

Identity Politics Reconsidered

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IDENTITY POLITICS RECONSIDERED

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*To all of the participants in the Future of Minority Studies Project,
and especially to the members of the FMS Junior Scholars Caucus*

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RECONSIDERING IDENTITY POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION

Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty

Go down Moses
Way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh
Let my people go . . .

Freedom's name is mighty sweet
Soon some day we're gonna meet
Got my hand on the freedom plow
Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now
The only chain that we can stand
Is the chain of hand in hand . . .

As we come marching, marching
We bring the greater days
For the rising of the women
Means the rising of us all
No more the drudge and idler
Ten that toil where one reposes
But a sharing of life's glories
Bread and roses, bread and roses

Just a few years ago, the great political movements that profoundly transformed American society—the movements demanding voting rights, civil rights, and equality for various disenfranchised groups—were generally viewed as the natural extension of liberal ideals. These identity-based liberation movements were viewed by many Americans as *confirming* rather than *challenging* democratic institutions, and *expanding* rather than *threatening* popular political values. Recently, this positive view of minority social movements has been transformed. Identity-based liberation movements and their

politically active constituencies, which include ethnic and racial groups, women's groups, gay and lesbian groups, and disability groups, have come under sustained attack by people on both the Left and the Right of the political spectrum in the debates over multiculturalism, identity politics, and political correctness. Thinkers as different in their political perspectives as Nathan Glazer and Judith Butler seem to agree at least on this one point—that identity-based social struggles are politically limited and misguided. Identity-based groups are widely portrayed as having an “agenda,” they are called “special interest groups,” and their leadership is often portrayed as opportunists uninterested in, even opposed to, the common public good. For those on the Right, these movements appear to be threatening individual freedom, while for those on the Left, they are seen as threatening the progressive coalition and wallowing in victimization. Thus, social movements associated with identity politics have been castigated by the left, right, and center, no longer enjoying their previous wide support.¹

Historically, identity politics has had both an activist and an academic existence. Activists involved in successful social movements, such as the civil rights movement and the women's movement, who self-consciously invoked the concept of identity in their struggles for social justice held at least the following two beliefs: (1) that identities are often resources of knowledge especially relevant for social change, and that; (2) oppressed groups need to be at the forefront of their own liberation. In viewing their politics as “identity politics,” activists involved in these movements were trying to sum up—and deepen—the lessons they had learned from the oppressed. Crucially, these successful social movements were led, never exclusively but primarily, by the oppressed themselves. And they have profoundly transformed society for the better.

The idea of identity politics has also been a grounding assumption of the new identity-based scholarly programs that have developed and grown in almost all universities and colleges since the 1960s. The student and intellectual activists who fought for women's studies, black studies, Chicano studies, and other identity-based programs believed that better, more truthful, and less distorted scholarship on the lives and experiences of marginalized identity groups would be more likely to come about when the faculty in the academy itself became more inclusive and diverse. And this belief has been borne out: a wealth of new questions about economic disparity, social violence, and cultural hierarchies has been put on the table for researchers across the disciplines to address. As Juan Flores shows in his essay in this volume, the development of minority studies programs that have thought consciously about the relationship of identity to culture and to knowledge has enhanced our collective understanding of academic study generally and its claims to universality.

Despite the successes of identity-based movements, however, identity politics has been criticized in both the political and the academic realms. It has been attacked not only by the reactionaries who opposed the goals of left progressive social movements and the purpose of identity-based scholarship, but also by some former supporters who have become concerned about

an overemphasis on difference and identity at the expense of unity. Political critics of identity politics claim that it fractures coalitions and breeds distrust of those outside one's group. Theoretical critics of identity politics claim that identities are social constructions rather than natural kinds, that they are indelibly marked by the oppressive conditions that created them in the first place, and therefore should not be given so much weight or importance. They point out, with some justification, that racial categories are specious ways to categorize human beings, that gender differences are overblown, that sexuality should be thought of as a practice rather than an identity, and that disability itself is often the product of social arrangements rather than a natural kind. These and other sorts of arguments are used to suggest that identities are ideological fictions, imposed from above, and used to divide and control populations. Both political and theoretical critics claim that we should be working to eliminate the salience of identity in everyday life, not institutionalize it.

We, the editors of this volume, believe that these critiques of identity politics are largely mistaken, too often based on anecdotes about incidents where specific groups used poor political judgment rather than empirical studies of identity-based movements from which a larger analysis of their effects can emerge. And yet, we also believe that some of the concerns that the critics raise are important and legitimate and worthy of discussion. Without a doubt, the social movements of the twenty-first century require a new language of liberation. We cannot enshrine any previous period as holding the key to our pressing political needs today—neither the era of the great anticolonial national liberation movements, nor the era of the progressive united front labor-led movements, nor the era of minority movements for equality. Neither can we assume that having a common enemy is sufficient to maintain alliances. History has lessons to teach us that we would do well to learn. The New Left of the 1960s, for example, was particularly inept in addressing the complexity and variety of identity-based forms of oppression. Any attempt to resuscitate its formulations—of mechanically privileging class over race, for example—will simply re-invite the previous splits. Rather, we need new accounts of the relationships among our various identities; we also need new ideas about how to make common cause across differences of privilege and geography. We need new thinking.

This volume is an attempt to create the conditions for such new thinking as we reopen discussion about the viability of identity politics for social movements, for scholarly programs of research, for pedagogy, and for democratic politics generally. Collected in *Identity Politics Reconsidered* are essays by a stellar list of intellectual activists, all of whom have participated in or responded to the various social movements of the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Readers of the volume will find a lively critical debate from leading theorists of ethnic studies, women's studies, gay and lesbian studies, and disability studies over what should, and should not, be learned from the extensive criticisms of identity politics. As intellectuals, the editors and the authors of the essays in this volume

understand the importance of remaining open to criticism and debate even over the very foundations of our political movements. But as activists, we perceive the need to go beyond simply criticizing liberation movements in order to see what can be done to improve and strengthen them. This volume thus seeks to reinvigorate the intellectual analysis of our progressive visions and goals by returning to the issues raised by the identity-based movements themselves, by revisiting questions that we think have been settled too quickly by many thinkers, especially those based in the academy. As one author here—José David Saldívar, former director of Ethnic Studies at Berkeley—explains, the aim of this volume, and of the project that gave rise to it, is to “encourage in-depth, cross-cultural comparisons within the general field of minority studies in the U.S.” In this volume, and in *The Future of Minority Studies* (FMS) Project more generally, we are taking the recent spate of criticisms as an opportunity for reassessment; we are working to formulate an answer that will address both the political and epistemological grounds for the unity of identity-based social movements and their political and theoretical contributions to social justice.

THE FUTURE OF MINORITY STUDIES RESEARCH PROJECT

All of the essays in this volume were written in response to a few basic questions posed by the editors of the volume to the authors of the essays within the larger context of *The Future of Minority Studies* Research Project. The four editors of this volume began the collaborative endeavor that is the FMS project in 2000 by putting together a team of intellectuals and asking several prominent scholars (many of whom are represented in this volume) to give serious reconsideration to the significance of identity for our knowledge-generating practices (for more on the FMS project, see www.fmsproject.cornell.edu). A series of conferences and meetings over several years at Stanford University, Cornell University, Binghamton University, the University of Michigan, Hamilton College, and the University of Wisconsin explored in some depth three questions we posed to the participants—questions that arose primarily in the context of postmodernist deconstructions of such key concepts of identity, experience, and knowledge. Our first question was

1. What is the epistemic and political significance of identity?

Insofar as we had been interrogating the postmodernist view that identities are purely arbitrary, and hence politically unreliable, the editors of this volume wanted to ask how and when taking identities into account may be justified, both politically and theoretically. In our own theoretical work as realists about identity, the founding members of the FMS project had offered alternative views of subjective experience—which many deconstructionists in particular dismiss as epistemically suspect—and explored the links between defensible notions of subjective experience and objective social location (see texts cited in note 2). Minoritized peoples often use subjective experience to

criticize and rewrite dominant and oppressive narratives. The legitimacy of some subjective experiences, we argue, is based on the objective location of people in society; in many crucial instances, “experiences” are not unfathomable inner phenomena but rather disguised explanations of social relations, and they can be evaluated as such. This recognition led us to wonder whether the rigid anti-objectivist stance that seems to dominate literary and cultural studies was justified and adequate. So our second question for our participants was

2. What role, if any, should a non-positivist notion of objectivity play in our intellectual and political endeavors?

The question about the nature of objectivity, and specifically about objectivity as an epistemic and social ideal, underlies many debates within the humanistic disciplines. Our goal was to connect the more local debate over identity politics to the general discussion of identity as an analyzable—and even “objective”—social phenomenon. We wanted, in other words, to dig a bit deeper than the polemical defenses or critiques of identity politics allow for; we wanted at the very least to ask if social activism, including identity-based activism, could in fact be seen as a form of legitimate social inquiry, one that often complements and indeed deepens more distanced and disinterested forms of academic analysis.

It is in the context of our emphasis on a reconsideration of the notion of objectivity and of social activism and its epistemic component that we posed our third question, about the role of moral universalism.

3. What is the place of moral universalism in struggles for social justice? (Is a focus on identity-based struggles compatible with moral universalism?)

Several of us had been arguing in our published work that respect for minority identity (and hence for some forms of cultural pluralism) complements and deepens the kind of moral universalism that most people implicitly accept and live by today. Such universalism is evident most clearly in the commitment to equality or basic human rights on which many modern constitutions and international legal documents, as well as progressive traditions of moral and political dissent, are based. We further argued that cultural pluralism and moral universalism can be complementary notions in part because social identities are often sources of objective knowledge about our world. Acknowledging the epistemic resources of identity enhances the possibility of knowledge and of achieving understanding across difference.

THE REALIST THEORY OF IDENTITY

The collaborative group of scholars who initiated and coedited this collection has been working for a number of years on the intellectual foundations of

minority, identity-based, scholarship. Key to our work has been the “realist” theory of identity, an approach to the question of identity that is better able than the postmodernist one to register and analyze the *complexity* that resides at the heart of identity-based political struggles and the subjective experiences on which these struggles draw. Although agreeing with some of the anti-essentialist critiques of identity that have been working to denaturalize identity categories, we argue against the conclusion that identities are merely fictions imposed from above. We contend that identities can be no less real for being socially and historically situated, and for being relational, dynamic, and, at times, ideological entrapments. Moreover, we believe that identity-based knowledge can achieve objectivity, not by the (unachievable) ideal of the disinterested, passive observer, but through a more workable approach to inquiry that aims to accurately describe the features of our complex, shared world. This postpositivist approach to realism, to identity, and to objectivity can yield new liberatory language, less fraught with the limitations and hubris of the 1960s era of national liberation movements, and capable of responding to more current criticisms and political needs.

Realists about identity define identities as “socially significant and context-specific ideological constructs that nevertheless refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world,” as Moya explains in her essay here. Identities are markers for history, social location, and positionality. They are *always* subject to an individual’s interpretation of their meaningfulness and salience in her or his own life, and thus, their political implications are not transparent or fixed. They are like theories, as Mohanty has put it, that can be tested for their ability to reveal and explain aspects of our shared world and experiences. Thus, identity claims cannot only be specious, narrow, and incorrectly described, but they can also be plausibly formulated and accurate.²

Realists about identity further argue that identities are not our mysterious inner essences but rather social embodied facts about ourselves in our world; moreover, they are not mere *descriptions* of who we are but, rather, *causal explanations* of our social locations in a world that is shaped by such locations, by the way they are distributed and hierarchically organized. The real debate is not over whether identities have political relevance, but how much and what kind. The theoretical issue concerning identities is not whether they are constructed (they always are, since they are social kinds) but what difference different kinds of construction make.

Very simply put, then, the core ideas that emerge from the realist theory of identity are these: Social identities can be mired in distorted ideologies, but they can also be the lenses through which we learn to view our world accurately. Our identities are not just imposed on us by society. Often we create positive and meaningful identities that enable us to better understand and negotiate the social world. They enable us to engage with the social world and in the process discover how it really works. They also make it possible for us to change the world and ourselves in valuable ways. This is what democratic and progressive social movements, such as the struggles for civil rights or the equality of women, show very clearly.

Like identities, identity politics in itself is neither positive nor negative. At its minimum, it is a claim that identities are politically relevant, an irrefutable fact. Identities are the locus and nodal point by which political structures are played out, mobilized, reinforced, and sometimes challenged. As Jack Tchen in this volume argues, identities make a real difference in the classroom or any pedagogical situation, and ignoring them is foolhardy for any educator, whereas recognizing them has the potential to enhance democratic and participatory pedagogies. Obviously, identities can be recognized in pernicious ways in classrooms or in society generally, for the purposes of discrimination. But it is a false dilemma to suppose that we should *either* accept pernicious uses of identity *or* pretend they do not exist.

MINORITY STUDIES

We are aware that the use of the term “minority” in the title of our project, “The Future of Minority Studies,” requires some explanation. The term minority has become passé in some quarters for two very good reasons: first, because, the “racial” groups classified within the West as “minorities” are not minorities globally, and second, because the demographic changes in the West itself indicate that European Americans will lose their majority status, at least in some countries such as the United States, in just a few decades. Minority studies, as we will use the term here, refers to areas of scholarly work that are related to social identities and that have emerged from liberatory social movements. As such, these bodies of knowledge have been doubly devalued, or minoritized, within the academy: associated with scholars who face a general intellectual discrimination as a spillover from social prejudices, and attacked as inquiry that fails to achieve the ideal of academic disinterestedness. Social identities themselves, especially racial and ethnic ones, are often seen today as nonobjective in the sense that individuals are believed to have a completely free choice about how much to emphasize or even acknowledge their own race or ethnicity. Those asserting the salience of identity are seen as opportunists, choosing to emphasize an outdated classification, or stuck in dysfunctional patterns of resentment.

This volume represents a critical debate among leading scholars over the viability of identity politics in the context of minority studies. Besides the problems with the term “minority” mentioned above, the term can also have the effect of overemphasizing the issue of numbers when the issue really is one of power. Our working definition of “minority” refers to power rather than numbers; it seeks to connect contemporary uses of this crucial term with older debates about the nature and goals of democracy, especially since in formal political democracies power is not shared equally and social groups (defined by gender, race, or sexuality, or disability, for instance) often have unequal access to it. As we are combining a discussion of broadly different movements and programs of inquiry, “minority” is a convenient way to incorporate the diversity of differences and forms of oppression we are concerned to bring into dialogue. We use the concept of minority in three senses: conceptual, political, and institutional. Conceptually, minority

signifies the nonhegemonic, the nondominant, the position that has to be explained rather than assumed, or the identity that is not taken for granted but is on trial. Politically, minority signifies a struggle, a position that is under contestation or actually embattled, that does not enjoy equality of status, of power, or of respect. Institutionally, minority studies have been made up by necessity of whatever has been excluded from the canon and the mainstream work of the disciplines, the afterthought of the academy, if thought at all. Thus, our use of the term is meant to foreground power relations rather than mere numbers. In none of these senses of the term just explained—conceptual, political, and institutional—is the existing meaning of any category of identity taken as inevitable, unchangeable, or determined.

The term minority also invokes a national context, which is only natural because it is a relational term. What is classified as minority only becomes clear against the background of a given dominant majority. Yet, just as minority-based studies need to pursue more cross-identity comparisons and dialogues, so too do we need to think of minority studies in a global context as well as a local or national one. Especially in the era of “neo-liberalism” those engaged in struggles against dominance internally need to consider how their actions affect those who are struggling against the same forces of domi-nation internationally. To make possible the grounds for coalition, we must come to understand the difference that global positionality makes, and thus we need to bring the concept of minority into a global context.

The key to all of these issues is identity, and our core claim is that identities matter politically. Identity politics is not new: as the epigraphs that open this introduction indicate, identity-based movements of political liberation have been vibrant in the West since at least the nineteenth century. Abolitionist and suffrage movements grappled with the conflicts among and within identities, with the role identity should play in determining leadership, and with whether the ultimate goal should be championing identity-based rights or de-emphasizing identity categories. Identity politics is only the most recent name given to this nest of issues concerning questions of separatism, nationalism, humanism, and the possibilities of a united front.

The contributors to *Identity Politics Reconsidered* address and debate the questions we have posed to them regarding the epistemic status of identities, the possibility of objectivity, and the role of universalism in struggles for social justice, even though it will be clear to the reader that the questions will continue to animate discussion and debate. It is our hope that this volume will serve as a springboard for further discussion of these issues, keeping the practical and urgent question of identity politics as the central problem to be explored. We will not attempt to summarize the complex discussions that take place in the pages of this book. Suffice it to say, however, that there is a very wide range of positions articulated here. All of the contributors deal squarely with the underlying problematic of identity and cultural politics and contribute to a clarification of the main issues that we need to explore further. At the most basic level, this volume is an engagement with the contemporary moment, as well as—inevitably—an invitation to readers to

continue the discussion. We will be happy if the volume reopens debate about this vital topic, enabling readers to engage the present more fully and encouraging us all to think about the future—the future as it can be imagined only through the concrete shapes of new, transfigured identities.

NOTES

1. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991); Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italian, and Irish of New York City*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1970); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked with Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995).
2. The realist theory of identity has been elaborated in the following publications since the mid-1990s: Satya P. Mohanty, “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition,” *Cultural Critique* 24 (Spring 1993): 41–80; Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, eds., *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Linda Martín Alcoff, “Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?” in *Reclaiming Identity*, 312–44; Hames-García, “‘Who Are Our Own People?’: Challenges for a Theory of Social Identity,” in *Reclaiming Identity*, 102–29; Tobin Siebers, “Disability in Theory: From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body,” *American Literary History* 13.4 (2001): 737–54; Moya, *Learning From Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Hames-García, *Fugitive Thought: Prison Movements, Race, and the Meaning of Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2006) and Sean Teuton, *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (forthcoming 2006).

DISABILITY STUDIES AND THE FUTURE OF IDENTITY POLITICS

Tobin Siebers

I

Nobody wants to be in the minority. People angle not to be left alone in a dispute, and those who risk to be seek the protection of those like them to lend greater weight to their social power. We all seem to share a basic intuition about what it means to be human and to face a community of others created by our exclusion. But the fear of being in the minority exerts pressure beyond the influence of social conformity. It carries tremendous weight in political and social theory as well, where minority identity appears as a category that will not go away, even though many political theorists give only a minor place to it. Liberal political theory, for example, is based on the expectation that minorities will eventually disappear as they become fully integrated into a single polity. For liberals, a utopian society with a minority population is inconceivable. If it is the case, however, that minority identity is not destined for extinction, it may be worth considering it as a factor in all political representation. Identity politics is often associated by its critics with minority groups, but it is crucial to a vision of democratic society in its complex entirety. For identity politics makes it possible to conceive of democratic society as comprising significant communities of interest, representing minor affiliations and different points of view that need to be heard and included if democratic society is to continue.

At nearly 20 percent, people with disabilities make up the largest minority population in the United States, unless one considers women at 51 percent as a structural minority. Moreover, only 15 percent of people with disabilities were born with their impairment. Most people become disabled over the course of their life. These statistics suggest why people with disabilities do not present immediately as either an identity or minority group—which makes it theoretically important, I insist, to include them in any discussion about the future of identity politics. On the one hand, people with disabilities are not often thought of as a single group, especially as a political group,

because their identities are too different from each other. Which political interests do blind, elderly, and paralyzed people share? On what basis do we consider them as having an identity in common? Is a woman cognitively disabled from birth like a man who receives a head trauma in a farming accident? On the other hand, the nature of disability is such that every human being may be considered temporarily able-bodied. The number of disabled in any given society is constantly on the rise, as more and more people age, have accidents, and become ill, and this fact is obscured only by controlled accounting practices that refuse to admit some disabilities into the statistical record. There are, for example, nearly 50 million disabled in the United States, but this number does not include people who wear eyeglasses, those who take medication for hypertension, the learning disabled, or people with AIDS or HIV. Neither does it include the elderly, many of whom cannot climb stairs or open doors with ease, nor children, whose physical and mental abilities fit uncomfortably with the adult world. The disabled represent a minority that potentially includes anyone at anytime. Their numbers may be increased by natural disasters, warfare, epidemics, malnutrition, and industrial accidents—not to mention by simple acts of redefinition. By what logic, then, do we consider people with disabilities as a minority group?

Disability seems to provide an example of the extreme instability of identity as a political category, but it would not be easy, I think, to prove that disability is less significant in everyday life for being a category in flux. In fact, that disability may take so many forms increases both its impact on individuals and its significance in society. Here I consider the future of identity politics from the perspective of the many forms of disability—and with two related emphases in mind. First, I insist that disability studies requires one to think with greater flexibility about what constitutes both an identity and a minority group. People with disabilities build political coalitions not on the basis of natural identification but on the basis of health-care needs, information sharing, and support groups. Most obviously, disability requires a broad consideration of identity politics beyond communities of interest based on race, nation, class, gender, and sex, and for this reason, it is crucial both ethically and theoretically to give a place to disability in the field of minority studies. Second, I want to engage disability studies with two theories important to identity politics: social constructionism and philosophical realism. Both are at bottom social theories—each one offers a different way of thinking about political representation dependent on identity—and yet it is not clear that either theory has yet found a way to incorporate the many forms of disability. My specific goal here is to use disability to put pressure on both theories in the hope that they might better represent the concerns of people with disabilities. I begin with social construction because it has played a crucial role in the emergence of disability studies, especially in the humanities. I then turn to the less familiar arguments of philosophical realism. My conclusion will be that if social construction has defined the past of disability studies, philosophical realism may well be in a position to influence its future.

II

The theory of social construction is fundamental to current thinking about the disabled body and mind—and with good reason—because it provides a major alternative to the medicalization of disability. The medical model lodges defect in the individual body and calls for individualized treatment. Medicalization has at least two unsettling effects as a result: it alienates the individual with a disability as a defective person, duplicating the history of discrimination and shame connected to disability in the social world, and it affects the ability of people with disabilities to organize politically. Since no two people with a disability apparently have the same problem, they have no basis for common complaint or political activism. Storied language mocks the idea of “the blind leading the blind,” but the medicalization of disability really does create a situation where it is extremely unlikely that a blind person will be allowed to take a leadership position in the blind community, let alone in the sighted community. The world is divided, as Susan Sontag put it in *Illness as Metaphor*, into the kingdom of the well and the sick, and although we all possess dual citizenship, the disabled usually lose their civil rights in the kingdom of the well, especially once they enter the doctor’s office (1).¹

The social model challenges the idea of defective citizenship by situating disability in the environment, not in the body. In a society of wheelchair users, stairs would not exist, and the fact that they are everywhere in our society reveals only that most of our architects are nondisabled people who care little about the problem of access. Disability seen from this point of view requires not individual medical treatment but changes in society. Social constructionism has changed the landscape of thinking about disability because it refuses to represent people with disabilities as defective citizens and because its focus on the built environment presents a common cause around which they may organize politically. More generally, social construction offers advantages for the political representation of the disabled because it demonstrates the falseness of any claim for political identity based on natural kind. It reveals that gender, race, sex, nationality, and ability are heterogeneous, indeterminate, and artificial categories represented as stable or natural by people who want to preserve their own political and social advantages. It is not surprising, then, that many of the major theorists of disability in recent years have adhered to the social model.

That identity is socially produced means in theory that minority groups like the disabled may challenge their own identities, allowing greater freedom and mobility in the social world. In practice, however, the social model does not seem to be as viable an option for the identity politics of people with disabilities as one might think because social constructionists remain in the end highly skeptical about any form of identity. Critics of identity politics remind, for example, that no two women are alike and that “woman” is not a coherent political category. They also remind that most of us have multiple identities not always served by the stricter identities required by

membership in a minority group. Theorists of disability have also expressed hesitation about conceiving of people with disabilities as an identity or minority group. Lennard Davis, for example, explains that disability does not fit with the “totality of an identity,” noting that “the universal sign for disability—the wheelchair—is the most profound example of the difficulty of categorizing disability because only a small minority of people with disabilities use that aid.” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson believes that “identity is a little bit like nationalism”—“a very coercive category, leading to political fragmentation and division.”² Critics of identity fear that the old identities used to repress people will come to define them in the future, or that claiming one, strong identity will excuse injustices against people not in that identity group. Neither is a small concern given the history linking identity and oppression.

The attack on identity by social constructionists is designed to liberate individuals constrained by unjust stereotypes and social prejudices. The example of disability in particular reveals with great vividness the unjust stereotypes imposed on identity by cultural norms and languages as well as the violence exercised by them. It also provides compelling evidence for the veracity of the social model. Deafness was not, for instance, a disability on Martha’s Vineyard for most of the eighteenth century because 1 in 25 residents was deaf and everyone in the community knew how to sign. Deaf villagers had the same occupations and incomes as people who could hear.³ This example shows to what extent disability is socially produced. In fact, it is tempting to see disability exclusively as the product of a bad match between society and some human bodies because it is so often the case. But disability also frustrates theorists of social construction because the disabled body and mind are not easily aligned with cultural norms and codes. Many disability scholars have begun to insist that the social model either fails to account for the difficult physical realities faced by people with disabilities or presents their body and mind in ways that are conventional, conformist, and unrecognizable to them. These include the habits of privileging pleasure over pain, making work a condition of independence, favoring performativity to corporeality, and describing social success in terms of intellectual achievement, bodily adaptability, and active political participation.

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have noticed that the push to link physical difference to cultural and social constructs, especially ideological ones, has actually made disability disappear from the social model. They cite a variety of recent studies of the body that use “corporeal aberrancies” to emblemize social differences, complaining that “physical difference” within common critical methodologies “exemplifies the evidence of social deviance even as the constructed nature of *physicality itself* fades from view.”⁴ As Davis puts it, cultural theory abounds with “the fluids of sexuality, the gloss of lubrication, the glossary of the body as text, the heteroglossia of the intertext, the glossolalia of the schizophrenic. But almost never the body of the differently abled.”⁵

Recent theoretical emphases on “performativity,” “heterogeneity,” and “indeterminacy” privilege a disembodied ideal of freedom, suggesting that

emancipation from social codes and norms may be achieved by imagining the body as a subversive text. These emphases are not only incompatible with the experiences of people with disabilities; they mimic the fantasy, often found in the medical model, that disease and disability are immaterial as long as the imagination is free. Doctors and medical professionals have the habit of coaxing sick people to cure themselves by thinking positive thoughts, and when an individual's health does not improve, the failure is ascribed to mental weakness. Sontag was perhaps the first to understand the debilitating effect of describing illness as a defect of imagination or will power. She traces the notion that disease springs from individual mental weakness to Schopenhauer's claim that "recovery from a disease depends on the will assuming 'dictatorial power in order to subsume the rebellious forces' of the body" (43–44). She also heaps scorn on the idea that the disabled or sick are responsible for their disease, concluding that "theories that diseases are caused by mental states and can be cured by will power are always an index of how much is not understood about the physical terrain of a disease" (55). The rebellious forces of the body and the physical nature of disease represent a reality untouched by metaphor, Sontag insists, and "that reality has to be explained" (55).

Consider as one example of the problems of the social model Judith Butler's writings on power. I choose the example deliberately because her work represents an extraordinarily nuanced version of social construction, offering a good idea of both its strengths and weaknesses on the subject of disability. A curious thing about Butler's work is that bodies, disabled or otherwise, rarely appear in it. This includes *Bodies That Matter*—a book that seems at first glance to describe how oppressed people are constrained to think about their bodies as deviant but that actually takes as its topic the relation between guilt and subject formation.⁶ For Butler, psychic pain and guilt are the preconditions of subjectivity. Power puts the subject in place via a process of subjection that constitutes the materiality of the self. Subjection, however, is a psychological process rather than a physical or material one—a conclusion made apparent by the fact that Butler reserves the defining use of "materiality" for the "materiality of the signifier" (30). Guilt not only regulates the body, Butler insists, it projects specific morphologies of the body. Consequently, political emancipation requires a revolutionary change in the mental state of the subjected person—a throwing off of every feeling prosaically referred to as guilt—but a change extremely difficult to achieve because guilt is anchored by an apparatus of social power well beyond the ken of the individual. Indeed, guilt predates the formation of subjectivity, for the subject comes into being only as the self-inscription of guilt on the body. Guilt is a regulatory idea that saturates the surface of the body and appears as physical illness (64).

It is to Butler's credit that she is able to read so clearly what might be called the tendency in the philosophy of mind to represent the body only in terms of its encasement of the mind. In fact, another book, *The Psychic Life of Power* (PLP), seems designed to apply her ideas about bodily subjection to

the philosophy of mind, where she demonstrates with considerable skill the long tradition of philosophical misunderstanding of corporeality. What is not obvious, however, is whether she offers an alternative to this tradition because her main concern remains the *psychic* life of power. Butler's work refers most often to the mental pain created by power, almost always referenced as guilt, and the ways that power subjects the body to fit its ends. But if power changes the body to serve its perverse agenda, changing the body may also be an option for those in search of a way to resist power. It is a matter, then, of finding a way to imagine one's body differently. This last point bears repeating with an emphasis: to resist power, one imagines one's body differently, but one does not imagine a different body, for example, a disabled body.⁷

The body supporting Butler's theories is an able body whose condition relies on its psychological powers, and therefore the solution to pain or disability is also psychological. The able or healthy body is, first, a body that the subject cannot feel. The healthy subject is either disinterested in its body or in control of its feelings and sensations. Second, the health of a body is judged by the ability not only to surmount pain, illness, and disability but also to translate by force of will their effects into benefits. It seems, to use the Foucauldian vocabulary favored by Butler, that the body is "docile" only because the mind is docile to begin with, for her heady analyses intimate that the only way to save the body is by awakening the brain. It is almost as if the body is irrelevant to the subject's political life. The physical condition of the body is not a factor in political repression; only the inability of the mind to resist subjugation ultimately matters.

Physicality is part of the reality of the disabled body, and if the physical state contributes to the experience of people with disabilities, then its misrepresentation as a mental condition will have a detrimental effect on their ability to organize themselves politically.⁸ The tendency of the social model to refer physical states to mental ones, then, especially to those that privilege acts of the imagination, is a political act, and hardly a neutral one, because it often represents impairment as the product of mental weakness. There may be no more damning political gesture. Many are the obstacles placed before people with physical disabilities who want to participate fully as citizens in political process, but the majority of nondisabled people does not dispute that the disabled should have rights of citizenship. This belief does not extend to people with mental disabilities. The "feeble-minded" hold rights of citizenship nowhere, and few people in the mainstream believe this fact should be changed. Behind the idea that physical disability may be cured by acts of will or the imagination is a model of political rationality that oppresses people with mental disabilities. I turn to the problem of rationality and political representation in the second half of this essay, but two ideas are worth stressing immediately. First, if the social model relies for its persuasive power on a shift from physical to mental disability, its claim to locate disability in the social environment rather than in the disabled person is less complete than it pretends, since the concept of individual defect returns to haunt its

conclusions. Second, that one fails to throw off one's physical disability because of mental defect implies a caste system that ranks people with physical disabilities as superior to those with mental ones. This caste system, of course, encourages the vicious treatment of people with mental disabilities in most societies. Its influence is fully apparent in models of political citizenship, the history of civil and human rights, structures of legal practice, the politics of institutionalization, employment history, and the organization of the disability community itself.

A final point about the psychology of social construction and its inability to respond to the identity politics of people with disabilities. Social construction, despite its preoccupation with political ideology, clings resolutely to a psychological model based on the autonomy of the individual rather than developing one designed to address political community. It seems to agree with liberal individualism that emancipation from repression relies on the intellectual and emotional resources of the individual and not on political action by people working in groups. This is nowhere more apparent than in its objection to identity politics. Wendy Brown, for example, argues that identity politics becomes "invested in its own subjection," feasts on "political impotence," and descends into a melancholy based on a "narcissistic wound." She claims that identity politics is essentially a politics of resentment but defines resentment by applying Nietzsche's comments about an individual character, "the man of resentment," to political formation, as if the psychology of many people and a single mind were interchangeable.⁹ Likewise, Butler comes to the conclusion that identity tied to injury—her formulation for identity politics—has little chance of freeing itself from oppression because once one is "called by an injurious name," "a certain narcissism takes hold of any term that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially" (*PLP* 104). In fact, the only chance of resisting oppression, she continues, occurs when the "attachment to an injurious interpellation," "by way of a necessarily alienated narcissism," supports "the condition by which resignifying that interpellation becomes possible" (*PLP* 104). It is revealing that Butler cannot critique identity politics without breaking into the first-person singular. Moreover, she hinges every form of political resistance and attachment on "narcissism"—an accusatory category with a long history of application to people with disabilities.¹⁰ Both gestures demonstrate her dependence on individual psychology—a dependence she shares with Brown and many other social constructionists.

What would it mean to imagine a model of political identity that does not rely on individual psychology—one that sees political psychology as greater than the sum of its parts? What would it mean to define political identity based not on self-interest or disinterest but on common interests? Finally, what would it mean to define physicality politically—not as the individual body supporting the political will or imagination but as a body beyond the individual? This body would be politically repressive because its form would be imprinted on the social and built environment, determining the exclusion of some people and the inclusion of others. But this body would also be

politically enabling because its form would belong not to one person but to the entire society. It would be a social body and therefore subject to transformation by direct political analysis and action.

III

“Blackness” and “femaleness,” to use typical examples, do not define individual bodies. It is true that some individual bodies are black, female, or both, but the social meaning of these words does not account for everything that these bodies are. Rather, these words denote large social categories having an interpretation, history, and politics well beyond the particularities of one human body. This fact is, of course, largely recognized, which is why the attempt to reduce a given body to one of these terms carries the pejorative label of “racist” or “sexist.” We know a great deal more about racism and sexism than we did 50 years ago for the simple reason that they are now objects of knowledge for entire societies to consider, and their interpretation, history, and politics are growing ever more familiar as a result. We recognize the characteristics, experiences, emotions, and rationales that determine their usage. If discrimination is in decline—although it is not clear that it is—the result is due largely to the fact that categories such as “blackness” and “femaleness” have become objects of knowledge and political interpretation for many people.

Disability does not yet have the advantage of a political interpretation. A blind body, for example, is seen as one person’s body. Blindness supposedly defines everything that this body is.¹¹ There is no term for the prejudicial reduction of a body to its disability. Disability activists have proposed the term, “ableism,” to name this prejudice, but it has not been accepted into general usage. Its use elicits scowls and smirks, even in progressive society. There is little sense either in the general population or among scholars that words like “blind,” “crippled,” “stupid,” “fat,” “deaf,” or “dumb” carry social meanings having an interpretation, history, and politics well beyond the particularities of one human body. Until something changes, people with disabilities will remain the largest minority population subject to unjust and unrecognized oppression. The number one objective for disability studies, then, is to make disability an object of general knowledge and thereby to awaken political consciousness to the distasteful prejudice called “ableism.”

The theoretical resources required to satisfy this objective, however, are still in short supply. Social construction, we saw, has advanced the study of disability to the point where one may name the environment and not an individual body as the reason for disability. A reliance on individual psychology as well as the claim that causal connections between ideologies and physical bodies are relative, unstable, and unmappable have nevertheless obstructed the capacity of the social model to offer a strong and rational critique of ableism based on political ideals. If people with disabilities are to enjoy full access to society, they will need to find theories that will advance literacy about disability to the next stage and create a basis for political action.

Acknowledging the philosophical limitations of the social model, Susan Wendell calls for an approach capable of recognizing the “hard physical realities” of disabled bodies:

In most postmodern cultural theorizing about the body, there is no recognition of—and, as far as I can see, no room for recognizing—the hard physical realities that are faced by people with disabilities. . . . We need to acknowledge that social justice and cultural change can eliminate a great deal of disability while recognizing that there may be much suffering and limitation that they cannot fix.¹²

Wendell’s call to arms is compatible with a number of approaches being pursued in minority studies, most notably by scholars inspired by philosophical realism. Paula Moya, for example, also disagrees with recent critics of identity politics who dismiss the “physical realities” of existence. Her approach applies a philosophical realism, based on the work of Richard Boyd, Satya Mohanty, and Hilary Putnam, that links minority identity to the natural and social environment: “Theory, knowledge, and understanding,” she writes, “can be linked to ‘our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings’ without being uniformly determined by them. Rather, those ‘physical realities of our lives’ will profoundly *inform* the contours and the context of both our theories and our knowledge” (37).¹³ Moya’s point is that sex and race, while not definitive of a person’s identity, arise from skin, color, land, and other physical realities that contribute to political knowledge and consciousness. More important, the links between physical states, social ideologies, and identities are open to scrutiny and criticism because they have a verifiable and rational character. This does not mean, of course, that social experience has absolute status as knowledge. We can be right, wrong, or beside the point, but experience remains intimately connected to political and social existence, and therefore individuals and societies are capable of learning from their experiences.

Philosophical realists, like social constructionists, believe that reality is socially produced. Unlike social constructionists, they believe that social reality, once made, takes on a shape, politics, and history that belong to the realm of human action, and as part of human action, it is available for rational analysis and political transformation.¹⁴ Realism entails a recognition of the significant causal factors of the social world by which the identities of groups and individuals are created. Identities are not infinitely interpretable, then, because they obey the rules of their formation and have strong connections to other cultural representations. Their verification and analysis rely on a coordination with the real world and a coordination between interconnected hypotheses about and experiences with society, which means that identity is both pragmatic and epistemic. In short, cultural identities, because they respond to natural and cultural factors, make certain actions possible and present a resource for understanding society and its many meanings. Identities are complex theories about the social and moral world.¹⁵

The politics of identity, then, are not about narrow personal claims, resentment, or narcissistic feelings. Rather, they are based on insights about how communities are organized. They also value cooperation as a moral good. Philosophical realists, in fact, make the case that there is no contradiction between identity politics and a certain moral universalism because both rely on the belief that human beings, regardless of culture or society, are capable of rational agency and therefore of cultural and political self-determination—an important claim that I will open to adjustment below. “No matter how different cultural Others are,” Satya Mohanty argues, “they are never so different that they are—as typical members of their culture—incapable of acting purposefully, of evaluating their actions in light of their ideas and previous experiences, and of being ‘rational’ in a minimal way” (198). Philosophical realists celebrate diversity because it exposes dogmatic assumptions about a given culture’s moral ideology (242); they embrace the hypothesis of moral universalism because it broadens the field of ethical inquiry beyond a given culture to recognize all human beings as rational agents. Identity, as both a specific cultural form and as a more abstract, rational principle, provides resources for human survival, welfare, justice, and happiness.

Consequently, philosophical realists affirm the positive value of identity for political representation. For them, identity politics create points of contact between individuals, or identifications, some of which are embraced as common personality traits, physical characteristics, beliefs and traditions, moral values, aesthetic tastes, sexual orientations, geographic origins, kinship, etc. These points of contact are social constructions insofar as they are constituted by a variety of experiences, but the political and cultural allegiances involved are often so powerful as to make the identity function as a social fact. Thus, people who identify themselves as members of a community have entered into cooperation for socially valid reasons, and their identities represent direct responses to distinct and often verifiable conditions of society, both positive and negative, whether shared customs, pleasures, and diets or the presence of racial prejudice, sexism, unequal distribution of resources, or an inaccessible built environment. Identities, then, actively expose the effects of ideology on individuals and provide a rational basis for acts of political emancipation. “Some identities,” as Moya puts it, “can be more politically progressive than others *not* because they are ‘transgressive’ or ‘indeterminate’ but because they provide us with a critical perspective from which we can disclose the complicated workings of ideology and oppression” (27; Moya’s emphasis).

Disability studies has, of course, already developed a critical perspective that reveals the workings of ideology and oppression in the social and built environment. It claims that ideologies usually favor the particular social body for which the space has been designed, and rarely is this body conceived as disabled. The body implied by social spaces, then, leaves no room for a conception of unaverage or less-than-perfect bodies, with the result that people with disabilities are not able to mix with other people in the very places

designed for this purpose. The general population is not conscious of the features of the social body, even though it has remained remarkably consistent since the beginning of the modern architectural period, but this does not mean that its ideology is unconscious—beyond analysis or correction—because the symptomology of an individual unconscious à la Freud does not determine it. Rather, we encounter something like the “political unconscious” described by Fredric Jameson—a social propensity to organize cultural representations and artifacts according to the symbolism of number and averaging rather than individualism.¹⁶ In fact, this propensity is entirely open to scrutiny and theorization, as the briefest glance at modern architectural history reveals. For example, both Le Corbusier and Henry Dreyfuss developed a form language for architecture and industrial design based on the proportions of an ideal social body. Le Corbusier invented the modular scale of proportion, while Dreyfuss pioneered human factors engineering. The former favored a man six feet tall, possessing proportionate dimensions between his upraised hands, head, waist, and feet (see figure 1.1). The latter created a series of charts representing “Joe” and “Josephine,” a typical American male and female, whose proportions set the human factors needed to design the Bell telephone, Polaroid camera, and Honeywell thermostat as well as airplane interiors, tractors, vacuum cleaners, trains, and helicopters. The efforts and principles of both men were entirely public and pursued with the best intentions in mind—to create objects and spaces more appropriate to human scale—but they also put in place what Rob Imrie has called a “design apartheid,” a system that methodically excludes disabled bodies.¹⁷

When a disabled body moves into any space, it discloses the social body implied by that space. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the dimensions of the built environment and its preferred social body—the body invited inside as opposed to those bodies not issued an invitation. This social body determines the form of public and private buildings alike, exposing the truth that there are in fact no private bodies, only public ones, registered in architectural space. The social body is the standard—presupposed but invisible—until a nonstandard body makes an appearance. Then the standard becomes immediately apparent, as the inflexible structures of furniture, rooms, and streets reveal their intolerance for anyone unlike the people for whom they were built.

Permit me to take as an example my own house in Ann Arbor, Michigan. An analysis of a private dwelling is especially important because we usually think of access in terms of public buildings and functions, while the greatest cruelty of inaccessibility remains the fact that people with disabilities are excluded from the private spaces where most intimate gatherings occur—dinner parties, children’s birthday parties and sleepovers, holiday meals, wakes, Shiva, and celebrations of births, anniversaries, and weddings. My house is a frame, side-entry colonial built in 1939. We built a major addition in 1990. It resembles many other houses in the neighborhood, since

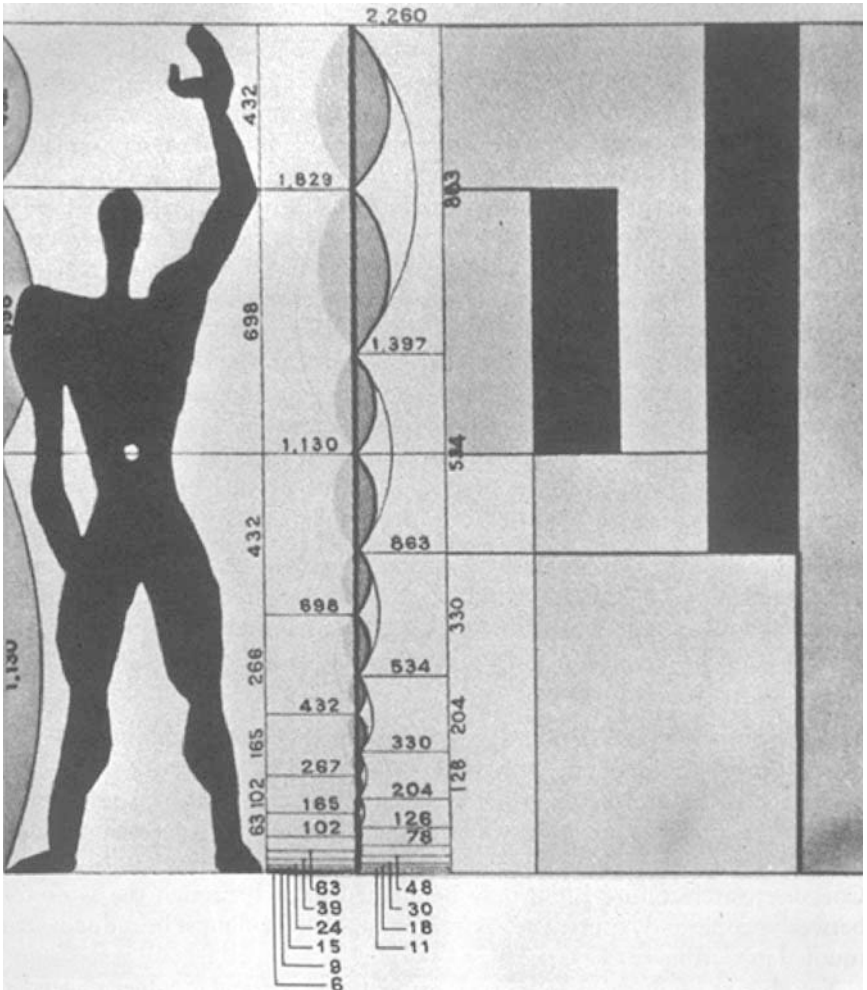


Figure 1.1 Le Corbusier, "Modulor."

most of them were built around the same period. A one-car garage, long but narrow, stands at the back of the lot. Poured concrete stairs, with three steps in total, climb to the front door whose passage is 35 inches. A side door, at the driveway, also serves the staircase to the basement and requires three steps to reach the main floor. Its entry is extremely narrow and made more so by a coat rack. The kitchen door in the rear, off a patio, is the most accessible approach to the house, since it requires one step onto the patio and one step into the door, but the passage is 30 inches. Finally, another rear door, off the patio, requiring one step, enters the family room, but the door is blocked by furniture and never used. If I were to install a wheelchair

ramp, the recommended ratio would mean that I would need 14 feet of ramp to climb the two steps into the rear kitchen door. The front door would require a ramp significantly longer. Recommended standards for universal entry give 36 inches, and sometimes 42 is required, if the approach to the door is at an angle and narrow. All of my entry doors are too narrow, and they also have metal, unbeveled thresholds that a wheelchair user would need to “jump.” Of course, if a wheelchair user were lucky enough to get into my house, it would still be impossible to use any of the bathrooms. The largest entry is the door to the master bedroom bath at 29 inches, but it is located on the second floor. The first floor bathroom has the smallest passage, 22.5 inches, and would not hold a wheelchair in any event. All of the toilets are too low for a wheelchair user, and there are no grab bars in any of the bathrooms. Nor could a wheelchair user sit easily at table in my house because the large table and small dining room leave little room to maneuver.

Other standard features in the house present difficulties for people with diverse body types. All of the doorknobs are at the standard 3-foot height, but none of them is graspable for people with arthritis or those missing hands or fingers. The light switches are set at 4 feet or higher. It is a curiosity that the ideal height for a doorknob is supposedly 3 feet, but light switches are placed higher. One of the bathtubs is much deeper than the other and difficult to step in and out of. Mirrors are generally out of view for people below average height. My children perched dangerously on the toilet to comb their hair for years. The stairway to the second floor had only an ornamental banister on the initial run until we installed a more functional one on the second run. There are no banisters on the stairways at the side entry and descending to the basement. Until we remodeled, light switches were located in such a manner that one had to turn off the lights before leaving a room or a floor. We have never been able to get our doorbell to work, which makes it difficult to hear when someone is at the door. Finally, in our kitchen, top shelving is out of reach for my wife, and low shelving is beyond my capacity to squat, and deep, 3 feet-high countertops keep items out of reach for children.

