure pleasure of the act or as a means to further ends—clothes itself in the theoretical fashions of rationality.”⁴⁷ Means and ends, as inherent to rationalism, are implicated in racial subjection.

For Goldberg, modern culture’s pre-conceptual sets embody race, and therefore interpellate racist subjects, implicating all subjectification which is not anti-modernist within a racist project. Herein lies a contradiction which is clear when he makes his conception of racism explicit,

Racisms involve promoting exclusions, or the actual exclusions of people in virtue of their being deemed members of different racial groups, however racial groups are taken to be constituted. It follows that in some instances expressions may be racist on grounds of their effects. The mark of racism in these cases will be whether the discriminatory racial exclusion reflects a persistent pattern or could reasonably have been avoided.⁴⁸

How can racial exclusion be reasonably avoided if reason is the hallmark of racial subjection? To paraphrase Cornelius Castoriadis, it would seem that Goldberg has adopted “a discourse . . . which has *already presupposed* the equality of human beings as reasonable beings,” but goes on to deny that presupposition as an example of racist culture.⁴⁹ The main problem with a “critical multiculturalism” which “pursues the interdisciplinary interpellation of (or calling to) subjectivity from within while transgressively challenging the confinements, the borders, of institutional structures, subjects and subjectivities, and imposed disciplinary forms,” is that the “transgressive challenge” implicitly relies on a *justification* underpinned by a notion of universal political equality predicated on the existence of an essentially and hence transcendent rational being, which is historically antithetical to the conclusion reached by a theory of subjective interpellation.⁵⁰ To paraphrase Žižek’s critique of Judith Butler, we could say that

⁴⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 136.

⁵⁰ David Theo Goldberg, ‘Multicultural Conditions’, in D.T. Goldberg (ed.), *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997), p. 2. The adoption of the

Goldberg “ends up in a position of allowing precisely for marginal ‘reconfigurations’ of the predominant discourse—who remains constrained to a position of ‘inherent transgression,’ which needs as a point of reference the Other in the guise of a predominant discourse that can be only marginally displaced or transgressed.”⁵¹ We could move as Lewis Gordon does, toward a human being imbued with reason as opposed to Western-imposed instrumental rationality (and we will return to Gordon), but neither Foucault’s take on power, nor Goldberg’s implication of modernity’s racist rational techno-culture, permits such a move.

There is a deeper problem shared both by Foucauldians and those who attempt to move beyond Foucault’s limitations. Linda Alcoff provides probably the most relevant and currently influential defense of difference. She argues, “[w]hen I refuse to listen to how you are different from me, I am refusing to know who you are. But without understanding fully who you are I will never be able to appreciate precisely how we are more alike than I might have originally supposed.”⁵² There is nothing inherently wrong with difference, nor for us does denial of difference entail some political virtue. The question of most relevance to our thesis is not so centered on your readiness to hear about my difference; rather, our concern is that there is no onus on you at present to even begin listening to me (nor I to you) in the first place (difference or not). There is currently no foundation for moral equivalence. In such a historical context marginal transgression is reconceptualized as a radical political act.

Similarly, while Goldberg recognizes, “[u]niversalisms offer the virtues of principles generally acknowledging the injustices of broadly construed racist expressions,” he considers that “they hide within their claims to universal values the inherent limitations of their lack of specificity, and they deny the value in culturally construed particularities inconsistent with the putatively universal principle.”⁵³ He therefore advocates “... moral indeterminacy as a necessary feature of social praxis.”⁵⁴ One can read “moral indeterminacy” to mean “we” *should not* take a moral stance. A more generous reading implies that any moral position must recognize its inherent partiality and the relative limit of truth claims so as to render our positions revisable in the light of other truth claims. The latter is in keeping with Alcoff’s relativization of horizons. “Social identities are part of

Footnote 50 continued

Althusserian concept of interpellation is highly problematic. By this theory, one can never think outside of the interpellating ideology, only within an alternative ideology if available. The shift from ideology to discourse, that is, from Althusser to Foucault does not remedy the passivity assigned to the subject in this regard, for force is not choice when the ability to choose is merely an effect of the ideology/discourse. In both positions consciousness is decidedly absent. The theory does however make a space for the “critical intellectual” who no longer centralizes a universal subject of historical transformation. The Althusser/Foucault shift has been elaborated by Heartfield in *The “Death of the Subject” Explained*, and subsequently developed to a comparison between Stuart Hall and D.T. Goldberg in Christopher Kyriakides, *The Anti-Racist State* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2005). It is on each of the latter two studies that we build our argument in this article.