When we imagine differently abled bodies in a space, the social construction of the space is revealed to us by dint of the fact that it owes its existence and preservation to an application of political rationality that is entirely public. In sum, people in wheelchairs, people with diminished sight and hearing, those with difficulty climbing stairs, people uncomfortable reaching high or bending low, and those unable to grasp objects do not fit easily in my house. Nimble, six-footers, with an intuitive sense of dark spaces, acute hearing, and a love of staircases do. These are social facts readable in the very structure of my house, and when they appear in many other buildings—and they do—we may rightfully conclude that they are supported by an ideology—an ideology also open to scrutiny and correction because it belongs to the public domain. The availability of social facts, of course, does not immediately translate into political action. Some people will not admit

facts even when they stare them in the face, and other factors, such as competing economic motives and existing structures of authority, may deter the correction of social injustices. The point remains, however, that oppression and injustice usually continue for political reasons, not because personal, psychological complexes render individuals incapable of action. It is to everyone's benefit, then, to develop a general theory for analyzing and critiquing different political rationales, but in the absence of a general theory, one may expect that individuals who have identified certain wrongs against them will gather together into groups for the purpose of better struggling against injustice. This is what we are witnessing currently with the rise of identity politics.

IV

Philosophical realists have a greater appreciation of rationalism than many literary and cultural critics writing today and therefore a more nuanced position on political rationality, both its value and dangers. Theirs is a flexible theoretical system adaptable to a variety of political analyses, sensitive to human diversity, and aware of past crimes committed in the name of objectivity, universalism, and rationalism. It is nevertheless the case that disability presents an obstacle to some of the basic tenets of philosophical realism.

One stubborn obstacle worth accenting here involves the connection in philosophical realism between rationalism and the concept of the human. Theories of rationality rely not only on the ability to perceive objective properties of things in the world; they configure rationality itself in terms of the objective properties and identifying characteristics of those agents whom Kant called rational beings, and these identifying characteristics do not always allow for the inclusion of people with disabilities, especially people with mental disabilities. I add two cautions immediately. First, neither ethics nor politics can survive without a concept of rationality, which is why philosophical realists have insisted that social construction needs to be integrated with rationalism. Second, the definition of human agency is a problem for the history of philosophy as much as for philosophical realists working and writing currently, which requires that we develop an adequate description of the ways that notions of moral personhood have evolved beyond the rigid eighteenth-century preoccupation with reason to attain the more flexible definitions of human beings and the respect due to them available today. Rationality theory, then, is not to be discarded—it is tied to human autonomy inextricably by the emancipatory ideals of the Enlightenment. But it needs to be pressured by disability studies because it is more exclusionary than necessary.

Juan Flores makes the point that the Enlightenment defines rationality by the creation of unenlightened others. Kant's idea of reason is suspicious of immature or underdeveloped thinking, he notes, and shuns "the inability to make use of one's reason without the direction of another."¹⁸ The moral and political capacity to be free, as described by both Rousseau and Kant, is

loosely related to mature rationality as well, although it permits a great deal of flexibility in theory. Eighteenth-century ideals of rationality preserve a strong emphasis on human autonomy and self-reliance and a hatred of heteronomy. Mohanty makes it clear, we saw earlier, that philosophical realists accept this emphasis. “No matter how different cultural Others are,” he notes, “they are never so different that they are—as typical members of their culture—incapable of acting purposefully, of evaluating their actions in light of their ideas and previous experiences, and of being ‘rational’ in a minimal way” (198). Moya in her response to Flores argues correctly that “any self only becomes a ‘self’ in relation to an ‘other’” (8).¹⁹ But the degree of interdependence ascribed by her to self and other stops short of recognizing people who are not capable of reflecting on their actions. She defines respect in part on the assumption that those with whom we disagree are not “confused or crazy or simple-minded” but comprehensible within their “world of sense,” acknowledging that we have an obligation to listen to others because they might have something to teach us, not because they are “radically other” or “terribly smart” but because “they are related to us through interconnecting structures of power” (8–9). If respect depends on the possession of rationality, is there a minimal rationality below which no respect for human beings should be given? How do we preserve the ideal of rational agency and at the same time make Kant’s kingdom of the ends accessible to differently abled people? This is not a rhetorical question but an interrogative that ought to be tied to our continuing aspiration to be human. I take it to be a very difficult question worthy of serious work.²⁰

To treat one’s personal maxim as if it were a categorical imperative, to summon Kant’s famous formula for rational deliberation, is a narrative maneuver meant to help one imagine a position of autonomy, one free of partiality and private interest—a very difficult thing for a human being to do and thus a very valuable thing. The purpose of rational deliberation, however, is not to arrive at moral principles but to test them. Moral universals are only universals insofar as they are true in general and not in particular—by which I mean that they usually involve place-holding concepts, such as “human being,” “freedom,” “virtue,” “vice,” “cultural diversity,” that require further narrativization to have a particular application. Using these concepts does not mark the end of the process of rational deliberation but its beginning, and such deliberation has to be without end as long as there is to be a kingdom of the ends.

The concept of the human, then, does not involve a fixed definition but must be a work in progress, just as human beings should always be works in progress. Oddly enough, the most flexible approach to the definition of the human today occurs in arguments for animal rights. The idea here is to treat animals with the respect due to them as equals to human beings, despite the fact that animals are not capable of extending respect as equals to us. This is an important gesture for ethical thinking, but I prefer, for political reasons, to make provisions for the accessibility of all members of the human species to the category of the human before we begin to provide access for other

species. The simple fact remains that it is easier at the moment to make a case for animal rights than for disability rights, and at least one major philosopher has gone so far as to argue that we owe animals greater kindness than people with disabilities. Peter Singer concludes that we should outlaw animal cruelty and stop eating meat but that we should perform euthanasia on people with mental disabilities or difficult physical disabilities such as spina bifida:

that a being is a human being . . . is not relevant to the wrongness of killing it; it is, rather, characteristics like rationality, autonomy and self-consciousness that make a difference. Defective infants lack these characteristics. Killing them, therefore, cannot be equated with killing normal human beings, or any other self-conscious beings. This conclusion is not limited to infants who, because of irreversible mental retardation will never be rational, self-conscious beings. . . . Some doctors closely connected with children suffering from severe spina bifida believe that the lives of some of these children are so miserable that it is wrong to resort to surgery to keep them alive. . . . If this is correct, utilitarian principles suggest that it is right to kill such children.²¹

This horrifying conclusion shows the limitations of eighteenth-century rationalism. My point is that another universal and metacritical concept of the human—one that moves beyond the eighteenth-century use of rationality as the determining factor for membership in the human community—is urgently required, if people with disabilities are to attain the respect due to them and if we are to make progress as a democratic society, and so I will try to provide one here. Humanness is defined by the aspiration to be human but in a paradoxical way that includes as part of that aspiration the requirement that one concede to other beings the status of human being in order to be recognized as human oneself. Conceding someone the status of human being, I note, is not so much a matter of giving them permission as just letting them be as human.

It is vital at the beginning of the twenty-first century to reconsider our philosophical ideas about humanness because democracy will have no legitimate basis for being the open society it claims itself to be without a generous and metacritical concept of the human, one that gives people with disabilities a place in the public forum. People with disabilities are not a political burden but a resource for thinking about fundamental democratic principles such as inclusiveness and participation.

V

Identity politics have been associated by both the Left and the Right with exclusion and injury. Adherents of identity politics exist supposedly on the margins of society, on the outside, stung by a sense of injury at their exclusion. Thus, the Right condemns identity politics as narcissistic affect, shunning those people who feel too sorry for themselves or have a tasteless and exaggerated sense of their own pain, whereas the Left cannot stomach people

who act like victims, whether they are really victims or not, because they are self-colonizers who set a bad example for everyone else. Both characterizations establish vital links to the politics of people with disabilities. For they, too, are said to live outside of society and to suffer for it. But people with disabilities have refused to accept these misconceptions, requiring different languages and theories of inclusion and pain. Perhaps, then, the perspective of disability studies may shed some light on current misconceptions about minorities and their identity politics.

How might disability studies revise, for instance, the concept of exclusion? It has been under assault since the eighteenth century, most obviously because the perceptual landscape of Enlightenment philosophy opposes most suggestions of externality. The Enlightenment depends famously on the position of the world spectator, and this position, responsible for promoting concepts as varied as empire, the United Nations, and reader-response criticism to name but a few, originates in part as a response to the moral problem of deciding between inclusion and exclusion. The value of world spectatorship lies in its conception of a world that has no outside, in its insistence that all notions of an outside are in fact false and destructive, whether one is discussing government secrecy or national borders.²² Enlightenment philosophy was eager to right the wrong of exclusionary behavior, and its objective, inherited by every subsequent age, involves naming who is being excluded by whom and insisting on inclusion. We usually forget, however, that a reference to an outside determines inclusion as well. Here is where disability studies might effect a sea change by asking that the inclusion-exclusion binary be reconceived in terms of accessibility and inaccessibility, thereby taking power and momentum from those on the inside and stressing that societies should be open to everyone. In short, all worlds should be accessible to everyone, but it is up to individuals to decide whether they will enter these worlds. We live in a built environment that is inaccessible, so it is a stretch to think about a moral and political world that would be wholly accessible, but this is the challenge issued by disability studies. How will the language of universal access transform politics in the future?

Finally, how might disability studies begin to interpret the politics of injury attached to minority identity? The model of rationality most visible today, we have seen, defines political subjects as disinterested and unique selves capable of making choices in private and public life on the basis of their own individual being. One of the ramifications of this model is the fear that identity of any kind oppresses the self, and generally when identity fails, it is considered a good thing. Identity politics are, consequently, better off dead because they interfere with individual autonomy. This conclusion is a direct result of thinking about identity as a cultural construct that interferes with individual being, either constraining or misdirecting it. The rejection of identity politics thus appears to aim solely at the emancipation of the self. But we might consider that the rejection of identity politics also derives from a certain psychology of injury. This psychology links injury to individual

weakness, and it makes us afraid to associate with people who either claim to be injured or show signs of having been injured or disabled. We interpret injured identity as a social construction of personality that an individual should not put on, and since not everyone does, people with injuries are somehow inferior. People with disabilities are familiar with this psychological response to them, and greater dialogue between disability and minority studies might make it clearer that attacks by the Right and Left against identity politics are motivated more by aversion than political rationality. There is no more reason to feel sorry for minorities because they are not in the majority than there is to feel sorry for people with disabilities because they are not able-bodied. Identity politics is not a curse on minority individuals but a political boon. They do not gather together because of wounded attachments or narcissism. They are not trying to turn an injury to unfair advantage. Rather, they are involved in a political process. In fact, identity politics is no different from any other form of political representation, since politics always implies the existence of a coalition whose membership is defined by ideological, historical, geographical, or temporal borders. Limited ideas of identity, then, are properties of all forms of political representation, and there is no reason to reject identity politics either on this basis or because they have been inappropriately linked to exclusion or injury.

Disability studies has much to offer future discussions of minority identity and its politics. Other topics might include (1) considering why the poor have been unable to establish themselves as a minority or identity group and how this inability relates to the general poverty of people with disabilities, (2) providing further elaboration about the relation between citizenship and mental disability and how this connection has influenced the representation of people of color and the GLBT community, or (3) asking how conceptions of disability determine different views of the marketplace, for example, images of health encouraged by genetic-engineering and drug companies versus ideas about worker safety and health in heavy industry. We are just at the beginning of our inquiry, and the inquiry is difficult. But we may take comfort for the slow advance of our knowledge, to paraphrase Freud with irony intended, in the words of the poet:

What we cannot reach flying we must reach limping. . . .
The Book tells us it is no sin to limp.²³

NOTES

1. References are to Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, n.d.).
2. See Lennard J. Davis, "Identity Politics, Disability, and Culture," *Handbook of Disability Studies*, eds. Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, and Michael Bury (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 535–45, esp. 536, 544 and Andrew W. Potok's interview with Rosemarie Garland-Thomson,

- in *A Matter of Dignity: Changing the World of the Disabled* (New York: Bantam, 2002), pp. 183–84.
3. Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993), p. 86.
 4. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, eds., “Introduction: Disability Studies and the Double Bind of Representation,” *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 1–31, esp. 5.
 5. Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 5.
 6. References are to Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
 7. References are to Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
 8. A related phenomenon is the demand that people with disabilities live in their mind and not their body. Anne Finger, *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy, and Birth* (Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1990) describes it superbly: “The world tells me to divorce myself from my flesh, to live in my head. Once someone showed me, excitedly, a postage stamp from Nicaragua: a man in a wheelchair, working alone, peering into a microscope. There’s a U.S. postage stamp that’s almost exactly the same. It’s always someone working alone, preferably male, brilliant, fleshless, a Mind” (18). And elsewhere: “I feel my disability as a physical reality, not just a social condition” (86).
 9. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 70, 71, 72. Brown, in fact, disagrees with Nietzsche at the conclusion of chapter 3 by calling for a new politics that departs from the resentment of identity politics. This new politics would “release” pain in the hope of future healing. It would be oriented not toward individual “want” but toward what Brown calls “being.” She is right to call for a shift, but her remarks, even when disagreeing with Nietzsche, continue to rely on individual psychology, notably on the theory of individual catharsis familiar to students of psychoanalysis. More disturbing in the case of the identity politics of people with disabilities is Brown’s insistence that “wounded attachments” are an inherently undesirable state of affiliation.
 10. For an extended critique of how the rhetoric of narcissism has been used both against people with disabilities and to degrade their participation in identity politics, see my “Tender Organs, Narcissism, and Identity Politics” *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, eds. Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Sharon L. Snyder, and Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: PMLA, 2002), pp. 40–55. Lennard Davis extends my reading of narcissism to an interpretation of recent Supreme Court rulings on the ADA in *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), chap. 7.
 11. See, for example, Potok, *A Matter of Dignity*: “My physical disability, blindness, dominates and skews the able-bodied person’s process of sorting out perceptions and forming a reaction . . . For my part, am I only or mostly my disability?” (90). See also the classic theorist in the field, Robert A. Scott, *The Making of Blind Men; A Study of Adult Socialization* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1969), p. 3.
 12. Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 45. See also my call for a new

- realism of the body, "Disability in Theory: From Social Construction to the New Realism of the Body," *American Literary History* 13.4 (2001): 737–54.
13. References are to Paula Moya, *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). See also Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 181–228 and Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).
 14. Other discussions important to philosophical realism and identity politics include Linda Martín Alcoff, *Real Knowing: New Versions of Coherence Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) and Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, eds., *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
 15. On the social and moral value of identity, see my *Morals and Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), esp. chaps. 2 and 4.
 16. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), defines the political unconscious as a collective impulse that situates the experience of the human group as "the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation" (17). See also my use of Jameson in "What Can Disability Studies Learn from the Culture Wars?," *Cultural Critique* 55 (2003): 182–216.
 17. Rob Imrie, *Disability and the City: International Perspectives* (London: Paul Chapman, 1996), p. 19.
 18. Juan Flores, "Reclaiming Left Baggage: Some Early Sources for Minority Studies," *Cultural Critique* 59 (2005): 187–206, esp. 200.
 19. References are to Paula Moya, "Response to Juan Flores's 'Reclaiming Left Baggage,'" Unpublished paper, pp. 1–12.
 20. Eva Feder Kittay, "When Caring is Just and Justice Is Caring: Justice and Mental Retardation," *Public Culture* 13.3 (2001): 557–79, takes up the idea that "mental retardation" may be liberalism's limit case because some people with disabilities may not be capable of participating in rational deliberation. Her essay provides a good background to the political issues raised by people with mental disabilities, although her conclusion about new ideas of caring justice is not entirely satisfying—not, I note, because she has not considered the question of cognitive disability thoroughly but because it is a difficult question. Other sources on the role played by the cognitive disability in U.S. history include Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, "Out of the Ashes of Eugenics: Diagnostic Regimes in the United States and the Making of a Disability Minority," *Patterns of Prejudice* 26.1 (2002): 79–103 and James W. Trent, Jr., *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
 21. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 131–33. Similar passages may be found throughout his corpus.
 22. The classic political description of a world without an outside is the essay "Perpetual Peace," *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), where Immanuel Kant argues against political secrecy and standing armies and calls for a "league of nations" to ensure world peace. For an in-depth analysis, see my, "Politics and Peace," *The Subject and*

Other Subjects: On Ethical, Aesthetic, and Political Identity (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 115–30. Please note, however, that the world spectator position is often placed outside the purview of its own vision, despite the idea that there is no outside to the world.

23. See the conclusion to “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” *The Standard Edition*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953–74), where Freud quotes Rückert: “Was man nicht erfliegen kann, muss man erhinken. . . . Die Schrift sagt, es ist keine Sünde zu hinken” (23:64).

ON A CRITICAL REALIST THEORY OF IDENTITY*

Rosaura Sánchez

The ongoing work of post-positivist realists¹ interested in reclaiming reality and identity as epistemological sites has generated much discussion in recent conferences and publications. While agreeing in general with the positions of post-positive realists, in this essay I would like to contribute to the discussion by turning to several fundamental issues and categories that often get misconstrued or subsumed in discussions of identity politics. I have considered it important to begin disarticulating the process of identity formation by focusing on the salient features of some basic categories. There is without a doubt a need to formulate a theory that posits a materialist grounding of knowledge and analyzes the always political nature of the production of that knowledge. I would like therefore to suggest that we engage in a critical realist analysis of identity formation. This requires, in my opinion, attention to three major points: (a) what is at stake in positing a reclaiming of reality, (b) what is involved in rethinking or refashioning identity in the current context, and (c) the need for a recentring of class and a reconsideration of the role of the state in any discussion of identity formation.

In the preface to *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Mohanty calls for exploring and developing a theoretical alternative to the notion of objectivity, one that could be called “realist” (xii). This desire for what I am calling a “critical realist” alternative, a term I am borrowing from Bhaskar,² for reclaiming reality is linked to epistemological as well as concrete political objectives. For, if the ultimate struggle is against forms of domination (material and ideological), then what is indispensable is a politics of agency, that is, political action within the many domains of capitalist society. Concretely, then, one of our main concerns needs to be exploring the role that a politics of identity can play in generating agency and in creating critical spaces from which to resist and contest hegemonic shaping and defining of “reality.” At one level, this implies a conscious search for commonalities, for identities-in-difference³ that can serve to unite individuals and collectivities alike around common interests in order to produce political alliances and solidarity for

social struggle. At another, it implies a conscious awareness of differences that are not only discursive but also social and economic, and definitely divisive.

It goes without saying that in the last two decades identity issues and identity politics have been the object around which not only theorizing but social and political organizing have revolved. Since at least the beginning of the post-civil rights period, identity politics have generated a great deal of discussion and been subject to appropriation, attacks, and dismissal from various quarters.⁴ The most facile attack has been to accuse proponents of identity politics (the so-called identitarians) of essentialism. Some on the Right are arguing that in what is construed as a race-blind society identity politics is now irrelevant.⁵ Others have argued that advocates of identity politics have given up the struggle against capitalism and, in foregrounding culture, identity, and performativity, have in good measure relinquished interest in political economy and in differential structural positioning and access to resources. Finding that capitalism has penetrated to nearly every corner of the world, it is argued, these identity culturalists tend to naturalize it, leaving aside to a large extent the fact that it is exploitative and oppressive, subjecting workers to the requirements of profit-maximization and capital accumulation throughout the world. This critique of the culturalists' shortcomings is valid to some extent and for that reason I see a need for a politics of identity that is less focused on recognition and representation and more interested in the constitution of political agents involved in global/local struggles for social transformation.

While not all proponents of identity politics have gone beyond critiques grounded in the economic disparities that characterize capitalism, there are undoubtedly those who find that the ideological/economic is no longer a productive site for social transformation. I would disagree on this point, not only because all social sites are in some way also economic and ideological, but because the very elements of negativity, always necessary for change and agential action, are generated by class differences. In fact, I would argue that the tendency to focus on cultural differences as practices or performances delinked from those social relations and contradictions that are the causal grounding of these differences is fetishistic. A critical realist politics of identity, I would offer, rejects all types of idealisms and provides a materialist account of identity formation that meets explanatory adequacy by examining identity in direct relation to social structures, noting how social structures configure, condition, limit, and constrain agency and never forgetting that agency has the potential to transform social structures. Identity, unlike identification, is agentially formed, and for this reason generating a critical and self-reflexive critique of identity in relation to non-identity, contradiction, absence, negation, and change is especially important.

In our search for the constitution of radical subjects that can organize to challenge the hegemonic order and eliminate structural constraints, bringing about social—especially radical or revolutionary—change, it is important to bear in mind that meaningful political organizing is seldom, if ever,

spontaneous but rather deliberate and painstakingly achieved; moreover it is always marked by immediate goals or short-term objectives as well as long-term goals. Surely there can be no major global/national struggle for substantive transformation without prior political organizing at the local level; but the opposite has also been the case historically, as local struggles often recall previous sites of national struggle (as is clear in the case of the Zapatistas in Chiapas). Organizing around issues of cultural identity can create sites of common political interests and political agency, that is, the constitution of political subjects willing to struggle. The fact that identity struggles are not necessarily transformative but rather reformist in nature at given historical conjunctures should not deter us, as it will instigate political subjects with accrued prior political activist experience (political “capital” so-to-speak) to take additional transformative steps. At the same time, a critical analysis requires that one recognize the shortcomings and limitations of particular struggles, but without necessarily dismissing them as peripheral or of little consequence, as some of my colleagues on the Left, who have argued that social change will not come from “voices on the margin.”⁶

While I harbor no illusions about transgressive “identity politics,” insofar as ultimately effecting transformative social change, and while I recognize that “identity politics” can be manipulated by hegemonic forces, I will argue that a critical politics of identity can play a part in political organizing and in challenging hegemonic discourses, even if structural transformation is not the issue at hand in the short term. Political agency, after all, can always simply lead to the perpetuation of existing structures (Bhaskar, 1993, 279). Yet, without agency there can be no emancipation. Structural social transformation will require, then, reflexivity and entail many battles along the way, of different types and at different levels, that can prepare us for larger struggles. In today’s stratified and divided context, I believe, retaining a critical politics of identity makes political sense and is strategically practical.

There is, then, a strategic rationale for a politics of identity and that is: developing critical political agency. For this reason we need to go beyond issues of inclusion/exclusion and an exaltation of difference as difference to engage in an exploration of events, relations, and structures that have a constitutive role in identity formation. Identity, though discursive in nature, is ultimately grounded in social reality, that is, social structures and relations; unfortunately in recent times, we have in many instances boxed ourselves into a discursive corner, positing discourse as itself constitutive over and above social structures.⁷ Is “the word the medium in which power works” as Stuart Hall affirms?⁸ I think that we need to look at this formulation closely and say that it is *a* medium but not the only one, for power works at all levels of our social structures, including, but not exclusively, within the cultural terrain. By contrast, reality is most definitely not limited to the discursive domain. Let us not incur, then, in the linguistic fallacy, confusing reality with our discourses about reality. Nor should we define reality in terms of knowledge—the epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar, 1991, 33). Thus, while recognizing that discourses mediate our knowledge and intuition about the world, it

is also important to bear in mind that reality is not reducible to our discourses—or to our knowledge of it—nor can any transformational social struggle be reduced to a negotiation over meaning.⁹ Reality is not, then, limited to the way we construct it or theorize it. We, although cognizant and sentient beings, are not the litmus test of reality. What we call reality, as noted by Prigogine, is nevertheless “revealed to us only through the active construction in which we participate.”¹⁰ And, yet, clearly we don’t all participate in this process of construction on an equal footing, an issue that, though crucial, is all but avoided by some knowledge theorists.

Let us recall, furthermore, that our knowledge of reality is itself constantly changing; knowledge itself is productive and transformative and conditions the emergence of new social identities, that, by virtue of being constituted in tension with other identities—that is, as non-identities, as differentiations—always are already political. Identity formation, then, takes place at a conjuncture of external and internal, contingent and necessary, processes that interconnect and emerge within specific historical conditions that are in good measure not of our own making. It would be foolhardy, then, to explore identity formation outside the complex web of social-structural relations. What is needed is a critical theory that is grounded in a fuller recognition of how particular social structures and relations condition a diversity of social and historical experiences and generate concrete social spaces that give rise to social, political, and cultural identities. In turn, these social spaces are themselves productive sites, enabling the construction of new and potentially radical/transformational political subjects.

Acknowledging the risk of stating the obvious, I think it bears repeating that we are all born into a multiply determined and contradictory world that preexists us, and is situated within specific social structures (be they economic, political, or cultural). As social agents, however, we are not reduced to one social location as we are constantly in the process not only of reproducing but also of transforming these very same social sites (Bhaskar, 1991, 71). The desire to transform the material world is a product of reflexivity, a conscious, though contingent, awareness on our part of gaps, absences, discontinuities, and inconsistencies between our social world and the discourses available to us with which to apprehend it. The transformation of social structures will, however, have to go beyond discursive change or redescriptions of reality, although revolutionary structural changes will undoubtedly involve the development of new explanatory discourses and critiques of particular practices (Bhaskar, 1991, 72). While seemingly an obvious point, it carries within it key implications for the construction of a reality-based critique, as I will develop below.

Broadly speaking, these are a few of the elements of a critical realist theoretical framework that I find promising for a fuller exploration of identity formation. And because, as I have sketched out above, social actors’ knowledge is conditioned by social structures—the very structures that human agency can transform—I want to first look more closely into two useful categories for exploring identity: positioning and positionality.

POSITIONING AND POSITIONALITY

Identity, as Harvey notes in *Spaces of Hope*, “cannot be understood outside of the forces that swirl around it and construct it.”¹¹ Identity formation is itself a process shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces that come together and mutually constitute one another in distinctive and dynamic ways. Key among these forces, although often backgrounded when not omitted, is the labor process, which positions one within a given class structure. The very fact that in the last three decades it has not been fashionable to talk about class, that, often, any mention of class is immediately labeled reductionist, should already raise a flag: we are facing denial and/or displacement of a central fact of social life. This retreat from class, as noted by Meiksins Wood,¹² is prevalent particularly among postmodernist/poststructuralist proponents of a “politics of difference,” who have no problem leveling off all differences and precisely because of this often fail to link particular differences with social location. A critical realist theory of identity formation, on the other hand, necessarily implies viewing class/structural positioning as part and parcel of *all* social conjunctures and inseparably connected to every distinctive conflictual difference. Identity, of course, cannot be reduced to social location or positioning, but it also cannot be analyzed in any meaningful way without taking it into account. In fact, I would argue, social location and identity could be said to be distinct but inseparable.

If social positioning is one’s location within a set or conjuncture of economic, political, and cultural structures, it follows necessarily that class cannot be the *only* positioning that matters; one is always also situated within interconnected and interrelated gender, racial/ethnic, and sexual social structures as well and subject to a network of social relations linking these various structures. Political structures situate us as citizens (first-class or second-class) or noncitizens, residents, etc., of a particular nation-state, with various rights and obligations. Through its coercive powers and authority and through its underpinning of the capitalist system, the state also constrains us in multiple ways. The state has the power to curb our actions and to subject us to unwarranted searches and imprisonment; it, in fact, defines for us what our social status will be: legal/illegal, dependent, spouse, draftee, and so on. There are multiple means available to the state to restrict political action against the state and history teaches us that the state has, in the past, taken action not only against its “enemies” but against its citizens, as in cases where troop action has been used against demonstrators or strikers, or in cases where state-funded researchers have conducted chemical and nuclear experimentation with patients, soldiers, and other citizens. The state’s multiple powers position us in many ways; the arm of the law is indeed long. Aside from the coercive reach of the state, perhaps the most powerful area in which the state operates is in exerting its power of identification, not only through its census-taking, as the most obvious example, but through a variety of apparatuses that institute systems of labels that categorize and classify us. This labeling is no mean thing as we know all too well; at its most malign

it is linked to its coercive powers to criminalize entire segments of the population on the basis of social location as determined by race, ethnicity, and economic standing, as is evident in police profiling, or to order and implement wholesale “relocations” of populations.

While the state may base particular cases of discrimination and oppression on social positioning, it is also fast to manipulate particular positionings, if it finds these expedient. The United States’ false allegations of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to justify an invasion and occupation is a clear example of the state’s ability to manipulate positionings for the profit of oil companies and the war machine. U.S. action in Afghanistan has likewise been explained in terms of police action against terrorists and against nations that support and shelter terrorists. During the period of intensive bombing of this area, interestingly, the state and mass media chose to foreground the need to improve conditions for Muslim women in Afghanistan, in the process implicitly legitimating military action there. This ostensible concern for positioning within sexist gender structures is, however, not evident at home, where women continue to be the objects of sexist practices, abuse, rape, and domestic violence. Women die every day in the United States at the hands of violent husbands and partners, much as children too die every day at the hands of parents, guardians, and sitters. Of course, it is quite understandable that those positioned in oppressive or exploitative locations should seek to improve their situation by whatever means are available. But those of us observing events from afar, who have not been consulted about military policies that we do not support, can see the astute way in which fashionable discourses can be manipulated by the state for its own agenda.

Gender positioning, like subordinate status by virtue of age or legal status, cannot, of course, be considered in isolation as it is always part of a conjuncture in which various factors are simultaneously implicated. Yet, the complexity of the conjuncture is often ignored as is clear in the many discussions dominating cultural criticism today and that focus almost exclusively—after paying lip service to the notion of the intersection of race, class and gender—on single issues or positionings. For this reason, and because it has been key in the positioning of Chicanas and Chicanos, I see the need to stress the intersectedness of positionings and to include class positioning in any conjunctural analysis, even when class is not the dominant issue. Unlike some that wish to envision the United States as a classless society, I see a thoroughly and even increasingly class-based social structure that conditions agency and shapes social relations, enabling or constraining possibilities.

Class, then, is not merely a “discourse” or a “narrative” but a concrete social positioning. For me the key term linked to class positioning is exploitation, but I recognize that today economists and other theorists are wary about defining class, lest it fall into essentialism.¹³ That danger can be avoided in a theory that posits social positioning, of any type, as not fixed, but rather as relational and, like reality itself, always in flux, always changing. Various theorists wishing to avoid static class definitions based on what sound like fixed relations of production have offered other conceptualizations. Harvey,

for example, prefers to define class as a “situatedness or positionality in relation to processes of capital accumulation” (Harvey, 1996, 359). This definition is meant to be more inclusive since all of us are positioned in relation to capital accumulation, by selling our labor power and consuming commodities, if not actively involved in exploiting labor or investing, and the like. We all relate, then, in various ways to different circuits of capital, and often in more than one way at any given time. What is important to note here is that class positioning situates us in relation to and within capitalist structures and thus locates us (and dislocates us) socially in highly complex and significant ways.

Discussions of class structures are too often skirted or avoided outright by focusing on issues of income, access to consumption, poverty, or socioeconomic inequality. In effect, discussions of poverty—the “poor,” the “underclass,” “the underprivileged,” according to the source—serve to displace attention away from social contradictions that are structural in nature. One cannot deny that inequality is a global problem that not only divides the rich North from the poor South, but also the very rich from the poor within individual countries, even in advanced economies, as noted by Callinicos,¹⁴ among others. Poverty, however, is only the most overt manifestation of structural contradictions that can be traced to capitalist relations of production, and the formulation is one that reduces the problem to one of distribution rather than to the class stratification inherent in society. While it is useful to contrast conditions in the affluent First World with those in much of the Third World, or consider the discrepancies between conditions in wealthy communities and those in ghettos and barrios, it does not necessarily call into account the role that national and multinational capitalist enterprises as well as the policies of international agencies like the IMF, World Bank, and trade agreements like NAFTA or the projected FTA have in creating conditions of unemployment, underemployment, and low-wage employment, at both the national and global level. What should be increasingly clear is that we are all positioned structurally not only within national but also international contexts, as much economically as politically. And however much we seek to ignore this positioning, the social situation is as close as the very blouse or shirt on our backs or the shoes on our feet, more likely than not the product of super-exploited cheap labor, mostly female labor, in maquiladoras or sweatshops, often owned by U.S.-based companies.

Gender, class, and race are always part of the social conjuncture. The question is why one should stress class location if the conjuncture is, in fact, constituted by several positionings? In response, one should recall that class considerations do not disallow other positions, but rather require an analysis of positioning in terms of antagonistic social relations and contradictions, which themselves are structural and geo-historically specific. Issues of gender, racial/ethnic and sexual orientation are, as previously mentioned, too often contained within a framework of difference that masks the structural grounding of these relations. Class, on the other hand, is first and foremost a structural positioning; class relations are, moreover, implicitly problematic

and not easily naturalized. Class can function, then, as a heuristic construct that invites the exploration of varied social problems on the basis of social positioning and social structures. Structural analyses also allow for a grasp of commonalities shared across different social positionings. In other words, an analysis of antagonistic relations within class, gender, racial/ethnic and/or heterosexual structures is also an analysis of equivalencies among non-equivalent positionings, or, to employ Bhaskar's formulation, "identities-in-difference."¹⁵

Before moving on to "positionality," let me sum up by reiterating that "positioning" refers to one's location within a given social reality. Positioning, as previously noted, is structurally determined but it goes without saying that it is unavoidably discursively mediated. It is also relational; in other words, one is always situated with respect to other locations, enabling individuals to become aware of differences between and commonalities among positionings. Positioning also implies standing in opposition to other locations; certain positionings are not merely different, but antagonistic. It is one's awareness of positioning within a conjuncture, one's awareness of disjuncture, that is, of social contradictions, of the lack or absence of certain powers, goods, opportunities or privileges, that is politically critical and productive. Reflexivity with respect to one's positioning is contingent on a series of factors. It may lead to complicity or a conciliatory compromise with given social structures and perhaps to a desire to maintain the status quo, or it may lead to transformative practices. This reflexivity vis-à-vis a particular conjuncture is what I would like to term positionality to draw attention to and differentiate from social positioning.

I would like to distinguish, then, between one's social location or positioning and positionality, that is, one's imagined relation or standpoint relative to that positioning. This reflexivity, understanding of, or subjective relation with regard to social location is ideological. While positioning is extra-discursive (i.e. structural), although conceptually mediated, positionality is discursive and may be contingent upon other factors, other complementary or competing discourses, not specifically implicated by one's social location. Positionality is a useful diagnostic construct as it enables one to better examine and understand why individuals sharing a similar or even the same positioning do not *live* their situation in the same way. A working-class Chicano, for example, may see the structural location of people living in his barrio variously: from a bourgeois perspective (disdain in the face of what he considers lack of individual effort or merit on the part of those he considers lazy and incompetent), a religious perspective (resignation before the will of God who determined their condition of poverty), or a progressive perspective (resentment against capitalist enterprises in collusion with the state to keep his segregated community polluted by industries, fragmented by free-ways, underemployed, ill-served by poor schools that lead to a high dropout rate, and faced with conditions that generate violence and drug dealing). One's positionality is thus conditioned, but not strictly determined, by one's social positioning; moreover, positionality is always at variance with other

positionalities, including one's own on other issues, as one's perspectives are always multiple, contradictory, and, again, constantly in a state of flux, renegotiating themselves in the face of changing realities.

What we generally intend to capture by the term "experience" is constituted by an aggregate of dialectically contradictory positionings and positionalities. In experience, positionings and positionalities are distinct but inseparable, connected yet contradictory. It is this interconnection between positioning and positionality that determines one's lived experience, that is, how one lives one's situation (actual and perceived) in the world. And in this regard, I consider the "post-positive realist project's" rejection of an "empiricist notion of experience" to be a key theorizing move. With recognition that experience is mediated, that a series of positional discourses intervene and mediate one's way of perceiving positionings, comes as well an awareness that one's experience may be mediated as much by hegemonic discourses as by critical anti-hegemonic discourses. It is then not surprising to find conservative Chicanos like Richard Rodríguez or African Americans like Clarence Thomas, both of whom assume hegemonic positionalities vis-à-vis the experiences of those with whom they at some point have shared social positioning.

Of course, the cognitive dissonance, asymmetry, or lack of sync between one's positioning and one's positionality can also, as previously noted, be politically productive. The moment positionality is mediated by counterdiscourses and one experiences alienation and becomes aware of disjunctures, social inequities, lacks, the non-parity of citizens, the social constraints and inconsistencies in society, then, one has reached the space of critical questioning, which can give rise to a critical assessment of hegemonic ideologies. Awareness of disjunctures between hegemonic discourses and one's reality may also be brought home by violence (e.g. police brutality, state violence against its citizens, class or racial discrimination, gender abuse, etc.). While a lack of sync between positioning and positionality can be a catalyst for reassessing the explanatory adequacy of hegemonic discourses, the "ill fit" between hegemonic discourses of equality and opportunity and a reality of racist, sexist, and classist practices may also lead to disidentification, not only—or necessarily—with the forces of domination but also with those sharing one's positioning, that is, with one's own group. This brings us to consider a second set of key issues: identification and identity, as these mesh in an often problematic fashion with social position and positionality. Clearly, one needs to consider not only positioning and positionality, but also identification, non-identification, disidentification, and misidentification in analyzing the broader process of identity formation.

IDENTIFICATION AND IDENTITIES

To try to chart what I consider the important differences between these sets of terms, let me begin the discussion by noting that unlike positioning, which is extradiscursive although discursively mediated, identification is

a relational and discursive process that is always linked to a group or collectivity that is contained within a particular social space. That space is the product of social location. Not only are social spaces themselves productive of other spaces, but one is always necessarily situated in several spaces. Multiple socio-spatial positioning also implies by definition being linked to a variety of social groupings that are spatially distributed. It is this particular socio-spatial distribution of collectivities that creates conditions for identification on the basis of distinctive groupings. To simplify, identification, then, is relationalist rather than individualist; it always designates individuals as part of a whole; the implication is thus always collective and socio-spatial in nature. It is the socio-spatial and structural positioning of collectivities of social actors that gives rise to discourses of identification.

The process itself of identification, of “ascription,” presupposes awareness of relations between socio-spatial positionings. Identification not only refers to a designation of ties or connections between groups and socio-spatial-structural positionings but also revolves around a contradiction, a negation, a concomitant non-identification, with particular social spaces and actors. Identification always implies a non-identification, or even a concretized disidentification with one or more social groups and social spaces. The fact that one can be linked to more than one collectivity points to the contingent nature of identification processes, which are always partial and in flux. Yet, one cannot deny that some identifications are more enduring, more critical, if not dominant, than others. To belabor the point, given a dominant eurocentric worldview, identification as a person of color has been highly significant for the past five hundred years; being of the female persuasion in male-dominant contexts, on the other hand, has been critical for an even longer period of time.

As a discursive process, identification can be imposed from without or it can be assumed as a matter of choice; it can emerge from outside or from within a social space or group. It can be forced upon a community or collectivity from beyond its confines, as in the case of the derogatory designation of people of Mexican origin as “greasers.” Identification can be imposed by the state, as in Census reports that designate Latinos as “Hispanics” or “white” or as in its targeting of particular segments of minority populations under the rubric of criminal or terroristic. Schools are an important state agency that often identifies entire segments of its minority student population as unfit for higher education or suited only for vocational training. Identification can also be generated from within in relation to the outside, as in the case of our self-identification as “Chicanos.” Identification is, then, a discursive process that can serve to signal a group’s isolation, uniqueness, segregation, rejection, subordination, domination, or difference vis-à-vis others; it can involve a defensive or exclusionary mechanism, but, as noted earlier, it can also serve as a rallying call for recognition and redress of grievances. What is clear is that identification arises from and serves to account for distinctions or conflictual differences coming out of relationships of power involving exploitation, domination, and subordination, and stemming not simply from “non-identity.”

As social processes, identifications are also generative and serve as catalysts to new and varied identifications. Consider, for example, the misidentification of the native population of the Americas as “indios,” as Indians. As Mariátegui recalled, the Quechua-speaking population of Perú, dispossessed, super-exploited, abused, and culturally oppressed, resolved to make the people’s misidentification/identification as “Indians” into a revolutionary identity by stating that if “Indian” was the name under which they had been oppressed, “Indian” would also be the name under which they would rebel.¹⁶ Thus, new identifications, even those arising out of misidentification, colonialism, and subordinate social positioning as in the case above, can serve as rallying strategies, but they can also be deployed to stigmatize and censure particular groups, as is still the case in the pejorative use of “indio” to designate an uneducated and/or uncouth person throughout Latin America today.

As opposed to identification processes, individual identity, on the other hand, emerges precisely out of individuation from a collectivity. While identification can be imposed from the outside, as we have noted above, identity is always agential; it involves an awareness of identification as a containment process and entails a conscious acceptance of a designation, that is, of a discourse, whether it be imposed from the outside or generated from within a group. Identity implies reflexivity, a willing connection to a collectivity, and a recognition of being bound to a group. By default, identity also implies nonidentity, that is, an acknowledgment of difference, of being one thing and not another (the “not-I”). In the absence of reflexivity, identification is not problematic and identity is a nonissue, as is often the case for Latinos/as who have been isolated in white communities of the Midwest, for example. Often it is when they migrate to the southwest or to a large metropolis and they are stopped by the police or are discriminated at work or at a coffee shop as people of color that they become suddenly acutely aware of the identification process and of their designation as members of a particular group. At that point their positionality, the way they view their positioning, is forced to undergo a major shift. In the process of becoming aware of social contradictions and difference (nonidentity or alterity), the individual may opt for a particular designation or identity linking him to a group. Of course the individual may just as well want to get as far away from being associated with any given group as he/she can. In either case, the response will be identity or nonidentity, but the issue cannot be skirted, although it may be displaced. Identity, then, implies an agential act of affirmation or negation and action, a coming to terms with the fact of identification processes at work.

Given the varied socio-spatial-structural location of individuals, and their links to a variety of groupings (family, community, gender grouping, etc.), identities are necessarily also multiple. One can then posit constellations of identities that are themselves distinct but connected, all grounded in historically specific social spaces but always open and in flux. Logically, it also stands to reason that not all identities can be foregrounded at any one time. There is, however, a tactical value to be gained in foregrounding—or

backgrounding—particular identities at given times, precisely because identity equips one discursively to relate to the world, to make sense of one's social positioning, or to further a given agenda at a particular moment. Identity, then, is a discourse that serves to mediate between the individual and the world.

The issue for critical realists is not only to link identity to social positioning and positionality but, in view of our desire for social transformation, to examine how the deployment of identities plays out. It should be expected that mapping social interaction, that is, the various recombinations of identities, and accounting for identities-in-difference, should be no less complicated than mapping the human genome.

THE EPISTEMIC VALUE OF EXPERIENCE

Both identification and identity are discursive processes that cannot be examined outside of experience, that is, outside of the varied social positionings and positionalities that situate individuals. Positioning, as previously noted, does not produce *one* experience, this in view of the fact that individuals often interpret and live their social location in a variety of ways. Similarly, positioning will trigger particular identifications, but there is no rule insuring willing acceptance of that identity by individuals. Nonidentity or disidentification from an ascribed collectivity, however, does not eliminate identification that is externally imposed, as any person of color trying to pass for white can attest. The dialectical connection between positioning and positionality is however crucial for an understanding of agency and experience. Further complicating this contradictory connection is the fact that one is positioned within multiple overlapping sites. Experience is thus variable as one is never situated only within one social site. Often this variability is ignored by a universalizing move that blurs particularity, resulting in the reification of experience, as in the phrase “barrio experience,” as if there were one universally shared, homogeneous experience in the barrio. A woman in the barrio does not have or live the same experience as a man, nor will any two men necessarily experience the barrio in like fashion. The space of gender as it overlaps with the space of class, for example, produces an entirely different social space, an entirely different experience. Experience, then, can only be considered within a constellation of positionings that interconnect in multiple ways, never only in one way, as there are always social boundaries and limits that impact particular interconnections and overlappings that are open or closed, that is, available or unavailable, to us, depending on our positioning.

What about the epistemic value of experience? Do positioning and positionality offer a particular—or privileged—vantage point regarding reality, and a particular understanding or knowledge of the world? It's a vexed question. One could argue that positioning and positionality enable a partial view of the world, an understanding grounded in the social spaces within which one is situated and in the discourses with which one is conversant. That would be true for every human being on Earth, as each and every one of us is socially and discursively located. If experience, however, enables only a

partial view (and isn't all knowledge partial?), this vantage point can also serve as the basis for either a distorted or enlightened view of reality. What becomes important, then, is reflexivity, that is, an acute awareness (however contingent) of contradictions between positioning and positionality that prepare us, make us ready so-to-speak, to seek new understandings and explanations that can point the way to emancipatory practices and, by the same token, unmask false antagonisms. The important distinction to remember is that experience is concrete and knowledge is theoretically based. At bottom, it seems to me that, in formulating a "critical realist" framework, what one seeks is a theoretical explanation or account of the concrete, both past and present. We need, however, to distinguish between descriptive and explanatory adequacy. The practical wisdom that any given experience affords may meet descriptive rather than explanatory adequacy, for it is the case that particular positionings may place constraints on the types of theoretical discourses accessible to one and result in "explaining" matters by merely describing them, or couching them in accessible discourses. For example, in the *barrio*, as noted before, one may have access to religious discourses or hegemonic discourses acquired at school to explain social reality. An awareness of contradictions, that is, the ill-fit between one's reality and the explanatory discourses available to one, on the other hand, can give rise to a questioning of both one's reality and hegemonic discourses. It is this explanatory inadequacy—what I want to term "discursive insufficiency"—as it were, that can lead to epistemic questioning and a search for discourses that provide more satisfactory accounts of "reality."

We can of course, as Mohanty notes, be right or wrong "about the way our social locations enable or inhibit certain kinds of understanding" (Mohanty, 148). What is crucial here, I think, is the language or theory available to the individual and by extension to the collective; with theoretical discourses as with other resources often it is a matter of differential access. The acquisition of particular discourses is not automatic and often a marker of privilege. And yet, especially when contradictions between positioning and positionality become acute, particular social locations can trigger an awareness of cognitive dissonance and generate questioning, resentment, resignation, accommodation, complicity, or disillusionment as a response to this explanatory insufficiency. The choice of questions we raise, the contradictions and processes we become aware of, and the causal factors we identify, on the other hand, will be very much linked to the particular language or theory that we deploy. A critical theory of reality that allows for new epistemologies, critical alternative cognitive frameworks born out of incongruent lived-experience, has a great deal to offer both at the level of theorizing and of concrete political practice, particularly now.

Being a literature person, I want to look now at how a number of these notions about positioning/positionality, identification/identity, and the epistemic value of experience play out, are revealed, and problematized, in a splendid short story, "The Salamanders" by Tomás Rivera.¹⁷ In this short allegorical realist narrative, we find a young boy positioned as part of a Texas Chicano migrant family working in Minnesota and Iowa in the late 1940s or

early 1950s. The family, on a yearly migrant farm-labor circuit, is forced to leave a Minnesota farmer's chicken coop, where they have been living, after three-week rains stop the harvest of beets. Faced with the prospect of having to feed or tend to the migrant family on his land, the farmer prefers to send it on its way, suggesting the family head south to Iowa, where work might be available. Unable to return home, driving an old car, with almost no money for gas and none for food, the family indeed heads south, searching for work along the way. The family's social positioning is painfully clear, but the positionality of the family members begins to waver along the way, as they, facing continual rejection on the part of the farmers, desperately attempt to find work. The potential employers do not even allow them to come out of the car; they merely shake their heads from inside their homes, as a way of sending them on their way and off their land.