⁵¹ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, p. 264.

⁵² Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 6.

⁵³ Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, p. 212.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

our interpretive horizon and have an effect on what we perceive or notice, but it is incoherent to propose that horizons be 'overcome.'"⁵⁵ Either way we are left with the question of arbitration. Who is to decide what the limits of a moral position may be, and on what grounds? How can we assess the fairness of such claims? Alcoff must surely accept that the validity of the political position she eloquently defends must appeal to some sense of Truth, otherwise why should we accept it over any other? More worryingly, Alcoff leaves us with a sense in which overcoming a bourgeois interpretative horizon is invalidated. "In stratified societies," she argues,

differently identified individuals do not have the same access to points of view or perceptual planes of observation or the same embodied knowledge. The queen may freely walk in the servants' quarters, but she will not view them in the same way as the servants do. Two individuals may participate in the same event, but different aspects of that event will be perceptible to different people.⁵⁶

Okay, but are all views valid? If so, on what grounds should and could we build the Republic? If the queen refuses the guillotine as oppressive, do we forfeit our plebiscitarian contract, or do we not really want this anyway? Alcoff's call to situate our understanding of the subject within unequal capitalist relations is implausible.

If, according to Foucault, the discourse (and force) of anti-racism must be the other of the discourse (and force) of racism, where does that leave us? In citing Franz Fanon, the "post-racial state," claims Goldberg, "would not be a state in which black (or white) people necessarily would *not* be recognized as black (or white), nor one in which the norms of regulation and governance were set by and in terms of black interests, whatever they might amount to. Rather such a state would be one in which people of color in general, like white people generally, would be recognized as fully human."⁵⁷ What is the "fully human" and what is the basis of its attainment, the standard by which all can expect to be treated? Nowhere does Goldberg provide a serious answer, nor can he. Fanon's rejection of the limitations of Western humanism did not entail a rejection of humanism; his pursuit of "a new history of Man" holds a mirror to current thought.⁵⁸ Goldberg's near-silence is symptomatic of a theoretical void in contemporary social analysis, premised on a wider and anachronistic disaffection with humanism, and it fully represents the dilemma facing advocates of post-raciality in a world disordered by the "victory" of capitalism. As detailed, nuanced, and sophisticated as Goldberg's position is, we are left with little to which we can appeal in order to fight inequality today. The true humanness he aspires to in justification of anti-racism is undermined by the Foucauldian anti-humanist precept from which he embarks.

Such a problem does not exist for Lewis Gordon who speaks from within humanism and advocates a universal and transcendent intersubjective existence,

⁵⁵ Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, p. 114.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁷ Goldberg, *Racial State*, p. 264. See also David Theo Goldberg, "In/Visibility and Super/Vision: Fanon on Race, Veils, and Discourses of Resistance," in L.R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and R.T. White (eds), *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 179–200.

⁵⁸ Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 245.

implicating not reason but Western instrumental rationality in racism's aetiology.⁵⁹ This is a more credible move because human existence is not a Foucauldian creation of power, but precedes (transcends) power. It is wholly coherent then to argue, as Gordon does, that the absence of black within the inter-subjective self-other configuration of relationality or sociality in which whites operate requires that we not see anti-racism as simply a moral position. If blacks are not even the other of whites then there is a pre-ethical step which blacks must take and which could also help to break the exclusive dialectical configuration of white society. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that Gordon works within a sociological self-other framework. In this formulation blacks need to *become* others in order to enter history. But why should entry into self-otherhood imply attainment of a human ethic, and if no prior ethic exists what founds the attempt to enter? One need not deny that blacks are kept out of history and that racism is a means of objectifying exclusion. But it is difficult to see how those racialized as (white or black) non-humans could break dehumanization in the name of some form of human emancipation against the limiting structures of capital when self-other conceptualization does not require a transcendent subject to be attained against the underlying exploitative relation of capitalism.

The point is that capitalism limits the quality of humanness—neither whites nor blacks are truly human. If as Marx wrote, “Communism... equals humanism,”⁶⁰ then under capitalist social relations the real “living labor” of human beings was transformed into “dead labor,” the capital “monster which is fruitful and multiplies.”⁶¹ Human beings are assigned the status of non-humans. The import of a *zone of non-being* is that it provides a basis for the attainment of humanness. This does not mean that the position of white non-humans, either historically or today, was/is the same or as bad as the position of black non-humans. Rather, the point is that becoming others cannot represent black entry into humanness because this presupposes the existence of a condition that is yet to be attained. More problematically, the possibility of transcending the limitations of a form of social organization which cannot provide equality is reduced. In retaining a sociological self-other conceptualization of society Gordon reveals an absence of aspiration, of radical subjectivity. It is poignant then, but in a different sense, that by privileging *visible identities* Linda Alcoff contrasts race, ethnicity, and gender with class. Although they all constitute social identities, the former, especially race and gender, “operate through visual markers on the body.”⁶² Class is a “less intimate” embodied identity such that the physicality of racial and gender difference supersedes not only the sociological category of “class,” but the

⁵⁹ Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (eds), *A Companion to African American Studies* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2006); Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (eds), *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005); Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Lewis R. Gordon, “Sociality and Community in Black: A Phenomenological Essay,” in Robert E. Birt (ed.), *The Quest for Community and Identity: Critical Essays in Africana Social Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), pp. 105–123.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 1.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I-Part I: *The Process of Capitalist Production* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p. 217. Original work published 1867.

⁶² Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, p. 6.

transcendent consciousness of radical subjectivity. Alcoff like Gordon begins not from a transformative politics but from a politics based on intersubjective self-other interplay, where social identity is always part self, part other.

As our discussion reveals, the problem does not simply hail from Foucault's theory; rather the curtailment of radical subjectivity is related to the experience of politics as primarily a repetitive concern which does not bring progressive change (the logic of defeat). Liberation, as Franz Neuman once derided, is reduced to "an indifferent repetition of the endless struggle of 'in groups' versus 'outgroups'" without resolution.⁶³ Endless repetition is exemplified in Omi and Winant's⁶⁴ thesis that "the state is composed of *institutions*, the *policies* they carry out, the *conditions and rules* which support and justify them, and the *social relations* in which they are embedded"; they add that, "every state institution is a racial institution," signalling that the state operates derivatively on the basis of a racialized social order contested by groups who mobilize, either through "war of position" or "war of manoeuvre," to alter the negative meaning of race. While Omi and Winant retain the crucial element of justification, race is here posited as a universal structuring, and structured by, human action, either negatively or positively endowed, which moves from a point of "*unstable equilibrium₁*" to "*unstable equilibrium₂*." Each new point represents a re-institutionalization of the racial order.⁶⁵ There is no escape. The more we search for an emancipatory space the more apparent it becomes that a virtue is being made out of the absence of solution. Similarly, while Stuart Hall seemingly made a place for a non-class bound subject, conscious subjects were redefined as incarcerated identities:

Identities are points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. They are the result of a successful articulation or "chaining" of the subject into the flow of discourse.⁶⁶

Identity refers to multiple intersections between ethnicity, gender, and class. Intersections denote a relationship between past and present identities: "... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past,"⁶⁷ thus breaking any essentialized notion of identity, which was the folly of Enlightenment humanism. Although we are permitted a degree of self-positioning, Hall finds virtue in "chaining." New identities constantly form in the creative intersection between self-histories and present context. The "new identity" can again change in response to how it is shaped in its current position (which is again relative to "new present" intersection with "new past"). New identities constantly move to past identities in relation to "new present." The "movement" is conceptualized as

⁶³ Franz Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State: Essays in Political and Legal Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p. 4.

⁶⁴ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 83.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 86–87.

⁶⁶ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity?', in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds), *Question of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 225.

social change, but the movement is identity change which remains immanent to constant shaping, “identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.”⁶⁸ Sounds radical, but the theory of representational self-other interplay posits no external transformation beyond self-other representation.

... identity is not only a story, a narrative which we tell ourselves about ourselves, it is stories which change with historical circumstances. And identity shifts with the way in which we think and hear them and experience them. Far from only coming from the still small point of truth inside us, identities actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition.⁶⁹

What is the basis of us being able to position ourselves? We can merely step into narratives of the past however that past may be constructed. The future is reconceptualized as constant change within the present social formation. Hall’s self-ascriber moves from identification to identification, a constant war of position(s), in the reversed Clausewitzian redefinition alluded to by Foucault, moving us from disequilibria to disequilibria. Following Foucault’s relational conception of power, retention of *significant affecting* directs us to the minutiae that make up the fabric of daily life—the *microphysics* of power. We are destined to stand inside the terms as they appear in constant repetition of the oppressive moment—oppression in and of itself can be shifted but not eradicated. It is the eradication of interests and values that exposes two serious weaknesses inherent in current conceptualization and critique of racism. The following question remains unanswered: on what basis would/could/should one resist racism without the affirmation of a transcendent universal human subject denied? Ultimately, for all their talk of agency and de-silencing, theorists of the cultural turn are unable to challenge this fatalistic development—immanent critique is all that remains available to us. This theoretical development played itself out in the US *vis-à-vis* the assault on Black Power, but in the UK a similar intellectual path has been worn in relation to the defeat of the labor movement. It is within their commonality that we can begin to discern the collapse of emancipatory politics, in theory and in practice.