In Crystal Lake, Iowa, their car battery runs down, and they stop in town to look for work, while they have the battery charged at a garage, but a policeman runs them out of town, saying the town is off limits to "Gypsies." The family's futile explanations are readily dismissed and their identification as unwanted "foreigners" takes them out of town and into the night. Here, what seems a misidentification of the family as gypsies is really an interpellation of the migrant family as unwelcome, racially marked "outsiders." The family is made to feel "different" and rejected. They are not like "them," that is, the white and local townspeople. Positioning as unemployed farm workers and as members of an ethnic/racial group is what triggers their identification as unwelcome foreigners and what in turn begins to trigger a shift in the positionality of the narrator—a boy, around twelve years old.

The family's situation becomes increasingly desperate. Hungry and tired, with nowhere to go, they stop the car on the side of the highway, hoping to sleep and rest up for the next day's search. As dawn approaches the boy awakens to see his sleeping parents and brothers as waxen dead bodies; this reification of family members makes evident his distancing and sense of disconnection from the family. The boy's reaction of increasing defamiliarization—literally—continues for three nights; the more he faces up to the family's desperate situation, the more he reifies family members, disidentifies with them, and begins to want to leave them. Finally, days later, an Iowa farmer grudgingly allows them to set up their tent near the edge of his field, where, if they're willing, they can wait to see if, once the rains stop, there is anything left to be harvested. This stop affords the family some respite, a temporary space of their own, and they are finally able to stretch out to rest after many days of sleeping cramped up in the car. Late at night the family awakens, however, to another dispossession and literal displacement by an invasion of salamanders, ironically also seeking a dry spot. Horrified, the family engages in a collective act of stomping them to death, channeling in the process a whole series of pent-up frustrations onto the battle against another—encroaching—species. In the collective act they also recuperate their family solidarity. The now-grown narrator recalls his childhood and in particular this episode, saying that after that collective act of rage he again felt like part of the family.

Parenthetically, it always proves interesting to me that students, when we read this story, always assume that the migrants are immigrants—that is, foreigners—and, moreover, undocumented. I repeatedly explain that these are native-born Texans, following the migrant stream to the Midwest to pick crops in the 1940s and 1950s. These are U.S. citizens, acutely aware of their dislocation and forced to come to terms with the disjuncture between positioning and hegemonic discourses. The parents are presented as anguished, but ultimately resigned. The boy, on the other hand, is desperate to distance himself from the situation and from the collectivity; that is why he begins to think of leaving them. The rejection of the farmers and the distrust and disdain of the townspeople are too much to take. At one level Rivera's story is all about second-class citizenship, class location, racial discrimination, and police coercion, but it is also very much about the ways in which social location produces insecurity and self-blame, giving rise to disidentification. At the same time, the story is about the dynamics and potential that collectivities under duress have for solidarity and collective struggle. And it is here, to my mind, that Rivera's story speaks directly to issues revolving around the politics of identity.

Identification as unwelcome foreigners points to the family's nonwhite identity or perhaps one should say, its nonidentity with the Anglo population, but the family is further identified in terms of its positioning, as poor migrant workers. Internalization of social rejection leads not only to the parents' quiet desperation, but to the young boy's growing rebelliousness, silent though it is, in the face of their plight, revealing an awareness of dissonance between what he expects and what he is experiencing that takes the form of disidentification with the family. Unable to change their social location vis-à-vis the White dominant population, the family does however assume an agential positionality when family members resolve to take a stand at the edge of the field, on ground that they are calling theirs for the night, in the process affirming themselves as human agents. Their resistance against this final act of dislocation is embodied in the very material struggle against the salamanders. This fight is thus allegorical; it is a socially symbolic act suggesting that the collectivity, now not merely that of migrant families but of the broader Mexican-origin population, can, in the process of suffering alienation and reification, find a way to reposition and re-identify itself in struggle. It is the conscious self-identification of the family as united in struggle that leads the boy to his individuation and his forging of an identity as a part of the larger collectivity.

There is, however, another narrative dimension in the story that weakens the ethnic identification that the story constructs so well. It is a secondary discourse that appears only in a couple of sentences in the narrative and suggests a motif that is existentialist in nature, that is, that alienation is species-specific. The narrator recalls both at the beginning and at the end of the story that he was particularly struck by the salamanders' alterity and death, projecting, a-la-Cortázar in "Axolotl," a consciousness of death in the salamanders as he squeezed the life out of them. Here, the story suggests that

social dislocation is not limited to those positioned structurally as economically exploited and racially oppressed by positing a displaced existential condition and angst of which both species partake. Rivera's brief attempt at naturalizing the family's plight by having both the family and the salamanders share in the struggle for space and survival is undercut ultimately by the story's demonstration that the family's circumstances have a clear material base.

In a sense Rivera's existential twist in "The Salamanders" is a positionality at variance with the positionings constructed in the story. In another Rivera story the young narrator, seeing that his father is ill from working in unbearable heat in the fields and finding that his parent's prayers go unanswered, becomes furious at an uncaring God who forsakes them. The boy reflects on his social location and realizes that his father may die of sunstroke, while also recalling that his aunt and uncle have recently died of tuberculosis. Things come to a head when the narrator's younger brothers faint in the heat as they try to work in the field. Feeling a total lack of fit between the family's social positioning and the religious discourses at his disposal to explain their situation, the boy begins to question the sense of life and challenges the existence and righteousness of God by doing the unthinkable: cursing God. As the title of the story indicates, the boy has a poignant but transformative epiphany when ". . . the Earth did not part."¹⁸ His understanding does not however lead to a search for other causes or other explanatory analyses of their suffering, but rather to a certain calm and even comfort allowing him to go on working without fear of being struck down by a metaphysical power. Here when the "truth value" of one explanatory framework is put to the test, it does not automatically generate an alternative knowledge set, although it may lead to it ultimately.

The site of identification in several of Rivera stories is with the family and the migrant worker collectivity. The importance of selfidentification as a way to counter external identification is nowhere more poignantly stressed than in the story "Zoo Island," where three young boys set about carrying out their own mini-census of the several extended migrant families living in chicken coops on a farm where they work.¹⁹ To people from the small town nearby who drive by to stare at their shacks and at them, as if they were monkeys in a zoo—as one of the boys' father complains—they are merely "dirty Mexicans." This identification as "Other," imposed upon them from the outside, leads to a conscious nonidentification with the Gringos and in turn this nonidentity generates a desire for an identity of their own, especially among the young, who come up with the idea of the mini-census. The women and men at the camp soon find themselves involved in an impromptu survey for the first time in their lives, and rather than gripe about the questions, one woman remarks that being counted, that having one's name written down, is significant. As she puts it, the simple act of having their names written down not only makes clear that each and everyone of them counts, but it also makes her acutely aware of their numbers and their circumstances. Thus, despite being superior in numbers to the townspeople, the farm workers have nothing, no services, no amenities, nothing to call their own, while the townspeople,

who do “count” as people with needs to be met, have a church, a dance hall, a filling station, a grocery store, and even a little school. Here too another character gives the revelation an existential spin, noting that the survey and more precisely the process of counting, makes them conscious of their existence: “by counting yourself, you begin everything. That way you know you’re not only here but that you’re alive.” (245) When the survey is over, the boys significantly move to “incorporate” as a collectivity by putting up a sign naming their site “Zoo Island” and specifying the number of people at the camp; the youths along with the rest of the migrant camp workers derive an ironic pleasure and shared sense of collective pride in the act of naming themselves and for once “counting” for something. The migrants, who even have their picture taken next to the sign, have taken a negative practice and given it their own spin; they now have an identity, a self-designated identity; they belong to a collectivity and to a social space that they themselves have carved out in this world, or more specifically, for now, at least, in Iowa. For the first time, those positioned as cheap migrant laborers count, not merely as field hands but as individuals that are part of a concrete and named collectivity. The story ends by telling that the young boy who had organized the census felt like whooping and hollering whenever he saw the sign they had put up at the farm gate, and, importantly, that the boy’s reaction was something the employing farmer “never managed to understand” (245).

In all of these stories, positioning and positionality enable a particular network of social relations and lead to a sense of identification or disidentification; in every case the process is linked to the affirmation or assertiveness of the individual, the family, or the ethnic group. The workers are aware of their structural positioning, their class location vis-à-vis the farmers, the owners of the land who hire and fire them, but they do not curse the farmers as the labor relation is “denaturalized” or dare I say “white-washed?” One of the fathers does curse the looky-loos who stare at them when they drive by, and the young boy does curse God, but their anger and resentment is not directed at the social structure. None of the characters express a desire to be part of a larger struggle, nor do they allow themselves to conceive of ways of transforming society or removing constraints on their ability to satisfy their needs. And, it should be noted, if only in passing, that in none of the Rivera stories are women more than abject victims (as in the case of Maria, the agoraphobic mother in “The Night Before Christmas”), murderous villainesses (as in the case of Doña Bone in “Hand in His Pocket”), or sexual commodities (as in the case of “La Chata” in “On the Road to Texas: Pete Fonseca”). We have to go to literature by Chicanas to find nonstereotypical portrayals of women.

In Helena María Viramontes’s novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, we have a social location similar to that of Rivera’s constructed in the text; only here the migrant farm workers are in California and the main character is a young woman.²⁰ The eldest of five children, Estrella has had to be strong for her mother, Petra, a single head-of-household, whose husband has run off to Mexico, leaving the family without money, lodging, or food, and forced to live in labor camps. When Perfecto, an older man, a handyman who with his

toolbox can fix anything, takes up with Petra, Estrella begins acquiring skills that only boys are generally taught. The use of tools, the wood saw, the sledgehammer, the ax, screwdrivers, and the like, signal new skills that reposition her as his apprentice and free her from certain gender constraints without eliminating them entirely. She is “naturally” still expected to be the nurturer and mother’s helper as well as breadwinner. When her boyfriend Alejo becomes hopelessly ill from the insecticide sprayed on the orchards, it is Estrella who is aggressive in her demands for medical attention for him. By contrast the senior male figure Perfecto seems immobilized and unable to “fix” matters. Faced with the possibility of being arrested for Estrella’s action at the clinic, anxious over his failing health, particularly when confronted by the fact that Petra is pregnant by him, Perfecto stands frozen by his old station wagon that night with only four dollars to his name, nowhere to go and seemingly unable to decide what to do. By contrast, it is Estrella’s determination to face up to the challenges that leaves the narrative open to new possibilities. Social positioning, especially class location, here marks the constraints that she and the other migrant farm workers face, but positionality born of countering social constraints allows Estrella to make use of new “tools,” to think and do the previously unthinkable; she imagines herself as able to resist. It is positionality that affords her the wherewithal to climb to the roof of the empty barn in the novel’s defining scene, raising herself on the chain to the loft and once there lifting the boarded opening to the roof. Once on the roof Estrella feels enabled, sure of herself and from that positioning, goes on to take in the majesty of the stars, the trees, and the birds flying about her from a different standpoint.

Identification here, as in the Rivera stories, is both externally imposed, on the one hand, by the whites who see Estrella and her family as undocumented workers, even though they are native-born Californians, and, on the other, internally determined on the basis of their work: “piscadores” (farm workers). But Estrella overrides gender and class-based identification to become a warrior of sorts, a woman that will make herself heard and demand respect, even if it takes the swing of a crowbar at the clinic where Alejo is refused care. Her individualized action, her wielding of “tools” unbecoming a woman, do not at this stage go beyond local and immediate goals, nor is she even certain of having saved Alejo’s life, but what goes without saying is that she is transformed. Both the past and class positioning weigh heavily on all of Viramontes’s characters in this novel and both at the same time constrain them from acting and compel them to action. Few agential possibilities are open to them and agency comes not automatically for subjects whose social and gender location entails more constraints than entitlements, but only after questioning and rebelling against norms.

IDENTITIES, THEIR IMPLICATIONS, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The relational character of social identities as played out in Viramontes’s novel offers us a place from which to comment on the futility of individualized action

outside of a social context of collective struggle, and I want to end the paper by addressing some of the implications of identity politics in recent social struggles. Removing social constraints and gaining power and knowledge have been at the forefront of what Touraine has termed “new social movements” that emerged principally in the First World during the latter half of the twentieth century.²¹ Unlike more traditional social movements that were concerned with labor and social needs or with armed struggle against colonial domination or authoritarian governments, these new social movements emerged in highly developed areas, primarily Europe and the United States, with a focus on issues of recognition and representation, giving rise to their being called “culturalist movements” or identity politics. In Latin America, social movements have dominated the political scene as well, especially after the failure of armed struggles in Central America and the Southern Cone, but they have not always fit the description of “new social movements.” In the last three decades most Latin American social movements have been grassroots movements involved in struggles for basic needs and democratization. In the case of indigenous movements, the struggle has gone far beyond issues of identity, of recognition and representation, focusing on redressing structural inequities faced by these populations. In the case of *feminist movements*, on the other hand, issues of recognition and representation—often in relation to the state and centered on citizenship—have been central to these struggles, to the point that feminist groups²² have often been at odds and clashed with *women’s movements*, more concerned with demands for basic social needs and material grievances.

The differences in political analyses and objectives within Latin American women’s movements are in effect quite similar to those dividing collective struggles in other parts of the world. In her work, Nancy Fraser makes a similar distinction between two types of struggles in the United States: those against injustices of distribution and those against injustices of recognition.²³ The first, Fraser argues, derives from a distributive inequity and implicates the structural underpinnings of capitalist society, while the second is the product of mis-recognition and is more identitarian in focus. Citing an example, in her debate with Butler,²⁴ for example, over whether struggles over sexuality are economic by definition or function (284–285), Fraser provocatively argues that “It is highly implausible that gay and lesbian struggles threaten capitalism in its actually existing historical form” (285). She goes on to say that to remedy the problems caused by the effects of heterosexism, “we do not need to overthrow capitalism in order to remedy those disabilities” (285). In a subsequent article, Fraser further laments what she sees as the decline in movements for redistributive justice and an increase in claims for the recognition of difference.²⁵ What I would like to suggest is that *neither* type of movement necessarily poses a threat to the structures that underpin the capitalist system.

Both of these types of struggles can be circumscribed to nontransformational strategies. While I am not as willing to concede that heterosexism can be disabled without dismantling patriarchy, I agree that identity struggles focusing strictly on recognition and inclusion are not inherently at odds with capitalist society. On the other hand, redistribution, as the term points out, calls for redistributive policies and social provisions to ameliorate social

problems, but not for an overhaul of the organizational basis of society. Redistribution involves what Meiksins Wood calls “protective strategies” that make provisions for certain basic necessities.²⁶ These measures can also go beyond redistribution to include labor organizing and struggles over the terms and conditions of labor. Social protection and workplace advances are of course part of the class-based struggle but tend to be of a reformist nature. All of these non-transformational or short-term struggles are nevertheless important, not only because they can achieve immediate reforms and improve the conditions of life and work, but also because they can enhance consciousness of what I earlier termed the “explanatory insufficiency” of hegemonic epistemologies, and in that, allow for the articulation and organization of struggle for long-term transformational change (Meiksins Wood, 25).

The importance of theorizing, of mapping, of finding a way to connect particular struggles to more general struggles is of course the overriding but difficult goal. But as Harvey notes, it is often difficult to make these wider connections since these movements often “rest on the perpetuation of patterns of social relations and community solidarities” (1996, 40), that is, they are invested in buttressing already existing identities and epistemological frameworks, and less so in forging new ones. Nevertheless I think that under the present circumstances, social movements for recognition and redistribution *can* play a role in maintaining people politically active and connected, and in finding equivalencies in the nonequivalent (Bhaskar, 1993, 122), that is, in constructing identities-in-difference. By seeing that despite differences, there are shared commonalities, shared structural constraints at work across communities, local struggles may connect in movements involved in what Harvey, borrowing from Raymond Williams, calls “militant particularisms” (Justice, 35).

The Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas in 1994 provides a good example of how a local indigenous insurrection based on both economic and ethnic/cultural demands has become linked not only to urban worker struggles throughout Mexico but to national protests against neoliberalism and the institution of NAFTA. Within Mexico, the Zapatistas have also used the national spotlight to call for political reform and democratization more broadly. Spurred on by events in Chiapas, that same year, 1994, tens of thousands of Mexican workers took to the streets in various cities.²⁷ This militant particularism, evident in a ferment in labor struggles and the resurgence of armed struggle, has demonstrated two things: (1) that local struggles can transcend particularities and have both national and global dimensions, and (2) that politics of identity can be an intrinsic and key part of the politics of social change. The figure of subcomandante Marcos that emerged from the EZLN struggle makes for a useful case to demonstrate the power of the politicization of identity. Recall that the very identity of the *guerrillero* Marcos was deconstructed at the same time that it was deployed and cloned with the slogan “Todos somos Marcos” (we are all Marcos). Thus, while it is true that many social movements of the last three or four decades have been largely reformist, often seeking basic needs or recognition or redress for

injustices, still, it is important to note that these movements and the inequities they point out may at some point come together and serve as necessary stepping stones for future and more broadly based struggles. In the Zapatista case, their very social positioning as subordinated, exploited, and dispossessed indigenous peoples became linked not only with redress of grievances cultural in nature, but with a positionality of revolutionary struggle. Their identification as “indios,” as part of a non-Western culture, has become not a derogatory term, but a call to action and to a new identity as Zapatistas, building in the process on a national revolutionary past that unites not only these indigenous groups but others in the nation-state—like peasants, workers, and the like—who seek social changes that are unlikely to be met under existing economic and political regimes.

If the task is not only to understand the world but to change it, then it is important to explore, again quoting Harvey, “different forms of alliances that can reconstitute and renew class politics” (1996, 41), and, I would add, that seek to transform capitalist forms of domination and exploitation in their various incarnations. Transformational agency, as underscored by Bhaskar, is informed by explanatory critique and entails a participatory–emancipatory politics.²⁸ To bring collectivities marked by difference to join in larger social struggles will involve an analysis and rethinking of the politics of identity and for that, a critical realist theory will be indispensable.

NOTES

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1. Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Paula Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, ed. *Reclaiming Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). See also Paula Moya, *Learning from Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
2. Roy Bhaskar, *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991) p. 139.
3. Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic. The Pulse of Freedom* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 10.
4. Bill Albertini et al., “Introduction,” to “Is There Life After Identity Politics,” *New Literary History* 31. 4 (2000): 621–25.
5. In California, Ward Connerly and his allies, through their Racial Privacy Initiative, sought to eliminate all classifications on the basis of race, ethnicity, color or national origin within public employment, public contracting and public education. See Evan McLaughlin, “Connerly, Moores team up on racial initiative,” *The UCSD Guardian* 105. 9 (2002): 1
6. David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 101.
7. Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” *Stuart Hall. Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 443.
8. Stuart Hall, “Subjects in History. Making Diasporic Identities,” *The House that Race Built*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), p. 299.
9. Timothy Brennan, “Black Theorists and Left Antagonists,” *The Minnesota Review* 37 (1991): 89–113.

10. Prigogine, Ilya and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 293.
11. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 16.
12. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat From Class. A New "True" Socialism* (London: Verso, 1986). See also her "Modernity, Postmodernity, or Capitalism?" *Monthly Review*, 48. 3 (1996): 21–39. See also E. Meiksins Wood, "Labor, the State and Class Struggle," *Monthly Review* 49. 3 (1997): 1–17.
13. J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff, "Introduction: Class in a Poststructuralist Frame," *Class and its Others*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 10.
14. Alex Callinicos, *Equality* (Blackwell Publishers, Polity Press, 2000), pp. 2–3. Citing Robert Brenner, Callinicos points to the fact that real wages and salaries have fallen since 1979 and that the U.S. "is evolving into a two-tier society, and the upper tier is shrinking."
15. Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic. The Pulse of Freedom* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 122.
16. From "Manifiesto del Movimiento Indio Pedro Vilca Apaza, Perú": ("Si "indio ha sido el nombre con el que fuimos sometidos, indio será el nombre con el que nos sublevaremos." Cited in Marie-Chantal Barre. *Ideologías indigenistas y movimientos indios* (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1983), p. 18.
17. Tomás Rivera, "Las salamandras," *Tomás Rivera. The Complete Works*, ed. Julián Olivares (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993), pp. 121–23.
18. Tomás Rivera, ". . . And the Earth Did Not Part," *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works*, ed. Julián Olivares (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992), pp. 176–80 (translated here as ". . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him").
19. Tomás Rivera, "Zoo Island," *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works*, pp. 241–45.
20. Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Group/Dutton, 1995).
21. Alain Touraine, *Actores sociales y sistemas políticos en América Latina* (Geneva: PREALC, 1987).
22. Of course these feminist groups have also been divided by politics, with more militant and leftist feminists choosing to struggle at the side of working-class women. See Maxine Molyneux, "Género y ciudadanía en América Latina: cuestiones históricas y contemporáneas," *Debate Feminista* 12. 23 (2001): pp. 3–66.
23. Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism. A Response to Judith Butler," *Social Text*, 15. 3 and 4 (1997): 280.
24. Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural," in *Social Text*, 15. 3 and 4 (1997): 265–75.
25. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," in *New Left Review* 3 (2000): 107–8.
26. Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Politics of Capitalism," *Monthly Review* 51. 4 (1999): 19.
27. Richard Roman and Edur Velasco Arregui, "Zapatismo and the Workers Movement in Mexico at the End of the Century," *Monthly Review* 49. 3 (1997): 105.
28. Bhaskar refers to "transformationist" agency (1993, 120).

RECLAIMING LEFT BAGGAGE: SOME EARLY SOURCES FOR MINORITY STUDIES

Juan Flores

Stanford brings back memories, personal, political, and intellectual associations very meaningful to me today as I reflect on the future of minority studies.¹ Thirty years ago I was on the faculty here at Stanford, a budding young assistant professor in the prestigious German Department. Yes, I spent my 1968 here, a steady fixture in the antiwar movement, which—for those with shorter memories—was to some degree directed against the doings of Stanford itself.

I was not to cash in on my Yale and Stanford pedigree in *Germanistik*, and landed in “minority studies,” Puerto Rican Studies in particular, and at the City University of New York instead of Stanford. My academic career after Stanford would appear to have been an extreme and protracted demotion, or self-demotion, a sharp downward mobility from center to margins, from prestige to the undervalued, from the universal to the particular. I remember colleagues in the humanities and social science disciplines asking me, “Puerto Rican studies? How can you limit yourself to just one group?” And I thought of *Germanistik*, its place firmly ensconced among the established disciplines, the home of “*humanistische Bildung*,” yet its field of inquiry cautiously circumscribed to one central national experience. From the vantage of Puerto Rican and minority studies, as I came to find out, the traditional European disciplines are also severely limited in their methodological and theoretical reach. The U.S. brand of *Germanistik* I had been groomed in was about philology and literary history, with only occasional dabbling, where pertinent, in broader philosophical or social issues. Fortunately for me Stanford’s German Department was among the most enlightened in the country in those years, one of the first in fact to refer to itself as German Studies, and in having complemented its language and literature offerings with a third branch or curricular sequence in intellectual history, *Geistesgeschichte*. For my colleagues, students, and me, that meant complementing our Thomas Mann with Nietzsche and Freud, our Goethe with Kant and Hegel, our Heinrich Heine with Marx and Feuerbach, our Kafka and Brecht with Walter Benjamin. It was a stimulating intellectual feast, a

counter-canon that articulated easily with the fervent student radicalism and rebellious sensibility of the times.

Yet, even this opening to *Geistesgeschichte* and our chance to study the great *Denker* along with the *Dichter* had its obvious limitations. It was still well-bounded humanities, a kind of extended belletristics, for we generally studied little of the history of music or the arts, and of course barely reflected on the multiplicity of German identities, or the cultural experiences of the huge German diaspora in the United States. Most notably, though, social science inquiry was fully excluded: economic, political, even social history remained outside the purview of an education in German culture. Most relevant perhaps for current debates, the issues of German national identity were rarely addressed in any direct or genealogical way, so that the mighty *Dichter* and *Denker* were left dangling, disengaged from the larger sweep of social and cultural history.

The historical formations and trajectories of group identity are of course central to minority studies, which is what accounts for its transdisciplinary imperative. In this respect, my migration from German to Puerto Rican studies was not such a demotion or diminution at all, but rather an expansion of intellectual field and a widening of methodological and theoretical range. The focus on a single national experience is as true of the established disciplines as for minority studies, but because interest in the problematic of identity is so integral to an area like Puerto Rican studies, all aspects of Puerto Rican life, across all the varied academic demarcations, are of direct analytical concern.

Yes, but what about the move from German to Puerto Rican? Surely that's a shrinking in scale, at least, from the big to the small, from the richly complex to the simple and stunted, from a modern culture of world significance and impact to a derivative subculture of only minor or particularist interest to the study of modernity. As nationally circumscribed as *Germanistik* might be, its universalist claim is incontestable because of the enshrined place of German culture in the European canon. Yet, my years in "*Puertorriqueñística*"—as I might refer to Puerto Rican studies in this context—have shown me the richness and complexity of that relatively unfamiliar Caribbean and diasporic culture in all its particularity and universality, as well as its potential contribution to an understanding of global modernity. It is not the scale or size of the national culture in question, or even its centrality to universalist social concerns that distinguishes fields like German and Puerto Rican studies, but their relative positions within the hierarchies of epistemic privilege constructed on the basis of Western European and North American power.

For once I came to immerse myself in Chicano and then Puerto Rican studies I was able to bracket these asymmetries of attributed value and study a national history in a way that had not been possible in the traditional disciplinary paradigm. As a result, I was illuminated by parallels and congruencies in these far-flung and unconnected cultures—German and Puerto Rican—similar stages and cultural voices in the varied process of national identity formation. No, I didn't unearth the Puerto Rican Schiller, Beethoven, or Brecht, but I did sense many striking kinships in the national

literatures and intellectual histories. There was in Puerto Rican culture, though roughly a century later and in more rapid succession, a sequence of epochal shifts much like that which accompanied German national formation, from an Enlightenment classicism to a Sturm-und-Drang patriotism, which was then followed by a turn to realist irony. Hostos and Tapia were like Goethe and Schiller; the Romantic poets in the two countries shared stylistic features and emotional postures; the antiromantic irony of “Pachín” Marín bore resemblances to Heine’s; and the national novelist Zeno Gandía seemed somewhere between Theodor Fontane and the early Thomas Mann. Some of my baggage from *Germanistik* has thus served me well in approaching and interpreting Puerto Rican culture, as long, of course, as I didn’t take the parallels too literally or mechanically, or fail to pay adequate heed to the gaping differences of a structural and geopolitical kind: during the same period when Puerto Rico was first forging its national life and distinctive intellectual history, Germany was rising rapidly and ominously to its status of most-feared imperial nation. That immense gap in global status and prominence remained through the twentieth century, but since the post-World War II period another interesting parallel surfaces, the politically imposed division of national life and culture in each case. Whether it was West Germany and East—my doctoral thesis and first book was about poetry in East Germany—or the relation between Puerto Rico and the diaspora, the theme of bifurcating national cultures and dual identities has been a constant along my sinuous voyage.

But the most cherished legacy of my *humanistische Bildung*, and the one surely most relevant to my more recent concerns, has been the great eighteenth-century thinker Johann Gottfried Herder. Not that I was aware of it yet in my Yale and Stanford days, when Herder loomed marble-like in the classical canon, best known as the intellectual inspiration of the Sturm und Drang and the purported model for Goethe’s Faust. Only gradually, with my increasing study of Puerto Rican and Caribbean cultural history, did I begin to sense another Herder, one with more to offer than that wide-eyed enthusiast, that German Rousseau, whose often incoherent effusions seemed a blend of sentimental pantheism and romantic nationalism of the treacherous German variety.

I heard resonances of this new-found Herder in Hostos and Betances, the nineteenth-century Puerto Rican anticolonial heroes and founding intellectuals, and most of all in the towering Cuban leader José Martí. The whole tenor of “nuestra América” and all of Martí’s writings, the impassioned plea for cultural distinctiveness and self-reliance, the appeal to nature and to the energy of subordinate cultural expression, read like an elaboration, not of Kant, Hegel, or Marx, but of Herder. Then, when I read Martí’s essays on Emerson and Thoreau, and of their adoration for the ideas of Herder, I came to recognize one of the many routes from Herder to the Cuban revolutionary and poet, and to countless anticolonialist and populist movements in the two centuries since his death.²

For what we had never emphasized in *Geistesgeschichte* 101, with all our cognizance of Herder's vast contribution to the fields of anthropology, literary criticism, linguistics, theology, folklore, and the philosophy of history, is that he was one of the earliest, most ardent, and consistent opponents of Eurocentrism, imperialism, and racism in the European intellectual pantheon; with Diderot he was among the first critics of the hegemonic universalism of the Western Enlightenment episteme.³ Even more than Diderot, or Montesquieu, and continually in the face of his magisterial professor, Immanuel Kant, Herder upheld and defended the philosophical and moral status of the particular, of difference, against the imposition of universal rules and values, especially, as in the case of Europe, when that imposition entails violent force and conquest. "Can we name a land," he wrote in the 1790s, "where Europeans have entered without defiling themselves forever before defenceless, trusting mankind, by the unjust word, greedy conceit, crushing oppression, diseases, fatal gifts they have brought? Our part of the earth should not be called the wisest, but the most arrogant, aggressive, money-minded: what it has given these peoples is not civilization but the destruction of the rudiments of their own cultures wherever they could achieve this."⁴

In another writing Herder imagines a conversation between a European and an Asian. The Asian, from India, asks of the European, "Tell me, have you still not lost the habit of trying to convert to your faith peoples whose property you steal, whom you rob, enslave, murder, deprive of their land and their state, to whom your customs seem revolting? Supposing that one of them came to your country, and with an insolent air pronounced absurd all that is most sacred to you—your laws, your religion, your wisdom, your institutions, and so on, what would you do to such a man?" "Oh, but that is quite a different matter," the European replied. "We have power, ships, money, cannon, *culture*."⁵

Recounting another imaginary anecdote, Herder writes: " 'Why are you pouring water over my head?' asked a dying slave of a Christian missionary. 'So that you can go to heaven.' 'I do not want to go to heaven where there are white men,' he replied, and turned on his side and died."⁶

A child of the Enlightenment, Herder saw the French Enlightenment *philosophes* in the whites of their eyes—and culturally speaking, in the white of their skin. Of its immediate offspring, he was its most radical *enfant terrible*, its "profoundest critic" in Isaiah Berlin's educated pronouncement, who also offers a revealing description of Herder's feelings when he actually met "some of the most distinguished of the *philosophes* on his visit to Paris in 1769. He suffered that mixture of envy, humiliation, admiration, resentment and defiant pride which backward peoples feel towards advanced ones, members of one social class towards those who belong to a higher rung in the hierarchy."⁷

Motivated by such a deep, and familiar, sense of colonial humiliation, Herder constituted nothing less than a frontal challenge to the Enlightenment precisely because in his very defense of particularity he upheld its own universal humanistic ideals; his major work, after all, was

Ideas on the Philosophy of Human History. Spurning the nostalgic, reactionary temper of much early anti-Enlightenment thinking in Europe, he staunchly upheld the ideals of progress and modernity. But for Herder, the progress of humanity was only nourished by diversity and cultural democracy. A century and a half before Adorno and Horkheimer elaborated the term, Herder embodied the “dialectics of enlightenment.”

If I may be forgiven the corny pun, it is thus not right for today’s minority studies scholars never to have “heard-a Herder.” An obscure source, yes, but let’s not forget that Herder has become the whipping-boy of the new universalists, those well-identified opponents of multiculturalism and identity politics from varied disciplines and ideological stripes.⁸ In the conservative view, it is Herder who is targeted as the father of multiculturalism, the root of that divisive, separatist particularism that so tragically impedes our sense of national and universal unity. With some trepidation, Geoffrey Hartman points to Herder as the “first to use the word culture in the modern sense of an *identity culture*: a sociable, populist, and traditionary way of life, characterised by a quality that pervades everything and makes a person feel rooted or at home.”⁹

Herder “invented multicultural theory,” claims the conservative commentator John Ellis in his book *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities*. Hundreds of years ago, it seems, this murky German philosopher set the agenda for today’s multiculturalists who, according to Ellis, “unwittingly follow Herder to the letter, first by asking us to celebrate difference, then by denouncing Western culture as elitist.”¹⁰ Ellis is right to link Herder’s particularism with his antielitist admiration for popular culture; indeed, Herder’s concept of the *Volk* encompasses both national and class references, and thus anticipates in important ways Gramsci’s notion of the “national-popular.” Where Ellis gets it wrong is in the sequence he imposes when he claims that the celebration of difference comes first, followed by the denunciation of Western cultural hegemony. The example of Herder shows that progressive multiculturalism is motivated in the contrary direction, that is, from denunciation to celebration, or that the two are thoroughly and dialectically intertwined. For it is in its suspicion toward and suppression of difference that hegemonic universalism, Western cultural hegemony, makes its most characteristic intellectual move.

This unearthing of Herder comes as something of an ironic surprise even to myself, since I’ve never been much of a revivalist, least of all the back-to-the-basics kind. I certainly wouldn’t want to be charged with dishing out any refried Herder, or of resurrecting still another dead white man no one ever “heard ‘a.” But my feeling is that if today’s conservative universalists can reserve so much venom for a thinker they could just as well have let rest in canonical peace—even go so far as to brand him and his presumed multiculturalist followers as proto-Nazis—then I want to know more about him. And I think that theorists of minority studies would do well to review his contribution, warts and all, in the future. For whether or not we actually take to “reading” the early thinkers, surely we should be aware of the intellectual

and historical range of our project, and of rifts and contradictions in the episteme we are subjecting to critique. I, for my part, remain thankful to my Stanford years for planting Herder in my memory so early on in the anticolonial and multicultural movements.

Of course, it was not only the radical sway of the political moment nor my rather rude, politically motivated dismissal from Stanford that impelled me toward Chicano and Puerto Rican studies, much less my intellectual exposure to Herder and other radical German democrats. Rather, combined with those pressures, it was culture, the Herderian sense of cultural identity and expression, that most sharply intervened in my career in the traditional humanities. My Puerto Rican background had seemed nearly irrelevant to me earlier in life and throughout my educational pursuits, and even in the formative years of the radical and antiwar movements. But as those movements deepened as of the late 1960s and early 1970s, attention turned more and more to racism and the struggle for national and ethnic affirmation. Gradually I was drawn into the Chicano movements and learned of the Young Lords Party, and my background became obviously relevant to me, personally and politically. And intellectually: as of the early 1970s I was moonlighting in Raza Studies at San Francisco State, while still teaching Schiller and Kafka at Stanford for my day job.

Marxism remained my main intellectual inspiration through those years, but one which was increasingly tempered and stretched by anticolonial, antiracist perspectives, and the affirmation of oppressed peoples' cultures. Herder lurked in the backdrop of these leanings, though Fanon, Che, Ho Chi Minh, and the Black Panther Party, were the most immediate catalysts. But it was Puerto Rico, the singular direct colony with its huge cultural diaspora, that soon riveted my intellectual, cultural and personal attention, and to which—after my return migration to New York—I then dedicated the next 25 years. Thanks to the founding of the *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños* at CUNY—by another Stanford professor, Frank Bonilla—I found welcome entry into Puerto Rican and Nuyorican intellectual life. It was an ideal opportunity to contribute to an understanding of a particular national culture with which, in rather intricate ways, I myself could identify. By that point “double-consciousness” had set in once and for all.

Beyond my own identification and self-identification, and my definition of an area of intellectual focus, this sharp transition has also involved helping to develop a field of study, Puerto Rican studies in this case, which was of course part of a larger project of epistemological and methodological remapping, what we call ethnic or minority studies. In the course of this project I have found another somewhat unfamiliar mainstay of *Germanistik*, Wilhelm Dilthey, to be of even greater relevance than Herder or any other of the *Denker* from my earlier incarnation. Though writing a century nearer to our time than Herder, that is, in the 1870s and 1880s, Dilthey may have even more warts than his predecessor, and much of his psychological and phenomenological terminology is dated by now. As Germanists we were of course mainly exposed to Dilthey as a literary theorist, especially his canonical and influential book *Das Erlebnis und*

die Dichtung (Experience and Poetry). Despite its long challenged critical methodology, Dilthey's best-known work still carries strong emotional force, and his concept of *Erlebnis* there and in other writings calls out for a new reading in the light of present-day discussions of "experience."

But it is his larger philosophical project, of which the theory of *Erlebnis* forms a central part, that bears most directly on the conceptualization of "minority studies."¹¹ For Dilthey was a "post-positivist" in the earliest and most literal sense, intent on developing an epistemological grounding for the social and humanistic "sciences" in the face of a hegemonic positivist sociology. Comtean prescriptions still held sway, and were given boisterous new expansions during Dilthey's time in the vastly influential writings of Herbert Spencer. During the age of Bismarck and the lean years of sociological theory between Marx and Max Weber, positivist and narrow historicist premises reigned supreme, and presupposed a sharp, nearly ontological separation between the social sciences and the humanities, between subject and object, fact and value.

The first major European thinkers to challenge this paradigm head on—aside from Marx—were Nietzsche and Dilthey, in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. While Nietzsche's more celebrated attack was total, and fully anti-positivist, that of Dilthey was more modulated and methodical, post-positivist in a more precise sense. His lifelong project was not to discard the idea of a "positive" social science but to unify that project with humanistic study on the basis of a shared hermeneutic. For this unified field of historical inquiry Dilthey coined the term "human sciences" (a felicitous translation from the French "sciences humaines" of Dilthey's *Geisteswissenschaften*), and the unending quest for transdisciplinary studies was underway. Cultural studies is perhaps the closest analogous version of this theoretical project in our own times, but I would suggest that all contemporary efforts to transgress that persistent divide in social and historical knowledge—very notably "minority studies"—owe great attention to Dilthey's early conceptions.

Objection may be taken—as does, among others, Satya Mohanty—that Dilthey's model has its serious flaw, and only perpetuates positivist assumptions, in drawing too sharp a demarcation between the "human sciences" and the "hard sciences" and taking that division for granted.¹² Though the point is no doubt accurate and well substantiated in its implications, the "human sciences" model and its insistence on a unified field of social and historical inquiry still provides an indispensable framework for the future of minority studies.

With its grounding in *Erlebnis* and methodology of empathy and understanding, Dilthey's historical hermeneutic also takes up issues central to identity theory today. Unlike Herder, Dilthey was in no way a precursor of multiculturalism and spent little time on issues of cultural identity and difference. Though testing and stretching hegemonic Western universalism, he was not a cultural relativist in the simplistic sense often misleadingly attributed to Herder and multiculturalism in its caricatured version. Rather, Dilthey's more phenomenological approach might best be called "relational," which differs from relativist in not only acknowledging cultural differences

but also identifying the object of analysis of the “human scientist.” It is the relations between and among cultural experiences, the process of interaction and influence, that is the goal of social knowledge and interpretation.

The idea of relationality makes for an important antidote to the philosophical limitations of a naive cultural relativism, as well as to the organicist kind of essentialism rightly objected to in Herder’s concept of cultural identity.¹³ Relational theoretical orientations much like Dilthey’s are also proving to be of some service today in addressing some of the paradoxes posed by multicultural theory. In an extended critique of Pierre Bourdieu’s new-found universalism, Robert Stam and Ella Shohat uphold multicultural studies as practiced in the United States and elsewhere, and place serious questions as to the ideological motivations for Bourdieu’s virulent attack on what he terms, disdainfully, “an American discourse.” The authors go to great lengths to qualify the multiculturalism they are defending as one based on a thorough analysis of global and local structures of power and prestige; in order to demarcate their critique from a sheer celebration of cultural difference and unreflected relativism among the various axes of social difference, they have continual recourse to what they term a “discourse of ‘relationality.’”¹⁴ “Races, countries, classes, nations, genders and even continents,” they argue, “exist not as hermetically sealed entities but rather as part of a permeable interwoven relationality, particularly in a transnational age typified by the global ‘travel’ of images, sounds, goods, and populations.”¹⁵

A similar appeal to a relational focus on cultural intersections is voiced from a very different perspective on multiculturalism in Nestor García Canclini’s *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (1995, 2001). Here too, as with Bourdieu, there is in the preface to the American edition, titled “The North-South Dialogue in Cultural Studies,” a trenchant admonition of a hegemonic U.S. multiculturalism, but from the vantage of Latin America rather than France. Over against the U.S. brand of multiculturalism, which in his view entails a divisive, separatist particularism, a fundamentalism at odds with the struggle for civil society, García Canclini comes to advocate a relational approach to diverse multicultural realities, one focusing on the intersections. “The cultural analyst gains little by studying the world from the vantage point of partial identities. It is not enough to study them only from the metropolis, or from the context of peripheral or postcolonial nations, or even from one isolated discipline, or even a totalizing knowledge. An effective study of culture focuses on the intersections.”¹⁶

García Canclini propounds a cultural studies of “human sciences” proportions, though largely distinct from what we would understand as minority studies, and explicitly disavowing all particularist claims to epistemic privilege, or the efficacy of group-based identity politics, in view of the pitfalls of fundamentalism. Rather than identity politics, the prolific author of the widely read book *Culturas híbridadas* (*Hybrid Cultures*, 1990) prefers what he calls, citing Paul Ricoeur’s critique of U.S. multiculturalism, a “politics of

recognition" (*reconnaissance, reconocimiento*). García Canclini is wary of identity because of what he takes for its inherent sense of fixity, immutability, independence from the web of social relations in civil society. *Reconocimiento* retains the centrality of relational process and the focus on heterogeneity and intersections. Ironically, and over the author's objections, many U.S. multiculturalists would embrace a "politics of recognition" as he frames it, as well as his call for a relational, intersectional approach to the study of cultural identities.

The problem in my view—and García Canclini would seem an appropriate lead-in to some reflections on Latino Studies—is that like other international critics of particularism, García Canclini takes for granted a one-sided, undifferentiated view of U.S. multiculturalism, which is that it is inherently oriented toward separatism and cultural exclusivity. The multiculturalism guiding "minority studies," on the contrary, is primarily aimed at equality and, yes, "recognition," and departs from a knowledge of structured separations and exclusions. Reciprocity does not preclude conflict and contradiction but is structured by it, as García Canclini would readily agree. And the fear of disunity should not impede the search for more solid and equitable unity.

There can be no denying the validity of García Canclini's claim for a distinctive Latin American agenda for cultural studies, or a Latin American cultural studies marked off sharply from the theoretical assumptions of that movement in its U.S. variety. The historical and geopolitical situation of Latin America is very different, even contrastively so, from the United States, such that the thought of national disunity would understandably seem more treacherous and damaging to a fragile civil society. Multiculturalism in the United States, on the other hand, responding to books such as Arthur Schlesinger's *The Disuniting of America*, holds that any sense of a prior national unity is itself mythical, especially so from the vantage point of those groups and sectors of society whose inclusion has been secured by virtue of conquest and who are perennially disadvantaged under the prevailing pretense of cohesion. Not that separation is the desired or necessary outcome of that standpoint, but certainly the full range of options would need to be a precondition of reciprocity.

Think of Puerto Rico. Is it to be part of the "unity of America" or a separate country? Is advocating the latter option a sign of fundamentalism and an offense to democratic unity? The options are there, but does the result even depend on the preference of the people? The lines of unity are unclear and multiple, and may extend in directions that transgress the national circumscription. In the Puerto Rican case, a robust particularism prevails among proponents of all options, yet no position is bereft of universal desire of some coloration.

But in a familiar move, Puerto Rico is dismissed as "the exception." Speaking of Latin America, García Canclini states that "only if we focus on the exception of Puerto Rico can one discern a colonial condition . . ." ¹⁷ He asserts that "the relations that now make us dependent on the United

States and on global powers cannot be explained as relations of coloniality,” and that “all other Latin American countries ceased to be colonies one or two centuries ago.” Surely there is some accuracy in thus differentiating the Latin American experience vis-à-vis the “postcolonial” discourse, especially if coloniality is taken to involve no more than “the occupation of a subordinated territory,” and if “imperialist relations” necessarily entail “a linear domination by the imperial center over the subaltern nations.” But García Canclini offers a qualifying explanation which I think well describes contemporary coloniality, understood perhaps in broader terms: though the Latin American countries ceased to be colonies long ago, “however, U.S. imperialism relegated these countries to dependency, and a peripheral position within the world system of unequal and uneven exchanges.”¹⁸

Call it coloniality, or dependency or peripheralization or imperialist “relegation,” or for Latin America perhaps “post-postcoloniality,” some term is clearly needed to account for that modality of intersection, and that determinant of “hybridity” (García Canclini’s best-known book is *Hybrid Cultures*). Relational theory, while an invaluable corrective to both essentialist and shallow relativist conceptions, needs to be accompanied by a broad theory of geopolitical and social power capable of registering differential kinds and conditions of relationality. I would therefore agree with José David Saldívar when he signals the need for, in the project of “reclaiming identity,” a concept like “coloniality of power” as set forth by Aníbal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, and others.¹⁹ For Latino Studies, most notably in its relationship to Latin American Studies, the attendant theoretical horizon of “Americanness” would also be of major utility. As Quijano puts it, in referring to the central importance of the global “racial axis,” “the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality.”²⁰ May be the colony Puerto Rico turns out to be the exception that proves the rule, as it most assuredly is for U.S. Puerto Ricans among Latinos in the United States.

Within the U.S. context, the workings of coloniality have been variously referred to as internal colonialism, racial oppression or, as in the present discussion, “minority status” or “minoritization.” The verb usage is advisable, I think, to accent process and constructed relations, while a post-positivist understanding is called for to avoid overidentifying the term minority with its quantifying, numerical signification. We should recall that in the most famous of all definitions of Enlightenment, Kant’s 1784 essay *Was ist Aufklärung?*, the Enlightenment ideal is contrasted with “minority” in its other meaning; “*Unmündigkeit*” here bears no reference to relatively fewer in number, but to immaturity, nonage, underdevelopment, “the inability to make use of one’s reason without the direction of another.” Minority means being a “minor,” a child before reaching adulthood. In other words, Enlightenment defines itself by the construction of unenlightened others. Minority studies is centrally about just those “others,” and most of all about this process of universalist “minorizing,” rather than about groups that are

outnumbered. But who knows, maybe the time has come in California, and in New York City for that matter, to start studying the “non-Hispanic white” as our newest “minority.”

A few closing thoughts, then, on my enduring intellectual vocation since leaving Stanford, Latino Studies, which I consider an integral part of minority or ethnic studies, symbiotically related to Latin American Studies, and as such a component of contemporary “human sciences.” My particular vantage is Puerto Ricans, the “exception” within the minority; I think of that particularity not as a narrowing lens but as a prism through which to scrutinize and interrogate universalisms in their varied and changing refractions and levels of generality and abstraction.

From that perspective I view three major lines of relationality in the concept of Latino and on an agenda of Latino Studies. First a word of caution: “Latino” as an intellectual construct and as a sociological fact—this latter over Orlando Paterson’s dubious disclaimer²¹—is history in the making, in full process of formation. We are standing in the river as it flows by us, and it is made more murky and turbulent because any generalization about the ethnic or national dimensions of “Latino” reality is relentlessly qualified by the cross-cutting axes of class, gender, and race. We should therefore be wary of prematurely fixing on any final or decisive explanatory model.

Tentatively, then, the relational dimensions of Latino Studies radiate in three directions, as capsulated in the prefixes “trans-,” “cross-,” and “intra-.” Latino studies needs to have a *trans*-national reach, having to do with the relations between U.S. Latino diasporas and the national histories and cultures of their respective lands of origin; as the Puerto Rican case attests, these relations are not reduceable to but need to include direct colonialism in its contemporary guise and the disproportionately large and racialized diaspora which it engenders. Rather than as a discrete entity or composite of entities, Latinos need to be studied *cross*-ethnically in their relations to other, non-Latino groups in U.S. society, especially those with congruent historical trajectories and social placement; in the case of U.S. Puerto Ricans, which includes very prominently African Americans, the main “minority” from whom Latinos are being differentiated. Finally, there is what would seem to be the concern of Latino Studies proper, that is, the *intra*-group relations among the various Latino nationalities or ethnicities, as well as the class, racial, and sexual contradictions within them; for Puerto Ricans in the United States that means, variously, with other Caribbean Latinos, with other “resident,” non-immigrant Latinos such as Mexican Americans, and comparatively with the many newly arriving Latino immigrant populations.

I would also propose, again very provisionally, that the latter, “intra”-group dimension—the relations among and within Latino groups and the idea of “Latinismo” or “Latinidad”—is most fruitfully studied in its articulation with the other two. That is, the meanings of “*lo Latino*” and the interrelations among Latino groups are in significant analytical ways defined by their differential transnational relations and by their relations within U.S. society,

as distinct groups and as a pan-ethnicity, to other national, ethnic, and international groups with whom they may or may not have any contiguous social interaction. In the case of Puerto Ricans, the terms of their relation to other Latinos are largely set by the colonial conditions structuring and determining their place in U.S. society, and by their relations with other groups, especially those with parallel and interfacing histories of conquest and enslavement, above all African Americans. Puerto Ricans are readily and commonly identified, and generally identify themselves, with their colonial island homeland, as becomes more than evident in the news about Vieques and the political prisoners; and as is more than evident in the streets of New York and many other urban centers, Puerto Ricans are and have been associated with African Americans, including by many other Latinos.

There is one more aspect of Latino Studies that needs mention, for it has less to do with the content and concept of study as with style, or what Doris Sommer has called a “rhetoric of particularism.”²² She is referring to how we “read,” or in her word how we “engage” so-called minority texts and practices, where—the line being very porous—the “we” can refer to either inside or outside the tradition, or both. In her book *Proceed With Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*, Sommer warns “readers” against jumping to conclusions about, or second-guessing, minority expression and performance. Pointing to purposeful secrets, mistranslations, untold stories, telling gestures and the like, she alerts us to the many ways in which “engagements” can be disrupted and invalidated by the imposition of universalist presumptions and interpretive closures.

“Universalism isn’t what it used to be,” Sommer begins her argument, and later expands on this philosophical condition by reference to the important contributions of Etienne Balibar and Ernesto Laclau to recent discussions.²³ “The idea has survived classical philosophy’s dismissal of particularity as deviation,” she writes, “and it has outlived a European Enlightenment that conflated the universal (subject, class, culture) with particular (French) incarnations. Today’s universalism is a paradox when compared with the past, because it is grounded in particularist demands.”²⁴ The primacy of the particular rests not in particularity per se, but in that which is particularized—and the particularization process—within a conceptual system where universalist claims rest on and so often serve to buttress prevailing structures of inequality and exclusion.

The “rhetoric” appropriate to the new particularist episteme is, for Sommer, one of caution, and of respect (*respeto*) for difference(s). So watch out—“proceed with caution”—when you start pushing a universalist claim, for you might find yourself on the wrong side of the universal/particular divide, along one or the other axis of social and cultural power and privilege. The “rhetoric of particularism” is new, and challenging to the neo-Enlightenment epistemological standpoint, in that it is not intent on rapid interpretive closure, transparency, and cross-cultural embrace, but on respectful engagement with the distances and silences that characterize the cultural “interstices” of our time. It is interesting that Sommer cites Dilthey’s historical hermeneutics in describing this new “rhetoric of selective, socially

differentiated understanding.” “Must rhetoric only build bridges,” she asks, “or can it also locate narrow contiguities? Dilthey’s skepticism about the possibility of coherence returns like a repressed warning against coercive unity. For him, the hermeneutical enterprise bowed to history and produced divergent worldviews, mutually incomprehensible and unbridgeable.”²⁵

The new rhetorical disposition of particularism refers not only to appropriate interpretive approaches and strategies, but also to the performative gestures and stylistic practices of diverse cultural groups. Latino pan-ethnicity is seen as exemplary of this expressive particularism; as Sommer puts it, “Improvising on the themes of sameness and difference, the way that musical mixes make salsa from different national styles, Latinos are also saying that universalism is not what it used to be. They are saying it with relief, because they had fit so badly into milky homogenizations.”²⁶ Performative and expressive particularism enacts a kind of subaltern irony, “an aesthetics of the ruse that allows the weak to survive by escaping through duplicitous means the very system of power intent on destroying them.” “Puerto Ricans,” Sommer mentions, “call the art *jaibería*. It is the knack for avoiding fixed and dangerously head-on positions, advancing sideways like the weak but wise crab.”²⁷ Epistemic privilege?, one might well ask. Sure enough, but one based not on some primordial and inherent quality—which so bothers reluctant universalists like García Canclini and Stanley Aronowitz²⁸—but rather on the war of position and on extended historical trajectories.

The Puerto Rican art of *jaibería*, that unmistakable, particularist “gestus” (in Brecht’s sense), is the subject of an important recent book of *Puertorriqueñística*, Arcadio Díaz Quiñones’ *El arte de bregar* (2000). The author of this extensive essay finds the crab-like rhetorical performativity of his countrymen best captured in the word “*bregar*,” a ubiquitous colloquial usage of ambivalent etymological and semantic status which is perhaps best rendered with the phrase “dealing,” not as in dealing a used car or a deck of cards, but in the sense of “dealing with,” or within and in the face of, a tough situation. It is not so much coping, with its implication of bare survival, but more like “getting by,” or even “getting over,” and to some extent “hanging in there,” as when one is “*en la brega*.” “When and how did Puerto Ricans begin to ‘deal’ (*bregar*)?” Díaz Quiñones asks. “The verb *bregar* hovers, wisely and amusingly, in the multiple settings of Puerto Rican life, from Cidra to Cabo Rojo on the island to the other extreme of the long-standing diaspora communities of Hartford and Newark.”²⁹ By pondering this one term and its attendant semantic practices along with its many uses and coinages, the author has identified not so much a national trait or idiosyncratic linguistic twist, but a performative, expressive mannerism that reveals the intricacies of contemporary colonial reality, what Herder in his time had called the “physiognomy of its speech.”³⁰ Analogous gestural practices are of course abundantly evident in other Latino cultures—think of *rascuachismo* among Mexicans and Chicanos³¹—but “*el arte de bregar*” with its specific historical genealogy pertains strictly to a rhetoric of Puerto Rican particularism.

Stanford brings back many memories indeed, vivid flashbacks to life behind the Eucalyptus Curtain of a full generation ago: have-a-nice-day smiles amidst clouds of tear gas and mace; the A3M (April 3rd Movement) and roving nightly affinity groups, taking and defacing buildings, throwing wrenches into business as usual in the chambers of Stanford's Enlightenment, the SRI, Hoo Tower, and Dr. Shockley's sperm bank. I think of Los Siete de la Raza, Venceremos, the theatrical witch-hunt trial of Professor Bruce Franklin. Teach-ins and speak-outs, be-ins and be-outs. And with the chants to free Angela Davis and the Soledad brothers, I sense the resonances of Herder and Dilthey, Brecht and Marcuse, and the Marx and Nietzsche I've never seemed to get out of my system. Political activism, intellectual growth, and personal transition: the stuff of memories lucid and translucent. Like the time some Chicano students asked me why I didn't come to MEChA meetings. "I'm not Chicano," I told them. "No importa profesor, usted es Raza!"

"*Y ahí,*" I think now, "*ahí sí aprendí el arte de bregar,*" that's when I learned how to deal. Or, in rough translation, and in the vocabulary of our present discussion, "That's when I first learned the epistemic and political value of identity."

NOTES

1. This essay was originally prepared for presentation at the conference "The Future of Minority Studies: Redefining Identity Politics," which was held at Stanford University on October 19, 2001. Though I have since revised the paper, as is clear from my title, I have chosen to retain much of the language and terminology of the conference, as well as the constant reference to Stanford; both, I felt, help anchor my argument by providing a sense of the particularity of location and personal experience about which I speak in my paper. For an idea of the intellectual and political project that formed the background of the conference, see the collection *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Paula Moya and Michael Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California, 2000).
2. On Herder's intellectual influence in the United States, see Gene Bluestein, *Poplore* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994).
3. See Stam and Shohat, "French Intellectuals and the U.S. Culture Wars," *Black Renaissance* 90 (2001): 90–119.
4. Cited in Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York: Viking, 1976), pp. 160–61. Amidst the voluminous writing on Herder, I still find this classic essay by Berlin to offer an excellent account of the historical importance and originality of his ideas, and an accurate appreciation of his radical democratic political outlook. For Herder's works in English translation, the most helpful collection is *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, ed. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For more recent publications, see Herder, *Selected Early Works, 1764–1767*, eds. Ernest A. Menze and Karl Menges (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); *On World History: Johann Gottfried Herder, An Anthology*, eds. Hans Adler and Ernest A. Menze (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); and Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

5. Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, p. 161.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 181. Berlin bases his remarks on Herder's critical theoretical reflections during that fateful trip, his *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*. For another valuable contribution by Berlin to understanding early opposition to Enlightenment intellectual hegemony, see his *Against the Current: Essay in the History of Ideas* (New York: Viking, 1955), esp "The Counter-Enlightenment," pp. 1–24. For more on Herder on race and his critique of Kant, see *Race and the Enlightenment*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), esp. pp. 65–78.
8. The major "new universalists—such as Todd Gitlin, Sean Wilentz and others—are identified and critiqued in George Sánchez, "Creating the Multicultural Canon: Adventures in Post-Nationalist American Studies," *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, ed. John Carlos Rowe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 40–58; and in Robin D.G. Kelley, "Looking Extremely Backward: Why the Enlightenment Will Only Lead Us Into the Dark," *Yo' Mama's DysFunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in America* (Boston: Beacon, 1997), pp. 102–124.
9. Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture* (New York: 1997), . . . (cited in Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 26.
10. John Ellis, *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 21. See also, Daniel Chirot, "Herder's Multicultural Theory of Nationalism and Its Consequences," *East European Politics and Societies* 10.1 (1996): 1–15.
11. For a useful English-language introduction to Dilthey's thinking, see Michael Ermarth, *Wilhelm Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
12. See Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 192.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
14. Stam and Shohat, p. 101.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
16. Nestor, García Canclini. *Consumers and Citizens*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) p. 12.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
18. *Ibid.*
19. See José David Saldívar, "Open the Historical Humanities: A Response to Paula Moya's and Michael Hames-García's *Reclaiming Identity*," (unpublished manuscript), pp. 4–5.
20. Cited *ibid.*, p. 4.
21. See Orlando Patterson, "Matters of Race(?)," *New York Times* (April, 2001).
22. Doris Sommer, *Proceed With Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) pp. 1–31.
23. See Etienne Balibar, "Racism as Universalism," *Masses, Classes, Ideas* ed. Etienne Balibar (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 191–204, and Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity," *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 93–108.
24. Sommer, p. 3.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

28. See Stanley Aronowitz, "Reflections on Identity," *The Identity in Question*, pp. 111–127, esp. 122.
29. Díaz Quiñones, *El arte de bregar* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2000), p. 19 (my translation).
30. As cited in Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, p. 183.
31. For a discussion of "rascuachismo," see Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, eds. George Yúdice, Jean Franco and Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

IDENTITY AS CALLING: MARTIN LUTHER KING ON WAR

Paul Sawyer

After several weeks of speaking out on various occasions against the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King, Jr., chose to deliver his most considered statement at Riverside Church in New York, at an event sponsored by the group Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam. The date—April 4, 1967—was chosen for maximum political impact (it was also exactly one year before King’s assassination). In early 2003, as opposition to the pending invasion of Iraq built up at home and abroad, “A Time to Break Silence” (the name given to the speech in King’s collected writings) gained considerable exposure at peace rallies, on alternative radio stations, and elsewhere. This is hardly surprising, given its extraordinary rhetorical power and its author’s immense reputation. What is more surprising, given those same two factors, is the speech’s relative neglect during the intervening 26 years. To vary Lincoln’s phrase, it was much noted at the time but not long remembered. The reasons for this neglect, it is not hard to assume, are the ghettoizing of King in official memory as a civil rights leader and the general amnesia that has settled over the antiwar movement of the 1960s. For King on April 4, 1967, both these issues—the nature of his career and the cause of peace—became indissolubly joined, with the result that his most considered attack on the Vietnam War is also his most considered meditation on his vocation—on what it meant to him to be “Martin Luther King.” Both his conception of identity and his conception of imperialist war speak urgently to the political crisis we face today.

To a generation used to associating King with peaceableness and uplift, the most surprising features of “A Time to Break Silence” must be its relentless massing of pertinent political and military facts and the sheer relentlessness—indeed, the ferocity—of its attack. King points out, for example, that the French War was largely financed by the Americans (up to 80% at its peak), that the “two Vietnams” were a fiction attendant upon national elections that were abrogated by the puppet Ngo Dien Diem in 1956; that the National Liberation Front was a heterogeneous group of anti-Diem guerrillas, only a quarter of whom were Communist at the beginning; and so forth. It is striking to remember today

how much accurate information was available to the peace movement (though not to casual readers of the mainstream press), a mere two years into the ground war—a point that belies the claim, made repeatedly since then by defenders of the government, that opposition to the war came late and benefited from hindsight. The amassing of evidence gains power by the form King gives his argument: a series of tableaux embodying the experiences of various participants in the war, which build upon each other to form a climactic, many-sided visual totality. Significantly, he begins with the viewpoint of American soldiers recruited from the ranks of the poor and the minorities: “So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.” From these he moves to the common people of Vietnam, then to our putative enemies—the National Liberation Front and then the North Vietnamese—holding in effect a mirror up to the United States by constructing the viewpoints of the Other. His section on the Vietnamese peasantry reaches an early pitch of outrage:

So far we have killed a million of them—mostly children. [The peasants] wander into the towns and see thousands of the children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals . . . What do they think as we test out our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? . . . Where are the roots of the independent Vietnam we claim to be building? . . . We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops . . . We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men. What liberators! . . . Soon the only solid physical foundations remaining will be found at our military bases and in the concrete of the concentration camps we call fortified hamlets. (James, 236)

Next he returns to the American soldiers, of whom he says, “We are adding cynicism to the process of death. Before long . . . the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy and the secure while we create a hell for the poor.” The words “what liberators” echo the sarcastic phrase “Strange Liberators,” the title of this section, which repeats like a mantra. A second repeated phrase—“I speak for . . . I speak for”—clusters in the following italicized paragraph, which climaxes the section:

I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours (James, 238; italics in the original)

The effect of the language at this moment is an almost visible “subliming” or heightening—an expansion of view that matches the gathering intensity of emotion. From the poor and oppressed back home to the destroyed

villages of the South to the hearts and minds of the enemy to the five “I speaks” of the latest paragraph, we seem to see all angles converging until the entire earth lies open before us, and all its peoples—the visual component of a frankly claimed moral objectivity.

For the rest of the speech King’s perspective remains global. His interpretation of the war is both moral and materialist: Vietnam is the symptom of a deep malaise—“the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism”—manifested in a worldwide system of economic control and exploitation: “we have taken up the role of those who make peaceful revolution impossible by refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investment.” If we fail to grasp this connectedness, he says, we will “find ourselves organizing for the next generation”; we will be “concerned about” Guatemala and Peru, Thailand and Cambodia, Mozambique and South Africa” “We will be marching for these and a dozen other names and attending rallies without end unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy. Such thoughts take us beyond Vietnam, but not beyond our calling as sons of the living God.” His speech is a call for a coordinated, long-term resistance and a revolutionary reversal of direction—to get on the right side of the world revolution. His sanction for such a position is an appeal to a moral universalism: an “all-embracing and unconditional love for all men” which is not “some sentimental and weak response” but “the force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life,” a “Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality” (James, 240–42). That night Daddy King said of his son, “He did not belong to us, he belonged to the world” (Oates, 436).

The speech surprises today for its radicalism and, as I have said, for its ferocity; indeed, these qualities were precisely what King’s contemporaries registered most sharply. Both the White House and the FBI began to monitor him at this point; a Congressman and an aide to Johnson called him Communist-influenced. Civil rights leaders were seriously (and rightly) alarmed that he had fatally antagonized President Johnson, who had made possible both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; Carl Rowan, Roy Wilkins, Jackie Robinson, and Edward Brooke, the nation’s only African-American senator, all disagreed with him publicly; Whitney Young of the Urban League had earlier engaged him in a public shouting match. Eight days after the speech the NAACP’s 60-member board unanimously opposed any attempt to fuse the war and civil rights movements. As for mainstream press accounts, the *Washington Post* said he had “diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country, and to his people.” *Newsweek*, of all sources, found that he had plunged in “over his head,” mixing evangelical passion with “simplistic political judgment,” and also that he abandoned his dream of an integrated America in favor of a country where “a race-conscious minority dictated foreign policy” (Oates, 437)—a remark that nicely reveals the unconscious worldview of the racial “moderate” (either minorities tyrannize over the rest of us or they disappear in a transcendent dream of integration).

For King, the most important of the media attacks was the *New York Times* editorial for April 7, 1967 (probably written by James Reston). After

reading it, King broke down and cried (Oates, 438). The reason he wept, according to his biographer, was his respect for a newspaper that had championed his cause for years; more than that, I would claim, the editorial is intelligent and persuasive—once its premises are granted. In tone and content it resembles the exhortation from Southern clergy that had occasioned the famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail in 1963. Like the Alabama letter, the *Times* uses language that appears measured, responsible, and concerned to construct King as hasty, extreme, even reckless, and a detriment to his cause: “Dr. King can only antagonize opinion in this country instead of winning recruits to the peace movement by recklessly comparing American military methods to those of the Nazis.” The emphasis throughout is on means rather than principles: things take a long time, problems are complex, the situation is delicate. In this decorousness, of course, one misses entirely the urgency, even the desperation, of King’s indictment. If one does not stand aghast at Vietnam—if the dropping of napalm on fleeing children does not strike one as similar to the worst atrocities history has to offer and a violation of international law at that—then the paper’s pragmatic argument may indeed be correct: if Vietnam is essentially a complicated muddle, then a ferocious attack is not worth the political risks to domestic social causes—the very risks that King himself had to weigh before speaking out. But though the *Times*’s emphasis is on means rather than on ultimate principles, its deeper political disagreement lies in King’s attempt to link racism and war—a procedure of connection that distinguishes the sixties’ radicalism in general:

This is a fusing of two public problems that are distinct and separate. By drawing them together, Dr. King has done a disservice to both. The moral issues in Vietnam are less clear-cut than he suggests; the political strategy of uniting the peace movement and the civil rights movement could very well be disastrous for both causes. (*New York Times*)

The other responses I have quoted make especially clear that beneath this transgression of liberal political ideology lies a deeper one: the transgression of authority. The *Times* wishes to limit King’s moral authority to his “weighty obligation to direct the [civil rights] movement’s efforts in the most constructive and relevant ways.” King’s enormous moral presence—his accumulated symbolic capital—was granted him in part by Northern liberals like Reston (later ratified by the Swedish Academy in the form of the Nobel Prize); but the editorial assumes the existence of an unwritten contract tying King’s symbolic capital to the civil rights movement alone—and excluding the U.S. government from the doctrine of nonviolence. By fusing civil rights with the antiwar movement, King violated the contract and squandered his “credibility” (the current equivalent to symbolic capital). *Newsweek*’s depiction of King as a lightweight once he strayed from his true calling captures the fragility of his authority.

The battle, in short, was over King’s public identity: what constituted it and who got to define it. A second look at the speech shows how

deliberately King anticipated precisely these objections—that he should not connect separate issues and therefore that he has no right to speak—a defense which he joins inextricably to the case against the war.

King actually begins by quoting those who say, “Peace and civil rights don’t mix . . . Aren’t you hurting the cause of your people?” and by claiming in turn that such people do not understand “either my commitment or my calling” or the world in which they live (James, 232). In fact, he says, the path from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery (the beginning of his public career) leads to Riverside Church in New York because of the clear political connections between the domestic problems of poverty and racism at home and the waging of war abroad. Most obviously, the war abroad oppresses the poor at home by draining money from the war on poverty and (as we have seen) by recruiting poor youngsters in disproportionate numbers to fight abroad. As for the despair of the young living in Northern ghettos, he says, “I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government” (James, 233). This explanation of the economic and moral connection between racism and war then modulates into a definition of King and his audience as an embodiment of those connections:

Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood . . . This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism and which go beyond our nation’s self-defined goals and positions. We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers. (James, 234)

What is the theory of selfhood implied in these sentences? The complex linkage of identity, experience, and moral responsibility in this passage expresses the core of King’s position and defines the meaning of his career as he conceived it. Three implications of King’s position stand out.

In the first place, the connection between a Southern Baptist church and the cathedral of the Rockefellers in the nation’s largest city simultaneously denotes a connection between Montgomery and Vietnam. This implies that as a specialist in the politics of domestic racism, King is particularly equipped to notice the repeated structures of oppression in general. But at the same time, he rejects the minoritizing categories that would deny his power to speak out against the war, as it were, from a center defined implicitly as white or “non-racial.” He recalls that in 1957 the Southern Christian Leadership Conference refused to restrict itself to “certain rights for black people” by adopting as its motto “To save the soul of America”; he then quotes an African-American poet, Langston Hughes, who wrote: “America was never America to me / And yet I swear this oath—/ America will be!” Throughout his public career, King never deigned to justify his right of a black man to

speak, simply assuming it instead. Montgomery leads to Riverside Drive: by devoting himself to the America that will be, King is a black man who does not specifically speak as a black man; racial subject-positions do not disappear, but by the same token, it has become impossible to think in terms of “majority” and “minority” identities. The italicized paragraph contains three versions of “I speak as” (“a child of God and brother to the suffering,” “a citizen of the world,” “an American”), all of them distinct subject-positions but none of them a “minority.”

In the second place, King speaks of identity not in personal, psychological terms but in terms of a speech-act, or “calling.” As commonly used, the word is a lazy synonym for “occupation” or “special talent” (the synonym “vocation” derives from the Latin for “to call”), but in the Christian tradition, it bears a specific history. Christ called men into discipleship, and therefore by extension into the ministry. Those who say “Aren’t you a civil rights leader?” misunderstand King’s “commitment” and his “calling,” words used here as synonyms for conscience or responsibility or lifelong purpose. The road from Dexter Avenue to Riverside Drive then is not so much a figure of his self-unity in psychological terms as the consistent direction in which conscience has led him. And in the phrase “Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood,” “calling” (used idiosyncratically) almost becomes synonymous with “identity,” conceived as a lived loyalty to a larger whole. This lived loyalty is an ontological and moral condition—something rather like a creative locatedness. In this way, the multiple implied meanings of the word “calling” as King uses it blend into a single complex idea—a divine summons, an occupation or career, an obligation, a condition of membership—that constitutes an implied argument about identity understood in its moral bearing.

Further, for King the condition of being called generates the second half of a double speech-act: he *is called* to *speak for*. To speak for other people is always a problematic attempt, which must here be understood in King’s specific context of a lived loyalty. For him, the imperative is to give voice to the voiceless, which includes “the enemy”—to embody their position and their suffering. To speak for “the enemy” is of course an expansion of the gospel summons to “pray for those who revile and persecute you.” The imperative to *speak for* is also the imperative to witness, yet another religious figure that in this case is also legal. Witnessing then blends into a slightly different metaphor, that of legal representation, which is finally not a metaphor at all but the truest description of this speech as a public action. Before the tribunal of the world’s conscience, which is what King has made of the pulpit on Riverside Drive, he is himself the tribune, the representative, and advocate of the victims of the “Free World.”

But not by himself alone. The third implication of King’s creative conception of identity is that his witnessing simultaneously includes and constructs the identity of the audience—as children of God, as citizens of the world, and as Americans whose “allegiances and loyalties” exceed the bounds of nationalism.

The importance of this conception of identity for postpositivist realism comes clear if we compare it to an influential and radically different conception of “calling”—Althusser’s notion of interpellation (“inter-calling,” or “hailing”). As is well known, Althusser calls “interpellation” the means by which state power at once names, locates, and subordinates its subjects, who become subjects by virtue of the identity that is constructed for them. In her essay in the volume *Reclaiming Identity*, Linda Alcoff persuasively argues that for Sartre, Foucault, and post-structuralism in general, human freedom is conceivable only in opposition to a notion of identity conceived as an inauthentic construction or imposition of the social Other. But such an account it impossible even to comprehend the terms for selfhood as King uses them. As Alcoff points out,

To respond to interpellation by accepting the hail, even in the context of racialized identities, is not simply to capitulate to power but to actively engage in the construction of a self . . . To self-identify even by a racial or sexed designation is not merely to accept the sad fact of oppression but to understand one’s relationship to a historical community, to recognize one’s objective social location, and to participate in the negotiation of the meaning and implications of one’s identity. (Alcoff, 340–341)

In King’s Christian idiom, all humans are called to be sons of God, which unites them with the entire species—a location that exceeds the “calling” of, for example, race and nation, although King makes very clear that those allegiances are legitimate as well, and potentially constitute a space of freedom rather than subjugation. His mention of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church indicates that his identification as a black man is both an acknowledgment of the fact of oppression and a creative claim of privilege—to speak on behalf of all people oppressed by a world-system of exploitation. Finally, his conception of a location or calling is “theory-mediated”: the massively factual indictment of Vietnam as a symptom of U.S. imperialism works to explain why King must—in order to be the person he is—call for the end of war, and to do so publicly. This basis of this self-identification can be argued empirically, as I have suggested in noticing the debate between King and the *New York Times*. Finally, the person he is, is less a static entity (a self considered in isolation) than a mode of action. A calling is above all things an imperative to act in a certain way, based on an empirically verifiable social state of affairs.

This, I argue, is the heart of King’s pertinence to the political crisis we face today. More specifically what does it mean, for King, to speak “as an American?” How does he define American identity? Recent writers on the Vietnam War—most ably the journalist Fred Turner in his book *Echoes of Combat*—have criticized a construction of American identity, bolstered by a pseudo-therapeutic language, which re-conceives the Vietnam War as a trauma “we” suffered. The blinkering, which separates “us” from the powers and pleasures of a global empire and erases the fact of what King calls our “great initiative in this war,” takes the form of a hard-fought return to

national “innocence,” a forgetfulness-as-cure. The American habit of seeing ourselves as victims rather than perpetrators of war was consummated, so to speak, on September 11: because the victims of the catastrophe at the World Trade Center did not deserve to die, “we” as a nation became as innocent (and as vulnerable) as “they.” This view is of course more plausible than the misremembering of Vietnam (“we” really were attacked) but it obscures the same things and leads, as we have seen, to a repetition of catastrophic warfare undertaken on behalf of a similar form of international military and economic order. King the radical spoke from a very different conception of American identity. To conceive oneself as simultaneously an American citizen and a citizen of the world was, for him, to break down the ideological barriers between those two terms, to remove the blinkers surrounding war and empire, and to endure a gaze—not so much inward as outward to the consequences of America’s “self-defined goals and positions.” As I have described it, his critique of a self-interested nationalism takes the rhetorical form of a gradually enlarging scene of exposure, climaxing in an encompassing view both of the catastrophe of “Vietnam” and of the audience that beholds it: “the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken.” He later varies this figure in regards to empire, the nexus that connects apparently disparate points, like Vietnam and Guatemala and South Africa. This encompassing view, many-sided and therefore complete, parallels the figure of a many-voiced speaker; by listing successive acts of *speaking for* and *speaking as*—for the Vietnamese peasants, for our enemies, for our soldiers, for our own poor and exploited; as Americans to our own government, as a citizen of the world, as a son of God—King constitutes himself, and therefore his listeners, as an ideal subject whose field of concern is species-wide. This concern he attributes to all major religions of the world.

Liberals have since forgiven King his radicalism, largely, as I have suggested, by amnesia. Failing to ghettoize him in life, official memory afterwards ghettoizes him as the symbol of civil rights. (Notice how startling the following, quite plausible, claims would sound even to people who revere King’s memory: that his greatest speech was about war; and that the greatest antiwar speech in American history was written by a black man.) Most frequently, of course, we hear him at the Lincoln Monument forever repeating a de-contextualized and therefore endlessly deferrable “dream.” In a *New Yorker* cover of the 1990s, he appeared as a sad-eyed Buddha gazing down at pictures of crack and crime, as though in condemnation of the victims rather than the victimizers—a stance taken on another occasion by President Clinton after his “reform” of welfare. “I have an idea for an article,” says E. L. Doctorow’s narrator in *The Book of Daniel*:

The idea is the dynamics of radical thinking. With each cycle of radical thought there is a stage of genuine creative excitement during which the connections are made. Finally he connects everything. At this point he begins to lose his following. It is not that he has incorrectly connected everything. It is that he has connected everything. Nothing is left outside the connections. At this

point society becomes bored with the radical . . . After the radical is dead his early music haunts his persecutors. And the liberals use this to achieve power. (Doctorow, 140)

As we attempt to build a new coalition for peace and economic justice—“concerned,” as King predicted we would be, about the consequences of empire because of the failure of enough concern, of enough connection-making, in the past—King the radical challenges us to rethink the horizons of our American identity.

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WHAT'S AT STAKE IN "GAY" IDENTITIES?

Michael Hames-García

I make two claims in this chapter. First, an important aspect in thinking about the political implications of modern, Western homosexuality is the status of identity, not simply the existence of homosexual desire or behavior (although sexual desire and behavior are not without their own importance). Second, whatever we decide about the status of desire, we should reject essentialist understandings of identity in favor of some form of constructionism that understands homosexual identities as coming into existence in the context of intermeshed oppressions (the rejection of essentialism about identity is based on its presupposition of sameness and unity within identity groups and its consequent inability to account for the intermeshing of oppressions).¹ Following these two claims, I argue that one might view socially constructed identities (at least in some contexts) as offering theoretical explanations about how the world is structured in relation to oppression. In other words, what concerns me mostly politically in this essay about gay and lesbian identities is what they tell us about the organization of the social world, not what they tell us about the existence of particular desires or behaviors. Furthermore, given the intermeshing of oppressions, when one considers gay and lesbian identities, one should ask how they are constructed not only in resistance to and complicity with homophobia, but also in resistance to and complicity with racism, colonialism, and capitalism. This argument is a theoretical contribution to numerous empirical projects that have already explored the inextricability of modern, Western gay and lesbian identities from legacies of race, class, and imperialism.²

IDENTITY AND DESIRE

The debate over essentialism and constructionism in gay and lesbian studies has been an especially fraught one, since it seems inevitably to reference (even when theorists try to avoid it) the nature/nurture debate over the origins of homosexuality. Thus, a discussion of the existence of gay and lesbian *identities* often ends up sliding into a discussion of causes of homosexuality. As numerous people have noted, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and North America saw a significant shift in how same-sex sexual behavior was viewed. Previously viewed as deviant behavior of which just

about anyone was capable and as therefore the object of penal and religious discourses, same-sex sexual behavior came increasingly to be seen as the purview of medical and emergent psychological and psychoanalytic discourses. For religious authorities prior to the nineteenth century there was no need to find causes within an individual's being for giving in to the temptations of the flesh; the capacity to sin was seen as intrinsic to being human. Penal authorities, in turn, saw criminal behavior similarly (this would change with the rise of criminal psychology and the notion of the "criminal type"). For the new experts on sexuality, however, behavior had its sources in the individual—either in one's body or in one's mind, depending on the expert.³ From the late nineteenth century onward most attempts *to define* homosexuality have simultaneously been discussions of its causes (whether the origin of homosexuality lies in biology, psychology, society, or some combination thereof). Emerging somewhat later, in the twentieth century, was a new—but related—debate, largely in historiography and philosophy, about the status of homosexuality as something that exists or does not exist independently of cultural context. This is the debate over essentialism and constructionism.⁴

Minimally, one might say that there are (and appear to have been) people in numerous societies who have and/or desire significant sexual/emotional relationships with other people understood to be of the same sex.⁵ Furthermore, in most of these societies, these relationships are (and have been) stigmatized, if not severely punished. At the very least, these things are true of present-day U.S. society. That is to say that homosexuals exist and that we exist in societies that are homophobic. One objective of this chapter is to unpack what possible broader meanings this statement can generate. I will assert that any inquiry into the origins of homosexuality (asking why people exist who have homosexual relationships or desires or what causes such relationships or desires to exist) in a homophobic society is ethically suspect. From an antihomophobic perspective, I can see only two reasons for such inquiry. Either one is seeking to keep homosexuals from existing, or one is attempting to show that homosexuals are not at fault for their homosexual relationships or desires. Both of these motivations proceed from the homophobic premise (dominant in most societies and eras) that same-sex relationships are something humanity would probably be better off without. An antihomophobic perspective, by contrast, assumes that human society is better off because (at least some) people have significant sexual/emotional relationships with other people understood to be of the same sex. While inquiry into the origins of homosexuality is ethically suspect in a homophobic society, critical inquiry into how, when, and why homosexuals identify themselves and are identified by others is an important antihomophobic practice. Thus, following theorists like Marilyn Frye, I believe that the question of the causes of homosexuality needs to be abandoned, even in its defensive (and strategic) guise, in favor of a position that sees homosexuality as worthy of choice, something desirable (149–150).

In his "Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics of Sexual Identity: Recasting the Essentialism and Social Constructionism Debate" (included in this collection), Raja Halwani argues that most social constructionist historians

and theorists of homosexuality have in mind *sexual identity* when they claim that homosexuality is a socially constructed category. Insofar as modern, Western homosexuals tend to think of ourselves as having a sexual identity based on our attraction to members of the same sex and tend to think of this identity as a significant (if not the most significant) aspect of our personality, as something that influences many of our nonsexual behaviors and attitudes, our sense of ourselves as *homosexual people* appears to be unique historically and culturally. In arguing for the cultural and historical specificity of homosexual *identity*, social constructionists have opposed essentialists, who make the claim that homosexuals have existed throughout history and across cultures. Halwani points out, however, that people making essentialist claims often have *sexual desire* in mind, not sexual identity. Essentialists thus believe that sexual and emotional attraction or investment in people of the same sex can be found across cultures and historical periods. They do not necessarily conclude from this belief that the meanings attached to this attraction or investment are the same everywhere or that desire or attraction will always form the basis of an identity. Although it may be that his separation between identity and desire is too absolute, Halwani's observation is important to my argument because it enables one to think of the construction of sexual identity without getting mired in considerations of the nature of sexual desire, such as whether sexual desire is constructed or essential, natural or cultural, where it comes from, or what its causes are. While it seems quite likely to me that, contra Halwani, sexual desires are always conditioned by social context, available social roles, and the identities that mediate our experiences, the crucial consequence of his argument for my purposes is that saying homosexual identities are socially constructed need not make any claims with regard to the *causes* of homosexual desire. As I will argue, this analytical distinction can be invaluable theoretically and politically.

What Kinsey's claim that "only 50 percent of the [white male] population is exclusively heterosexual throughout its adult life" should tell us is that homosexual *identity* is indeed something quite distinct from the same-sex desires (or behaviors) that might potentially lead one to embrace that identity (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 656; quoted in Stein 3). The fact that only a small percentage of men who have sex with men identify as gay tells us that there is something interesting about a gay male (or straight male) identity other than just its ability to explain or predict a given man's behavior. An important theoretical question from an antihomophobic perspective is how social identities are created, given same-sex desire or behavior and the social roles available in a given time and place, *both as a result of and in resistance to homophobia*, not how or why homosexual behavior and desire come into being. In this essay, I mostly address the question of how these identities might be understood, noting their relation to desire and behavior as an issue I lack the space to do justice to at this time.

Consider when people behave differently from how one might assume based on their identity. For example, some straight men and some lesbians might sometimes have sex with men. While these people's practices might lead a sex researcher to classify their behavior as *bisexual*, the identity that

they use to make sense of themselves and their place in the world might remain *straight* or *lesbian* (respectively). These self-conscious, socially constructed identities are much more than attempts by individuals to transparently map their behavior or desires. It is not necessarily the case, therefore, that these identities are wrong and that a bisexual identity would be more accurate. Identities like *straight*, *lesbian*, and *gay* do not refer merely to sexual desire or behavior (although they certainly refer to these things in part). Instead, they are theorizations of the sexual and gender organization of the social world. For a woman, given her understanding of her own sexual desire as primarily directed toward other women, to identify as a lesbian despite being in a sexual relationship with a man could be to acknowledge the central structuring role of heterosexism, homophobia, and heteronormativity in society. The identity *lesbian* in this case, rather than a neutral description of sexual orientation, is a rejection of the social injunction for women to downplay connections and identification with other women in favor of heterosexual alliance with men. It rejects both the idea that a woman's identity is defined by the presence or absence of a man and the notion that a present relationship to a man is automatically more (or even as) important to defining who she is than previous and/or potential future relationships to women. It may be that a bisexual identity would better describe her behavior, but in the absence of a politically salient and oppositional social role for bisexuality, this woman's decision to retain a lesbian identity best brings her public identity into line with her personal desires and behaviors as well as her political and theoretical interpretation of the world in which those desires and behaviors take on meaning.⁶ How a person self-consciously identifies, therefore, can say a great deal about how that person interprets her or his relation to structures of oppression.

There are, of course, contexts in which other ways of categorizing people (e.g., according to behavior without regard for self-conscious identities) might be more important. In HIV-prevention work, for example, the category "men who have sex with men" has been crucial in identifying at-risk populations regardless of how they might understand their place within society. However, one's sense of oneself as gay or lesbian (or queer or marimacha or same-gender-loving) can be critical for making the work of political coalition or collective resistance against oppression possible. This is not because there is a single party line that goes with identifying oneself with a certain group. Rather, it is because behavior (or desire) in itself says so little comparatively about how one sees oneself in relation to others. Men "on the down low" or who have wives or girlfriends but engage in sex with men on the side might exist alongside me in the category of "men who have sex with men," but probably stand in a very different relation than I and other jotos, gays, queens, and same-gender-loving men to the homophobia and sexism that structures our society. Assuming that their choice to have sex with men reflects desires that might lead them to identify as gay and given the availability of that identity, continued identification as *straight* reflects a decision to privilege one's homosocial, patriarchal bonds with straight men

(heterosexual privilege) over possible identification with women's oppression or with marginalized men who have taken the risk of assuming an identity in resistance to homophobia. (At this point, I should concede that there are, in fact, *multiple* antihomophobic identities available. I have already mentioned joto, gay, lesbian, queer, queen, marimacha, and same-gender-loving. Furthermore, I do not mean to head off the continued proliferation of such identities, including the possible elaboration of antihomophobic identities for men who primarily sexually desire women. For the moment, however, I need to continue to defer the complexity involved by this concession for a few more pages.)

THE PITFALLS OF ESSENTIALISM

If I am correct that it can be useful to consider the political significance of identity separately from the origins or status of desire, we are left with some further questions. First, can we understand identity as essentialist, or need we understand it along more constructionist lines? Next, what does identity tell us about the world? I will offer an answer to the first two questions in this section and return to the last question in the following section. I will first argue in this section through an analogy to nationalism that, whatever gains essentialism about identity might appear to give us, there are pitfalls that should make us wary. I will then consider briefly a version of essentialism about identity that appeals to commonsense ideologies of gender, followed by two attempts to elaborate critical, complex versions of essentialism in feminist theory. Each of these attempts fails to avoid the pitfalls I outline.

Anticolonial theorist Frantz Fanon argues in a chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* titled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" that a principle problem with nationalism in the struggle of colonized peoples against colonialism is that it tends to privilege only the interests of members of the emergent middle class, who tend to be the ones in leadership positions both in the national liberation party and in the newly independent nation.⁷ Another way of putting this is that nationalism often generalizes the interests of the colonized elite into the interests of the colonized people as a whole. Nationalism thus is susceptible to two mistakes simultaneously: on the one hand, it can lead to the assumption that all of the colonized have a shared experience or identity, or have the same shared interests; on the other hand, it can take the interests of the elite to be those shared interests. Of course it might be that there are *some* widely shared experiences and interests (e.g. the interest in ridding the nation of colonialism). The unity that nationalism can provide to an anticolonial struggle is the reason why Fanon sees some value in it. However, the pitfalls of nationalism are precisely that it can (and typically does) assume more sameness and more unity among the members of the colonized nation than actually exists. Differences of interest along gender lines or class lines tend to be downplayed, while the often male-specific interests of the petty bourgeoisie are taken to be the interests of the nation. For this reason, one of the projects of anticolonial struggle, according to

Fanon, should be to build national consciousness among the colonized even though it cannot be presupposed without great danger. I see the pitfalls of essentialism to be similar to those of nationalism: a too quick assumption of sameness and unity within a group. These assumptions serve to mask both differences in how oppression is experienced across the group and domination within the group. Unity, for the kinds of essentialism one sometimes finds in feminist and gay and lesbian activism, has often been something not to be worked toward so much as something presupposed.

Like nationalism, essentialism about identity has an allure, in addition to its political expediency. It often fits with one's common sense, with what feels right and true, with precritical intuitions about how the world works. The dangers of this commonsense version of essentialism run deep. The recent book *The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism*, by J. Michael Bailey, an evolutionary psychologist and chair of the psychology department at Northwestern University, provides a good illustration of how essentialism about sexual identity works through appeals to common sense, what everyone (supposedly) knows and takes for granted about what is masculine, feminine, gay, and straight. The basic claim of Bailey's book is that sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender role behavior are all linked, dependent psychological traits (xi). Because he relies on commonsense definitions of what femininity and masculinity are, Bailey never brings these categories into question. He blurs together an astonishing array of behaviors and practices, concealing any differences among them through a broad claim that femininity and masculinity are likely "inborn," not the result of any "obvious social influence" (x).⁸ He dodges difficult questions about childhood Gender Identity Disorder, for example, refusing to consider the difference it would make if such gender roles as "aversion toward rough-and-tumble play" or liking to play with dolls or wearing high-heeled shoes were culturally specific and not universal qualities pertaining to heterosexual girls and women across human societies (23).

Bailey, in Halwani's terms, is an essentialist not only about homosexual desire, but also about homosexual identity (a position Halwani claims that no one really holds). Furthermore, he is an essentialist about gender identity and gender roles and argues throughout his book that a transcultural and transhistorical homosexual sexual orientation is linked to a transcultural and transhistorical transsexual identity (134–136). Extremely feminine gay men, Bailey argues, often choose to become women in order to attract men. Bailey offers some biological and psychological data to support links among popular definitions of femininity and gay male behavior, but this data is rife with inconsistencies (as, for example, the showing of gay men to be masculine in some ways, feminine in others, and of some individual gay men to be very masculine overall and others very feminine overall). Furthermore, he never brings the categories of analysis (femininity and masculinity) into question or subjects them to serious cross-cultural scrutiny. Therefore, he argues for an essentialist understanding of gay (and "gay transsexual") identity primarily on the basis of implicit and explicit appeals to common sense: surely, a normal girl

would act “maternally” toward her dolls, rather than carrying them by the hair (41); surely, since women are normally attracted to men, there must be something feminine about attraction to men. Bailey’s essentialism exhibits one of the most frequently identified problems with forms of essentialism: it takes a number of cultural qualities associated with an identity and naturalizes them. In his case, this further leads to a naturalization of oppressive relations bearing on those identities. According to Bailey, men simply cannot help being more aggressive or promiscuous than women. Conversely, one should not expect women and young girls to be as assertive or athletic as men, because that is just not the way women have evolved (87–102).

While Bailey’s essentialism might be described as *uncritical*, insofar as it takes common-sense categories of analysis for granted, naturalizes oppressive ideologies, and conflates desire and identity, some feminist theorists have attempted to articulate more critical and politically progressive versions of essentialism. Perhaps the best-known book-length discussion of essentialism with regard to identity is Diana Fuss’s *Essentially Speaking*. Fuss defines essentialism in the context of feminist theory as “the idea that men and women, for example, are identified as such on the basis of transhistorical, eternal, immutable essences” (xi). Essentialism, for Fuss, concerns some essential aspect of identity that exists across times and cultures *as the basis of that identity*. This definition continues to inform her considerations of essentialism with regard to gender, race, and sexuality. While Fuss quickly dismisses the truth-value of essentialism, she goes on to defend a form of strategic essentialism from a putatively nonjudgmental position that is theoretically relativist but politically interested (xii, xiv, 104). Thus, while she holds that essentialism is false, she believes it both unavoidable and at least sometimes politically expedient. She embraces this position despite an acute knowledge of essentialism’s pitfalls: “[T]he doctrine of essence is viewed as precisely that which seeks to deny or to annul the very radicality of difference. The opposition is a helpful one in that it reminds us that a complex system of cultural, social, psychological, and historical differences, and not a set of pre-existent human essences, position and constitute the subject” (xii). Here, Fuss opposes essence-as-sameness (e.g., the idea that all men share something in common that defines them as men) to difference (e.g., the idea that all men are in important ways different from one another). She draws the conclusion from this opposition that essences do not constitute the subject; for Fuss, the connection between essences necessarily privileges sameness over difference.⁹

Because she only allows essence to play an all-or-nothing role in constituting a subject (thereby allowing for difference within an identity category), it follows that strategic uses of essentialism would posit both sameness and unity across members of an identity group. Rather than offer an essentialism that avoids these pitfalls, Fuss argues that we cannot avoid invoking strong essentialist claims. This is a key point for her: even constructionist positions cannot avoid relying on some form of essentialism (1). I agree that in many cases constructionist dismissals of identity categories as mere fictions are

based on the essentialist assumption that the only definition (of the self or of a social identity) that can be politically adequate is one that is unitary, stable, and determinable outside of cultural mediation (a version of Aristotelian essence). Since such an essence turns out not to be empirically discoverable for the category of men, for example, Fuss's constructionist must therefore assume that no adequate definition of men can exist.¹⁰ This then leads to the dismissal of all identity categories, or—the position Fuss supports—the conclusion that identity categories are unavoidable but can only be formulated in essentialist terms (strategically). Fuss's conclusion implies a bad faith that is apparently inevitable insofar as people cannot avoid the continued (albeit strategic) use of categories they know to be fictitious (104). Since I endorse a version of constructionism for identity, Fuss's conclusion that essentialism is unavoidable even for constructionists is a potentially alarming one. Do all forms of constructionism fall prey to this Catch-22? Are all invocations of identities unavoidably essentialist insofar as they imply a fictitious sameness and unity that erases salient differences? I believe that the answer to both of these questions is "no," and I will provide an alternative in the next section of this chapter. For now, I would simply like to note that, were Fuss to entertain a notion of how something can be real without being fixed, stable, unitary, and determinable outside of cultural mediation (qualities she ascribes to essentialism), she might not conclude that essentialism is inescapable and must therefore be "risked" strategically.