Economic with the Truths

The problematization of an emancipatory working-class subject weighed heavily on the British New Left, but it took its most developed form *vis-à-vis* “race” in Paul Gilroy’s mid-1980s critique. Building on US Black Power criticism of the Old Left’s racial myopia and liberal color-blindness, Gilroy set out to demonstrate that the negative attribution of blackness had been countered, re-presented as positive articulation. His focus was on “racial meanings . . . as a salient feature in a general process whereby culture mediates the world of agents and the structures which are created by their social praxis.”⁷⁰ Where the British Right celebrated the lack of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 222.

⁶⁹ Stuart Hall, “Negotiating Caribbean Identities,” *New Left Review* 209 (1995), p. 8.

⁷⁰ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 17.

"black in the Union Jack," the cultural left identified a space of resistance through which hegemonic symbolic practices of whiteness were being countered in urban Britain. Writing at a time when the British labor movement was under intense government attack, a class war which eventually dismantled the post-war welfare consensus, Gilroy's premise was that a theory of class in racism analysis should be deprioritized, thus shifting the analytical focus to the politicization of race. Highlighting the impact of "crisis and technological change" on "industrial class politics" which "combines with a related loss of ability to identify with work among those who remain employed," Gilroy intuited Hall's and the Communist Party's later concern to delineate a subject of New Times. We will discuss this later, but for now the crucial point is Gilroy's critique of the Marxist class subject, and his targeting of a theorist he perceived as its most representative advocate—Robert Miles—is symptomatic.

According to Gilroy, Miles's theoretical and political failing was his silencing of black subjectivity in favor of "the apparently unlimited potential of an ideal category of workers."⁷¹ His proclivity to "dissolve 'race' into class," delegitimized black mobilization, which Gilroy understood as emancipatory in that "race" could energize oppressed communities. Gilroy argued that "the construction of the Black Community as a complex and inclusive collective with a distinctive political language" undermined Miles's critique which did not allow for the black subject's transformation of the meaning of race.⁷² Gilroy's target was "the idealist residues of Hegelianism concentrated in Marx's analysis of the proletariat," which he took from Andre Gorz's reading of Marx to signal, "rather than being confined to Marx's early writings, metaphysical, ontological views of the origin and mission of the proletariat pervade Marx's mature work"; that is, rather than finding a definite break between early historical idealist and later scientific materialist Marx, as Althusser did and in whose footsteps Hall tread, Gilroy was critical of Marx's apparent continuity of proletarian universalism. Gorz's suggestion, with which Gilroy had "considerable sympathy," was "that the Hegelian philosophy which constructs the proletariat as a universal class has encouraged a 'mythologised proletarian ideal' which can never be matched by the composite, fractured and heterogeneous actions of the empirical working class." It was such impossible "outmoded criteria" that theorists such as Miles used, "to measure the activities of the new social movements and find them wanting."⁷³ Therein lay Gilroy's dual critique. The Hegelian idealized proletarian subject denied validity to groups not mobilizing around class politics, but the failure of the proletarian subject to realize its prophesized destiny—to emancipate the human race—created the political possibility and necessity of progressive race politics. It was the presumed failure and reactionary nature of class politics which underpinned the political and theoretical catalyst for a progressive new subject of history.

In one sense Gilroy's critique of Miles is correct. By attempting to "outflank from the Left" Miles held onto proletarianization as a unique form of social transformation and did not take the Althusserian step of de-Hegelianizing Marx by positing a break between early and later "scientific" writings; that is, he did not

⁷¹ Ibid., 23.

⁷² Ibid., 25.