Christine Battersby, in her book *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*, makes an original case for reconsidering the truth-value of a form of essentialism, which she calls "post-Kantian nominal essentialism" (30). This version of essentialism rejects an appeal to naturalness and also tries to overcome the pitfalls of sameness and unity. It is thus a far more sophisticated and critical essentialism than either Bailey's or the strategic kind described by Fuss. Battersby's larger project is to rethink the philosophical subject based on a norm that can give birth to new subjects (the female body). She makes a strong case that traditional Western philosophy wrongly takes a male body as the norm for thinking about the subject. She is also persuasive when she suggests the usefulness of rethinking the subject (especially with regard to its traditional autonomy and singularity) along the lines she lays out of a female body capable of giving birth to new subjects.

In elaborating this female subject position, Battersby rejects versions of essentialism that suppose sameness as natural or experienced across differences among women (16). (She associates this form of essentialism with a specifically Aristotelian notion of *essence*.) She also, therefore, rejects strategic versions of this kind of essentialism, which she associates primarily with the work of literary critic Gayatri Spivak (24). Despite this rejection of sameness, however, Battersby believes that some notion of essence is necessary for her project and is at great pains to distinguish it from other versions of essentialism:¹¹

women's experiences are diverse—so diverse as to be untheorizable in terms of empirical generalization. Our identities are shaped by a conglomerate of forces

and regulative practices, not just by the single matter of sexual difference. In so far as there is “sameness” between women, this is not a matter of shared experiences or life-histories. It is, rather, a question of a shared positioning *vis-à-vis* the founding metaphysical categories that inform our notions of individuality, self and “personhood.” Thus, whether or not a woman is lesbian, infertile, post-menopausal or childless, in modern western culture she will be assigned a subject-position linked to a body that has perceived potentialities for birth. (16)

Battersby thus holds that there is some link between women’s social identities and female bodies, but without seeking to naturalize female biology. Instead, she holds both that bodies are culturally mediated and that such things as biology can have causal force for our theories and how we use cultural categories (22, 30). Drawing from philosophers John Locke and Immanuel Kant, Battersby elaborates a causal theory of linguistic reference, similar to the one for which I have argued elsewhere, in order to account for the mediated relationships between cultural meanings and female bodies (Battersby 29–30; Hames-García, “Who Are Our Own People?” 108–109).

Battersby seeks to “stress the diversity of female experiences—but [to] retain the underlying sameness of the female predicament” (22). This predicament is that of being defined in particular ways in relation to an ideal norm of female embodiment within a patriarchal culture. Patriarchy—which she defines as “that form of social organization which takes male bodies and life-patterning as both norm and ideal in the exercise of power”—is thus central to her sense of female essence (15). For Battersby, there are norms (cultural and linguistic) that work to fix the identity of a group. Some of these norms have more influence than others in a given society at a given time. Interactively with the causal features of female biology, the dominant regulative norms of gender therefore determine the “essence” of women within society. As she notes, “A feminist essentialist of this post-Kantian persuasion can allow essences and also register differences between standards adopted across different cultures and historical epochs in securing sexually differentiated bodies” (31). She further points out that “[t]alking about a female ‘essence’ does not necessarily entail hypostatizing a ‘true’ female ‘nature’ which reflects an underlying (real) heterosexuality or a bodily ‘design’ that will consign a woman to the fate of becoming a mother. Instead, my own defence of the notion of a female ‘essence’ involves registering the norms and regulative practices that at one particular time and in one type of culture act as sexual definers” (32). This model of essence can account for variation across cultures and for the dominance of one set of norms within a given culture. However, even within the same culture, will there merely be one “subject-position linked to a body that has perceived potentialities for birth,” or might there be several? Furthermore, how might one account for differences within a culture such that the same regulatory practices assign female gender to different women in different ways, even to the point of defining different women in opposition to each other? This is more than just a matter of cultural and historical variation. Rather, it suggests

that Battersby's use of patriarchy as the defining context in society for women is insufficient. It overlooks, for example, the degree to which societies might take white male bodies or sometimes even white male and female bodies as the norm and ideal. In response to earlier theorizing by women-of-color feminists, one might ask, "Do women come into being as women just in relation to their femaleness, or also in relation to their whiteness or blackness or their colonial status or class?"¹²

The reason for the importance of retaining a notion of female essence, as Battersby defines it, is that some features of women's bodies gain significance under patriarchy (after all, babies do not seem to develop within and emerge from *male* bodies). As a result, even women who, for example, are not capable of giving birth exist within a system that both views them in relation to a female body capable of giving birth and has a powerful interest in controlling women's reproductive capacities. She fails, however, to elaborate the notion of patriarchy with regard to differences among women of class or race. Thus, while she responds provocatively to objections to essentialism-as-naturalness, her presumption of a largely unitary patriarchy overlooks the contradictory positioning of women within a matrix of racism, colonialism, and capitalism. To the extent that a woman's positioning in relation to gender occurs only within such a matrix, there cannot be even an ideal normative female body that is the same for all women. For example, white women in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States existed in relation to the capacity to give birth differently than Puerto Rican women of the same period. While white women were being prevented by the state from terminating pregnancies, thousands of Puerto Rican women were sterilized by agencies of that same state.¹³ One can attempt to lessen the significance of this difference by defining the relation of patriarchy to women's reproduction very generally: for example, control over women's reproduction. However, what is lost by this move is the significance of colonialism and racism in relation to women's reproduction. Understanding control over women's reproduction as a function of colonialism and racism better explains why some women are encouraged to reproduce and others are prevented from reproducing than does simply attributing to a generalized patriarchy an interest in controlling women's reproductive capabilities.

Even Battersby's sophisticated essentialism, therefore, fails to avoid the pitfalls I laid out. It continues to assume sameness, if not of experience or nature, then of predicament. While it allows for differences among women, in other words, it assumes that patriarchy (at least within a given society at a given time) operates with some uniformity as the set of practices defining the essence of women. This move—which is key to making Battersby's position essentialist—inevitably downplays the intermeshing of sexism with other forms of oppression. It thus either participates in the concealing of other forms of oppression or contributes to the portrayal of oppressions as separate and interlocked rather than inseparable and intermeshed.¹⁴ If patriarchy is not something separable from capitalism, racism, and colonialism, then this fact is something that simply cannot be seen from an essentialist point of view.

WHAT IS AT STAKE IN SOCIAL IDENTITIES

I agree with much of Battersby's larger philosophical intervention. I think that she at the very least provides useful ways of thinking about the importance of female biology for how women experience their predicament in society, without positing a naturalized female biology as an essence for women. Her move to thinking about the interplay between individual particularity and nominal categories of identity and about the connections between a causal theory of reference and regulatory cultural norms and practices bear a strong affinity to the version of realism that I and others have developed in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Battersby's attachment to a form of essentialism, however, hampers her ability to account for the full complexity of identities, especially as they take shape in relation to multiple, intermeshed forms of oppression. In order to show how one might better account for this complexity, I would like to further elaborate a realist point about how political identities might be best understood. More exactly, I would like to argue for what I see as being most at stake in the elaboration, evaluation, and mobilization of social identities.

Identity theorizing needs to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism as I have laid them out: sameness and presupposed unity. Furthermore, thinking about identity within sexual politics and gay and lesbian studies needs to steer away from debates over the causes of sexual desire or positions that oppose culture to nature, as these confuse what is truly at stake in our considerations of identity. I suggest that the acknowledgement that sexual identities are constructed should lead one to ask how these identities function in complicity with and/or resistance to oppression. I would argue that the realist claim that identities refer "outward" to causal features of society is best understood not as a claim about accurate reference to blood quanta or sexual arousal patterns or the number of X chromosomes someone has (there is, to be sure, an additional need to understand the reference "inward" to such factors). Rather, the acknowledgement that social identities like gay and lesbian are social constructions allows us to see how they are based on theoretical understandings of the workings of oppression and resistance as well as on one's sexual desires and practices. The truth of a lesbian identity, therefore, lies less in its mapping of the behavior of a woman whose sexual desire is at least partly directed toward other women than in its interpretation of that woman's place (and sense of her place, given her desires) within a given society.¹⁵ My own whiteness in Mexico and nonwhiteness in the United States is a similar example of how social identities are better understood as referring to the reality of how a given society is structured than to some natural fact about a person's body. *Whiteness*, here, is not a label whose truth or falsity lies in the melanin of my skin. The same body can even *look* white or not white depending on how a society is structured with regard to racial difference. More crucially, however, *whiteness* describes an individual's or group's relation to the racial organization of society *as well as* to the intermeshing of

race with class, gender, ability, and sexuality. A white lesbian is white, but not in the same way as a white heterosexual man.¹⁶ Whiteness, like heterosexuality, refers to a privileged positioning within a society oppressively structured around a racial hierarchy (a positioning that one can occupy in resistance to that racial hierarchy, to be sure). Identities like *gay* or *white* are therefore not arbitrary. While they have something to do with sexual behavior and skin color, I submit that sexual behavior and skin color alone cannot assess the truth-value of these identities.¹⁷

This is the kind of claim argued for by William S. Wilkerson in his essay "Is There Something You Need to Tell Me? Coming Out and the Ambiguity of Experience." He writes that coming out as gay or lesbian "reflects a new and more accurate understanding of who one is in the world and how one can act in the world. Coming out allows gays or lesbians to better organize salient aspects of their experience, to gain an understanding of themselves that will help them to understand their place in the world and to develop modes of life and personalities that stem from this new understanding" (266). Wilkerson's claim is thus that coming out is not a "more accurate" interpretation of one's desires so much as it is a more accurate interpretation of how a person with such desires fits into a homophobic world:

Anyone who adopts a gay or lesbian identity but ignores the political implications of this action has not fully grasped the meaning of the coming out experience. Coming out is the recognition that one has been in error with respect to who one was, and that this error came about because of homophobic theories about sexuality and personhood prevalent in society. Once the transformation into a gay identity begins, one implicitly rejects homophobia and those parts and structures of society that maintain it. In this way, gay identity "refers" to existing social structures, reveals their relation to one's personal identity, and also condemns them as wrong. (267)

This is not to say that coming out as gay or lesbian is the only way to reject homophobia. However, coming out does reject homophobia in some sense. What I showed in my considerations on essentialism, however, is that a unitary understanding of oppression is insufficient for thinking about the reference of identities. What remains to be seen is how gay and lesbian identities have been and/or can be formed in response to homophobia *understood as one of many intermeshed oppressions*.

Centering people of color in a gay and lesbian studies framework, one can see that sexuality, its construction, and its regulation are central to the ongoing histories of racism, colonialism, and capitalism. This formulation borrows directly from the work of the activist movement "Incite!," a women-of-color-led organization that is dedicated to struggling against violence against women of color. Part of its sense of how to understand violence against women of color is to see women of color as central to the intermeshing of racism, colonialism, and capitalism. Thus, for example, Incite! is critical of traditional organizing against violence against women because of its

complicity with the prison-industrial complex, as well as its too narrow definition of violence as interpersonal violence.¹⁸ By centering women of color at the intersection of racism, colonialism, and capitalism, Incite! seeks to find new ways of understanding how state violence, interpersonal violence, poverty, and racism are defining features of gendered oppression in U.S. society. Following the lead of Incite! activists and thinkers, I believe that we can understand sexuality as both something real and as something that is constructed differently for those situated differently in relation to race, colonialism, and capitalism. As a consequence, in looking at how homosexual identities are constructed, one would want to be careful to ask whether they are only constructed in resistance to homophobia, or whether they are constructed in resistance to multiple, intermeshed oppressions. If, as Frye suggests, we should see homosexuality as something worthy of choosing, then this will only be the case in relation to homosexual *identities* insofar as those identities can be taken up in resistance to multiple oppressions. A corollary would be that, when we find that they have been elaborated in complicity with racism, colonialism, sexism, or capitalism, they should be rejected or revised.

Thus, for example, a realist understanding of gay, lesbian, and queer identities prompts us to be critical of many contemporary elaborations of such identities, but not on the basis that they misrepresent the “truth of desire” or because their adoption does or does not entail a normative effect on an individual’s sexual practices. Rather, the most compelling critique of modern, Western gay identities comes from the insufficiently critical theoretical perspective that they frequently embrace with regard to sexual oppression. Numerous theorists and social scientists, for example, have detailed how modern gay male identity has often been elaborated through an Orientalist or colonialist theoretical lens that is predicated on the sexual (re)colonizing of non-Western peoples. Most recently, Joseph Boone has explored this ideological (and material) operation in the travel writings of notable European and North American gay men from the twentieth century, linking the writings and experiences of Oscar Wilde, André Gide, and Joe Orton to the material creation through colonialism and neocolonialism of a North African sex trade in boys (61–70). Similarly, M. Jacqui Alexander suggests links between the neocolonial tourist industry in the Bahamas and white gay tourism.¹⁹

Perhaps the most explicit challenge along these lines to dominant U.S. conceptions of gay and lesbian identity was articulated by a coalition of the Hawai’i Gay Liberation Program and National Community Relations Division of the American Friends Service Committee’s Hawai’i Area Program, Na Mamo O Hawai’i and the Urban-Rural Mission (USA). In a series of documents reprinted in a special issue of the academic journal *GLQ*, members of these organizations place the struggle for same-sex marriage in Hawai’i and gay tourism in a context of ongoing colonial devastation of Hawaiian lands and people. Arguing that “justice for all *is* a gay issue” the Hawai’i Gay Liberation Program juxtaposes the conditions of native

Hawaiians (who have “the worst health, the highest levels of incarceration and poverty, the lowest level of educational attainment, and the highest mortality rate of all groups in Hawai’i—and among the worst in the U.S. [211–212]”) with the claim that “the LGBT movement must be rooted in something far deeper and more genuine than political marriages of convenience forged in crisis, in reaction to the initiatives of the religious right” (210). Specifically vexing for activists such as those from Na Mamo O Hawai’i was the position among mainstream gay and lesbian rights organizations that increased tourism from gays and lesbians should have been an incentive for the legalization of same-sex marriage in Hawai’i. Both groups argue further that U.S. gays and lesbians have something to learn from native Hawaiian understandings of sexuality. According to the “Open Letter to the LGBT Community” by Na Mamo O Hawai’i, an “example of the unique needs of our Kanaka Maoli [native Hawaiian] LGBT is seen in the difference between Kanaka Maoli sexuality and the Gay movement in America. For instance, while the American gay movement claims its roots from the Stonewall riots in New York, Kanaka Maoli sexuality is grounded in a person’s relationship to the ‘aina or land” (215). It follows that the decolonization of land in Hawai’i is inseparable from the decolonization of LGBT sexualities there. Sexual decolonization also necessitates, from a Kanaka Maoli perspective, a critical relationship to tourism: “Tourism . . . appropriates, caricatures, and degrades Kanaka Maoli culture and spirituality. Tourism promoters offer soft, alluring, exoticized images of the Hawaiian landscape and sexualized, racial stereotypes of Kanaka Maoli as commodities to be consumed by tourists—who, often without realizing it, participate in practices that are rapidly depleting the natural and cultural resources of the islands” (211).²⁰ While dominant understandings of gay liberation see sexual autonomy as a preeminent value, separating resistance to homophobia from practices of colonialism and racism, these queer Hawaiian activist organizations instead argue that “struggles to decolonize the nation, cultural, spirituality, social relationships, the body, and the self, are deeply entwined” (213).

By way of conclusion, I would also like to observe Sue-Ellen Case’s recent reservations about the replacement of gay and lesbian with “queer” both in the academy and in activism. Specifically, Case worries that forms of lesbian identity that were intertwined with feminist critiques of capitalism have been jettisoned via an overly broad queer critique of essentialism (associated with lesbian feminism). She writes, “after those queer dykes slammed the door on the way out of lesbian feminism, the dowdy old women-centered places began to close down: most feminist and lesbian theaters, bookstores, and bars have disappeared. . . . those old dowdy lesbian feminist hangouts—almost all of them were organized as collectives . . . Lesbian dowdy politics had been intrinsically tied to collective ownership and collective labor. They locked the mode of material production to cultural production and to the production of sexual, personal relationships . . . Does it matter that A Different Light [Bookstore] is not a collective and is, in fact, a chain? Is someone getting rich? Is someone not? Does it matter?” (210–211). Case

sees the opposition between queer and lesbian less as an opposition between normative and nonnormative, fluid and static, understandings of sexuality than between different political implications beyond sexuality:

“One can buy queer and wear it. In some circles, ‘queer’ seems to be primarily constituted by body piercings, leather, and spike haircuts. One might applaud such signs of commodification as signs of success. Good. We are not necessarily poor, nor downwardly mobile. Lipstick lesbians are cute. Sex can be fun. We are visible, strong, making more money, dressing better, eating out, and enjoying sex. . . . Antiassimilationist in its move away from pleading civil rights, the queer movement insinuates its sexual citizenship through affluence in the market and the willing participation in national agendas. Wouldn’t it be victory for the movement if Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer, mother of four sons, Vietnam vet, could be reinstated into the army?” (213).²¹

The understanding that how we identify sexually amounts to more than either the choice of a label or a coherent account of the nature of our desires places us on a path that allows us to see the complex interrelations between sexual identity and race, colonialism, capitalism, militarism, and commodification that Case and the Hawaiian lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists point toward. A realist understanding of sexual identity thus raises the stakes for a gay or lesbian identity beyond those implied by the essentialist-constructionist debates, putting queer people at the center of debates over globalization and decolonization and forcing us to continue to ask and to ask again, What kinds of communities and identities are we coming out to and coming out from?

NOTES

1. I have written previously on some of these issues, including both essentialism and the intermeshing of oppressions and mutual constitution of identities in the following essays: “Who Are Our Own People? Challenges for the Theory of Social Identity,” *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 102–29; and “Can Queer Theory Be Critical Theory?” *New Critical Theory: Essays on Liberation*, eds. William S. Wilkerson and Jeffrey Paris (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), pp. 201–22.
2. See, for example, George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994); Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Rosemary Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); and Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
3. This transformation has been documented and commented on, for example, by John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies*

Reader, eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 467–76; Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), esp. pp. 42–44; Eve Sedgwick, in *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 44–48. George Chauncey has further observed that the changing of everyday people's sense of their sexual identities often changed in ways not too strongly influenced by the discourses of experts (*Gay New York*, 111–27).

4. In addition to the works cited above, see J. Michael Bailey, *The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2003); Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Women: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (New York: Routledge, 1990); A. C. Kinsey, W. B. Pomeroy, and C. E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948); Pete Signal, ed., *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Edward Stein, ed., *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and William S. Wilkerson, "Is There Something You Need to Tell Me? Coming Out and the Ambiguity of Experience." *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Moya and Hames-García, pp. 251–78.
5. Note that my formulation leaves a number of things open. One could hold that homosexuals are only such when in a homosexual relationship, and not outside of such a relationship, or one could hold that homosexuals are homosexuals all throughout their lives, regardless of whether they ever enter into a homosexual relationship. On the first view, homosexuality is a kind of behavior and someone is a homosexual when engaging in that behavior. On the second view, homosexuality is a kind of desire residing inside a person and a homosexual is the kind of person in whom this desire can be found, regardless of the person's behavior. These two dramatically different views of what a homosexual might be are not decided between by my minimal definition. Furthermore, my definition is agnostic regarding one's sense of oneself as a homosexual or the question of whether or not homosexuals are a separate kind of person from anyone else in any way other than having a particular desire and/or entering into a particular relationship.
6. I return to some of the issues brought up here in section 3. My example does bring up the case of "political lesbianism," the sense among many feminists in the 1970s that one needed to identify as a lesbian because of an abstract definition of what the figure of the lesbian represents politically without any regard for one's sexual desires or behaviors. This is not the kind of position I intend to endorse since I believe that one adopts a social role and an identity within a context that includes preexisting desires and practices. To choose an identity without regard for its ability to match up with one's desires and practices is in bad faith, sidestepping the hard work of elaborating a politically resistant identity from within the context in which one finds oneself.
7. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
8. The variety of characteristics that Michael Bailey ropes into the bundle of gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation is truly astounding: attraction to men (feminine and gay) vs. attraction to women (masculine), standing with hands in pocket (masculine) vs. hands on hips (feminine and gay), "legs not crossed or

- ankle on knee” (masculine) vs. “legs crossed, knee on knee” (feminine and gay), “precise” (feminine and gay) vs. “lazy” (masculine) speech articulation, preference for being penetrated sexually (feminine and gay) vs. preference for penetrating (masculine), desire to have children (feminine but not gay), desire for casual sex (masculine and gay) vs. feeling “cheap and used” after casual sex (feminine) (101), preference for younger partners (masculine and gay) vs. older partners (feminine), and tendency toward violence (masculine) or depression (feminine and gay). He even suggests that there might be *genetic* links between being gay, being artistic, and having a “keen sense of style” (118).
9. All that really follows from Fuss’s opposition between sameness and difference is that essences do not all by themselves constitute the subject in its entirety. That is to say, men might all share something in common that defines them as men, but still be different from each other in significant respects. The essence of manhood, then, would be something that fails to completely define a male subject. Something like this position characterizes Battersby’s essentialism, discussed later in this section. Fuss, however, does not seem to draw such a conclusion, implying instead that essences do not play any real role in constituting the subject.
 10. Judith Butler draws similar conclusions in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
 11. I actually don’t think that Battersby needs a defense of essentialism for her larger argument about the usefulness of taking a version of the female body as a norm in philosophy.
 12. See, among others, Audre Lode, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984); María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Paula M. L. Moya, *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
 13. On the sterilization of Puerto Rican women by the U.S. Government, see Ana María García’s excellent documentary, *La Operación* (1982), distributed by The Cinema Guild.
 14. According to María Lugones’s terminology, oppressions that are intermeshed are inseparable, shaping an individual’s experience in relation to one another. When oppressions are understood to be interlocking, they are understood to be separable and distinct. Understanding oppressions as interlocking fragments the experience of someone who faces multiple, intermeshed oppressions (223–24, 231–32).
 15. See note 6, above.
 16. On how gender and sexuality influence the experience and state of being white, see Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, (110–27).
 17. I think this is something like what Battersby wants to get at by insisting that, regardless of their actual potentiality, all women in a patriarchy are positioned in relation to a normative body that is perceived in relation to its capacity for birth. What makes sense of a given definition of *woman*, from this perspective, is its ability to account for the structures of patriarchy in which women exist.
 18. My thinking about these issues has been profoundly shaped by the work of Incite! and by conversations with individual Incite! members, including María Lugones, Shireen Roshanravan, and Gabriela Veronelli. In addition, the work of Joy James on state violence has been very helpful to me.

19. See M. Jacqui Alexander, "Imperial Desire/Sexual Utopias: White Gay Capital and Transnational Tourism," *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, ed. Ella Shohat (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 281–305, and Joseph Boone, "Vacation Cruises; or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism," *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, ed. John C. Hawley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). See also Lionel Cantú, "De Ambiente: Queer Tourism and the Shifting Boundaries of Mexican Male Sexualities." *GLQ* 8.1–2 (2002): pp. 139–66; and Jasbir Kaur Puar, "Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, and Globalization." *GLQ* 8.1–2 (2002): pp. 101–37.
20. See American Friends Service Committee, "AFSC Hawai'i Gay Liberation Program: Activist Materials Addressing Tourism." *GLQ* 8.1–2 (2002): pp. 207–25. See also Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonization and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).
21. Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Feminist Retro-Future," *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance*, ed. Dana Heller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 205–20.

WHAT'S IDENTITY GOT TO DO WITH IT? MOBILIZING IDENTITIES IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

Paula M. L. Moya

Research done over several decades in a variety of disciplines across the social sciences and humanities has shown that students and teachers alike bring their identities and experiences with them into the classroom. Identities are highly salient for students' experiences in school; they make the classroom a different place for different students. This is because students with different identities in the same classroom will face different sets of what Claude Steele calls "identity contingencies." Steele uses the term to refer to the specific set of responses that a person with a given identity has to cope with in specific settings. Indeed, *who* a student is perceived to be will affect such variables as her placement in an educational tracking system, the friends she will have to choose among, and the academic and social expectations that her teachers will have of her.¹ While these identity contingencies might seem relatively insignificant, they can have major consequences for the opportunities a person will have over the course of her life.

To the extent that we are genuinely interested in educating for a just and democratic society, then, we will recognize the salience of identities in the classroom. We will work to alter the negative identity contingencies that minority students commonly face, even as we find strategies for maximizing opportunities for all our students. But I will go even further than this. I argue that a truly multi-perspectival, multicultural education will work to *mobilize identities* in the classroom rather than seeking to minimize all effects of identities as part of the process of minimizing stereotypes. Only by treating identities as epistemic resources and mobilizing them, I contend, can we draw out their knowledge-generating potential and allow them to contribute positively to the production and transmission of knowledge.

IDENTITIES

What are identities? In my book, *Learning From Experience*, I define *identities* as the nonessential and evolving products that emerge from the dialectic

between how subjects of consciousness identify themselves and how they are identified by others. Elsewhere in the book, I define them as “socially significant and context-specific ideological constructs that nevertheless refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world.” I argue that identities are “indexical”—that is, they refer outward to social structures and embody social relations.² Insofar as identities reference our understanding of ourselves in relation to others, they provide their bearers with particular perspectives on a shared social world. They are, in the words of Satya Mohanty, “ways of making sense of our experiences.”³

In this essay, for analytical purposes, I take the dialectical concept of identity I worked with in *Learning From Experience* and separate it into two components: ascriptive and subjective identities. I make this analytical distinction not to suggest that the two components can be, in fact, separated from one another. Indeed, identity is inescapably relational. Rather, I make the distinction because it allows me to more clearly delineate what is at stake in taking a realist—rather than an essentialist or an idealist—approach to identity. I argue that taking a realist approach to identity is critical to the project of working toward a more egalitarian and free society. Only a realist approach effectively registers the dialectical (as well as historically- and culturally specific) nature of identity construction—an adequate understanding of which is essential to our ability to work toward the transformation of socially significant identities. To the extent that we are interested in transforming *this* world into a better one—insofar as we cannot get *there* except from *here*—the transformation of the identities that are central to the arrangement and functioning of society will be a necessary part of our epistemic and political project.

Ascriptive identities are what some researchers call “imposed identities,” and what I sometimes call “social categories.” They are inescapably historical and collective, and generally operate through the logic of visibility. Examples include racial categories such as “Black” and “Asian” as well as gender categories such as “woman” and “man.” Ascriptive identities come to us from outside the self, from society, and are highly implicated in the way we are treated by others. More importantly, ascriptive identities are highly correlated with the selective distribution of societal goods and resources. This is because, as a result of variable and historically specific economic and social arrangements such as slavery, employment discrimination laws, and restrictive housing covenants that unfairly advantaged some groups of people at the expense of others, different social categories have accrued different meanings and associations. These meanings and associations—many of which linger long after the economic or social arrangements that gave rise to them have been dismantled or even outlawed—are often invoked and mobilized by those in positions of relative power to justify day-to-day processes of social and economic inclusion and exclusion. These processes can range from the personally painful, as when a young Black girl is refused admission to a schoolyard game by a group of white girls, to the economically debilitating, as when a Latina fails to gain a much-deserved promotion because her white male boss has trouble imagining her in a position of authority.⁴

The other aspect of the dialectical concept of identity is what we call subjective identity, or simply “subjectivity.” Subjectivity refers to our individual sense of self, our interior existence, our lived experience of being a more-or-less coherent self across time. The term also implies our various acts of self-identification, and thus necessarily incorporates our understanding of ourselves in relation to others. Thus, subjective identities can refer to aspects of someone’s personality, such as when we describe ourselves as being a “non-conformist,” or a “joker.” They can also advertise our values, such as when we identify ourselves as a “Christian,” or an “ecofeminist.” Finally, they can reference available social categories, such as when we self-identify as “gay” or “disabled.” Although subjective identities sometimes feel as if they are completely internal, and thus under our individual control, thinkers since Hegel have agreed that subjective identities are inescapably shaped by the experience of social recognition. As Linda Martín Alcoff has argued, “the ‘internal’ is conditioned by, even constituted within, the ‘external,’ which is itself mediated by subjective negotiation.” “Subjectivity” she explains, “is itself located. Thus the metaphysics implied by ‘internal/external’ is, strictly speaking, false.”⁵

REALIST VS. ESSENTIALIST AND IDEALIST CONCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY

I draw the distinction between ascriptive and subjective identities because how we understand the relationship between them will determine whether and when we are essentialist, idealist, or realist about identity. Essentialists about identity suppose that the relationship between the ascriptive and the subjective is one of absolute identity. They imagine, for example, that if a person can be assigned to a racial or gender category on the basis of some invariable characteristic like skin color or genitalia, then everything else of significance, including how he or she self-identifies, his or her propensity for violence, personal characteristics, and even innate mental capacity follows from being a member of that particular group. These days, there are very few scholars who claim to be essentialist about identity. Notable exceptions would be Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, the authors of *The Bell Curve*, and some of the researchers who are searching the human genome for evidence that would provide a genetic basis for the sociohistorical concept of race.⁶

Idealists about identity, by contrast, claim that there is no stable or discoverable relationship between the ascriptive and subjective aspects of identity. Idealists imagine that how others regard a person should be of little consequence to the strong-minded individual who makes her own way in the world. The neoconservative minority with the “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” mentality is one kind of person who takes an idealist approach to identity. Shelby Steele in *The Content of Our Character* and Richard Rodriguez in *Hunger for Memory* provide good examples of a neoconservative idealist approach to identity.⁷ Another example of an idealist approach to identity would be that of the postmodernist who argues that we can disrupt historically sedimented and socially constituted identity categories

through individual acts of parody or refusal. I am thinking here of Judith Butler's argument in her influential work *Gender Trouble*.⁸ If essentialists impute too much significance to the social categories through which we receive societal recognition, idealists attribute too little. They underestimate the referential and social nature of identity. Identities, after all, refer to relatively stable and often economically entrenched social arrangements. Such social arrangements can change, and when they do, available identities will change along with them.⁹ But individuals, qua individuals, have much less power over their identities than idealists imagine.

Realists about identity, by contrast, understand ascriptive and subjective identities as always in dynamic relationship with each other. We understand that people are neither wholly determined by the social categories through which we are recognized, nor can we ever be free of them. Indeed, the intimate connection between the organization of a society and the available social categories that we must contend with in that society accounts for why no transformation of identity can take place without a corresponding transformation of society—and vice versa. This is true for everybody—Black, White, male, female, gay, straight, able-bodied, disabled—but the stakes for those of us who are members of stigmatized identity groups are especially high. Because the identity contingencies we are likely to face have potentially debilitating effects on our life-chances, we ignore the dynamics of identity at our peril. To the extent that we are interested in transforming our society into one that is more socially and economically just, we need to know how identities work in order to effectively work with them.

Before I proceed, I need to make a point about the relational and contextual nature of all identities. As social constructs that draw upon available social categories, identities are indexed to a historical time, place, and situation. A consequence of this is that the same identity evokes very different associations in different places. On most mainstream news programs, a Chicana/o identity evokes associations of illegality, poverty, criminality, and delinquency. In Casa Zapata, the Mexican-American theme dorm at Stanford University, a Chicana/o identity is associated with pride, family, hard work, achievement, and solidarity. As the meanings associated with any given identity changes with the context in which that identity is invoked, the identity contingencies associated with that identity correspondingly change. There are a number of implications that follow from the contextual nature of identity, including the fact that a person can experience her identity very differently at different times, depending on the historical context and locale in which it is invoked. Claude Steele has done important work on the phenomenon of “stereotype threat,” which is a particular kind of identity contingency that results from the fact that some identities are stigmatized in socially significant ways. He defines “stereotype threat” this way: “When a negative stereotype about a group that one is part of becomes personally relevant, usually as an interpretation of one's behavior or an experience one is having, stereotype threat is the resulting sense that one can then be judged or treated in terms of the stereotype or that one might do something that

would inadvertently confirm it.”¹⁰ Stereotype threat is thus not only anxiety producing, but, crucially, it can measurably affect a person’s performance in a realm that might alter the course of his or her future. Steele’s work demonstrates empirically what most of us have known at the level of experience all along—that an identity that feels very safe in one situation can feel very threatened in another. Moreover, it helps explain why individuals who are members of certain groups might make the decisions they do—why, for example, Latina/o and African American students, who may have achieved well in elementary school, begin to disidentify with education as adolescents and either under-perform or drop out altogether. They are responding to the myriad messages about who they are and what they are capable of that they get from the larger society. They are removing themselves emotionally, if not literally, from a very unpleasant and uncomfortable situation. Given the stereotypes about these two groups, African American and Latina/o students who care about doing well in school are almost always going to be subject to stereotype threat in the classroom—unless their teachers and fellow students work actively to alter the identity contingencies these students have to face in the classroom setting.

The relational and contextual nature of all identities reveals that the problem is not identity, *per se*, but the way in which particular identities are invoked in particular social contexts. Understanding the dialectical nature of identities helps us to avoid falling into the trap of thinking either that nothing can be done to change typical educational outcomes (women just *are* bad at math; Latinos just *are* the type of people who drop out of school), or that individuals should be able to escape, willfully and through sheer force of character, the identity contingencies to which they are subjected. Educators who take a realist approach to identity understand the importance of changing the classroom dynamics in which people with different identities interact. By changing classroom dynamics, we transform the local social contexts in which particular identities are invoked. And because identities are dialectical, a transformation of the social context will necessarily alter the contingencies attached to particular social identities. The first step toward addressing negative educational outcomes that are identity-based, then, is understanding the dialectical nature of identity and recognizing the fact that identities are always already invoked in the classroom—usually in pernicious ways. The next step involves figuring out a way to mobilize identities in a way that recognizes *all* identities, but especially minority identities, as important epistemic resources.

IDENTITIES AS EPISTEMIC RESOURCES

The idea that we should mobilize identities in the classroom is a somewhat unconventional idea. Identities are often thought by right-, classic liberal, and even left wing thinkers to be pernicious, or at least not conducive to rational deliberation and the public good. Some critics of identity are afraid of the difference that identities imply, afraid that an acknowledgment of

cultural or perspectival difference will lead inevitably to a situation of irresolvable conflict. For others, the risk of stereotype threat and prejudice is so great as to suggest that, rather than mobilizing (and recognizing) identities, we should try to eliminate the salience of identities in the classroom completely. Such critics advocate an “identity neutral” or “color blind” approach that denies the continuing salience of certain kinds of identity for everyday interactions and experiences.

The work that those of us involved in the Future of Minority Studies project have been doing, however, suggests that seeing identities as things we would be better off without is not the most productive or accurate way to understand them. Linda Alcoff, for example, devotes a chapter of *Visible Identities* to dismantling the political critique of identities, demonstrating that such critiques are predicated on erroneous assumptions and a metaphysically inaccurate understanding of what identities are.¹¹ Providing careful readings of such political theorists as Todd Gitlin and Nancy Fraser, Alcoff demonstrates that their arguments against identity politics depend upon three basic assumptions about the nature and the effects of identities: (1) people with strongly felt identities are necessarily exclusivist; (2) whatever is imposed from outside as an attribution of the self is a pernicious constraint on individual freedom; and (3) identities bring with them an unvarying set of interests, values, beliefs, and practices that prevent their bearers from being able to participate in objective, rational deliberation about the common good. Such assumptions, Alcoff notes, are “hardwired into western Anglo traditions of thought”; as such, they are rarely ever made explicit and defended (31). As a way of questioning these assumptions, Alcoff examines the practices and claims of a wide range of political groups who attend to the salience of identity—from the Puerto Rican Political Action Committee (PRPAC) to the Service Employee International Union (SEIU)—to see if the picture of identity supported by these assumptions corresponds to the lived experience of identity or its politically mobilized forms. Importantly, the correspondence is not there. Alcoff argues that when we look at how identities operate in the world, we see that people with strongly felt identities are not necessarily exclusivist and that they can be capable of seeing past their own immediate interests for the common good. Moreover, we see that identity ascription is an inescapable—but not necessarily pernicious—fact of human life; it can enable, as well as constrain, individual freedom. The work Alcoff has done suggests that any dismissal of identity is, at minimum, required to begin with a metaphysically adequate understanding of it. Otherwise, dismissing identity is about as effective as dismissing gravity: you can do it, but unless you radically change the conditions that give rise to it (such as by traveling to space to achieve a condition of zero-gravity), you are not going to make much of a difference in how it works.¹²

Similarly, I have argued elsewhere that identities should be considered important epistemic resources that are better attended to than dismissed or “subverted.”¹³ The argument I have been making begins with the presumption that *all* knowledge is situated knowledge; there is no transcendent

subject with a “God’s eye” view on the world who can ascertain universal truths independent of a historically and culturally specific situation. Having recognized that all knowledge is situated, I see the importance of considering both from where a given knowledge-claim is derived, as well as whose interests it will serve, in any evaluation of its historically and culturally specific significance and truth-value. Moreover, I understand that even good, verifiable *empirical* knowledge must be evaluated in relation to a particular historical, cultural, or material context. Significantly, my view that all knowledge is situated does not lead me down the primrose path of epistemological relativism any more than my view that identities are constructed leads inexorably to the idea that they are arbitrary or infinitely malleable. I am a realist, and as such, I hold that there is a “reality” to the world that exceeds humans’ mental or discursive constructions of it. While our collective understandings may provide our only access to “reality,” and may imbue it with whatever meaning it can be said to have, our mental or discursive constructions of the world do not constitute the totality of what can be considered “real.” The “real” both shapes and places limits on the range of our imaginings and behaviors, and therefore provides an important reference point in any sort of interpretive debate about the meaning of a text, a picture, or a social identity. The part of the “real” that exceeds humans’ mental and discursive constructions of “reality” is also what occasions some “truths” to carry over across specific historical and cultural contexts.

The link between knowledge and identity stems from the fact that our identities provide us with particular perspectives on shared social worlds. And while identity and knowledge are not coextensive, nevertheless, what we “know” is intimately tied up with how we conceptualize that world and who we understand ourselves to be in it. Our conceptual frameworks are thus inseparable from how we comprehend ourselves in terms of our gender, culture, race, sexuality, ability, religion, age, and profession—even when we are not consciously aware of how these aspects of ourselves affect our points of view. Our identities thus shape our interpretive perspectives and bear on how we understand both our everyday experiences and the more specialized and expert knowledge we encounter and produce through our research and teaching. They influence the research questions we deem to be interesting, the projects we judge to be important, and the metaphors we use to describe the phenomena we observe.¹⁴ This is as true for those who have “dominant” identities as for those of us who have “minority” identities. As fundamentally social beings, we humans can no more escape the effects of our identities on our interpretive perspectives than we can escape the process of identification itself. Identities are fundamental to the process of *all* knowledge-production.

The link between knowledge and identity provides a compelling rationale for why a diverse work force, professoriate, or research team maximizes objectivity and innovation in knowledge production. People with different identities are likely (although not certain) to ask different questions, take various approaches, and hold distinctive assumptions. Insofar as diverse members of a research team conceptualize their shared social world in

dissimilar ways, they may view a shared problem in discrete ways. In situations where mutual respect and intellectual cooperation are practiced, the existence of such divergent perspectives can lead to the sparking of a productive dialectic that might lead to a creative solution or advancement in knowledge. Complacency and too-easy agreement, by contrast, can lead to intellectual stultification. The presence of people who hold different perspectives but who are able to respect each other's intellect and creativity increases the possibility that a research team will come up with an innovative solution to a shared problem that looked, from one point of view alone, unsolvable.¹⁵

Solving a problem held in common is certainly not the only, and perhaps not even the best, explanation for why a diverse professoriate can lead to advancements and innovations in knowledge-production. In a disciplinary field like history or literary studies that takes as its object of study human society or culture, for example, the existence of researchers with diverse identities increases the possibility that someone might ask previously ignored research questions that open up entirely new areas of inquiry. This is essentially what has happened with such subfields as women's history and African-American literature. Importantly, when the object of study is human culture or society, paying special attention to the struggles for social justice of people with subjugated identities is especially crucial to the process of investigating the functioning of a hierarchical social order such as our own. This is because subjugated identities and perspectives are often marginalized and hidden from view. Unlike the perspectives of those who have the economic means and social influence to publish and broadcast their views, the views of people who are economically and socially marginalized do not form part of the "common-sense" of the "mainstream," or dominant, culture. As I have argued elsewhere, the alternative perspectives and accounts generated through oppositional struggle provide new ways of looking at a society that complicate and challenge dominant conceptions of what is "right," "true," and "beautiful." Such alternative perspectives call to account the distorted representations of peoples, ideas, and practices whose subjugation is fundamental to the maintenance of an unjust hierarchical social order.¹⁶ Consequently, if researchers and teachers are interested in having an adequate—that is, more comprehensive and objective, as opposed to narrowly biased in favor of the status quo—understanding of a given social issue, they will listen harder and pay more attention to those who bring marginalized views to bear on it. They will do so in order to counterbalance the overweening "truth" of the views of those people in positions of dominance whose perspectives are generally accepted as "mainstream" or "common-sense."

It is for these reasons, and one more, that I argue that teachers in multicultural classrooms would do well to recognize identities as epistemic resources and work to mobilize them in the classroom. As Michael Hames-García argues in an essay about the teaching of American literature, an important part of educating for a democratic society involves helping students understand what is at stake in the outcome of various debates.¹⁷ If students are to grow up to be participatory citizens in a functioning

democracy, they need to see themselves as contributors to an ongoing conversation about the best way to live in the world. This will necessarily involve introducing all students—majority and minority alike—to alternative conceptions of what that “best way” might be. Whether the class is interpreting a novel or debating the merits of welfare reform, the discussion as a whole will benefit from the introduction of alternative (non-dominant) perspectives. Importantly, involving minority students in classroom discussions as privileged members—participants whose identities bring crucial (and otherwise missing) information to the discussion at hand—has the effect of changing the classroom dynamics and, by extension, the identity contingencies in that classroom. And where the teacher and students are successful at linking the perspectives expressed (in the novel, the textbook, or by the students themselves) to historically specific material interests and consequences, the stakes for students’ life choices will be that much more evident. Research has shown that when education is presented as being relevant to students’ lives, they will be more invested in both the discussion at hand and their education as a whole.¹⁸ Finding ways to mobilize identities in the classroom thus serves the dual purpose of empowering students as knowledge-producers capable of evaluating and transforming their society even as it has the potential to contribute to the production of more objective, and less biased, accounts of the topics under discussion.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The recognition that identities are epistemic resources has implications for a wide range of policies that are external to the classroom, but that bear on what happens within it. At the most basic level, it provides a strong justification for integrated schools and classrooms. If a teacher is working in a classroom that is extremely homogeneous—along lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ability—she will have fewer perspectival differences to exploit in her efforts to encourage her students to think critically about their own assumptions and values. Insofar as preparing students to be good citizens of a functioning democracy is an important goal of education, it must provide students with opportunities to exercise their critical capacities by reflecting on the convictions that guide their judgments about the best way to structure our common society. Students who are not encouraged to think about *why* they believe what they do will have difficulty understanding why other people believe differently. They will, moreover, be deprived of important occasions to consider changing their beliefs and transforming their identities. By contrast, a teacher whose classroom is diverse along lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ability will have a rich variety of perspectives to draw on. She will have a greater probability of success in her efforts to encourage the sort of productive dialogue that is fundamental to the goal of educating for a multicultural democracy. Through giving her students the chance to examine their own identities, she will be training them to more adequately negotiate disagreements arising as a result of cultural, racial,

economic, and class differences. Furthermore, by allowing her students to consider their own implication and agency in the structure and functioning of our society, she will be developing their critical capacities to imagine that society could be organized differently. The epistemic and pedagogical importance of perspectival difference, then, suggests that teachers and educational policy makers should resist, in whatever ways possible, the re-segregation along the lines of race and class of schools and classrooms that is currently taking place throughout this country.

A further implication of the importance of having diverse perspectives in the classroom is the need to re-examine current ability-based tracking practices. The work of educational researchers Jeannie Oakes, Amy Stuart Wells, and Irene Serna suggest that tracking, as it is currently implemented, works more to segregate along the lines of race and class than to discriminate along the lines of educational preparedness or ability. In several studies examining the decision-making processes of the people responsible for deciding how students will be tracked, these researchers demonstrate that ascriptive identities like ethnicity and gender are as instrumental in determining where a student ends up as are the student's test scores. Wells and Serna have further shown that the resistance to de-tracking is extremely strong among elite parents who perceive their children to be beneficiaries of the tracking system.¹⁹ Such parents assume, mistakenly, that ability-based tracking is unbiased and that it ensures a more educationally challenging environment for their child. They thus fail to acknowledge the salience of identity categories for affecting educational outcomes—for their own children as well as for nonelite children. Moreover, they lack an appreciation for the potential epistemic benefits of a diverse classroom. So, while educators committed to transformative multicultural education cannot expect to easily end current tracking practices, we need to continue our efforts to develop more compelling discourses about the economic and social salience of identity and the epistemic significance of perspectival diversity. Such discourses will be crucial to our success in affecting educational policies regarding the population diversity of our nation's classrooms.

Finally, the need for diverse perspectives and the importance of fostering dialogue in the classroom calls for a re-examination of current policies affecting the funding and oversight of our nation's public school system. As teachers know very well, it takes both time and space for us to get to know our students well, and for our students to get to know and respect each other. Moreover, it takes money to buy an adequate supply of that time and space. Without sufficient funding to hire well-qualified teachers, purchase up-to-date teaching materials, build and maintain safe and functional physical facilities, and retain the necessary administrative support staff, public schools will not be able to provide the small classrooms and interactive learning environments that are necessary for mining diverse perspectives and fostering productive dialogues.

Indeed, the steady defunding of public schools—and the consequent rush of panicked parents toward private schools, home schooling, and school vouchers—poses a grave danger to our democratic system inasmuch as it

effectively eviscerates public education's function as a shaper of civic identities. As Rob Reich discusses in his *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education*, parents who pull their children out of the public school system are more likely to place them in learning environments that reinforce their beliefs rather than in environments that challenge them. This can have the effect, Reich argues, of stunting children's sense of civic responsibility and diminishing their capacity to develop what he terms a *minimalist autonomy*. Minimalist autonomy, according to Reich, "refers to a person's ability to reflect independently and critically upon basic commitments, desires, and beliefs, be they chosen or unchosen, and to enjoy a range of meaningful life options from which to choose, upon which to act, and around which to orient and pursue one's life projects." Its development, moreover, *requires* engagement with diverse perspectives and is crucial to an individual's ability to act purposefully with others in the service of creating and maintaining a democratic society.²⁰ Under this view, unless we fund our public schools sufficiently to provide good, safe, educational environments that are attractive to a wide diversity of parents, we will fail to provide *all* our students with the opportunities they need to fully develop their sense of civic responsibility. Without a diversity of perspectives in the classroom, and without engaging in dialogues that challenge their sense of what is good, right, true, and beautiful, our children are highly unlikely to spend time reflecting on the best way to structure our diverse society.

Without diminishing the importance of working for large-scale school reform, I understand that teachers cannot wait for reform before they step into the classroom. Consequently, I turn my attention now to how teachers can work to mobilize identities in the classrooms they currently occupy. I begin by addressing a common mistake that teachers and students both make, that is, attributing to another student an "alternative" or "marginal" perspective that he or she does not have. I then discuss more specifically how to mobilize identities in a way that does not burden students, or stereotype them, or prevent them from growing and changing.

IDENTITY AND THE REALM OF THE VISUAL

An important part of mobilizing identities in the classroom in the way that I am proposing involves acknowledging—and then disentangling—the relationship between identity and the realm of the visual. As I indicated above, some identities appear to be visibly marked on the body. That is, they exist as social categories or ascriptive identities in part because they reference what are visual bodily characteristics (such as skin color, hair texture, limb shape, etc.) and assign to those characteristics an excess of social meaning. It is important to note that these visual bodily characteristics have no intrinsic meaning. Rather, they become imbued with meaning through the conflictive process involved in producing a social consensus about the way our society should be organized. Members of a society for whom a particular identity is especially meaningful will be socialized to select out and "see" the visual

bodily characteristics commonly associated with that identity. Such socialization is necessary because such bodily characteristics are not visually obvious to everyone—especially to those people who have not been brought up to see them.

Racial identities are one example of the kinds of identities that appear to be marked on the body. Others include gender and some kinds of disabilities (such as blindness, paralysis or limb loss). By comparison, other kinds of identities are commonly thought to be “invisible.” Examples include sexuality, class, and other kinds of disabilities (such as dyslexia or chronic fatigue syndrome). Even with these “invisible” identities, though, we often behave as if we can reliably “see” identity. This is because we, as members of a society in which such identities are seen as significant, are socialized to pick up visual cues (bodily comportment, clothing, accessories) as a way of “seeing,” and thus “knowing,” them.

Sara Hackenberg has recently identified a process and coined a term—*visual fetishism*—that has been useful to me in thinking through our societal tendency to privilege the act of “seeing” the Other as a proxy for “knowing” the Other.²¹ Even as we realize that some black people can “pass” for white, that Latina/os come in a wide range of colors and physiognomies, that some men dress and live as women and vice versa, that we cannot reliably read sexuality or class status on the body, and that many disabilities are invisible to the eye, we consistently operate in the world *as if* identities are always visible. We imagine that we can “see” difference, and that we always “know” to what racial, gender, class, or sexual orientation group someone belongs. We fetishize what is visible to us as if it contains the “truth” of the person—revealing their inner thoughts, capacities, and attitudes—even though we understand, at some level, that we may well be mistaken. We imagine not only that we can “see” race, gender, ability, and sexuality, but also that we can “know” in a reliably determinative way what those aspects of a person’s identity will imply for the kind of individual that person will turn out to be.

It is important to remember that the act of “seeing” and thus “knowing” the people we come into contact with is experienced by most of us as being indispensable to our ability to act in the world. At a very basic level, visual fetishism helps orient us in the world as we act in accordance with the narratives we have internalized about who we are in relation to others. Visual fetishism can thus be a source of comfort to us as inhabitants of a rapidly changing society. But at a more problematic level, visual fetishism provides some people with an unfounded sense of superiority. This is particularly the case when such people are confronted by those racial, sexual, cultural, or bodily “others” who confound them, whose practices and values, because they are different, challenge their own. Because of the Othering it involves, visual fetishism can give some nondisabled persons a false sense of confidence about their own enduring able-bodiedness, even as it provides a measure of solace to the nativists who seek to shield themselves from the instability of values, practices, and hierarchies that racial and cultural “otherness” seems to threaten them with. In this way, visual fetishism can foster profound

ignorance by preventing those who are most anxious about the existence of “others” in their midst from learning more about the “others” they know so little about, even as it can exacerbate oppression by keeping such people from interrogating their own false sense of superiority.

Even as we exercise caution with respect to judging people on the basis of how we see them, we must yet recognize that how we see them *does* matter for their experience. After all, the extent to which identities are referenced through the realm of the visual is also the extent to which they activate the pernicious aspects of visual fetishism, and thus matter to a person’s day-to-day experience of oppression. In a society like ours that fears both strong women and women whose sexuality exceeds the bounds of normative heterosexuality, a lesbian who “looks” like a dyke is at greater risk of being gay-bashed than is a lesbian who is more gender conforming. Similarly, in a society like ours that has long associated skin color with status, a dark-skinned black man is at more risk of being pulled over and interrogated while driving an expensive vehicle in a predominantly white area than is a light-skinned black man. And finally, in a society like ours that, as Tobin Siebers has pointed out, has no common experience of disability, a person who has difficulty speaking is more likely to be judged by others as mentally incompetent than someone who speaks clearly—when in fact there may be no correlation between that person’s ability to speak and his or her mental capacity.²²

MOBILIZING IDENTITY IN THE CLASSROOM

How can we, as teachers, mobilize identities in the classroom in a productive way? How do we avoid stereotyping students on the basis of visual fetishism even as we give due weight to the perspectives they have developed as the result of the identities they have? How do we bring our students’ experiences into the classroom without either pigeonholing them as “native informants” or allowing them to be unquestioned authorities on an identity group as a whole? How, in other words, do we recognize our students as complex human beings not reducible to their ascriptive identities even as we take full advantage of the knowledge they have gained as a result of being socially situated beings?

Mobilizing identities, as I am defining the practice, involves mining our students’ identity-based perspectives to see what insights into an issue they might have to offer, as well as subjecting our students’ identities to evaluation and possible transformation. As educators, we want to attend to the various perspectives our students bring into the classroom, even as we give them an opportunity to change and grow. After all, if we wanted our students, upon leaving our classrooms, to be the same people they were when they entered it, we would not have accomplished very much. Moreover, because socialization as a fundamental aspect of all forms of education cannot be avoided, we need to think carefully about the values our pedagogical practices support. Education should give students the tools they need to evaluate the beliefs,

conditions, and truth claims they will be exposed to throughout their lives; it should not be about merely inculcating status quo values. The purpose of a transformative multicultural education, moreover, should be to educate for democracy and social justice; it should be to help our students develop a better understanding of the structure of society and an increased sense of efficacy with respect to their own ability to influence positive social change. With these purposes in mind, I propose several principles for successfully mobilizing identities in the classroom.

Remember that every student is a complex individual with the capacity to contribute positively to the learning environment. Unless we treat our students—and, in particular, our minority students—as complex human beings with the capacity to contribute positively to the educational goals of the classroom, we risk reinforcing negative identity contingencies and creating classroom conditions that trigger stereotype threat. Since stereotype threat is activated when students fear they will be evaluated in terms of a prevailing negative stereotype about a group with which they are associated, students need to feel that their teachers, and peers, are capable of seeing them as complex individuals with the capacity to grow and change rather than as embodiments of a reductive stereotype. Although, theoretically, any student can be subject to stereotype threat, the risk for our minority students is much greater simply because they are the ones most subject to reductive and negative stereotypes in our society at large.

Work to get to know each student as a particular individual who is shaped and reshaped as a social being in and through collective identity categories and larger social structures. We can use several strategies to get to know our students as individual and complex human beings. I will suggest here a few that have worked well for me: First, ask your students to write something about themselves for you at the beginning of the class. Make the question open-ended so that you can get a sense of what aspects of their identity are most salient for each of them as individuals. Second, hold individual student conferences. This is a lot of work, but really worth it if you can make the time; there is simply no better way to get to know someone. Third, set aside a sufficient amount of discussion time, and introduce topics designed to get students talking. Think about ways to clear space for students who are too shy to talk, without forcing them to talk if they are very uncomfortable. If a student is particularly quiet during class discussions, I will ask her privately if she would like for me to call on her. Usually, she will say yes—the trouble she has in entering the discussion often has more to do with a reluctance to interrupt than with a lack of something to say. Occasionally, he will say no, and explain that he is either nervous about his language skills (this is frequently the case for ESL students), or simply shy. In such cases, I offer alternative ways for my students to contribute to the discussion. I never want my students to be plagued by performance anxiety and I do not believe that everyone has to participate in a conversation to the same degree. The important issue for me is that everyone should have the opportunity to share his or her views in one forum or another. A number of university professors

I know, myself included, have taken advantage of our universities' move toward web-based discussion forums. I find that students who are uncomfortable talking aloud in class can be quite eloquent in online forums. Web-based discussions have not replaced in-class discussions in my courses, but they have enhanced my classroom discussions in crucial ways. Most importantly, learn to listen carefully as you allow your most die-hard assumptions to be challenged. Do not assume that an Asian student's parent pushes him too hard. Do not assume that a Latina/o student's first language is Spanish. Do not assume that your women students are not going to do well in math. Rather, listen to what your students say about their growing-up, their partners, their abilities and disabilities, their intellectual and social commitments. Do not expect consistency and allow for contradictions. Treat each student as an individual who is shaped and reshaped by his or her changing social and economic situation.

Help your students to understand their connectedness to others by developing strategies to denaturalize your students' identities. In a society like ours that idealizes the unconstrained abstract individual, those of us who wish to mobilize identities in the classroom must help our students develop an analysis of society that allows them to understand their connectedness to others—and, in particular, to those who seem most different. This involves denaturalizing our students' customary (narrowly individualist) ways of being in the world. It means demonstrating to our students that *all* identities (including their own) are linked to historically-, geographically-, and culturally located ways of being a person in the world. Making the connection explicit will not only denaturalize the process of identity formation, but will introduce students to the complicated and far from obvious—but significant—relationship between social location, experience, and knowledge. In general, unless people's customary ways of being in the world are disturbed, their identities (and thus their interpretive perspectives) will remain untheorized and profoundly parochial. And while even untheorized and “inaccurate” identities can be epistemically useful to an observer for investigating the workings of ideology, they will not contribute to their bearers' ability to effect positive social change until they have been denaturalized and brought into the realm of examination and evaluation.²³

Find strategies for denaturalizing your students' identities that are appropriate to your classroom and to your students. Denaturalizing identities in a lecture class will be a different project than in a discussion class. For example, in a lecture class I co-taught with Hazel Markus in Spring 2004. I watched as she accomplished, in an effective way, the task of demonstrating that all identities are linked to historically-, geographically-, and culturally located ways of being a person in the world. One day, Markus began the class by having our students fill out a short psychological survey describing themselves, their ethnic identities, and their attitudes about upward mobility and prejudice. In the lecture that followed, she introduced them to the large body of social science research in the United States and in Japan that describes what she has termed “self-ways.”²⁴ In a subsequent class, Markus

brought the results of the survey to share. In presenting the results, Markus demonstrated how—with some variation along gender and race lines—our students conformed to an identifiably “American” way of being a person in the world. Markus’s research and pedagogical strategy effectively allowed our students to see themselves as racially- and culturally located beings who have been shaped, but not wholly determined, by the values and mores of their racially- and gender-stratified society. This not only disturbed our students’ customary sense of themselves as self-created and wholly autonomous individuals, but it also pushed them to understand themselves as analogous to the Japanese young people who have been similarly shaped, but not wholly determined, by the values and mores of *their* particular society. Denaturalizing the process of identity formation has the advantage of helping our students understand that *everyone’s* identity is complex and multiple and formed in relation to his or her situation. It helps them to avoid the pitfalls of assuming, too quickly, that they know the attitudes and assumptions of the “others” they are interacting with, even as it frees them to explore different aspects of their own identities. When students are given the tools to understand how and why they believe and value what they do, they are empowered to question their own received notions, occasionally rethink them, and, in the process, transform their identities.

Mobilizing identities in a discussion class, as opposed to a lecture, will necessarily involve the students in a more active way. Susan Sánchez-Casal has experimented with mobilizing identities in her Latina/o Studies classroom by identifying existing communities of meaning and sorting her students into small working groups based on those communities.²⁵ She then asks the students in each group to work together to develop arguments on issues that will be discussed in class. The beauty of Sánchez-Casal’s approach is that it allows students to develop their ideas in concert with like-minded peers; it thus works against the false notion of the individual knower even as it provides students who have minority perspectives a sense of affirmation for their ideas during the crucial period of development and clarification of those ideas. I know from talking with my minority advisees that if they get no support for their ideas from the professor or even one other student in a class, they begin to withdraw from that realm of interaction by disidentifying with it. Students need to feel that their ideas are good (i.e., valued) before they can effectively put those ideas to the test through dialogue or debate in a classroom setting. Keeping our students engaged is a prerequisite for providing them an opportunity to reorient their perspectives. Identifying preexisting communities of meaning, as Sánchez-Casal did, is thus an important strategy in the effort to mobilize identities in the classroom.

One way to identify existing communities of meaning is by noting how students sort themselves when they enter our classroom. Which students consistently sit together? Do they share a racial or ethnic background? Are they of the same gender? Do they hail from the same geographical community? Are they affiliated with a particular university club or religious group? What is the source of their identification with each other? Paying attention

to where and with whom our students sit will tell us a lot about how they understand themselves relative to the other students in our classrooms. Knowing this will help us figure out how best to engage our students in the learning process. Of course, in setting up communities of meaning in the classroom, we should keep in mind the importance of avoiding polarization along one set of identity lines. While we want to give due weight to the communities of meaning into which students initially sort themselves, we also want to help students realize that they might be able to form communities of meaning that are drawn along other lines. We can do this by emphasizing the complexity of students' identities and by not letting race, or gender, or ability stand alone as the determining factor for the formation of working groups for the entire duration of the class. One possible way to address this concern is to switch topics of discussion to allow students to see how the different aspects of their identities become salient in different situations. As we change the issue—from affirmative action to abortion, from handicapped access to online file sharing—the possible communities of meaning should alter somewhat. Changing the focus of discussion and re-forming working groups in your classroom to create new communities of meaning can reinforce the lesson that *all* people, themselves as well as others, are complex and multiple beings not reducible to their most visible ascriptive identities.

Actively cultivate an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation and mutual respect by being prepared to compensate for differences in power relations and adjudicate conflicts in values that enter the discussion. Given the hierarchical nature of our society, we are likely to be called upon to compensate or adjust for disparities in power that seep into the classroom from the larger society. Part of creating a context in which disagreements can be aired safely may thus involve interceding on behalf of a marginalized viewpoint or community. One way teachers can preempt the necessity of such intercession is to strategize ways to give marginalized perspectives and minority identities priority in the discussion. We can, for example, give students who are advocating a position that is not easily understood (or held) by the majority of students extra time to present background information necessary for understanding the issue. We can require the class as a whole to read articles, watch videos, or do research projects that excavate a minority or erased historical event or perspective. Additionally, we can point to the interests historically served or denied by the social and economic structures that have privileged some identities and perspectives at the expense of others. And we can explain to our students that such apparent "imbalance" is necessary for opening up the issues under discussion and for maximizing objectivity by bringing a multitude of perspectives to bear on the issue.

Adjudicating conflicts in values can be equally difficult but just as necessary to the project of creating an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation and mutual respect. Of course, we need to be careful to adjudicate conflicts in a way that does not close down discussion. To that end, students will need to know from us, through consistency of word and action, that we will not penalize them for taking the wrong position. Moreover, teachers should

avoid having too strong a voice or position at the beginning of any debate or dialogue. In general, disagreements and strong rebukes are best voiced by fellow students, who have less real power over their peers in our classrooms than we do. This is not to say that we should stay out of the discussion entirely, or that we should tolerate any form of rudeness or disrespect. The first reason we cannot exempt ourselves from the discussion is that doing so will cause our students to mistrust us; they know we have a perspective and will feel cheated if we pretend we do not. Besides, our students expect to learn something from us (we are the teachers, after all!) and may feel that we are acting in bad faith if we expect them to lay their cards on the table while we refuse to do the same. Another crucial reason we may need to intervene in a discussion is that true dialogue can occur only in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Where real disagreements arise, we will be called upon to make sure that students show respect for each other's views. Our efforts in this vein should be directed toward fostering an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation and mutual respect while allowing for an exploration of conflict and contradiction. Our goal should not be to reach consensus (although consensus is not bad in itself!); our goal should be a respectful airing of differences and a meeting of intellectual and emotional challenges.

Remember that you are teaching the practice of critical thinking rather than a particular ideological stance. At base, remembering that we are encouraging a practice rather than delivering a product means that not every issue needs to be discussed in every classroom. Indeed, in order to effectively identify and mobilize communities of meaning in the classroom, we must be sensitive to the sorts of issues we introduce for discussion in the context of our particular set of students; it is not always safe for students to voice or champion minority perspectives. After all, if a teacher has only one gay student (or if he himself is gay) in a classroom full of anti-gay religious fundamentalists, it might not be the wisest idea to bring up the subject of gay marriage. The teacher might end up creating a situation in which his one gay student is silenced, alienated, or shamed, while his fundamentalist students are reinforced in their homophobia. Accordingly, we must bear in mind that it is neither possible nor necessary to discuss every issue in every classroom context. Just as I do not have to give my children every different kind of fish to get across the general idea that fish are in the class of things that are good to eat, so teachers do not have to discuss every hot button social issue with their students to convey the general idea that social issues are in the class of things that are good to discuss and evaluate. Once we introduce students to the dialectic of identity and the principle of socially situated knowledge, they should be able to extend those lessons into other arenas of debate later on throughout their lives.

The key to mobilizing identities effectively in the classroom is your own identity. If we, as teachers, hold and neglect to examine and change stereotypical or prejudicial attitudes toward members of socially stigmatized groups, we are going to take those views into the classroom and mobilize them—whether we intend to or not. Because of the power dynamic inherent in

every classroom situation, our identities will have a tremendous influence on classroom dynamics. As much as possible, then, we need to be aware of and understand those dynamics so that we can work with them. Whatever your identity, it is going to matter for how you interact with the students in your classroom. And because identities are relational and contextual, your identity will matter differently according to *who* and *what* you are teaching. If, for example, a teacher is an Asian man who is teaching math to a group of white students, he is probably going to be accorded a good deal of credibility. He may be terrible at math; he may have received a 480 on his math SAT, and be a substitute teacher who normally teaches art. But because of the positive stereotype our society holds about Asians and math, the presumption he will face is that he knows what he is doing. But if she is a Black woman who is teaching math to a group of white students, she is probably going to have a hard time at first. This is not to say that she should not do it. It is to say, though, that part of her work in that math classroom is going to involve challenging stereotypes as much as teaching differential equations.

Finally, find ways to link the issues you discuss in the classroom to your students' daily lives. The recognition that *all* identities matter in the classroom—yours as well as your students'—affirms yet again the importance of linking learning to life. Because it is not possible to check our identities at the door of the classroom, we must work to avoid the “not in my backyard,” or NIMBY phenomenon that some teachers fall into when they are talking, for example, about race. Pretending that identities do not matter in the classroom does not make them insignificant to educational outcomes. It just makes it harder to confront their very powerful effects. So, without ever accusing any of our students of being racist, or sexist, or ableist, (because making such an accusation will never alleviate the problem, but will contribute to a situation of defensiveness and polarization), a teacher who is working to transform her classroom into one that meets the needs of *all* her students must find a way to acknowledge that the social dynamics we discuss and study are social dynamics that we are all a part of both inside and outside of the classroom. Even as we work to avoid the pitfalls of blaming and accusing—as well as their corollaries, guilt, and defensiveness—we have to acknowledge that *we* are implicated in the production and reproduction of racist, sexist, heterosexist, and ableist ways of knowing and unknowing.

As teachers and students, we are not responsible for what our society and parents teach us, any more than we are responsible for being born into a particular situation or having an identity ascribed to us. Identities, initially, are given to us. What counts is what we do with them—whether we embrace them without question or whether we work to transform them by critically examining the dogmas of our society, thus undermining the ideologies and associations that unfairly disadvantage some people at the expense of others. Certainly, mobilizing identities productively in the multicultural classroom will never be an easy, or even a completely safe, thing to do. But doing so is both possible and necessary if we are to ever be successful at creating a more just and democratic society for everyone.

NOTES

1. Claude Steele, "Not Just a Test," *The Nation* 278.17 (2004): 38–40; Claude M. Steele, Steven J. Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, "Contending with Group Image: The Psychology of Stereotype and Social Identity Threat," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 34 (2002): 379–440.
2. References are to my *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 86 n. 2, 13, 133. It should be clear from my definitions that I understand identities to be both *constructed* and *real*. Identities are *constructed* because they are based on interpreted experience and ways of knowing that explain the ever-changing social world. They are also *real* because they refer outward to causally significant features of the world. Moreover, because identities refer (sometimes in partial and inaccurate ways) to the changing but relatively stable contexts from which they emerge, they are neither self-evident and immutable nor radically unstable and arbitrary. Identities, in sum, are causally significant ideological constructs that become intelligible within specific historical and material contexts.
3. Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 216.
4. For concrete examples of how racial ascription works in three elementary schools, see Amanda Lewis, "Everyday Race-Making: Navigating Racial Boundaries in Schools," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47.3 (2003): 283–305.
5. Linda Martín Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 337.
6. Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele, *Race: The Reality of Human Differences* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004). For critiques of Herrnstein and Murray, see Bernie Devlin et al., *Intelligence, Genes, and Success: Scientists Respond to The Bell Curve* (New York: Springer, 1997); Steven Fraser, ed., *The Bell Curve Wars: Race, Intelligence, and the Future of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
7. Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983). For a critique of such neoconservative idealist approaches to identity, see my *Learning from Experience*, esp. chap. 4.
8. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
9. A good example of an identity that is emergent is that of "mixed-race." For more on mixed-race identity, see Ronald Sundstrom, "Being and Being Mixed Race," *Social Theory and Practice* 27.2 (2001): 285–307; Michele Elam, "Pedagogy, Politics and the Practice of 'Mixed Race,'" *Navigating the Frontline of Academia*, eds. Deirdre Raynor and Johnella Butler (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).
10. Claude M. Steele, Steven J. Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, "Contending with Group Image," p. 389.
11. See Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. chap. 2.
12. See also Hazel Rose Markus, Claude M. Steele, and Dorothy M. Steele, "Colorblindness as a Barrier to Inclusion: Assimilation and Nonimmigrant

- Minorities,” *Daedalus* 129.4 (2000): 233–59. Working with a social-psychological model of identity, Markus, Steele, and Steele argue that creating what they call “identity-safe” classrooms involves understanding the precise ways that historical identities are *already* mobilized in the classroom, generally in negative and pernicious ways. Because of this, they are opposed to “color-blind” approaches to identity.
13. See my *Learning from Experience*. See also Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, *Reclaiming Identity*; Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory*; Michael R. Hames-García, *Fugitive Thought: Prison Movements, Race, and the Meaning of Justice* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2004); Alcoff, *Visible Identities*.
 14. See Natalie Angier, *Woman: An Intimate Geography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), esp. chap. 3. See also Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Men and Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
 15. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women’s Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). See also the discussion of standpoint epistemology in her contribution to this volume.
 16. Paula M. L. Moya, *Learning from Experience*, p. 44. See also Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory*, pp. 213–14.
 17. Michael Hames-García, “Which America Is Ours?: Martí’s ‘Truth’ and the Foundations of American Literature,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.1 (2003): 19–53. See also Patricia Gurin, Biren (Ratnesh) A. Nagda, and Gretchen E. Lopez, “The Benefits of Diversity in Education for Democratic Citizenship,” *Journal of Social Issues* 60.1 (2004): 17–34.
 18. Nadga, Kim, and Truelove, in their study of a multicultural educational initiative at the University of Washington, argue that disconnecting learning from life has the negative effect of decreasing students’ sense of agency with respect to interacting with diverse peers. They show that when intergroup dialogue is combined with content-based learning, students’ levels of confidence regarding their ability to make changes in the existing social structure was measurably increased. Biren (Ratnesh) A. Nagda, Chan-woo Kim, Yaffa Truelove, “Learning About Difference, Learning with Others, Learning to Transgress,” *Journal of Social Issues* 60.1 (2004): 195–214.
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 21. Sara Hackenberg, “Reading the Seen: Mystery and Visual Fetishism in Nineteenth-Century Popular Narrative” (Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 2004).
 22. Tobin Siebers, “Passing,” Gary L. Albrecht, ed. *Encyclopedia of Disability*, 5 volumes. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005). See also Rod Michalko, *The Mystery of the Eye and the Shadow of Blindness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Tobin Siebers, “Disability as Masquerade,” *Literature and Medicine* 23.1 (2004): 1–22; Tobin Siebers, “What Can Disability Studies Learn from the Cultural Wars,” *Cultural Critique* 55 (2003): 182–216; Tobin Siebers, “Disability Studies and the Future of Identity Politics,” in this volume.
 23. Because identities are indexical—because they refer outward to social structures and embody social relations—even previously untheorized identities that are

brought into contact and dialogue with other interpretive perspectives have the potential to provide us with differential, and potentially valuable, access to a shared and very complicated social world.

24. Hazel Rose Markus, Patricia R. Mullaney, and Shinobu Kitayama, "Selfways: Diversity in Models of Cultural Participation," *The Conceptual Self in Context: Culture, Experience, Self-Understanding*, eds. Ulric Neisser and David S. Jopling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 13–61.
25. In their essay, "Identity, Realist Pedagogy, and Racial Democracy in Higher Education" (presented at *The Civil Rights Project* conference at Harvard University, 2003), Susan Sánchez-Casal and Amie A. Macdonald introduce the concept of *communities of meaning*, which they define as interpretive perspectives on the world that are common to people who come from similar social locations. The concept is useful for reminding us of the social nature of identity and of knowledge, and of the way in which "common sense" changes according to the social context. See also Lynn Hankinson Nelson, "Epistemological Communities," *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Linda [Martín] Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993) 121–59; Susan Babbitt, "Feminism and Objective Interests: The Role of Transformation Experiences in Rational Deliberation," *Feminist Epistemologies*, 245–64.

IDENTITY POLITICS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY BY A PARTICIPANT

Renato Rosaldo

In the United States, identity politics has come under attack from all sides, the left and the right. Identity politics came into being in the mid-1960s and inspired a series of new social movements based on the politics of gender, sexuality, and ethnic or racial factors. It also inspired progressive white men, who apparently felt left out, to produce outspoken critiques of the so-called divisiveness of the new social movements based on identity.¹

I want initially to show the value of identity politics by responding to critiques made by (primarily white male) progressive thinkers. My method is auto-ethnographic, a reflection on my participation in the social movements of identity politics, particularly the Chicano movement. In these reflections, I should like to underscore the interplay between structure and agency, between the role of social movements in shaping identities and, reciprocally, the role of subjectivities in shaping political action.

A REPLY TO CRITICS OF IDENTITY POLITICS

It is important to see identities within a field of social relations, within a contested terrain marked by criticism and sharp debate. Critics assert that identity politics emerges from a moment of social and intellectual crisis during which we have retreated to navel gazing. This criticism could be compared with dismissals of a critical anthropology that explores rhetoric and writing in ethnography. The methodological attention to how ethnographies are written advocates reflection on the collection of data as well as “writing up” the data. The notion is that different modes of writing are more and less well suited to different theoretical projects, as a matter of method that extends from the collection of data to its writing. Social movements based on identity, in turn, are accused of narcissism, an introspective self-regarding vice. One critic, in an unpublished paper, asserts that identity politics involves the concept of identity in the sense that the term is used by the psychologist Erik Erikson. This critic insists that the term identity has the same meaning in both contexts—as if a single word cannot be used in two senses. This critic

overlooks what participants in the social movements meant by the term identity, if, indeed, they used it at all.

For Erikson, identity is associated with a crisis that occurs during the passage from youth to adulthood. It takes place during the transition between stages in the life cycle. The crisis has to do with the necessary and prolonged task, the extended crisis, the necessary moratorium, of coming to know who one is in this society. Who am I and how do I enter the adult world? This crisis, which is a stage of human development, usually takes place between the ages of 15 and 25.

Identity politics is neither about the isolated, narcissistic individual nor about the person in passage between childhood and adulthood. Erikson's concept of identity has been most richly applied to the younger years of a moral or political leader, such as Martin Luther, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Cesar Chávez. The process of identity politics, in contrast, has more to do with participation in new social movements. For the individual it involves entry into already established social processes, in which each person participates in her or his manner. The psychological processes in question concern the manner in which an individual participates. They are not pure narcissism.

The proximate origins of the new social movements and their processes of change often have to do with consciousness-raising. Processes of consciousness-raising began with the feminist movement. In consciousness-raising sessions participants told stories from their lives about hurts and wounds they had suffered. Through this process they realized that their individual issues were in fact collective. They thought they were depressed, but through this process they discovered they were both oppressed and angry. They thus moved from a personal to a political consciousness of their issues. They realized that systemic factors have produced the symptom. In this sense, feminists have come to say that the personal is political.

In addition to the accusation of narcissism, the critics maintain that identity politics is monolithic and divisive, whether it divides the working class, social movements, or the nation state. Their argument is tinged with nostalgia for the 1950s when, they think, there was a national unity that now has been balkanized by the new social movements of women, homosexuals, and people of color. I would reply that the unity of the 1950s, such as it was, was based on the exclusion of people of color, women, and homosexuals. In the latter case, it is not that there were no homosexuals at the time, but rather that homosexuality was not tolerated as a public identity. What unity are these critics talking about? Was there once upon a time unity in progressive political movements? Movements of the Left have been noted for their sectarian conflicts and are a strange case to invoke as an exemplar of unity.

The critics often oppose identity politics in the name of the common good. The rhetoric of the common good, however, fails to ask who has the authority to choose and name the common good. It also fails to name who participates in the process and who is included in and excluded from discussions that determine the content of the common good. Similarly, progressive

movements often say that they are antiracist, but their leadership or their membership includes few African Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans, or Asian Americans. Antiracism should begin at home, in one's workplace or in the organization. These critics have not recognized the legitimate demands of groups they dismiss under the label of identity politics. In the case of Chicanos, the demands for bilingual education, human rights for new immigrants, affirmative action, employment, a labor union for farm workers, and an end to residential segregation are significant social issues that require serious attention from the wider society. The issues raised by the Chicano movement are not narrowly racial or ethnic. They are ethical and political. They are informed by a utopian vision of how a democratic society should be, rather than of how it is.

A fine way to create political participation in general is to create participation in one movement. A finding of political science research is that participation in one political activity often leads to participation in others. Rather than creating isolated monolithic movements, the consequence of identity politics is that its participants also are active in wider social movements. The exclusions attributed to identity politics started with ideologies of the nation state and its search for ethnic homogeneity.

Also consider the case of a Chicana lesbian who is working class. She is likely to participate in four movements (feminist, lesbian, Chicana/o, and working class). Chicana lesbians at times congregate and separate from other men and women to discuss their issues as Chicana lesbians. These moments of congregation dramatize that the Chicana/o movement contains differences of class, sexuality, and gender that were not so apparent in the movement's initial period of strong nationalism in the Chicano movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In other words, the Chicano movement contains within it differences of gender, sexuality, and class; it must work with a politics of coalition. Identity politics more generally contains within it the seeds of its own deconstruction. Hence the sense in which it is an error to see these groups as monolithic.

THE POLITICS OF SUBJECT POSITIONS

The consciousness of those of us who participate in the social movements called identity politics differs from that attributed to us by the critics. Point of view or subject position implies that these identities are seen in very different ways from different perspectives. As a matter of method, one should place social relations at the heart of the analysis along with the intersubjective world of the participants. The politics of citizenship derives from the emergence of new citizens with new identities who demand their rights and know that they have the right to demand their rights.

According to Stuart Hall and David Held (1990) in their article "Citizens and Citizenship," the key question is "Who belongs and what does belonging mean in practice?" I would add that not only does one choose to belong, but there's also the matter of whether or not one's choice to belong is accepted

or not. For example, if an African American decides to be a member of a group, is she or he accepted by other members of the group? Are they accepted as full members of the group? Or are they granted the status of second-class citizen? For Hall and Held, the distribution of resources determines the crucial distinction between what they call theoretical and substantive rights. One could say, for example, as did Governor Pete Wilson and other cynical politicians in California, that supporting the electoral proposition against affirmative action was a way of opposing the granting of special rights to women and people of color. The cynical politicians said that instead of affirmative action they were proposing rights based on class and income rather than race and gender. They proposed favoring economically poor students for admission to the University of California. In this case, the right wing politicians appeared to have adopted a Marxian class analysis, but in fact they proposed theoretical rather than substantive rights because they wished to admit low-income students without providing funds to cover their tuition or room and board.

Hall and Held go on to say that, “the contemporary politics of citizenship need to take into account the role that social movements have played in the expansion of claims to rights, and recognition into new areas. One has to address not only issues of class and inequality, but also questions of belonging that arise from within feminism, and movements of blacks and ethnic groups, ecology (which includes the moral demands of species of animals, and of nature itself) and within vulnerable minorities such as children” (p. 176) and, I would add, the disabled and the elderly, a powerful, yet vulnerable group of voters.

Hall and Held treat the expansion of rights claimed and of the groups that claim rights as if they were a quantitative change, but in my view it is not only quantitative, but also qualitative. The step from the redistribution of resources based on identities is important and basic, but it includes a politics of recognition: what are the legitimate demands of these groups, and how will society respond to them? Thus the expansion of rights enters questions of identity and the recognition of social relations differently defined. In other words, it is a process of negotiating from one identity to another, from one citizen to another, and also between citizens and the state. If the state or its citizens ask Chicanos to conform to the norms of civil society in the United States they should expect to be asked to recognize norms of *respeto*. This process amounts to a renegotiation of the national contract and the norms of conduct in public life. The price of being a woman in public life during the 1950s, for example, was that the woman had to behave like a sergeant. In her public conduct she had to be more masculine than most men. Now it has become possible for women to enter the public sphere as women without having to stop being who they are. Thus, it is not simply a question of the expansion of rights, but rather of new norms of conduct in public life. It is a renegotiation of political culture that leads to a recognition of groups that had not participated as such in democratic processes.

Identity politics involves social movements that select their members at the same time that individuals select their movements. This is a process of negotiation rather than being a simple choice because not all identities are accepted in social movements. In other words, this is a dialectical and intersubjective process. Perhaps this point can best be developed through a personal narrative than through a theoretical statement.

My mother was born in southern Illinois. Her ancestors were from Virginia and Kentucky on her mother's side and from Pennsylvania on her father's side. My mother was a border product from a marriage between north and south during a time when the legacy of the Civil War in the United States was more alive than today. My father was born in Minatitlán, Veracruz. His father was employed in a store owned by his maternal grandfather who was from Villamar (then called Guarachita), Michoacán. His paternal grandfather owned a cattle hacienda. He came from the convergence of business and ranching with aristocratic pretensions and a strong bourgeois reality. Both my mother and father thus were borderlands products. My parents in their marriage followed their family pattern by uniting south and north, in their case Mexico and the United States.

After the Mexican Revolution my father's family moved to Mexico City where he finished high school and began to study engineering at the National University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City. From there he went to Chicago, to the Mexican barrio that was founded in the 1920s. I don't know what his plans or hopes were when he migrated to Chicago, but he arrived in the midst of the world depression in 1932. He worked at various jobs and then enrolled in high school because he had not studied U.S. History and Civics in Mexico. At that time schooling was one of the primary mechanisms for the assimilation of new migrants. My father accepted the assimilationist project, like the good English-speaking citizen-to-be that he was becoming, except for a significant detail. He did not cease being Mexican. He completed a doctorate and went on to teach Mexican literature and culture at the University of Illinois (and later at the Universities of Wisconsin and Arizona). He was one of the first U.S. Ph.D.s in the literature of Latin America rather than of Spain. At the University of Illinois he met my mother, and they married. I was born in Champaign, Illinois in 1941. Later, I went to primary school in Madison, Wisconsin and secondary school in Tucson, Arizona.

Before I was in primary school we made frequent trips to Mexico during the summers. At that time my identity corresponded with my parents' wishes. I felt the pride of being both Mexican and American, but the pride of nation I felt as a child was an abstract loyalty to entities that were little more than names, Mexico, the United States. At the same time I felt concrete loyalties toward family members, my grandmothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins. During primary school I forgot Spanish in large part because all my education was in English. I was subjected to a process of assimilation and was aware that my teachers warned my parents of the dangers of speaking two languages at home.

In January of 1955, when I was thirteen, we moved to Tucson, and I experienced the shock of identity. I went from being Mexican and American to being Mexican American. I found myself in a community of Mexican descent in Tucson. Before that time I had been an isolated case, not part of a community. I began to become a member of the Mexican American community in Tucson through a double process of attraction and pain. This was a long process, not a single moment of acceptance or rejection. The pain came from the wounding words of Anglos who probably said things without thinking. They said, for example, things like "Mexicans are dirty; they love to fight. But you're not like that, you're different, we're not talking about you." After a couple of years I became a member of the Chasers, a teenage Mexican American gang. In high school I also went steady with a Mexican American. Thus I discovered the pleasures of participation in the community.

When I came to teach at Stanford University in 1970, I found myself for the first time in the height of the Chicano movement. At that time the movement had not reached the eastern seaboard of the United States where I had been an undergraduate and a graduate student. My participation in the Chicano movement increased significantly in subsequent years. In certain times of crisis my participation became nearly a full-time job, and at other times it was more like a day job.

My autoethnography is meant to indicate how usual rather than how exceptional the rhythm of my involvement in the movement has been. My waxing and waning participation is not unusual in the spectrum of possible ways of participating in social movements called identity politics. In my case, there was a dialectical process in which the movement chose me at the same time that I chose the movement. Identities change through time, rather than being static.

Now I wish to consider a third step in this essay, the vision of social good, the utopian hope that identity politics can offer. The social vision of the Chicano is not one of a world inhabited by Chicanos and nobody else. In my view, the hope is that there will be a general recognition that we all are positioned subjects and we all speak from distinct points of view shaped by identities that have to be socially recognized. The array of different subject positions must be taken into account in order for people to have a conception of the social whole. On taking account of the different points of view one has to think with care about the groups that are subordinated, marginalized, or excluded by the dominant discourse because they are the people least taken into account for reasons of power. One must think of the possibility of social change as a means of thinking of the society in its totality and coming of a vision of the common good. And one has to take into account, as I have said, distinct points of view. In this case, one must think of the point of view of marginalized, excluded, and subordinated groups.

A poem by Chicana poet Lorna Dee Cervantes expresses the notion of distinct points of view, though in her case she speaks from a complex subject position that encompasses an array of perspectives. She articulates how one can have different experiences of the same events from different perspectives.

Her poem is called “Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-read Person Could Believe in the War Between Races.” I will cite two stanzas to make these distinct perspectives within a complex subject position clear:

In my land
 people write poems about love,
 full of nothing but contented childlike syllables.
 Everyone reads Russian short stories and weeps.
 There are no boundaries.
 There is no hunger, no
 complicated famine or greed.

A subsequent stanza, which is a perspective different from the first, reads as follows:

I believe in revolution
 because everywhere the crosses are burning,
 sharp-shooting goose-steppers round every corner,
 there are snipers in the schools . . .
 (I know you don't believe this.
 You think this is nothing
 but faddish exaggeration. But they
 are not shooting at you.)

In this poem, the reader sees differences in perspectives within a complex, rather than a monolithic, subject position, and can see the same social reality understood in opposing ways. Contrary to the critics, the notion of identity is complex and changes through time. It is neither monolithic nor static.

My hope is that the participation of subordinated groups in democratic politics will yield an improvement for the whole society, without reducing everyone to the same identity. In the case of affirmative action a result has been that job listings are made public. This includes jobs in universities, among firefighters, police, and other institutional settings. In my view, the people who have most benefited from such listings are white women and men because they have the opportunity to apply for jobs that once were closed to them. Jobs were once given without public announcement, by sending out the word along the old boys network. In the university a person would call a friend from Harvard, or Yale, or Chicago and ask who were their best students. Now students who receive their doctorates at other institutions have the opportunity to apply for job openings. Processes that open jobs to subordinated groups can often makes changes for the benefit of all. From marginal positions we can see social problems and can make systemic corrections that are invisible to the dominant groups and that benefit other groups as well as themselves.

In the United States, there is a need to rewrite history and include the different identity groups that make up the country. The vision of the

excluded offers the possibility of correcting certain inequalities and widening the larger social vision, social participation, and democratic processes. The different perspectives that identity politics underscores emerge from dissident traditions that have existed over the course of more than two centuries. These traditions have their origin in the Constitution, the key document for the nation state, that initially granted citizenship only to property-holding white men. Prior to being amended, the Constitution excluded people from citizenship in the nation along the lines of class, race, and gender. These juridical exclusions eventually produced the main dissident social movements in the United States, which are the antecedents for the social movements of the twentieth century. The civil rights movement emerged from the abolition of slavery (which was achieved at the end of the Civil War in 1865); the feminist movement came from those who supported women's suffrage (which was not achieved until 1920). Thus, it makes sense to locate identity politics within the dissident traditions that have existed for more than two centuries in the United States, rather than to situate it as a phenomenon of the late twentieth century.

NOTE

1. For a discussion of this debate, see Iris Marion Young, *Democracy and Inclusion*, chap. 3.

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MULTICULTURALISM NOW: CIVILIZATION,
 NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND DIFFERENCE
 BEFORE AND AFTER SEPTEMBER 11*

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The events of September 11 and following have been shocking beyond belief. For me, part of the shock has been the almost instantaneous contradiction in public-speak: the simultaneous evocation of the notion that the world has changed, that the war we will fight will be a “new” war, and the rearticulation of only slightly modified Cold War rhetoric and “civilizational” discourse. Indeed, in his address before Congress on September the 20th, George W. Bush declared, “This is civilization’s fight.” In so doing he evoked, consciously or not, Samuel Huntington’s well-known theory about the “clash of civilizations,” a theory that has been used to explain why the attacks took place and also how the United States should respond. Huntington’s thesis, if taken in toto, has dramatic ramifications for minority studies, minority rights, and political dissent in general.

This essay takes the form of both a description and an exhortation, as indicated by its title. I will first try to outline some of the recent historical contexts of what we call “multiculturalism” and in particular address the way multiculturalism, while usually understood within the United States in terms of “domestic” minorities, has always had an important international dimension. Today’s new civilizational model goes beyond the cultural internationalism of the 1970s and even beyond the language of the nation *per se*.¹ What we find, rather, is the imbrication of nationalist and civilizational thinking, and that is what makes the case today so difficult to disentangle. National interests seem indistinguishable from “a way of life,” and national policy seems synonymous with large, civilizational imperatives. While the convergence of national and civilizational thinking is nothing new (indeed, one could say that the former usually implies the latter), the specific historical conditions under which this is taking place today bring the civilizational into the national in a particularly potent and dangerous way for minority rights. Thus, added pressure is put on critical multiculturalism to address the imperatives of the moment and to rebut the particular assumptions of the new

civilizational thinking. By “critical multiculturalism” I mean a multiculturalism that focuses on the material historical productions of difference rather than on “culture” as a ready-made thing.

One question has to be asked at the beginning: On what grounds was a distinct American identity to be founded? It is during the period of the Second World War that the modern attempt to understand national identity took hold. It began most visibly in the work of anthropologists. As early as 1939, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, two students of Franz Boas, founded the Committee for National Morale. When the war came, they were enlisted by the Office of War Information and the Office of Strategic Services to help the United States plan its war strategies. Dealing with the enemy, as well as discovering the constancy of American identity, required particular attention to the notion of “culture.” “Culture” would serve to explain and define what was then called “national character.” This, indeed, was the birth of American studies, which was declared “a branch of cultural anthropology.”² It was during the war, and for those purposes, that Mead wrote a classic text probing the American national character entitled *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. For her, “character is . . . an abstraction, a way of talking about the results in human personality, of having been reared by and among human beings whose behavior was culturally regular.”³ In a later essay, “National Character and the Science of Anthropology,” Mead explains what was to be included as evidentiary forms. To study national character “means to interpret the people of a nation as distinguished from their history, literature, arts or philosophy.” She defines the project’s nature as “a form of applied science, by which skills developed in the field work on primitive, preliterate societies were used for rapid diagnosis study . . . [to] provide some kind of prediction of the probable behavior of the members of a given national group.”⁴ The rapidity of the study was necessitated by the war: “We had to tackle the enormous problem of a world on the verge of self-consciousness, a world on the verge of a new period in history.”⁵

The application of “character” to policy and morale is clear:

This book may seem to have harped on a single note, what we as Americans are and what we must do if we are to fight with all our hearts and with all our strengths, and what anthropology as a science can offer to implement that fight, to say to every American, “Here is a tool you can use, to feel strong, not weak, to feel certain and proud and secure of the future.” Because I am an American, because I am an anthropologist, I have stressed these things which I know. I have outlined American character as it looks against the background of seven other cultures which I have studied with as microscopic an attention as my canvas here has been broad and rough. I have stressed the strengths and weaknesses of Americans and the importance for winning the war, of using our democratic structure in a fashion which will use its strengths and discount its weaknesses.⁶

The comparative aspect of this study is as important as its purpose: American character is to be discerned through careful comparative studies. The basic questions asked by cultural anthropology were applied to

Americans themselves—what makes ours a *distinct* “culture?” Most especially, the liberal definition of American national character stressed an *ethos* to which theoretically anyone could subscribe: Hence, immigrants could adopt that ethos if they did so in good faith and in so doing become Americans. But this required first separating out the irredeemably foreign from the domestic.

After the war, there was a persistence of such interests in defining the American character as that thing which was “exceptionally” American.⁷ It was to be something essential and enduring, despite having to respond to external factors such as immigration and social and political change.⁸ “Character” now was redefined as “identity” and used to find some constant element, some way to found a moral order “despite the restructuring of American society by large-scale, impersonal, morally neutral bureaucracies.”⁹ In finding a balance between an unchanging “identity” and the need to adapt to a rapidly changing world, we find an essential definition of modern America. While intense urbanization, corporatization, and bureaucratization were found at home, for international relations America had to adapt to its new role as world power with new geopolitical imperatives. This required understanding the world from outside America’s traditional, and somewhat provincial, boundaries. Benedict’s key phrase from 1946, “A world made safe for differences,” tells it all: “The tough-minded are content that differences should exist. They respect differences. Their goal is a world made safe for differences, where the United States may be American to the hilt without threatening the peace of the world, and France may be France, and Japan may be Japan on the same conditions.”¹⁰ Besides the wonderfully unconscious rhetoric of being “American to the hilt without threatening the peace of the world,” note, too, the countries that Benedict names, for they will come to be precisely the representatives of the new economic order: the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. Benedict carries forward Mead’s notion of distinct national cultures but unconsciously articulates precisely the new consortium of world powers who will be joined in multilateral endeavors in the 1970s.