⁷³ Ibid., 233.

see history as a process without a subject.⁷⁴ So, on attributing the Hegelian idealization of a proletarian subject to Miles, Gilroy is quite right. Miles's Hegelian versus Kantian⁷⁵ analysis did initially draw from Nicos Poulantzas and C. Wright Mills, but differed in that classes as agents were *not* conceptualized in the Poulantzian form of technical relations onto which are constructed social class relationships of distribution, ownership and appropriation.⁷⁶ For Miles, class was not the positivist conceptualization left undisturbed by Althusser's abandonment of dialectics. It has become quite common, particularly within sociology, to situate Miles at one end of the structure-agency or structuralist-culturalist debate and Gilroy at the other,⁷⁷ but where Gilroy's work moved from that of the CCCS and Hall's Althusserian bent, Miles's *never* reproduced the anti-subject position of Althusserian Marxism. This is represented in Hall's and Miles's respective approaches to ideology:

ideological statements are made by individuals; but ideologies are not the product of individual consciousness or intention. Rather we formulate our intentions within ideologies.⁷⁸

ideology cannot, in itself, have any effect, but is the means by which people evaluate or stimulate an outcome or event (although the outcome may not be the one that the actors intended). The active agent is, therefore, not the ideology but the person or group generating and articulating the ideology.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, as Fanon-Sartre reveals, stating that a position is Hegelian tells us little. Rather, it is the theory of reification derived from Georg Lukács that distinguishes Miles from Hall's Althusserian Marxism. Miles also differed from Adorno in his use of Lukács by retaining the proletarian subject of history. In adopting a Lukácsian insistence on the process of reification, Miles makes explicit the Hegelian edge implicit in his work. The addition is an important one because, as Miles made clear early on, his analysis, "shares certain core assumptions and concepts" with that offered by Hall and colleagues in *Policing the Crisis*, "but differs in one fundamental respect, its reification of 'race'."⁸⁰

At the risk of crude oversimplification, Lukács's theory of reification holds that capitalist contradiction is naturalized, appears as normal, unchangeable, and beyond human agency. For Miles, the generality of ideology lies in the mistaken

⁷⁴ "Outflank" quote cited in Gilroy, *ibid.*, 22. For an example of Milesian outflanking see Robert Miles, "Marxism Versus the Sociology of 'Race Relations?'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7:2 (1984), pp. 217–237.

⁷⁵ See Michael Banton and Robert Miles "Racism," in E. Cashmore (ed.), *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 308–312.

⁷⁶ See Simon Clarke, "Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas' Theory of the State," *Capital and Class* 2 (1977), pp. 1–31.

⁷⁷ For an earlier analysis which discusses Miles see John Solomos and Les Back, "Conceptualizing Racisms: Social Theory, Politics and Research," in E. Cashmore and J. Jennings (eds), *Racism: Essential Readings* (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 346–356, and more recently, Bob Carter and Satnam Virdee, "Racism and the Sociological Imagination," *British Journal of Sociology* 59:4 (2008), pp. 661–679.

⁷⁸ Stuart Hall, "The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," in G. Bridges and R. Brunt (eds), *Silver Linings* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981), p. 31.

⁷⁹ Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 96.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

perception (reinforced by the Althusserian concept of ideological interpellation) that the products of human actors are the products of “a power independent of human beings,” which are, in turn, “represented as ... determinant[s] of social relations.”⁸¹ In this respect it is not only blacks but also whites who remain outside of History. For Lukács, only proletarian consciousness could break reification. For Miles, racialized human beings white or black are designated as naturally bound to remain in reified social relations—non-humans outside of history. Specific ideologies such as racism, nationalism, and sexism share general characteristics in common which enable elements of each to be expressed in combination. “The central shared characteristic is the mistaken postulation of natural divisions within the human species which are defined as inherent and universal. These divisions are therefore presented as inevitable determinants of social organisation.”⁸² “Natural divisions” do not simply refer to physical stuff located materially outside man, but to the form taken by day-to-day activity when the belief in natural division structures human relationships. The sensual life solidifies, becomes rigid such that experience in a capitalist society is taken as a natural form of existence beyond question or conscious change. All ideologies must be adequate to the task of making sense of phenomenal relations.⁸³ Reification is used by Miles to designate the continuing purchase of an erroneous belief that race naturally determines. Race consciousness embodies the belief that human beings cannot progress to a truly human equality, and is therefore an obstacle to transcendence. The existence or determining role of racialized consciousness in social relations is not denied. Because racialization can determine social position, consciousness should be raised, via transcendent critique, beyond race towards something better. Because “ideologies have effects only because they are constructed by human actors in order to give meaning to and to structure human activity”⁸⁴ the theory of the death of the subject entails the continuance of reification unchallenged.

Miles implicitly allows for a position of nothingness. His retention of a distinction between essence and appearance and of a class-based anti-capitalist *consciousness* attempts to preserve a spirited Hegelian master-slave dialectic, and a theoretical critique which transcends appearance by first occupying the space between it and essence. Though the essential relations of *capitalist* social organization are class-relations, this does not stop us from acting on the reifying and fractionalizing stimulus of racist, nationalist, and sexist ideologies. Nor does it stop us from acting on the appearance or meaning of “race.” For Miles, “although human beings have the capacity to act in ways which transform the material world ... the scope for such transformative activity is always constrained by the character of the particular material circumstances in which they live,” in this case capitalist.⁸⁵ The key term is *constraint*. Human consciousness can be raised such that the constraint of capitalist exploitation is overcome. This is of course the purpose of Miles’s intervention—to raise

⁸¹ Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 87.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ See Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour*, p. 103, and Miles, *Racism*, p. 80.

⁸⁴ Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour*, p. 96.

⁸⁵ Robert Miles, *Capitalism and Unfree Labour: Anomaly or Necessity?* (London: Tavistock, 1987), p. 221.

consciousness beyond mere appearance in order to locate an underlying objective basis for human oppression. The distinction presupposes repressive forms of political relations. Consequently, despite appearances to the contrary, under capitalist social relations, "the state is...an essential relation of production, regulating *all* those relations which sustain the commodification and exploitation of labour power."⁸⁶ Bourgeois politics are conceptualized as anti-human, and hence repressive. One cannot theoretically sustain the view that the state is a relation of production comprised of conscious human subjects if one does not first privilege human consciousness.⁸⁷ "Race" as configured in the statal regulation of conscious human actors obscures the *possibility* of human commonality. This is the premise for a renunciation of race as reification. The conscious human subject drives the liberation logic of Miles's radically subjective stance which is the implicit theoretical target of the cultural turn.

Gilroy accused Miles of attributing radical progressive spontaneity to the working class. However, if "the form of class consciousness, which Miles identifies as non-ideological, emerges only in this narrow conception of production relations,"⁸⁸ then what purpose or utility would there be in critiquing racialization and racism? Gilroy does not identify where Miles outlines the apparent "narrow conception." Nevertheless, having been attributed this theoretical stance Miles is consigned to the dustbin of Eurocentric economism.

Black political action has often been articulated through what appears to be a utopian political language. The distance from economism which has characterised it has baffled critics who would measure it by Eurocentric yardsticks and are consequently unable to perceive the sophisticated critique of capitalism which informs the social movement of blacks in the overdeveloped countries.⁸⁹

Gilroy plays the Fanon, anti-Sartre, and US Black Power cards, but in this case both are anachronistic. It is true that Miles "vigorously criticises" "[t]he possibility that either the political and cultural life of 'races' or their experiences of racial subordination can become unifying factors enabling groups to act across formal lines of class ... " But if one sees human emancipation as inextricably aligned with proletarian revolution, and racialization through racial separation as divisive, as Miles did, then it becomes incumbent on Gilroy, who at that time purported to be working within "historical materialism,"⁹⁰ to demonstrate in what way Black communities in mid-1980s Britain furthered the realization of human emancipation through the cause of proletarian revolution. As Gilroy opposed "the 'black and white unite and fight' variety"⁹¹ of mobilization, which he also attributed to Miles, on what basis could a unified black collective further the cause of proletarian revolution, when, as Gilroy correctly contended, white workers saw and experienced themselves as having both national and racial interests in common as white Britons; the possibility of internationalism underpinned by self-determination collapses. It is difficult for Gilroy to reconcile his interest in forms

⁸⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 195 and 221.

⁸⁸ Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, p. 23.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 24–25.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁹¹ Ibid., 23.

of consciousness; in raising consciousness toward the realization of history, with his giving up on the racialized white working class. As Miles argued, the most significant omission in the approach of Gilroy and others was their, "silence on the question of the class divisions within the 'black masses' and on the ideological and political continuities, as well as divergences, in the consciousness and practice of various 'fractions' of the British working class."⁹² Gilroy overestimated the degree of political homogeneity in the black community, and the degree to which the celebration of black cultural difference would be shared, for example, by Indian and Pakistani communities. There is at least a desire for proletarian unity in Miles's approach which is missing from Gilroy, but by the time *Ain't no Black* was published the Thatcher government had destroyed the British trade union movement and was funding Left-wing local government multicultural policy through its urban program. Gilroy's anti-workerist radicalism kicked at an open door, despite later protestations.⁹³