But even before this period, the range of “difference” had been historically circumscribed. Akira Iriye has documented the persistent tension between international cosmopolitical aspirations and the realities of racial and other differences. After Bandung, as the three worlds came into existence, what Iriye calls Third World “multiculturalism” came to threaten, or at least call into question, the capaciousness of Euramerican cultural internationalism. This occurs exactly during a period that saw the increased importance of culture as a mediator of difference. As Iriye notes, “What was . . . significant [in the 1970s] was the emergence of cultural themes as important keys to international affairs. It was as if the waning of the Cold War and the crisis of the world economy were calling forth cultural agendas with greater vigor than ever before, the more so because these agendas now included what came to be known as multicultural perspectives.”¹¹

This point of tension between cultural internationalism and what Iriye calls “Third World multiculturalism” is found in the contrast between the next two statements. In 1972, the Hazen Foundation’s report, *Reconstituting the*

Human Community, notes a “clear historical trend away from unilateral cultural relations, or the dissemination and imposition of a unified value system with implied universal and absolute validity, toward reciprocal cultural relations.”¹² That is, we see the emergence of a set of multilateral negotiations around the idea of world culture and a lessening of cultural hegemony. And yet during roughly the same period, we find a statement that trenchantly specifies who, exactly, would be included in such cultural international discussions. Note especially the role intellectuals are to play. In 1967, Anthony Hartley writes in *Interplay*:

A mutual concept for responsibility must unite countries with a *high standard of living* where competition for power once divided them . . . If the *civilization* of the late twentieth century fixes itself in rigid patterns of thought, it will break and crumble to dust. But it is the business of the intellectual to provide a remedy for this mental ossification by drawing the attention of his rulers to the existence of new problems and the need for new attitudes of mind facing them. In 1967 the speed of communication and the increasing cosmopolitanism of the intellectual community allow this task to be carried out on a level above old national oppositions and ideological feuds . . . contrary to Marx’s celebrated phrase, to understand the world is also to change it.¹³

What we find, then, in this period is the increased pressure on multilateralism for international economic and cultural relations, which entailed a rearticulation of civilizational thinking along the axis of developed capitalist states. Hartley’s brand of new thinking was multilateral but distinctly confined to perpetuating a civilization of only certain countries. But as countries such as the United States were to be made more flexible and adaptive to such multilateral arrangements in order to facilitate the development of multinational capital, there arose the question of the governability of such flux. How would such rearrangements, their effects on national policy, and, crucially, the impact of various already existing subaltern pressures on national politics, policymaking, and the academy be managed? To address these domestic pressures, there was a resurgence of national-character thinking. Let me stress that it is exactly this dichotomy between an international economic profile which calls for “cultural internationalism” and the deployment of national-identity thinking to undergird order at home against a potential crisis in democracy brought about by strident minority demands which is under question in the present day, albeit modified in one important way, which I will get to in my conclusion.

In the United States, under the Nixon administration, liberal elites worried that there was “a growing lack of congruence between . . . ‘economic and political worlds,’ the former being characterized by an increasing global integration, the latter persistently fragmented, with political decisions largely made at the level of the nation-state.”¹⁴ There was strong opposition to Nixon–Kissinger unilateralism, which was considered outmoded and dangerous for evolving liberal international economic order. (This has certain manifestations on the international cultural front. For instance, Nixon said

he “eschewed gushy optimism of any kind,” adding, “some Americans think that we can rely on peace by sending a few Fulbright scholars abroad . . . but that doesn’t bring peace. We can avoid war if we are realistic and not soft-headed.”¹⁵

In 1973, the Trilateral Commission was convened by David Rockefeller in order to forge “diverse interests for a common *civilizational* purpose.”¹⁶ The United States, Western Europe, and Japan were its constituent states, and Zbigniew Brzezinski its first director. That key word, *civilizational*, comes up again and provides a foreshadowing of one of the most important works by one of the commission’s advisors. But we are not ready for the “clash of civilizations” just yet. Let me first address Huntington’s work for the commission, which focuses on the domestic scene in ways that will be crucial for his later work. Indeed, the commission specifically asked its resident intellectuals to prognosticate on the current state of democracy.

In the 1975 publication of the commission, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, Samuel Huntington remarks, “The essence of the democratic surge of the 1960s was a general challenge to existing systems of authority, public and private. In one form or another, the challenge manifested itself in the family, the university, business, public and private institutions, politics, the government bureaucracy, and the military service. People no longer felt the same obligation to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talents. . . . Each group claimed its right to participate equally—in the decision which affected itself.”¹⁷ In short, while lauding the active participation of more and more diverse populations on the one hand, Huntington is concerned that there may be too much of a good thing: “The vitality of democracy in the 1960s raised questions about the governability of democracy in the 1970s” (*Crisis*, 64). This increase in political participation is “primarily the result of the increased salience which citizens perceive politics to have for their own immediate concerns” (*Crisis*, 112).

So what’s wrong with that? Isn’t this precisely the picture of a robust democratic society? Not exactly, for this vigor is largely made up of minority voices and viewpoints demanding attention to their particular needs. This puts pressure on the political institutions of the state: “In the United States, the strength of democracy poses a problem for the governability of democracy in a way that is not the case everywhere . . . We have come to recognize that there are potentially desirable limits to the indefinite extension of political democracy. Democracy will have a longer life if it has a more balanced existence” (*Crisis*, 115). This ominous phrase is indeed his concluding statement. While the Trilateral Commission focused on multilateral, “civilizational” issues, it also instructed its members to keep their respective national houses in order. Ironically, such order would be mobilized against the excesses of American character: “The roots of this surge are to be found in the basic American value system and the degree of commitment which groups in society feel toward that system” (*Crisis*, 112). And I again would stress the

contradiction between international civilizational thinking and domestic national-identity thinking. We also need to remember that this authoritarian, and anti-democratic criticism of minority voices becomes the backbone of Huntington's "civilization" book two decades later.¹⁸

The activism of the 1970s that Huntington decries created, among other things, the conditions for the emergence of multiculturalism in the 1980s. But just as much as the multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s can be seen to be the result of gains of the Civil Rights era, the Third World and antiwar movements, the rise of the New Left, and the burgeoning of the feminist and gay and lesbian movements, it should also be placed within the context of the continuance of development of multilateralism, here taking the shape of economic neoliberalism, which accommodated and even celebrated diversity for its own purposes. As Secretary of Labor, Elizabeth Dole issued a publication lauding diversity in the workforce and urging sensitivity to difference. She noted that making a skilled labor force out of nontraditional elements was the key to a healthy economy and the maintenance of social security. Similarly, big businesses initiated sensitivity training and special programs to promote diversity. I say this not to reduce multiculturalism to its worse appropriation by the corporate state, but rather to underscore once again the need to grapple with a historical and intense dialectic around negotiating *difference* and *culture*, the need to constantly struggle to define multiculturalism's terms and values against such takeovers.¹⁹

Thus, on the one hand, we have the interests of multinational corporate and state interests urging for "diversity" and reconfiguring multiculturalism to be consonant with the neoliberal agenda. This tendency can perhaps no better be summed up than in Bill Clinton's sublime statement that his favorite novel was *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. On the other hand, we have the insurgent, contestatory demands of a critical, and sometimes radical, multiculturalism that calls for a rethinking of issues of recognition, distribution, and rights. And it is here that we find the deployment of national identity, national character, national values, and national interests to countermand those contestatory movements.²⁰ Indeed, it is in the triangulation of multi- and transnational corporatism, nativism, and what I will provisionally call "progressive humanism" that we find ourselves.

In the 1990s, the world became read as a confrontation between the new transnational capitalism and the resurgence of nativist, local, tribal fundamental identities, and people were asked to make a choice between these two (bad) alternatives. It is precisely the reputed collapse of the nation-state that is deemed either the cause or the effect of these moves toward either civilizational or tribal collectivities. Since neither of these identities was desirable for national policy, what was required is the resuscitation of the nation, but along the most simple, conservative, and antiprogressive lines. Nevertheless, although the third term, what I have called *progressive humanism*, drops out, it is precisely that term that I will evoke in the conclusion of this essay as central to any critical and progressive multicultural project. This was the period that saw the publication of books such as Joel Kotkin's *Tribes: How*

Race, Religion, and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy (1993), Robert Kaplan's *The Ends of the Earth* (1996), Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (1995), and Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order* (1996). I hasten to add that Kotkin's book emanates from a liberal standpoint that bemoans the decay of a liberal collective identity, and Barber's is distinguished by his insistence on participatory democracy and a liberal civil society. That is, their books emanate from different ideological perspectives than Huntington's. Nevertheless, all these books share the sense that the world was now to be read postnationally and postideologically, and in terms of either large "civilizational" or "tribal" tendencies. Each tries to grasp this new global configuration, split between market forces, the end of the Cold War, and reaction to both in intense, sometimes primordial affiliations.

As I noted above, the events of September 11 were immediately read within Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory. There are, of course, many things to say about this provocative book; again, I will focus only on the elements of multiculturalism, democracy, and national identity. I want to puzzle out how civilizational thinking, now that it seems to be back, is related to multiculturalism, and what new kinds of multiculturalism might be needed to address our new historical situation. *The Clash of Civilizations* subordinates economic concerns to a purely cultural thesis that argues that multiculturalism is the bane of America's existence. Indeed, his long book spends three hundred pages organizing the world according to civilizations in order to launch an attack on domestic cultural politics.

The basic thesis of the book is that in the post-Cold War world, the great conflicts will not occur between nations nor through ideological conflict (capitalism vs. socialism) but through "civilizational conflict." The world is made up of Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Western, and Latin American civilizations. To this list he adds "African" but immediately adds a parenthetical comment, "possibly."²¹ The historical occasion for the book motivates the author's alarm. If clashes are to be civilizational, the West had better wake up. Huntington describes a world in which "The West" is losing ground universally, while other areas of the world are gaining various sorts of advantages: "The balance of power is shifting: the West is declining in relative influence; Asian civilizations are expanding their economic, military, and political strength; Islam is exploding demographically with destabilizing consequences for Muslim countries and their neighbors; and non-Western countries generally are reaffirming the value of their own cultures" (*Clash*, 20).

He specifies both the "quantitative" and "qualitative" advantages of all that lies outside the West: "Quantitatively Westerners thus constitute a steadily decreasing minority of the world's population. Qualitatively the balance between the West and other populations is also changing. Non-Western peoples are becoming healthier, more urban, more literate, better educated" (*Clash*, 85). Ironically, the rest has benefited from modernization (Westernization) while the West has declined. Crucially, after extracting the benefits of Western modernization, these non-Western civilizations have

realized the importance of indigenous traditions. Huntington is not bothered by this (aside from his dismay that these countries have not had the good grace to be thankful)—this return to “native traditions” is exactly what he will instruct the West to do. He describes the “second generation” of modern national leaders: “Most of the much larger second generation, in contrast, gets its education at home in universities created by the first generation, and the local rather than the colonial language is increasingly used for instruction The graduates of these universities resent the dominance of the earlier Western-trained generation and hence most often ‘succumb to the appeals of nativist oppositional movements.’” He continues: “We are witnessing an ‘end of the progressive era’ dominated by Western ideologies and are moving into an era in which multiple and diverse civilizations will interact, compete, coexist, and accommodate each other. This global process of re-indigenization is manifest broadly in the revivals of religion occurring in so many parts of the world and most notably in the cultural resurgence in Asian and Islamic countries generated in large part by their economic and demographic dynamism” (*Clash*, 95). For Huntington, the West requires a similar “resurgence,” a withdrawal from certain global positions and a retrenchment of fundamental values.

Turning now inwardly, Huntington does not like what he sees. The fear of civilizational clashes is nearly dwarfed by a fear that the West has eroded to such a degree *internally* that it cannot respond to external threats. Indeed, he claims that “the central issue for the West is whether, *quite apart from any external challenges*, it is capable of stopping and reversing the *internal processes of decay*” (*Clash*, 303; my emphasis). Now, finally, after some three hundred pages, we move to the central argument of the book. We have been prepared for this by Huntington’s covert emphasis on religion (via the more neutral idea of “civilization”). Civilization or religion, it all comes down to a belief in the absolutism of national culture and identity. From this perspective, the real enemy is within, made up of those individuals who would deprive the West of precisely that particular fundamental cultural identity to which all civilizations must hold if they are to survive: “Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies. One such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies” (*Clash*, 304). He then proceeds to define what, exactly, the fundamental identity of the West is. The West is, simply, the United States:

Historically American national identity has been defined culturally by the heritage of Western civilization and politically by the principles of the American Creed on which Americans overwhelmingly agree: liberty, democracy, individualism, equality before the law, constitutionalism, private property. In the late twentieth century both components of American identity have come under concentrated and sustained onslaught from a small but influential number of intellectuals and publicists. In the name of multiculturalism they have attacked the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of a common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and

other subnational cultural identities and groupings The multicultural trend was . . . manifested in a variety of legislation that followed the civil rights acts of the 1960s, and in the 1990s the Clinton administration made the encouragement of diversity one of its major goals. (*Clash*, 305)

He does not mince words: “Rejection of the Creed and of Western civilization means the end of the United States of America as we have known it. It also means effectively the end of Western civilization” (*Clash*, 307). If, as he argues, “in this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations” (*Clash*, 28), then the local politics of ethnicity have to be erased so that the U.S. nation (or, as Huntington equates, the West) can compete for survival globally. The consequences of not doing so are catastrophic: “The leaders of other countries have, as we have seen, at times attempted to disavow their cultural heritage and shift the identity of their country from one civilization to another. In no case have they succeeded and they have instead created schizophrenic torn countries” (*Clash*, 306). This leads us to revisit the earlier citations regarding the “second generation”: These people have done what is only natural and proper—they have rejected the West and returned to their indigenous heritage. If they had not, they would have suffered the consequences of “schizophrenia.”

Huntington’s study, therefore, wipes out any legitimacy for multiculturalism. His agenda is clear from the very title of his book—his argument will exhume essentialist (even fundamentalist) notions of civilization in order to rally the West to reclaim its territory (diminished as it is). Externally, this means strengthening the West against foreign incursions and erosion of international policy (i.e., American interests); internally, it means wiping out any element that would differ from and thereby challenge Anglo-Saxon hegemony.

Huntington develops this line of reasoning in a later essay published in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Erosion of American Interests” (1997). He suggests that one of the factors contributing to this erosion is the absence of a clearly defined enemy against which to consolidate the nation. Following the path laid out in *The Clash of Civilizations* he claims the contemporary need to find an “opposing other” in the absence of a cold war, which readily provided one in the form of the Soviet Union. Why must we find an “other?” Again, to consolidate the nation against its enemies within: “Given the domestic forces pushing toward heterogeneity, diversity, multiculturalism, and ethnic and racial division, however, the United States . . . may need an opposing other to maintain its unity.” Huntington believes the most likely candidate is China, but he notes, with some disappointment, that “China is too problematic and its potential dangers too distant in the future.”²²

Indeed, in 1997, the very other needed to consolidate the United States in the face of widening chasms created by ethnic and other minorities turns out to be those ethnic minorities *themselves*, who are more visible and vocal than ever before because of “changes in the scope and sources of immigration and the rise of the cult of multiculturalism” (*Erosion*, 32). *They* are the

others against whom “we” may set our identity politics, for they have taken over the entire set of apparatuses essential to the running of the state: “The institutions and capabilities—political, military, economic, intelligence—created to serve a grand national purpose in the Cold War are now being suborned and redirected to serve narrow subnational, transnational, and even nonnational purposes. Increasingly people are arguing that these are precisely the foreign interests they should serve” (Erosion, 37). In 1997, there is thus a double erosion of the national character carried out on the one hand by multiculturalists (largely made up of ethnic minorities) who skew America off course and weaken its resolve and, on the other hand, by newly internalized others, diasporics who retain allegiance to their homelands and work from within the United States to focus its interests in their favor. Indeed, we see that the two groups might indeed be the same—ethnic Americans are now recast as diasporics, un- or non-Americans, in a rehearsal of the logic of the Japanese American internment. This recasting is made explicit here:

The growing role of ethnic groups in shaping American foreign policy is reinforced by the waves of recent immigration *and by* the arguments for diversity and multiculturalism. In addition, the greater economic wealth of ethnic communities and the dramatic improvements in communications and transportation now make it much easier for ethnic groups to remain in touch with their home countries. As a result, these groups are being transformed from cultural communities within the boundaries of the state into diasporas that transcend these boundaries.” (Erosion, 38; my emphasis)

In sum, “diasporas in the United States support their home governments” (Erosion, 38).

This evocation of American identity is directly in contradiction with both liberal democratic ideology and the version of American identity promulgated in the postwar period, one which, as we remember, championed the notion that the American *ethos* could be adopted by new immigrant groups, who would then become Americanized. Huntington turns the clock back on that notion—he finds such a possibility remote at best, and only if these new immigrant, ethnic, and diasporic groups agree to be politically inactive.

Crucially, in the *present* incarnation of civilizational thinking, the dichotomy between national identity and international civilizational thinking has collapsed, the two positions intermingling and recombining into a potent ideological position, now mobilized by the events of September 11. To the enemy within (ethnic and diasporic populations) is now added a viable enemy without, something Huntington pined for in order to solidify the nation just a few years before. The enemy will be civilizational: It will be Islam. In this process of addition, we find a dangerous mathematics, confused and potent. And while our president urges us to remember that Arab Americans are Americans, too, and that this is a war against terrorism, not Islam, the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan with all its “collateral damage,” makes such distinctions hard to maintain.

Indeed, the influential Defense Policy Board, whose members include Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Henry Kissinger, Newt Gingrich, Dan Quayle, James Schlesinger, and former Director of the CIA James Woolsey, has argued vigorously for extending the war to Iraq. But this movement to continue the Gulf War started nearly four years ago, when in January 1998, a group letter was sent to President Clinton urging him to reorient foreign policy toward eliminating Saddam Hussein. The signatories of that 1998 letter include some of the very most powerful individuals in the current Bush administration, people who are guiding the war against terrorism: Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Robert Zoellick (now U.S. trade representative), Richard Armitage (now deputy secretary of state), John Bolton (now under secretary of state), Paula Dobriansky (now under secretary of state), Peter Rodman (now assistant secretary of defense), Elliott Abrams (now a senior National Security Council official), Zalmay Khalilzad (now a senior National Security Council official), Richard Perle (now a key Bush adviser).²³ It has been noted that there is a dangerous fissuring of the Bush administration, now split between a hawkish Department of Defense, which is employing civilizational thinking, and the Department of State, which is pragmatically trying to hold together the alliance of Arab states, Britain, and the United States. Without informing the U.S. State Department, the Department of Defense sent former CIA Director Woolsey to Britain to find evidence of Iraqi participation in terrorism; and without clearing it with the State Department, in his speech announcing the bombing of Afghanistan, Bush added his famous reference to the possible need to extend the war to other organizations and other nations.

Thus, despite the rhetoric that this is not a war against Islam (a move insisted on by Colin Powell so as to keep the fragile support of Arab states within the “coalition”), there is a dangerous convergence of civilizational thinking on the part of the rightmost wing, now provided with an *international* other to take the place of the Soviet Union—it is Islam, and national identity thinking, which targets ethnics, immigrants, diasporics. Each fuels the other.²⁴ But it should be stressed that the deployment of civilizational rhetoric on the part of policymaking hawks is done to forward a *national political* agenda, not a cultural civilizational one. They had already staked out national policy goals in 1998 and before. The civilizational ploy is thus used to mobilize support for a war they had planned four years before September 11, 2001.

Let me conclude by emphasizing the danger of exhuming Huntington’s thesis *in toto*, with his presumptions fully in tact. This is not a remote possibility but one which is already being realized. For as things unfold, we already see the attempts to curtail civil liberties, privacy, freedom of speech, and association. We see the attempt to limit student visas and to allow racial profiling. As of today (30 November 2001), over six hundred individuals have been “detained” by Ashcroft’s Justice Department; the United States is

considering granting citizenship to those who inform on suspected terrorists, and colleges are being asked to comply with the PATRIOT Act and allow intense surveillance of international students and suspected “terrorist” activities and speech; the president has mandated that suspected terrorists be tried in military courts of law. The line between voicing dissent and aiding and abetting terrorism (or otherwise threatening the State) is now fading. Not only is dissent being framed by some as sedition, but even skepticism, doubt, and critical thinking are taken as treasonous.

The recent report by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), the inaugural project of its “Defense of Civilization Fund,” uses the events of September 11 as a way to reintroduce the notion that the demise of America is a result of the loss of a core curriculum on America and Western civilization and its supposed replacement by multicultural education (described here as “a smorgasbord of often narrow and trendy classes and incoherent requirements that do not convey the great heritage of *human civilization*”).²⁵ The group, founded by Lynne Cheney, wife of the vice president, and Senator Joseph Lieberman (last year’s Democratic vice presidential candidate), has issued the pamphlet for distribution to three thousand U.S. campuses. Entitled “Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It,” the slim report argues that there is a stark contrast between public opinion (largely gleaned from statements by the president and from Congress) and the range of opinions found on college campuses (“The Ivory Tower” [DC, 8]). The “failure” here is the failure to participate fully and uncritically in promoting the war—the report finds an uncomfortable level of “moral equivocation” (DC, 1) on American campuses, calling them the “weak link” in our national efforts. The authors of the report tell us that to fight this weakness, American history and Western civilization must be reinstated and expanded in our colleges, but the center of gravity is indisputably “America”—indeed, the United States is the only country from the West mentioned, the only country mentioned at all: “We Call Upon all colleges and universities to adopt strong core curricula that include rigorous, broad-based courses on the great works of Western civilization as well as courses on American History, America’s Founding documents, and America’s continuing struggle to extend and defend the principles on which it was founded” (DC, 7). Such a curriculum will be “America’s first line of defense” (DC, 6). It will ostensibly erase the moral doubts and reticence of students and faculty—if skeptics only knew these things, they could not possibly act as they are. Yet, like the use of the word *civilization* noted throughout this essay, the ACTA is opportunistically using *civilization* to revive a very narrow notion of the nation and to promulgate a very narrow set of acceptable opinions—that is, what *is* America and how should its actions be judged.

The report is itself quite slim, seven pages in total. It’s the appendices that are its meat: eight comments by politicians supporting the war, followed by 115 comments by university students, faculty, and administrators. Each is

used as evidence of unacceptable “moral equivocation.” If the USA PATRIOT Act is adopted in its widest sense, it may not be long until comments like the following are used for other, prosecutorial purposes:

- #2 “We offer this teach-in as an alternative to the cries of war and as an end to the cycle of continued global violence.”
- #19 “[We should] build bridges and relationships, not simply bombs and walls.”
- #27 “We have to learn to use courage for peace instead of war.”
- #32 “[I deplore those] who are deploying rhetoric and deploying troops without thinking before they speak.”
- #66 “There is a lot of skepticism about the administration’s policies on going to war.”
- #81 “If Osama Bin Laden is confirmed to be behind the attacks, the United States should bring him before an international tribunal on charges of crimes against humanity.” (*DC*, 13–25)

Certainly the knowledge of American history is important, but not if it includes any criticism of the United States. Among the pronouncements condemned by the ACTA is the following from the dean of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University: “There is a terrible and understandable desire to find and punish whoever is responsible for this. But as we think about it, it’s very important for Americans to think about our own history, what we did in World War II to Japanese citizens by interning them” (*DC*, 2). Thus a new sense of illegal public discourse has been born even as the suspect process that brought Bush into office has fallen from view—the report of the electoral commission has been effectively stifled, and news magazines and television pundits pronounce Bush now fully anointed as a “real President.” *Democracy* and *Americanism* have taken on very particular meanings. The struggle will be to debate the terms openly and democratically.²⁶

The conditions for a participatory democracy are worsening, as the imperative to protect our *civilization* trump all other considerations. In this case, the rights and privileges of minorities of all stripes are at risk. The antidemocratic motif laid down in Huntington’s 1975 essay is now reinforced by the current crisis.

American national identity has now been blended with civilizational identity, as the United States tries to rally its allies against terrorism. The resulting policies have profound national consequences. The inflammatory rhetoric of civilizations, unfortunately deployed by both extremes, serves only to obscure the real issues at hand, for in both cases the other side of civilization can remain only a cipher of irrational violence. That is not to say that every cause of this violence can be rationalized neatly; however, the caution should be against letting our analyses of this crisis rest on theories whose ramifications threaten whatever progress we have made in terms of tolerance, justice, and equality. Furthermore, the evocation of a civilizational war masks the inherently unilateral nature of the armed conflict now under way. To stand outside

one civilization or another is to render oneself invisible, or to be labeled sentimentalist or amoral. This should not be the only choice.

The third term that seems to have dropped out is, again, what I have provisionally called *progressive humanism*, and I think it is to some notion of humanism that we must turn to get away from the assumptions and dangers of narrow civilizational thinking. It would be a humanism that is not mystified or abstract but realist and historical materialist. To have this, it is essential that multiculturalism be international in scope, that it widen its boundaries outside that of any particular nation, and even beyond diaspora studies, to an international frame. While the ACTA deplors the increase in courses on the Middle East (from nearly zero on many college campuses) and argues the need for more American and Western civilization courses (which are required for high school graduation already), the events of September 11 argue, to me, that a general and broader knowledge of the world is necessary. This will require no small amount of work, but if we could each, when thinking multiculturally, think of subnational, national, and regional cultures beyond our borders and even continents, and how those cultures have been produced historically, ideologically, materially, and in interaction with each other, we will have made some small move away from the mystification of civilizations, on both sides.

NOTES

- * This essay is derived from a talk delivered at the Future of Minority Studies conference at Stanford University, October 2001. I thank the participants of the conference for their comments, especially Satya Mohanty, Linda Martín Alcoff, Paula Moya, Margo Okazawa-Rey, and Dominick LaCapra. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Paul Bové and the *boundary 2* collective for publishing this piece in such a timely and supportive manner. There are certain issues raised here which I cannot fully develop because of the time factor. Parts of this study are taken from my book, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999), but they have been reframed for the current context.
1. Throughout, I will be borrowing this term from Akira Iriye, who defines “cultural internationalism” as the efforts of “individuals and groups of people from different lands” to “develop an alternative community of nations and peoples on the basis of their cultural interchanges . . . I call the inspiration behind these endeavors, as well as the sum of their achievements, ‘cultural internationalism.’” He specifies what he means by “internationalism”: “an idea, a movement, or an institution that seeks to reformulate the nature of relations among nations through cross-national cooperation and interchange.” Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 2–3.
 2. See Richard Sykes, “American Studies and the Concept of Culture: A Theory and Method,” *American Quarterly*, 15. 2.2 (1963): 253–70.
 3. Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1942), p. 21.
 4. Margaret Mead, “National Character and the Science of Anthropology,” *Culture and Social Character*, ed. Seymour M. Lipset and Leo Lowenthal (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 15–16.

5. Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, p. 3.
6. Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, pp. 260–61.
7. For an interesting analysis, see Seymour Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: Norton and Co., 1996).
8. Probably the single most influential writer is Erik Erikson. See, for example, his texts *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959) and *Childhood and Society* (1950), especially the chapter “Reflections on the American Identity.”
9. Christopher Shannon, *A World Made Safe for Differences: Cold War Intellectuals and the Politics of Identity* (Lanham and Boulder, Colo.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. xiii. For works dealing with these issues, see David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, and the various works of Erving Goffman.
10. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946; reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), pp. 14–15. But, importantly, in *A World Made Safe for Differences*, Shannon notes, “The idea of a world made safe for differences allows for the retention of indigenous cultural symbols, provided they are abstracted from the often restrictive, normative contexts that originally gave them meaning, and then instrumentalized in the service of the greater psychic freedom of the individual” (12).
11. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, p. 165.
12. Quoted in Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, p. 170.
13. Hartley is quoted in Stephen Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 139; my emphasis.
14. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, p. 133.
15. Nixon is quoted in Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, p. 160.
16. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, p. 123; my emphasis.
17. Samuel Huntington, “The United States,” *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, ed. Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 76–77. Hereafter, this publication is cited parenthetically as *Crisis*.
18. Dominick LaCapra points out that this is a perversion of traditional liberal political thought, which was used to curb the excesses of sovereign states internationally. Here, he argues, Huntington has deployed the same rhetoric of containment to suppress democratic activity *within* the nation-state (personal communication).
19. See the “Critical Introduction” to my edited volume, *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, Interventions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
20. The fact that these notions were deployed by Patrick Buchanan, who also argued against multilateralism and corporatism, makes clear the opposition of the two trends.
21. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 45–47. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Clash*.
22. Samuel P. Huntington, “The Erosion of American Interests,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 32. Hereafter, this essay is cited parenthetically as *Erosion*.
23. Indeed, Michael Klare has pointed out that U.S. targeting of Iraq since the Gulf War of 1989–1990 has had more to do with protecting Saudi oil from Iraq than with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. The bombing of Afghanistan in 2001 is thus

linked to a long-standing history of U.S. involvement in Saudi Arabia going back to 1945, and the history of ARAMCO (the Arabian American Oil Company) there. See Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), and his article "The Geopolitics of War," *Nation*, 5 November (2001): 11–15.

24. For an interesting rebuttal to such attempts to show U.S. support for Muslims, especially as they come out in statements by Paul Wolfowitz, see "Wolfowitz's Remarks on Terror Questionable," *Jakarta Post*, 18 October 2001.
25. Jerry L. Martin and Anne D. Neal, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2001), p. 5, my emphasis. This work is available on-line at <http://www.goacta.org>. Hereafter, it is cited parenthetically as *DC*.
26. The 4 October 2001 issue of the *London Review of Books* featured a broad range of contributions to a roundtable discussion of the events; it has subsequently been attacked as "anti-American."

AMÉRICO PAREDES AND THE TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINARY

Ramón Saldivar

In his underappreciated and early essay “Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity” C. L. R. James observes that “the simplest reflection will show the necessity of holding fast . . . the affirmation that is contained in every negation, the future that is in the present” (1992:161). James’s notion of “the future in the present” helps me begin to respond to a question paraphrased from Michael Hames-García as to “who our own people are” (2000:102) and to the larger issue of the series of discussions taking place under the rubric of “The Future of Minority Studies.” With C. L. R. James, I make the preliminary observation that the future is in the present and that the future is in the past.

I take the case of the great Chicano intellectual Américo Paredes, whose works from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s I describe briefly to make a point about “The Future of Minority Studies.” I will begin by saying a word about citizenship, then something about Paredes, and then I will conclude with some comments on identity and social location, especially as identity and social location may be conveniently collapsed into the vexed questions of American citizenship and national identity.

CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship is an intricate and complex thing. It is a topic I have been exploring recently at Stanford in a required General Education course in the Introduction to the Humanities series, entitled “Citizenship and Governance.” One of eleven such courses required of all entering undergraduate students at Stanford, the course is team-taught, multidisciplinary in nature, and designed to engage students in the process of critical inquiry. In this case, I share the stage with Professors Gerhard Casper of the Law School and Steven Krasner of the Political Science Department. Limited to five central readings, the course requires of students close analysis rather than broad coverage.

Citizenship can be defined in a variety of ways but, to my mind, the most elegant and evocative definition, certainly the one most central for an understanding of contemporary U.S. citizenship, is one offered by John Locke in

The Second Treatise of Government (1689). In the *Second Treatise*, Locke asks why people found it advantageous to move from the freedom of the state of nature into the restrictions of civil society. And having done so, how and why do people come to feel part of a national homeland? First, says Locke, people “unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living amongst one another” (par 95). In creating forms and structures of governance, he continues, people begin to feel “safe and secure” and further, in doing so, they unite into “one *coherent, living body*” (par 212), which in turn gives “form, life, and unity to the commonwealth.”

With this beautiful, well-framed period, Locke is specifically referring to the system of laws that make up civil society. However, his words also evoke the psychological and emotive factors related to our desires to belong to, to be a part of, a larger community. In the course on “Citizenship and Governance,” we learned that from the ancient world to the present day, citizenship has entailed a discussion of, and a struggle over, the meaning and scope of membership in the community in which one lives.

In recent American debates over the meaning and scope of citizenship, writers like Peter Brimelow have argued that the United States is on the verge of becoming an “alien nation” as a result of misguided immigration policy and standards for citizenship. Brimelow sees an American “immigration disaster” (1996). He decries the possibility that Asian, South Asian, and Latino immigrants are overrunning the nation and, indeed, transforming it. (When I travel around the SF Bay Area, I have to say that he may have a point. But I see this as a positive development.) He means something else though. According to Brimelow, immigrants are inflicting “demographic mutation” on the national character by their refusal to “Americanize.”

In the aftermath of September 11 events, questions of belonging are so very important to us now, as matters of both polity and comity. Is it possible for us to conceive of an American national identity that is based on features beyond ethnicity, religion, language—an identity that is open, inclusive, and accommodating of difference while also providing the basis for Locke’s notion of a shared national identity as “one coherent living body”?

I wish to explore in very preliminary form a set of questions concerning how the activity of being citizens affects how we view ourselves; concerning, that is, how culture constructs and interprets citizenship. On top of all the political and civic issues having to do with the origin, nature, and value of citizenship, we are today witnessing a unique situation in the West and Southwest, namely, the presence of a rapidly increasing Latino and Mexican population that challenges the region’s self-identity.

We should recall that, unlike other immigrant groups (excluding American Indians), for Mexicans in the United States, the American continent is a homeland that precedes the arrival of Euro-American groups. At the same time, their experience is bound up with the history of conquest, colonization, and decolonization in the Americas. Despite this historical precedence, Mexicans (and other Latinos of course) continue to be seen as “outsiders” and “aliens” in their homeland by Brimelow and other national commentators.

They are considered foreigners even when they hold legal citizenship by birth, naturalization, or, as in the case of Puerto Ricans, by Congressional decree. This is so even as we are finding out how many Mexican and Latino service workers died as Americans at the World Trade Center, a case of having one's identity imposed upon you with a vengeance.

In the context of this demographic transformation, what role, if any, does culture play in citizenship? How is culture political? How do different groups participate in building a national community? Is it possible to claim membership in a society, claim political and social rights, and become recognized as an active agent in American society while at the same time retaining real difference? Is it possible, in other words, for "foreign" groups to become part of the "coherent living body" of U.S. society while at the same time retaining or even developing cultural forms that keep other identities and heritages alive?

AMÉRICO PAREDES

Américo Paredes draws directly from his experiences of border life for his ethnographic writings and his literary works to answer some of these questions. Born in Brownsville, Texas, in 1915 and himself a descendant of colonial border settlers, Paredes taught at the University of Texas at Austin from 1956 to 1984. In addition to his many scholarly writings, Paredes's works include a novel and a novella, poetry, short fiction and a variety of nonfiction prose. These works document, with gentle irony and a haunting sense of the transformation of a culture, the vitality of life on the U.S./Mexico border. A work entitled *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (1958), Paredes's study of a ballad cycle focused on the figure of Gregorio Cortez, an early twentieth-century Texas-Mexican defender of social justice, helped established a critical and analytical tradition for doing ethnographic work among minority groups.

In the "Introduction" to *With His Pistol in His Hand*, Paredes writes:

El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez . . . is a Border Mexican ballad, "Mexican" being understood in a cultural sense, without reference to citizenship or "blood." But we must stress "Border" too. It is as a border that the Lower Rio Grande has made its mark: in legend, in song, and in those documented old men's tales called histories.

Borders and ballads seem to go together, and their heroes are all cast in the same mold. During the Middle Ages there lived in some parts of Europe, especially in the border areas, a certain type of men whose fame has come down to us in legend and in song. On the Scottish-English border there were the heroes like Wallace, the rebel against English domination, like Jock o the Side, Hobie Noble, Willie Armstrong, and other Liddesdale and Teviotdale raiders, whose favorite occupation was defying the power of England.

It is crucial to note here that Paredes writing in the 1950s links the struggles of the Border people of south Texas with the struggles of other peoples on the margin of power globally and historically. Like Raymond Williams, another border intellectual, Paredes argues that in attempting to understand

the land, its people, and their history and their imaginary self-construction, one needs simultaneously to feel the materiality of their presence in the cultural geography of the landscape. It is there that the significance of their history will reside. Border thinking and local histories, Paredes suggests, are always coordinates of larger global designs.

Rather than serving simply as celebrations of authentic identity, Paredes' writings continually urge an interrogation of what constitutes Mexican and American social space, as sites for the construction of race, and gendered identity, in short of a minoritized polity, in the American twentieth century. "Every Mexican knows that there are two Mexicos," notes Paredes in one of his early essays. "One . . . is found within the boundaries of the Mexican republic. The second Mexico—the México de Afuera (Mexico abroad) as Mexicans call it—is composed of all the persons of Mexican origin in the United States" (1979:3). The composite hybrid of the two Mexicos is what Paredes called "Greater Mexico." Of these transcultural domains created by the labor diasporas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Paredes adds, "what is often not known is that their limits are not defined by the Customs and Immigration offices at the border These regional folk cultures thus include regions of two nations" (1979:7). His version of national identity thus cuts across imaginary borderlines and symbolic immigration checkpoints to document the undocumented styles and realities of the diasporic, transcultural, Mexican American imaginary in the context of twentieth-century hemispheric labor markets and cycles of modernization. This sense of what makes an imaginary border is what I am calling here Paredes' sense of the "transnational imaginary." It is also what I use to describe the future of minority studies.

In both his ethnographic work and in his literary writings, the "national" culture or political event is always seen as a local inflection of a *transnational* phenomenon that can be read according to a hemispheric dialectic of similarity and difference. His ethnographic work thus powerfully signals the emergence of new hemispheric studies of the Americas and the need for the development of new postcolonial optics for the study of this transnational phenomenon.

However, Paredes's work seeks still more. It also attempts to display the power of culture to configure the borders of the modern American nation and to shape the identity of the subject with the traditions of the nation. His literary writings, like his ethnographic and folkloric studies, acknowledge the social dimension of difference, the complexity of identity, and the limitations of homogeneous community. Repeatedly, this acknowledgement occurs aesthetically, in the shapes and nuances of a variety of oral forms and gestures, symbolic expressions and articulations, that is, in the formulaic patterns that disguise and sometimes reveal the limits of community and identity in their relationship to the discourses and realities of power.

THE POSTWAR TRANSNATIONAL

In 1945, Paredes gave up his deferment from the draft and with many other young Americans shipped out for the Pacific. The war ended before he arrived but the occupation was just beginning. In fact, he landed in Nagoya

in 1945 with the first American troops to arrive in postwar Japan. These patterns are most remarkable in Paredes's literary writings from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Of great significance from that period are the short stories collected under the title of *The Hammon and the Beans and Other Stories*, and his journalism from Japan, China, and Korea. Drafted into the Army near the end of the war, Paredes served first as a staff writer and then as the political correspondent for *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, the official journal of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Pacific theater of war. As a reporter for *Stars and Stripes*, Paredes covered the aftermath of the war in the Pacific, the transformation of postwar Japan, the beginnings of the Chinese Revolution, and he describes the political climate in the months before the Korean War. He occupied a front row seat at the War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo, witness to the proceedings that marked the close of one very hot war and the beginning of a cold one. After having finished his tour of duty in the Army, Paredes remained in Asia working for the International Red Cross distributing medical supplies and coordinating humanitarian relief aid in Japan, China, and Korea until the months just before the beginning of the Korean War in 1950. Through all of these events Paredes was observing, thinking, and writing about the power of national cultures, languages, and literatures as activities that inform the apparatus of the cultural and political hegemony of the ruling classes in the process of nation (re)-building.

Over the next several years, Paredes would write numerous short stories dealing with the war in the Pacific and the occupation of Japan. These stories link domestic American racism with the conduct of its armed forces during the war and the postwar occupation of Japan. In all of them what is at issue is the global nature of the idioms of racism and their role in the construction of an American national subject, suggesting how expressive forms of racial hatred encountered on the border became imbricated with the effects of colonialism and imperialism in Asia during World War II.

In these early writings, Paredes is asking: What would it take, materially and psychologically, to imagine a new identity, and what would it take to conceptualize what by definition could not yet be imagined since it had no equivalent in current experience? He was asking these questions as a reporter and member of the army of occupation in Japan. In both the literary texts and his other writings from the Far East, Paredes attempts meticulously to imagine what it means for a member of a minority community to belong to the greater cultural national polity.

In my research at the Hoover Library at Stanford University and at the American History Center at the University of Texas at Austin, I have found some sixty-eight different articles in *Pacific Stars and Stripes* and another ten written for the Mexico City daily, *El Universal* by Cpl. Américo Paredes. Composed between 1945 and 1948, these articles are on a variety of topics, including the U.S. supervision of the creation of a demilitarized, social democratic, anticommunist government for postwar Japan, Japanese protests against the occupation, food riots due to the shortage of adequate supplies, and most dramatically, the war crimes trials of Hideki Tojo, wartime prime

minister of Japan, and of other Japanese military and civilian leaders. Shortly before he joined the paper, the man who had been the political staff writer, “a committed leftist and probably a member of the Communist Party,” according to Paredes, was dismissed from the paper and sent home under a cloud of suspicions concerning loyalty, national allegiance, and national security that would soon darken the American mainland. Paredes took over the beat of this man. In an interview I conducted with Paredes in 1995, he said to me:

The 1930s was the period of Sandino’s revolution in Guatemala and we in south Texas were very attuned to the political struggles of Latin America. The work of Emma Tenayuca, political and labor activist in San Antonio especially moved me All through this period, I was an angry young man, angry at the way Mexicanos were treated in Texas and the rest of the southwest, and angry about social inequality and economic injustice. The other members of a reading group I belonged to were constantly urging me to renounce my U.S. citizenship and become a Mexican citizen. But I wasn’t exactly taken by what I saw of Mexican nationalism either In part because of the influence of my uncle Eduardo . . . who had belonged to the anarchist Flores Magón group, my own politics were really quite radical. I’ve often thought that if there had been a Communist Party cell in south Texas at the time, I would have joined it. By 1939, however, war had broken out in Europe and gradually everything started to change, even in south Texas. (Interview with Paredes, author’s personal files.)

Paredes was not an avowed communist, but his heroine was the great socialist daughter of San Antonio, Emma Tenayuca, who was general secretary of the Communist Party of Texas during the 1930s. Paredes’ articles for *Stars and Stripes* are not about Texas but about the economic and political turmoil in postwar Japan. They describe the hunger of the Japanese, the agitation of “leftwing Social Democrats and Communists” battling the police for equitable food rationing. Other articles report on “huge rallies organized by labor [and] communists” agitating for labor reform. In addition, he reports on the emerging sex industry, as the Ginza commercial district of Tokyo, which he describes as a “Japanese cross between Broadway and a Mexican marketplace” (*Pacific Stars and Stripes*, July 21, 1946). In what can only be called a postmodern image, the Ginza sex industry rises from the ruins of bombed out Tokyo to provide nightlife to the occupying American army.

These are not the usual sorts of articles that one finds in the pages of post-World War II *Stars and Stripes*. And when one recalls that his predecessor as the political writer had been shipped home in disgrace as a “communist” for taking his job too seriously in the emerging red-baiting era of early cold war America, it is nothing short of startling to see how biting Paredes’s reports are. In fact, they serve as a prelude to the critique of social injustice that Paredes would engage in within his scholarly manifestos, versions of Gramsci’s war of position, in Texas upon his return to his native land. In Asia, however, Paredes had experienced another form of the transnational imaginary.

IDENTITY, SOCIAL LOCATION, AND THE TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINARY

Fifty years before the current focus on issues of globalization, transnationality, and coloniality and its relationship to history, power, knowledge, and subaltern modernities, Américo Paredes attempted to specify what the conditions of history and border knowledge might be. In his prospective version of subaltern modernities, folklore and history serve as the repositories of border knowledge from a subaltern perspective across a hemispheric horizon, north to south but also east to west. Although our conception of Paredes's later work has been informed correctly by the insistence of the racial politics of Texas and the Southwest during the first half of the twentieth century, we must now add to this conception Paredes's experiences of nationalism, racism, and the politics of cultural formation in Asia, as an American in pharaoh's army. How those years contributed to the creation of Paredes's resistance writings of the 1950s, and of *With His Pistol in His Hand*, is a matter that has not yet been studied by scholars.

When Paredes finally returned to the United States in 1951 to begin his interventions and contestations in the academy, he did so with the experience of having witnessed the emergence of America as a global power. Thus, concerning that vernacular knowledge, Paredes would write that "folklore is of particular importance to minority groups such as the Mexican Americans because their basic sense of identity is expressed in a language with an 'unofficial' status, different from the one used by the official culture . . . [T]he Mexican American would do well to seek his identity in folklore. If the Mexican American will not do it, others will do it for him" (1982:1). By this point in his career, Paredes was already fully aware that conceptions of identity and subjectivity imparted by the traditional social environment are contained, as Antonio Gramsci has noted, in "language itself," in "common sense," in "popular religion," and therefore, also "in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled under the name of 'folklore' " (323).

In contrast to official conceptions of the world and narratives of historical process, folklore offered for Paredes a conception of the world that was not systematic, formalized, elaborated, or centralized. Folklore was vernacular history in the making, sometimes offering the only surviving evidence of another history, adulterated and mutilated by the official narratives of the nation. Thus, of history, Paredes would claim that "History (oral and written) is a dynamic process that is always open to change; . . . it tends to reshape itself according to the half-conscious desires and yearnings of those who behold it, changing a detail here, a name there, making itself less what probably was and more what it should have been" (1993: 261).

Following Paredes's formulations of the transnational citizenry of "Greater Mexico," I propose a term from the ethnographic work of Renato Rosaldo, namely, *cultural citizenship*. Cultural citizenship is a broad range of activities of everyday life through which groups claim real and symbolic space

in society and rights as part of the national polity. It also describes the obligations on the part of the national cultural citizens to participate in the act of creating Locke's "one coherent living body" that gives "form, life, and unity to the commonwealth." Culture has always served as a way of constructing "American" identity, but perhaps never more so than today when the reach of American culture is practically global. To what extent can popular culture and just plain vernacular everyday practices serve to create polity from the cultural gestures and expressions of a language with unofficial status? Is it possible to claim membership in a society, claim political and social rights, and become recognized as an active agent in American society while at the same time retaining difference? Can we imagine a form of citizenship that adds to American diversity without threatening the "dis-unity" of American national identity or its national sovereignty? At mid-century, in the midst of the crisis of national identity occasioned by the emergence of the cold war, these were the salient questions that intellectuals like Américo Paredes were deliberating.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when one thinks of "American" culture one is inevitably bound to think of Hollywood and HBO film and also CNN, ESPN, MSNBC and other mass media. But we are equally bound to think of the blues, jazz, soul, and increasingly, hip hop salsa, and techno bands as emblematic, for better or worse, of a developing American *global* culture. These cultural forms, together with more mundane cultural signs, such as the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the games we play, the politics we practice, construct us as communities across the political and social realms. They contribute, quietly and unobtrusively, but effectually nonetheless to the creation of an American public identity that is not like the one that used to be. So, instead of seeing "who we are" in opposition to a united and monolithic American citizenry, may we not already be engaged in building a new kind of shared identity through "cultural citizenship?"

I think the answer is "yes," especially if we see that history, folklore, and the particular features of border thinking are at the core of the matter of conceiving national belonging and the identity of the polity. Will Kymlicka has argued that to retain a sense of national belonging in an era of globalization a new kind of national belonging must be imagined, one that allows for diverse peoples to feel that they have a stake in the common cause and share in the fate of the whole. "People belong to the same community of fate," argues Kymlicka, "if they care about each other's fate, and want to share each other's fate—that is, want to meet certain challenges together, so as to share each other's blessings and burdens. Put another way, people belong to the same community of fate if they feel some sense of responsibility for one another's fate, and so want to deliberate together about how to respond collectively to the challenges facing the community" (320).

The notion of cultural citizenship depends on this sense of a "community of fate." It is not an identity politics but a politics in the vernacular of identity. It is a moment of pre-history, a crucial element in the development of

one version of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century border thinking. Its transformations are visible already as elements of the future in the present, as C. L. R. James and Américo Paredes both envisioned it in the early part of the twentieth century.