Lost in Race

Criticism of the class subject is not only pertinent to the UK. It took its most devastating form with the turn to Foucault paralleling the Reagan administration's assault on the (predominantly black) US working class. Snatching at the coat tail of Gilroy's "victory," Goldberg offered a "corrective" to structural Marxist approaches to racism because of the tendency to conceptualize racism as an epiphenomenon of more stable elements in the social structure such as politics or the economy. Into the latter category he situated Miles, whom he saw as "the most recent defendant of this approach."⁹⁴ Miles

casts the issue far too narrowly in concluding that "... patterns and structures of material inequality between populations [racially] differentiated are created in the context of class differentiation." Clearly, racial creation and racially defined inequalities have often served the ends of class exploitation. But three counter-considerations militate against class reductionism. First, such exploitation has at times simply been a contingent by-product of racialized expression; second, racial management has occasionally been pursued at the expense of class differentiation; and third, explanations of various and widespread exclusions enabled by racial expression are not nearly exhausted by class determined or economically functionalist constraints.⁹⁵

Goldberg misreads Miles. "Class exploitation" does not appear in the sentence quoted. At no time has Miles argued that "class exploitation" is an end realized by racialization (as Goldberg does in the above quote). The class reductionism Goldberg attributes to Miles does not hold. One could merely read Miles's explicit statement and definition of "exploitation" in the *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*.⁹⁶ For Miles "economic" is placed in inverted commas to denote that

⁹² Miles, "Marxism Versus the Sociology of 'Race Relations?,'" p. 221.

⁹³ Paul Gilroy, "The End of Anti-Racism," *New Community* 17 (1990), pp. 71–84.

⁹⁴ Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, p. 93.

⁹⁵ David Theo Goldberg, "The Semantics of Race," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15:4 (1992), p. 563.

⁹⁶ Robert Miles, "Exploitation," in E. Cashmore (ed.), *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 129–131.

exploitation cannot be conceived within the parameters of bourgeois political economy as a separate sphere of social relations based on the acquisition and distribution of financial rewards. Class is not “economic” in the sense that Goldberg conceives it, but is an objective relation premised on the extraction of surplus through and on which human beings exist. Class exploitation is the form of social organization which human existence takes when human relations are subject to the sale of “free” wage labor. Exploitation so defined is an essential relationship *only* of capitalist society and cannot be equated with what Goldberg refers to as “economically functionalist constraints”: class is not a simple “economic” category in the functionalist sense. A “context of class differentiation” refers to structures of meaning attributed to human beings within capitalist relations of exploitation; “racial differentiation” refers to additional meanings which are weaved throughout the exploitative relation. The difference between them is that a discourse of human, not race, emancipation projected via consciousness of alienated labor—capitalist exploitation—is a means through which the exploitative relation, as Miles conceptualizes it, can be overthrown. The objective basis of his critique is the attainment of an ideal human subject. Racism structures human creativity to its detriment. Class fractionalism is therefore to be tackled. As Miles’s study of the British labor movement exemplifies,⁹⁷ in the absence of a class-based politics for human emancipation against racism, racial politics even positively conceived do not reverse the political context (in which he wrote) where black *and* white agents, post-colonial or reformist, lived as diminished subjects within the Western capitalist metropolis. Only the absence of proletarian anti-capitalist vision could celebrate their diminished emancipatory status. Despite their differences both Goldberg and Gilroy leave this absence intact.

Transcendent idealism is the essence of a politics which takes History as its premise. The measure of “what is” by “what could be” is at stake. In critiquing what is referred to as Hegelian idealism, what permits the possibility of “what could be?” If there is no such possibility, what is the basis of present critique? The collapse of a transcendent ideal leaves only immanent critique; criticism which alters not transforms the present. The cultural turn did not retain a theoretical intervention which could produce transcendent results—raising consciousness beyond the present in pursuit of a better future—beyond “race.” By arguing that “[r]ace’ must be retained as an analytical category ... because it refers investigation to the power that collective identities acquire by means of their roots in tradition,”⁹⁸ Gilroy’s radical cultural sociology ascribed an inflated sense of power to new social movements which, like that of reformist industrial class politics before it, did not break the exploitative premise of capitalism. Superficially the Fanon-Sartre debate is replicated, but the incommensurable self-other categories emanating from Hegel dispirited find their full fruition in Gilroy’s unending dialectical treatment of race. Although unlike Goldberg, Gilroy at least attempts to privilege the human subject, pursuit of a future non-capitalist

⁹⁷ Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, *The TUC, Black Workers and New Commonwealth Immigration, 1954–1973* (Bristol: S.S.R.C. Research Unit on Ethnic Relations, 1977).

⁹⁸ Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black*, p. 247.

world is diminished as a theoretical and political intervention while immanent alterity is centralized. Gilroy does not move to nothingness. Incommensurability, once championed, undermines his more recent pursuit of planetary humanism against “the uneven effects of globalisation and planetary commerce in blackness”:

These groups will need to be persuaded very carefully that there is something worthwhile to be gained from a deliberate renunciation of “race” as the basis for belonging to one another and acting in concert.

...the prospect of losing one’s identity reduces cultural traditions to the simple process of invariant repetition. It has helped to secure deeply conservative notions that supply real comfort in dismal times but do little justice either to the fortitude and the improvisational skills of the slaves and their embattled descendents or to the complexities of contemporary cultural life.⁹⁹

Gilroy’s recent seeming turnabout is in actual fact strongly continuous with his previous disavowal of the proletarian subject. While his essays in *Darker than Blue* attempt to draw on the emancipatory vision of Fanon this is somewhat curtailed by his adoption of Arendt and Foucault.¹⁰⁰ Where pessimism towards the failed working-class subject of history, a working class bought-off by commodities and consumption, set the historical marker for Gilroy’s earlier critique of class, similar criticism is now leveled at the once celebrated black subject. Pessimism has moved (barely noticed) from critique to critique, a repetitive exercise in futility. Whether or not one agrees with Miles’s position, the real distinction with Gilroy lay in the pursuit of a proletarian revolution and the barriers to such precipitated by the racialization of human beings. Miles’s ideal was the overthrow of capitalism, Gilroy’s critique of class confined us to capitalism’s boundaries thus reflecting the despondency of the times; the historical moment was his, and Miles lost.

Marxism Today’s New Times post-Fordist thesis crowned the moment. Fordism, an analytical term used by Gramsci to capture hegemonic industrial organization which constituted class formation under national rubrics of mass production and methods of scientific management, was no longer. Post-Fordism characterized,

a shift to the new “information technologies”; more flexible, decentralised forms of labour process and work organization; decline of the old manufacturing base and the growth of the “sunrise,” computerbased industries; the hiving-off or contracting-out of functions and services; a greater emphasis on choice and product differentiation, on marketing, packaging and design, on the “targeting” of consumers by lifestyle, taste and culture rather than by the Registrar General’s categories of social class; a decline in the proportion of the skilled, male, manual working class, the rise of the service and white-collar classes and the “feminization” of the workforce; an economy dominated by the multinationals, with their new international division of labour and their greater autonomy from nation-state control; the “globalization” of the new financial markets, linked by the communications revolution; and new forms of the spatial organization of social processes.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 12–13.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Gilroy, *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2010).

¹⁰¹ Stuart Hall, “Brave New World,” *Marxism Today*, October 1988, p. 24.

The new other of difference, fragmentation, consumption, and fluid national boundaries de-centered Fordism's "subject"—the mass unionized industrial actor—in "a time-zone marked by the march of capital simultaneously across the globe and through the Maginot Lines of our subjectivities,"¹⁰² demanding a conceptual space for new social movements and subjectivities marked by extra-economic demands. Hall carefully and characteristically distances "the social" from "economy" while remaining within that self-other dispirited "tradition" catalyzed by Kojève. In a sociology of unending self-other interplay, emancipation beyond the fetters of capitalism is no longer viable. Theory and politics merge. It is no coincidence that Kojève was to exert a parallel, this time acknowledged, influence on Francis Fukuyama. Heretical as it may seem to pair champions and protagonists of "neo-liberalism," the underlying logic of their respective positions—that there can be no transcendent subject of historical emancipation beyond capitalism—is their mutual legacy. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's treatment of contemporary "global capitalism" alerts us to this congruence:

Empire establishes no territorial center of power. [] It is a decentered and deterritorialising apparatus of rule. [] Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command.

Empire presents its rule not as a transitory moment in the movement of history, but as a regime with no temporal boundaries and in this sense outside history or at the end of history.¹⁰³

The Foucauldian turn sealed the fate of critique which remains immanent to capitalism and reveals most clearly the anti-emancipatory credentials of end of history thought. The absence of any theoretical interplay between "race" and "class" is now somewhat banal in a pessimistic world-view which orders the immanent conceptualization of capitalism as empire without a subject.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid., 27.

¹⁰³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. xii–xv.

¹⁰⁴ This paper draws from, abridges, and expands on material included in our forthcoming book, *Race Defaced: Paradigms of Pessimism, Politics of Possibility* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).