This revised sense of citizenship comes particularly into play concerning the relationship between Paredes's "Greater Mexico" and the "transnational imaginary" on one hand and the idea of a "national" polity on the other. What is perhaps confusing to realize is that both social structures are vitally present in the current historical moment, a nationalist and a trans-nationalist one. As early as the 1950s, Paredes foresaw this development and referred to it under the rubric of "Greater Mexico." Today, both trends are present because we are far from abandoning the idea of the "nation" as a viable category of political and personal identity, as almost every item in the news these days confirms. At the same time, something else is also visible on the political horizon, namely, a loosening of "national" categories on various levels, including the economic, political, and personal experiential. This loosening has been with us at least since the post-World War II years. We have to live with the one (the nation) even while we see something else also emerging (the trans-nation). It is not at all clear which will be the way of the future. But what is clear is that both experiences are with us, almost as social imperatives, and that citizens must respond to both. How, then, do we make sense of the "national" in the midst of an emerging "transnational," and vice versa? These are the questions that Paredes was addressing with his idea of "Greater Mexico."

Furthermore, since we have to live within the nation, how can we compel it to be responsive to other forms of "national" identity, polity, and rights? These questions too converge on the multicultural issues that almost all "modern" nations today have to face. That is where the ideas of "shared fates" and "cultural citizenship" have their most vital function. They allow for a way of dealing with multicultural politics in our everyday lives. There is really no inconsistency here at all, simply a messy attempt to deal with a confoundingly complex and evolving process in the current historical moment.

Viewing the matter from the perspective of the transnational imaginary and multicultural politics in the vernacular of identity, I can think of no more appropriate a statement of the power of social location and the importance of the multicultural analytic concepts than Linda Martín Alcoff's when she shows that:

To say we have an identity is just to say that we have a location in social space, a hermeneutic horizon that is both grounded in a location and an opening or site from which we attempt to know the world. Understood in this way, it is incoherent to view identities as something we would be better off without. (2000:335)

We would do well to seek to name those identities. If we do not, others will undoubtedly do it for us.

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BORDER THINKING, MINORITIZED
STUDIES, AND REALIST INTERPELLATIONS:
THE COLONIALITY OF POWER FROM
GLORIA ANZALDÚA TO ARUNDHATI ROY

José David Saldívar

Literature follows great social changes—. . . it always ‘comes after’. To come after, however, does not mean to repeat (‘reflect’) what already exists, but the exact opposite: to resolve the problems set by history.

Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic*

INTRODUCTION

This essay has a somewhat sweeping character. It is a preliminary attempt to link *pensamiento fronterizo* (border thinking) in Chicano/a Studies and realist interpellations of the subject and the politics of reclaiming identity of this volume. Border thinking emerges from the critical reflections of (undocumented) immigrants, migrants, *bracero/a* workers, refugees, *campesinos*, women, and children on the major structures of dominance and subordination of our times. Thus envisaged, border thinking is the name for a new geopolitically located thinking or epistemology from both the internal and external borders of the modern (colonial) world-system.¹ Border thinking is a necessary tool for thinking what the Peruvian historical social scientist Aníbal Quijano calls the “coloniality of power” and identity at the intersections (*los intersticios*) of our local histories and global designs.²

Quijano’s coloniality of power, I argue, can help us begin to account for the entangled relations of power between the global division of labor, racial and ethnic hierarchy, identity formation, and Eurocentric epistemologies. Moreover, the coloniality of power can help us trace the continuous forms of hegemonic dominance produced by colonial cultures and structures. As I use it, the coloniality of power is fundamentally a structuring process of racial identity, experience, and racial knowledge production articulating geostrategic locations and subaltern (minor) inscriptions.

My emphasis will be on late-twentieth-century postcolonial narratives (Chicano/a and South Asian) and early twenty-first century realist theories about identity, critical multiculturalism, and minoritized studies. So I'll begin by discussing three of the most important paradigms of minoritized study as forms of culture which have shared experiences by virtue of their antagonistic relationship to the hegemonic culture, which seeks to marginalize and interpellate them as minor. Then I will examine the issue of minoritized border thinking and languaging practices in Gloria Anzaldúa's celebrated *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.³ Last, I will speculate on the issue of epistemic privilege and kinship trouble in Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things*.

Why propose a cross-genealogical (U.S. Latino/a and South Asian) treatment of differently structured histories of border and diaspora identity and minoritized writing? I hope this will emerge as I go along, and indeed throughout this book (designed as it is by Satya Mohanty, Paula Moya, Michael Hames-García, and Linda Martín Alcoff to encourage in-depth, cross-cultural comparisons within the general field of minority studies in the United States). But I'll begin by asserting some of the potential meanings and nuances of the minor as they have appeared on the scene of U.S. post-colonial studies in the past fifteen years.

THE POLITICS OF "BECOMING MINOR"

In a landmark 1987 conference at the University of California, Berkeley, the literary theorists Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd called for a radical examination of the "nature and context of minority discourse."⁴ JanMohamed and Lloyd were specifically interested in rethinking the relationship between a "minor literature" and the canonical literatures of the majority. Schematically put, Lloyd and JanMohamed's theory and practice of minority discourse involves "drawing out solidarities in the forms of similarities between modes of repression and struggles that all minorities experience separately but precisely as minorities" (1990, 9). Their project of minority discourse fundamentally supplemented Deleuze and Guattari's Eurocentered theorizing of a minor literature—a literature so termed by its "opposition to those which define canonical writing." A minor literature entails for them "the questioning or destruction of the concept of identity and identification . . . and a profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification" (1990, 381). In other words, Lloyd and JanMohamed maintained that a "minority discourse should neither fall back on ethnicity or gender as an a priori essence nor rush into calculating some 'nonhumanist' celebration of diversity for its own sake" (1990, 9). While some realists might take issue with Lloyd and JanMohamed's partial dismissal of the cognitive work of our identities and their overreliance on the Eurocentric work of Deleuze and Guattari (their erasure of the cognitive aspects of U.S. and other globalized racialized minority experiences and identities), the political project of minority discourse remains on target: "Becoming 'minor,' " they write, "is not a question

of essence . . . but a question of position: a subject-position that in the final analysis can be defined only in political terms" (1990, 9).

My sense of the utopian future of minority studies owes much to the theoretical work of my colleagues at Berkeley but it does not quite reproduce the nuances of the way Lloyd and JanMohamed use the term minor (following Deleuze and Guattari's famous study of Kafka.)⁵ In my own recent cross-genealogical work in Chicano/a and U.S. Latino/a subaltern studies, on José Martí as a subaltern modernist and revolutionary anti-colonialist, on the Cuban testimonio of Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet, and on the border modernisms of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and Américo Paredes for example, I have used the terms *subaltern* and *minor* to cast doubt not so much on our "narratives of identity" but on the narratives of the major, mainstream, and the hegemonic.⁶ My emergent minority studies follows the collaborative scholarly and activist work of the Coloniality of Power Research Group (especially Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Quijano) and the South Asian Subaltern Group, particularly the work of historian Dipesh Chakrabarty. As Chakrabarty suggests in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, "[the minor] describes relationships to the past that the rationality of the [mainstream] historian's methods necessarily makes 'minor' or 'inferior' as something 'irrational' in the course of, and as a result of, its own operation."⁷ The cultural and political work of the subaltern or minoritized historian, in Chakrabarty's words, is to "try to show how the capacity (of the modern person) to historicize actually depends on his or her ability to participate in nonmodern relationships to the past that are made subordinate in the moment of historicization. History writing assumes plural ways of being in the world" (2000, 101). In thus critiquing mainline historicism and monotypical Eurocentrism and using that critique to interrogate minoritized studies, in emphasizing the colonial difference in archival documents, and in considering representations between the elite and the minor, Chakrabarty has been moving away from mainline "history from below" studies and turning to minoritized studies mapped out by Lloyd and JanMohamed.

This brings me to the third (and for the purposes of this book the most recent) sense of minority studies: minority studies as a comparative "epistemic project" formulated by Mohanty, Moya, Hames-García, and Martín Alcoff. Against purely skeptical (postmodern and poststructuralist) attitudes toward identity, ethnic studies, and experience, they argue for a strong defense of critical cosmopolitanism and minority studies based on what they call "realist" views. (As a shorthand for this realist-inspired group of minority studies, I will focus in what follows on the collective project entitled *Reclaiming Identity*, edited by Paula Moya and Michael Hames-García.)

What Moya and Hames-García have done is to tease out (using Satya Mohanty's realist view of identity) a new way of doing literary, cultural, and comparative ethnic studies in the United States. *Reclaiming Identity* is at the very center of what the authors (after Mohanty) call a "postpositivist realism," an engaging method of philosophical, cultural, and literary interpretation that

situates “identity” in both a “radical universalist” and a “multiculturalist” world view (1997, xii). Briefly stated, *Reclaiming Identity* (like Mohanty’s *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* [1997] and Moya’s *Learning From Experience* [2002]) is a sustained, eloquent, and rich exemplification of this innovative method, practice, and pedagogy.⁸ Moya puts their collective project this way: the realist view of identity can provide “a reconstructed universalist justification for the kind of work being done by . . . ethnic studies scholars,” (2000, 2) by supporters of multicultural education, as well as for the salience of the identities around which such minoritized programs are organized.

Ranging across issues involving philosophy, literature, and social theory, the essayists explore realist accounts of identity and experience by making linkages among social location, experience, epistemic privilege, and cultural identity.⁹ All contemplate a world where cultural identity is both socially constructed and substantively real. By attempting to transcend the limits of postmodernism/poststructuralism and essentialism, the authors in *Reclaiming Identity* take seriously (1) that identities are real and (2) that experiences are epistemically crucial. As philosopher Martín Alcoff emphasizes, *Reclaiming Identity* “is an act of taking back . . . the term realism in order to maintain the epistemic significance of identity” (2000, 312).

Because I’m working under some constraints of space, I will only focus in the remainder of this section on the essays by Mohanty, Moya, Hames-García, and Martín Alcoff. *Reclaiming Identity* blasts off with Mohanty’s minoritized philosophical exegesis of Toni Morrison’s celebrated novel *Beloved*. “The community sought” in the novel he argues, “involves as its essence a moral and imaginative expansion of oneself.” Moreover, Morrison’s “political vision of the oppressed . . . provides the context” in which her characters challenge each others’ views “on the limits of mother-love” in specifically historical, gendered, and ethno-racial terms. Thus envisaged, Morrison’s characters’ perspectives, Mohanty suggests, are “not only affective but also epistemic.” By reading Morrison’s *Beloved*, many of us are therefore put in the position of characters in the novel, like Paul D, who have inadequate understandings of the social world they live in. Briefly, Morrison teaches us in *Beloved*, among other things, how to read infanticide and the social roles of slave mothers, thereby widening the scope of the moral debates about slavery and the gendered division of labor in the modern world system of capitalism.

Do slave mothers, like Morrison’s Sethe, have a “special knowledge” (2000, 236)? Can a realist account of identity spell out the claim that members of a diaspora often have a privileged, albeit sharable knowledge about their social world? What are the valuable implications that the epistemic privilege of the politically oppressed and socially underprivileged people has? These are the major interpretive questions Mohanty grapples with in his essay. If diaspora implicitly refers to an identity, and Morrison elaborates it in narrative and descriptive terms, Mohanty argues persuasively that readers of *Beloved* have been slow to see how Morrison elaborates diasporic identity in unavoidably moral and theoretical terms. Thus, instead of seeing Morrison’s characters as “empty signifiers” and therefore dismissing her take-on identities

on the grounds that they are after all rhetorically constructed and hence “spurious,” Mohanty argues that identities in *Beloved* are not only descriptive and affective but also evaluative and epistemic. Hence, realists need to distinguish between different kinds of constructedness and at the same time see the politics of identities as enmeshed in competing social and ethical-theoretical worldviews. Last, Mohanty sets the *Reclaiming Identity* project in motion by arguing for a notion of “epistemic privilege”—that our experiences have real cognitive content and that deconstructive suspicions of experience (Joan Scott [1992] and Jonathan Culler [1982]) are unwarranted.

Building upon Mohanty’s realist view of identity and his ideas about epistemic privilege, Moya and Hames-García complement and enlarge the realist view of the project by reading Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* and Michael Nava’s *The Hidden Law* as contributing to understandings of how the minoritized “other” can change us, and how issues that challenge identity such as heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity do not have to be seen as separate entities but as “mutually constitutive.” If Moraga, as Moya suggests, “understands identities as relational and grounded in the historically produced social categories that constitute social location” (2000, 69) and not as trapped in a cyborgian “signifying function” a la Donna Haraway (1991), Nava’s work, Hames-García argues, “demands that we . . . take seriously the moral implications” of gay Chicano protagonist Henry Rios’s experiences. For Hames-García, taking Henry’s experiences seriously does not make him a “strategic essentialist” a la Chakravorty Spivak (1988); rather Henry bases his claim on the “moral sense of his right to participate in a Chicano community on the basis of his cultural upbringing and experience of racialization” (2000, 113).

In the book’s conclusion, “Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?,” philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff carefully defends the new postpositivist accounts of identity by discussing how approaches to the self developed by Hegel, Freud, Foucault, and Althusser have influenced the most important postcontemporary conceptions of identity and subjectification. The answer to the problems of essentialism and anti-essentialism, Martín Alcoff argues, is not political scientist Wendy Brown’s theory of “wounded attachments” (where the cycle of blame is never transcended) but new, better alternative formulations of identity produced by the essayists in *Reclaiming Identity*.¹⁰ Near her essay’s ending, Martín Alcoff writes, “To say that we have an identity is just to say that we have a location in social space, a hermeneutic horizon that is both grounded in a location and an opening or site from which we attempt to know the world. Understood in this way, it is incoherent to view identities as something we would be better off without” (2000, 335).

Given this précis of what I take to be one of the central aims of the *Reclaiming Identity* project, I would like to end this section by raising two issues for further interrogation. The first concerns the issue of identity in relationship to what the historical social scientists Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein call “Americanness” and what Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Agustín Lao, Ramón Grosfoguel, and others are calling “the coloniality of power.”

In their essay, “Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system” (1992), Quijano and Wallerstein argue that the Americas were fundamental to the formation of the modern (colonial) world-system, and that Americanity is a fundamental element of modernity. For our purposes, Quijano and Wallerstein identify four new categories that originated in the so-called discovery of the Americas. They are: coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and the concept of newness itself. My first hesitation with the *Reclaiming Identity* project thus has to do with the way most of the contributors are generally silent about our identities in relationship to what Quijano and Wallerstein are grappling with in their work, namely, coloniality and power.

In other words, if Mohanty, Moya, Hames-García, and Martín Alcoff are right that to have an identity means that we have to understand that “we have a location in social space,” wouldn’t it be useful for us to ground these identities and locations in the history of the modern (colonial) world-system? Quijano and Wallerstein remind us that after all coloniality created a structure of hierarchy and drew new boundaries around and within the Americas. Moreover, coloniality was also essential to the formation of states, and Quijano in his more recent work such as “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America” makes the additional claim that even in decolonization the stateness of decolonized states recentered the colonial structure of power. “What is termed globalization,” Quijano writes, “is the cultural process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power. One of the fundamental axes of power is the social classification of the world’s population around the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its rationality. The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than colonialism in whose matrix it was established. Therefore the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality” (2000, 533).

For Quijano and Wallerstein, ethnic identity fundamentally is “the set of communal boundaries into which in part we are put by others [through coloniality], in part which we impose upon ourselves, serving to locate our *identity* and our rank within the state . . . [Ethnic identities] are always contemporary constructs, and thus always changing. All the major categories, however, into which we ethnically divide today in the Americas and the world (Native Americans or Indians, Blacks or Negroes, Whites or Creoles/Europeans, *Mestizos* or other names given to a so-called mixed-category)—all these categories did not exist prior to the modern world-system. They are part of what makes up Americanity. They have become the cultural staple of the entire world-system” (my emphasis, 1992, 550).

If our identities are real and affective, they do come from somewhere. Any postcontemporary account of subjectification (Butler, Laclau, Žižek [2000]) and any postpositivist realist account of identity (Mohanty, Moya, and Hames-García), I believe, would have to grapple with the coloniality matrix

of power that Quijano and Wallerstein, among others, are outlining for us. Perhaps to get back to Martín Alcoff's concluding riffs on the realist view of identity that is why it might not be so dizzying for some to view identities as something we might be better off without. Michel Foucault, for instance, noted in "The Subject and Power" that the point is "not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (1982, 212). But here, too, I'd stress that Foucault tends, especially in *The History of Sexuality*, to erase the crafty details of the colonial difference in his analysis of biopower. On the whole, however, I'm in strong agreement with Martín Alcoff's point about the political power of our identities. In our informational culture and society, our identities, sociologist Manuel Castells insists in *The Power of Identity*, are crucial and important because "they build interests, values, and projects, around experience, and refuse to dissolve by establishing a specific connection between nature, history, geography, and culture." Identities, Castells concludes (in Marxist realist fashion), "anchor power in some areas of the social structure, and build their resistance or their offensives in the informational struggle about the cultural codes constructing behavior and, thus, new institutions" (1997, 361). And it is this new subject or identity project of the informational mode of production, I believe, that many "straight" marxists have refused to grapple with in their engagement with the powers of identity politics.

This issue of "coloniality" then leads to another minor hesitation I have with the rich *Reclaiming Identity* project of Mohanty, Moya, and Hames-García. In his book, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000), Mignolo draws on the social scientific work of Quijano and Wallerstein to criticize various recent desires for universalist theories among both neoliberals and neo-marxists. Mignolo argues that parallel to the ethno-racialized classification of the Americas and the world (the embalming of identities) the colonial project in the Americas also classified languages and knowledges. The epistemology of the European Renaissance was, therefore, assumed to be the natural perspective from which knowledges could be described and suppressed. This same process, Mignolo suggests, was resituated after the Enlightenment, when the concept of reason opened up a new description and reason became associated with northern Europe and indirectly with whiteness (Hegel and Kant).

What are we to make of Mohanty and Moya's use of an apparently idealist Kantian "universalism" in their postpositivist realist project? Shouldn't a realist view of identity severely criticize the abstract hegemonic universalisms in Kant and the Enlightenment? Is it possible to imagine an "epistemic diversality or pluriversality," as Mignolo (drawing on the work of Glissant) suggests in his work on Zapatismo? For Mignolo, diversality is not "the rejection of universal claims, but the rejection of universality understood as an abstract universal grounded in a monologic." Further, he writes, a "universal principle grounded on the idea of the di-versal is not a contradiction in terms but rather a displacement of conceptual structures" ("Zapatistas' Theoretical Revolution," 2002).

As an alternative to the Kantian universalism in Mohanty and Moya's postpositivist realist project, I propose that Gloria Anzaldúa's and Arundhati

Roy's imaginative works belong to a "diversalist" cross-genealogical field that I term (after Quijano) the coloniality of border and diaspora power. Coloniality, because of the many structural and ethno-racial similarities about identity formations binding them to a colonizing past. But border and diaspora power because there are certainly many discontinuities—the outernational dimension of represented space—to dictate the cognitive metaphor of the "world-system" text, which recalls as I have been suggesting the world political economy of Wallerstein and Quijano.

The category of the coloniality of power is not, of course, without its defects. But it has fewer than others, as well as having some local and global advantages. So let the coloniality of power be taken in my essay for what it is: a hypothesis designed to grapple with hierarchy based on what Quijano terms the "social classification of the world's population around the idea of race." The racial axis of *mestizaje* in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and of caste in Roy's *The God of Small Things* have colonial origins in the Américas and South Asia, but Anzaldúa and Roy suggest that race and caste have proven to be more durable in our postcolonial world.

By cobbling together Quijano's subalternist concept of the coloniality of power and Wallerstein's modern world system, we can argue that the coloniality of power has survived in the Americas and South Asia (the Portuguese brought with them to India the idea of caste) for over 500 years and yet they have not come to be transformed into a world empire. The secret strength of the coloniality of power and the world system is the political side of the economic organization called capitalism. Capitalism, Wallerstein astutely argues, has flourished precisely because the world-economy "has had within its bounds not one but a multiplicity of political systems" (1974, 348).

CHICANO/A BORDER INTERPELLATIONS AND SUBALTERN STUDIES

Over the past decade an awareness has begun to develop of the affinities between the work of recent Chicano/a imaginative writers and the thought of U.S. migratory postcolonial thinkers. Indeed, what is remarkable is that it should have taken so long for the interlocking of concerns between Chicano/a writers and postcolonial thinkers to be properly appreciated. Among the most prominent of such common concerns are the following: the location of knowledge from the perspective of the U.S. empire's borderland contact zones; the critique of Occidental dominant perspectives in the current practices of U.S. social sciences, humanities, and area studies; and the grappling with localized geopolitics of knowledge and what Mignolo calls "border epistemologies." Furthermore, these affinities have not only been observed by scholars from the South (Latin America and South Asia), but also are becoming part of the self-consciousness in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has called the "emerging dominant" (1995, 179) in American Studies.

This section is a study of the interplay between the performative, border epistemologies of a Chicano/a imaginative writer and the changing

discourses of American vernacular literatures and cultures. Gloria Anzaldúa's writings about U.S. Latino/a life explore, among other things, the linguistic intermixture of ethnic and mainstream languages (English, Spanish, and Spanglish) to illustrate the changing languages of America. What vernacular varieties of English or Spanish will dominate in twenty-first century America? Which *lingua rustica* will the some thirty million U.S. Latinos/as (with over 10 million in California) hegemonize in their *testimonios*, novels, essays, and poetry? What new literary genres and bilanguaging regimes, produced by Chicanos/as, will emerge in American literature? If the "dialect novel" was all the rage in late nineteenth-century vernacular America¹¹ (Twain, Cable, Cahan, Du Bois), is there a borderlands English or Spanglish already underway in U.S. Latino/a dominant California, Arizona, Florida, Texas, Illinois, and New York? On another level, I want to investigate the enabling condition of some recent Chicano/a narrative and poetry and the various ways in which they seek to create an epistemological ground upon which versions of the world may be produced. As many U.S. Latino/a writers themselves suggest, to read is to question and to understand the (bilingual) texture and the rhetorical resources of language. Anzaldúa sees the aesthetic structure of knowledge as a form of *nepantilism*, a Mexica word signifying a violent cultural in-betweenness.¹²

To begin, I will juxtapose Gloria Anzaldúa's key concept of U.S.-Mexico border *nepantilism* (1987) against U.S. historian Frederick Jackson Turner's well-known nineteenth-century idea of the frontier. I do so to emphasize that while Turner and Anzaldúa may share some affinities of narrative and subaltern conventions and self-locations in the United States—both writers locate their stories in a tradition of border historiography—their contrasts, I think, run far deeper, for Turner's paradigms of the "frontier" and Anzaldúa's *frontera* are not equivalent.

One of the most imperial images of the American West, Turner's so-called frontier thesis helped shape the study of Americanization both domestically and, after the War of 1898, globally. U.S. historian William Cronin suggests that "few historical arguments [about the significance of the frontier in American history] have risen so high and fallen so far in [U.S.] scholarly reception" (1995, 692).

Turner famously opens his 1893 essay by quoting from the 1890s census report that described empirically the disappearance of the frontier. Moreover, in an idiographic vein, Turner theorized that U.S. modernity and modernization were caused by the frontier, for "free land and its continuous recession and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development" (1920, 1). By emphasizing the movement westward, Northeastern, Euro-Americans not only encountered peoples and cultures "less civilized" than they had experienced, but through this very contact, Turner argued, they had left behind their old world civilization and invented a new, North American one.

As Klein suggests, Turner's essay "narrates a dramatic struggle between past and present." Turner's compositional mode of emplotment rolls out

from East to West; from the Puritan's errand into the wilderness to the Gilded Age's San Francisco. If Turner starts off quoting social scientific data (census reports), he quickly moves his essay into the mythos of romance. His invocations of the colonial frontier heroes (Daniel Boone, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln) are, as U.S. historian Kerwin Klein notes, perfect "synecdoches for the American frontier spirit" (1997, 183).

All of the familiar themes of the U.S. cultures of imperialism are cobbled together in Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"—the advancing of the frontier, the free land, or the nineteenth century's equivalent of the twentieth-century U.S. food stamp program, and the conquering of and the errand into the wilderness. Throughout Turner is gracefully straightforward: "the frontier prompted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people" (1920, 40). And one of my favorite lines in the essay reveals Turner's poetic flair: "In the crucible of the frontier, the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into one mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics" (1920, 40).

U.S. historians such as Richard White locate Turner's essay as part of an emerging incantatory imperialism. By strategically using a frontier iconography in his essay—log cabins, covered wagons, canoes, and the like—Turner argued for a Jeffersonian "empire for liberty," surely one of our most interesting nationalist oxymorons for the cultures of U.S. imperialism (White, 1994). Like White, U.S. Latino historian George Sánchez chastises Turner for constructing "a myopic vision" in his frontier essay—"that of the East looking West, civilization looking toward chaos, Europe looking toward the rest of the world" (1993, 38). Conversely, against Turner's hegemonic vision, Sánchez suggests that the concept of the transnational *frontera* developed in postcolonial Chicano/a studies works against Turner's myopic imperialism. The transnational *frontera*, he argues, suggests "limitations, boundaries over which American power might have little or no control. It implies a dual vision, that of two nations looking at each other over a strip of land they hold in common" (1993, 38). U.S. Latino/a border thinking, therefore, enacts a powerful contrapuntal corrective for mainline American studies.

Pensamiento fronterizo—border thinking—for Anzaldúa, is a site of criss-crossed experience, language, and identity. Mignolo's pluritopical reading of Anzaldúa is especially helpful in this context. She draws, Mignolo insists, "a different map: that of reverse migration, the migration from colonial territories relabeled the Third World (after 1945), toward the First" (2000, 237). And this reverse U.S. Latino/a migratoriness, in Mignolo's view, helps explain Anzaldúa's powerful "linguaging practices" which "fracture the colonial language" (2000, 237).

If Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* thematizes not the hegemonic Hegelian–Emersonian universalism of Turner's frontier thesis, but the epistemic diversal reason of local U.S. *nepantilism's* multiple broken tongues, "such fractures," Mignolo argues, "occur due to the linguaging practices of two displaced linguistic communities" in Anzaldúa's work: "Nahuatl, displaced by the Spanish expansion and Spanish displaced by the increasing

hegemony of the colonial languages of the modern period (English, German, and French)” (2000, 237).

This fracturing and braiding of colonial and postcolonial languages explains why Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* has the power to elicit such critical emphasis from Mignolo, one of the most innovative U.S. Latino critics of postcolonial literatures of the Americas. Reading Anzaldúa as a Chicana feminist philosopher of fractured and braided languages is precisely what I want to address below as both one of the major postcolonial issues in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and indeed for U.S. Latino/a studies in particular, and for the futures of minority studies in general.

Rather than a unified subject, representing a folk border culture in any holistic sense, we meet in Anzaldúa’s *autohistoriateoría*¹³ a braided, mestiza consciousness, and a feminist writer fundamentally caught between various hegemonic colonial and postcolonial languages and subaltern dialects, and vernacular expressions. Her lament that “wild tongues” such as her own “can not be tamed” for “they can only be cut out” (1998, 76) might as well be addressed to Anzaldúa’s complex postcolonial audience of radical women and (feminist) men of color. Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa expresses regret that even her bilingual mother in Hargill, has been partially complicit in valuing the English language of the hegemonic: “I want you to speak English. Pa’ hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Que vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent,’ my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents” (1998, 76).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa not only self-consciously speaks English with an “accent,” she also writes in multiply accented, vernacular tongues. Read with its marked accentuation, Anzaldúa’s work can be reinterpreted as expressing a late North American situation of multidialectism. Her negative dialectical answers to her earlier meditations that she will not “tame a wild tongue,” or “train it to be quiet,” or “make it lie down” (1998, 76) are her feminist philosophical dictums of border language and thinking. At the very heart of Anzaldúa’s *autohistoriateoría* is her claim that a braided “tongue” is centrally and dramatically at war with colonialism, U.S. Empire, patriarchy, and androcentrism’s project to silence women: “Ser habladora was to be a gossip or a liar” (1998, 76).

Anzaldúa’s response to being preoccupied with “the unique positioning consciousness takes at these confluent streams” (1987, i) is apprehended linguistically in the text in the juxtaposition of multiple dialects or tongues—Tex Mex, *caló*, *choteo*, Spanish and English—with their dominant and subaltern varieties. Moreover, this linguistic juxtaposition allows us to see Anzaldúa’s attempts to reflect post-Jim Crow ethno-racial practices in South Texas as well as attempts at *nepantilism*—however incomplete—to merge, transculturate, and braid different ethno-racial formations and languages in a single text. As she puts it, she struggles with an “almost instinctive urge to communicate, to speak, to write about life on the borders, life in the

shadows” (1998 i). In this regard, Anzaldúa’s *conciencia de la nueva mestiza* seems to be a respectful and gendered updating of W. E. B. Du Bois’s famous early twentieth-century insights about the cross-linguistic foundations of double consciousness and the shadows of the color line:

One ever feels a two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the Negro is the history of this strife . . . , to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost . . . He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of *white Americanism*, for he knows that Negro blood has a *message* for the world. (1986, 364–365, my emphasis)

My point is that Anzaldúa, like Du Bois, sees her braided Chicana consciousness as a fractured, cracked, and braided construction, an effort to merge new cultural formations and ethno-racial subjectivities. Like Du Bois, she highlights the inherent U.S. linguistic wars both inside the body of the nation and in the body of her soul, for like the U.S.-Mexico border itself, it is “an open wound, dividing a *pueblo*, a culture, /running down the length of my body, / [it] splits me, splits me/ me raja, me raja” (1998, 24). Both Du Bois and Anzaldúa call for new ethnic, linguistic, and cultural exchanges between the South and the North. If for Du Bois at the beginning of the twentieth century blackness and whiteness were inextricably woven together, then, for Anzaldúa at the century’s end Chicana, Latina, African American, and Euro-American vernacular English and Spanish have been knitted together into what Du Bois called “the very warp and woof of this nation.” This “colonial difference” is crucial to emphasize for those of us tracking Chicano/a studies’ shifting and shifty cross-genealogy.

In arguing for the centrality of human language rights in Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I mean to support Mignolo’s critical, subaltern, U.S. Latino/a, postcolonial evaluations of Anzaldúa’s *pensamiento fronterizo* without losing sight of the importance of the author’s multiple renaming processes and her radical recodifications of womanhood. As Chicana feminist scholars such as Norma Alarcón, Chela Sandoval, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, Sonia Saldivar-Hull, and Paula Moya have all rigorously and gracefully argued, *Borderlands/La Frontera* is fundamentally a Chicana feminist text; a first-rate *historia* of post-Jim Crow South Texas; a jolting new positioning of the native woman in Chicana Studies; a terrific study in comparative whiteness and brownness; and postpositivist realist call for identity and social justice. Yet what is perhaps an equally powerful feature of Anzaldúa’s text has also been one of its least analyzed—Anzaldúa’s discussion of *nepantlism* as a braided, U.S. Latino/a linguistic consciousness. *La conciencia de la nueva mestiza*, for Anzaldúa, is “neither español ni inglés, but both.” It is a consciousness of *nepantla*, signifying in betweenness and “capable of communicating the real values” of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to others (1998, 77).

In arguing for the centrality of her “forked,” “wild,” and active feminist tongues, Anzaldúa emphasizes that these tongues are informed with other, border-crossing tongues: “los recién llegados, Mexican immigrants, north from Mexico,” and the older tongues of the “braceros” (78). And to these vernacular tongues, she merges her Tex-Mex dialects that she uses with her brothers and sisters and the “secret language of *pachuco*, a language of rebellion” (78) in order to create a foundational consciousness of the new *mestiza*.

Read against recent legal attempts in California and Florida (states with large U.S. Latino/a populations) to force an English-only linguistic absolutism, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* offers readers a dialect-centered anti-absolutism, for there “is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience” (1998, 80). In her own testimonial theorization of experience, when in high school she was “encouraged to take French classes because French [was] considered more ‘cultured,’” she ends by noting that “Spanish speakers will comprise [by 2005] the biggest [minority] group in the USA” (1998, 81). However, she also argues that by the end of the twentieth century, a braided “Chicana/o” English “will be the mother tongue of most” Chicanas/os (1987, 81).

If I have focused on what may seem one of many issues, what Anzaldúa terms the practices and resistances of “tam[ing] a wild tongue,” my goal has been to highlight various things at once: to agree with Anzaldúa’s insistence on the centrality of *nepantilism* as a radicalized, minoritized and pluritopical linguistic project; and to explore *nepantilism* as the author’s attempt to merge multiple subaltern and vernacular “serpent tongues—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice” (81).

The souls of the outernational new *mestizas*, Anzaldúa argues, have “nothing to do with which country one lives in.” They are “neither eagle or serpent, but both” (85). It is precisely this going beyond the two-ness of national consciousness that Anzaldúa aspires to in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. If U.S. literary historian Gavin Jones is right that at the heart of nineteenth-century American literature was what he calls “the cult of the vernacular” with real “political and cultural functions,” (1999) Anzaldúa’s *autobiocrateoría* grounds her late-twentieth-century work in the differential vernacular serpent’s tongue, a catachrestic subalternist tongue which is capable of cracking, fracturing, and braiding the very authority of the master’s English-only tongue.

POSTCOLONIAL/MINORITIZED IDENTITIES IN ROY’S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

In concluding this essay, I want to stay with the themes of minoritized identities and the coloniality matrix of power I outlined in a broad trans-American mapping, and examine briefly how recent Indian writings of the memories of violence and identity may also help us think through the colonial difference in a more global framework. I do not approach this question as a specialist in the history of the English novel in India. My relation to a globalized matrix of power is clearly at an early stage of thinking. However, what I have found in my preliminary readings of some of the English novels in India is this: at

the center of many English novels in India are the histories and memories of violence and coloniality: how humans create absolutist others out of others. In this sense, narratives of the violence of colonialism in the English novel in India—Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, for example—are also narratological studies of the politics of identity and the colonial difference. What animates many South Asian novels of the memories of the violence of British coloniality, of the Partition of 1947, and beyond is the question of how to live with the coloniality of power difference. It is with this larger question that I turn to a pluritopical reading of identities in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

The complexities of South Asian identities and kinship are at the heart of Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*. Central to the novel is a vision of the continuity between knowing the world through experience and struggle and changing the central relations of the coloniality of power that sustain and make the world what it is. Additionally, subalternized characters in the novel, especially children, divorced women, and peasants defy bloodlines of kinship and caste to condemn the bloodsheds of their everyday world in Kerala. In so doing, they defy both the gods of dominance and of kinship to remember what they experienced and shared with the god of small things.

The radicalized sense of kinship sought in *The God of Small Things* involves an expanded standpoint positionality of oneself, in particular the ability to enlarge and enrich one's ability to experience.¹⁴ Thus envisaged, readers can better understand the political terms of the debate over the coloniality of power, caste, and the normative principles of kinship that inform and shape the narrative: the debate between Ammu, the twins, Rahel and Estha, on the one hand, and Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and the local police on the other, about the nature of so-called Untouchables in postcolonial Kerala. Did Velutha that "cheerful man without footprints . . . count?" (1997, 208), Ammu asks her children. Was it possible for Ammu, Rahel and Estha "bounded by the certain, separate knowledge" to have really "loved a man [Velutha] to death"? (307). "How could [Ammu] stand the smell? . . . They have a particular smell, these Paravans," (243) Baby Kochamma asks when she hears from the peasant Vallya Paapen what Ammu and Velutha had done. How we evaluate this debate over the coloniality of power, the love laws, and kinship depends upon how we interpret Rahel and Estha's remarkable transformation and defiance at the novel's end and how we see the relationship between their ability to experience and understand, their capacity to grieve for their mother Ammu and the peasant Velutha, and even perhaps how in their grieving they de-institute kinship.

Ammu's defiant response to her family's insistence in maintaining caste rules coherent in Keralite culture and society is to make the twins Rahel and Estha "promise" her that they will "always love each other"—especially in the face of what Roy refers to as the local "love laws" which pin down "who should be loved. And how. And how much" (168). With this straightforward speech act of promise, Ammu tampers throughout the novel with the stable heteronormative issues of family, bloodlines, and the bourgeois nation. The political vision of the subaltern which Roy's *The God of Small Things* seeks

primarily through the standpoint positionality of women, children, and peasants provides the context in which family members such as Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and the state police's support of caste and the coloniality of power can be challenged, made specific, and given meaning. These are the many idioms of dominance and subordination that Roy thematizes in the novel.

Ammu's capacity to know herself is directly related to her ability to feel with others and to tussle with the normative rules of kinship in Kerala: "It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day" (44). While Ammu disgraces her bourgeois family by divorcing from an alcoholic and abusive husband and returns home with her young twins to her parents' home in Ayemenem, she intensely feels "that there would be no more chances. There was only . . . a front verandah and a back verandah. A hot river and a pickle factory . . . And in the background, the constant, high, whining mewl of local disapproval" (42). It is Ammu's braided "unmixable mix[ed]" subaltern consciousness of "tenderness" and "rage" that drives her feelings toward her children, toward the Untouchable Velutha, and her disapproving mewling family and local culture and society. The urgent assurances that the peasant and card-carrying communist Velutha provides Ammu with profoundly change her and her children. Velutha, I sustain, makes possible a qualitative cognitive reorientation through his "beauty" and his labor and gifts for her, the children, and the family's business. "As she watched him she understood the quality of his beauty. How his labor had shaped him . . . Had left its stamp on him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace" (316). Interestingly, Velutha is important not only because he is the god of small things in Kerala but also because of the qualitative joy he produces in others with his magician-like "facility with his hands." Velutha (since the age of eleven), Roy emphasizes, "could make intricate toys—tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts. He would bring them for Ammu, holding them on his palm (as he had been taught) so she wouldn't have to touch him to take them (71–72).

Apart from his graceful carpentry and toy-making skills, Velutha "mended radios, clocks, water pumps. He looked after the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house" (72). Years later, Velutha's creative engineering skills are used at Ammu's family's business where he reassembled "bottle-sealing machines, maintained 'new cannery machines' and automatic fruit and vegetable slicers" (72). Indeed, one of the main reasons for seeing Velutha as a pivotal character in the political debate about "who counts" in Kerala and the world that *The God of Small Things* stages is that he reveals an enormous ability to create culture and society for everyone around him. He has an enormous imaginative and cognitive life of experiences that the coloniality of power in Kerala has denied him as a Paravan.

While there are several tragic deaths in *The God of Small Things*—the novel opens with the memories of the Mol family grieving around the

drowned Anglo-Indian Sophie Mol's coffin, and Ammu dies alone in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey at the viable and die-able age of thirty-one, the novel revolves around the brutal death of Velutha and the postcolonial nation's inability to count him as one of its own.¹⁵ After the forbidden sexual encounter between Ammu and Velutha is uncovered by the family, Baby Kochamma makes a complaint to the local police on false charges, and with the approval of the local Marxist party hegemony, Velutha is hunted down, beaten, and tortured to death at the police station: "his skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth. . . . Four of his ribs were splintered. . . . The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy" (294).

The God of Small Things circles around Velutha's, Sophie Mol's, and Ammu's deaths and the subsequent "social deaths"¹⁶ of Rahel and Estha. After the twins are forced by Baby Kochamma to "save" Ammu's sexual and caste reputation by condemning Velutha to false charges of kidnapping and child abuse, Roy shows how dominance (without hegemony) intrudes into the smallest spaces in Kerala. What Rahel and Estha experience, Roy writes, was "a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions. . . . of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly. . . . If [the police] hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any *kinship*, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature—had been severed long ago. [T]he posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria" (293, my emphasis).

While Rahel and Estha almost never recover from these deaths, Velutha's life and brutal death force them to tamper with the incoherencies of "kinship" and biology. Kinship is therefore not just a situation Rahel and Estha, Ammu and Velutha find themselves in, but a set of practices in postcolonial Kerala that are, as Roy suggests, controlled, performed, ritualized, and monopolized by those in power. Kinship trouble, we might say, is what Roy seeks to deinstitutionalize in *The God of Small Things*.

In political and psychoanalytic terms, *The God of Small Things* traces Estha and Rahel's struggles to "work through"¹⁷ the implications of their complex cathartic relations with postcolonial Kerala and the Ayemenem House. Estha never fully recovers. He stops talking altogether. Occupying as little space as possible in Kerala, he walks "along the banks of the river that smelled like shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans" (14). Rahel, too, returns from a self-imposed diaspora of sorts in the United States, where she suffers a bad marriage in Boston, divorces, and labors in a New York City ethnic restaurant. When she learns that Estha has returned to Ayemenem (they have been apart for twenty-five years, since December 1969), she comes home.

If for Rahel surviving the brutal Kerala past is partly predicated on her identity of diaspora, her attempt to form a coherent present also involves

a transgressive “acting out” with her twin brother Estha. The adult twins do so by making the love laws and its rules incoherent. Interestingly, Roy cannot directly represent Rahel and Estha’s sexual transgression. There was, after all, Roy explains “very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened” to Rahel and Estha. “Nothing that . . . would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings” (310). What is only narratable is that Estha and Rahel had held each other closely, long after making love, and that “that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (311).

Hideous grieving, intimate loving, working through—all these idioms are woven together in *The God of Small Things* through Rahel and Estha, suggesting the complexity involved of coming to know oneself and expanding one’s capacity to experience with others. The figures of Rahel and Estha may well compel a reading that tampers with the normative spheres of kinship and bloodlines that sustain and monopolize the society and the nation by exposing the socially contingent character of kinship.¹⁸

Roy ends her postcolonial novel by suggesting how much theoretical and historical knowledge is involved in Ammu, Estha, and Rahel’s learning to experience in Kerala. Their changing relationship with Velutha is based on an understanding of the brutality of caste, the love laws, and of the necessity and urgency to deinstitutionalize them. *The God of Small Things* is one of the most intriguing of postcolonial texts precisely because of the ways it indicates the extent to which subaltern identity and experience depends upon a minor (or small) historiography. We cannot claim a political identification, Roy suggests, until we have reconstituted our small collective identities and reexamine who counts in our cultures and societies.

In conclusion, I suggested that pluritopical border thinking is linked to a realist view of minoritized studies. I suggested further that the recent directions in critical minoritized studies—subaltern studies, the coloniality of power studies of the Americas, and postpositivist realist studies—could be taken as the most significant movements in U.S. postcolonial studies rather than as blueprints or master discourses to be imposed worldwide. Thus, border thinking in minoritized studies demands a different conceptualization of the self, of power, and of cultural citizenship.

I have also assumed a framework in which the minoritized designs in Anzaldúa’s and Roy’s narratives are linked to different stages of the modern world system: the coloniality of power from the Renaissance to the present in Anzaldúa’s narrative, and the love laws and the British imperial difference in Roy’s novel. Both minoritized designs in these Chicano/a and South Asian works argue for a border and diasporic thinking as a necessary epistemology upon which a diversalist knowledge can be articulated in a transmodernist world governed by global capitalism and new forms of coloniality. Finally, my essay is an argument for a critical cosmopolitanism from below; at the same time I see in Anzaldúa’s and Roy’s imaginative writings a plea for a new politics of diversity—one that conceives border and diasporic thinking as a critical project.

NOTES

1. On the world system of capitalism, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974) and Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1994).
2. Quijano argues that modern regimes of power are characterized by “coloniality,” which, as distinct from colonialism, is not simply defined by a formal redomination between empire and colony but primarily defined by global and national/cultural hierarchies (gendered, racialized, and sexualized) that are articulated differentially in time and space. See Quijano’s “Modernity, Identity, and Utopia in Latin America,” *Boundary 2* (1992): 140–155, and “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla* 1/3 (2000): 533–580. See also Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Augustín Lao-Montes’ superb “Introduction” in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City*, ed. Augustín Lao-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), and Ramón Grosfoguel’s *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
3. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Second Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).
4. See *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, ed. Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
5. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s “What is a Minor Literature?” *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
6. See my “Foreword” entitled “Migratory Locations: Subaltern Modernity and Inter-American Cultural Criticism” in Julio Ramos’ *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), “Looking Awry at 1898: Roosevelt, Montejo, Paredes, and Mariscal,” *American Literary History* 12/3 (Fall 2000): 386–406; “The Location of Américo Paredes’s Border Thinking,” *Nepantla* 1/1 (2000): 191–195; and “Las fronteras de Nuestra América: para volver a trazar el mapa de los Estudios Culturales Norteamericanos,” *Casa de las Américas* 204 (Julio-Septiembre, 1996): 3–19.
7. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).
8. See the following: Satya Mohanty’s *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula Moya and Michael R. Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) and Paula Moya’s *Learning from Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
9. Mohanty hypothesizes in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*: “instead of conceiving identities as self-evidently based on the authentic experiences of members of a cultural or social group . . . , or as all equally unreal to the extent that they lay any claim to the real experiences of real people because experience is a radically mystifying term . . . , we need to explore the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location. To do so, we need a cognitivist conception of experience . . . (1997, 216).
10. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Freedom and Power in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

11. For an understanding of how nineteenth-century America was obsessed about vernacular varieties of English, see Gavin Jones's *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
12. *Nepantla* is a word used by the Nahuatl-speaking people in the sixteenth-century to define their own sociocultural situation in the face of the Spanish conquest. According to Mignolo, the word *nepantla* was recorded by Diego Durán, a Dominican missionary who was writing an ethnographic history of the Nahuatl speakers from the Valley of Mexico. When Durán asked one of his informants what he thought about the difficult situation that had been created for them by the Spanish invasion, the informant is reported to have responded, "estamos nepantla," ("we are Nepantla"), that is, "we are in-between" (personal correspondence with the author, January 15, 1998). My emphasis on *nepantla* throughout the essay is meant to function as a reminder of the "colonial difference" implicit in U.S. Latino/a Studies, a translational and transnational memory that all cultural difference has to be seen in the context of power and of the relations of subalterity and domination.
13. Gloria Anzaldúa writes in "Border Arte: Nepantla, El lugar de la Frontera," that border art "depicts both the soul of the artist and the soul of the pueblo. It deals with who tells the stories and what stories and histories are told. I call this form of visual narrative *autobistorias*. This form goes beyond the traditional self-portrait or autobiography, in telling the writer/artist's personal story, it also includes the artist's cultural history" (113). In a conversation with me at the University of California, Santa Cruz, on October 17, 1990, Anzaldúa described the form of *Borderlands/La Frontera* with the neologism, *autobistoriateoría*.
14. Here, in this last section, it should become clear that I am in substantial agreement with Mohanty that our identities are not mere social constructions and hence "spurious," nor fixed unchanging essences in a brutalizing world. I agree, further, with Mohanty that "we have the capacity to examine our social identities, considering them in light of our best understanding of other social facts and our other social relationships" (1997, 201). My reading of Roy's *The God of Small Things* is indebted to what I take to be Mohanty's significant reformulation of experience and identity.
15. I read Roy's critique of the bourgeois nation in *The God of Small Things* as echoing Ranajit Guha's description of the South Asian Subaltern Group's project. In his essay, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" (1988), Guha defines the problematic of their project as "the study of [the] historical failure of the nation to come into its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it to a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of either the classic nineteenth-century type under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or a more modern type under the hegemony of workers and peasants, that is a 'new democracy'" (43).
16. I refer, of course, to the term Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death* gives to the status of being a living being radically deprived of all rights.
17. See Dominick LaCapra's "Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historians' Debate" (1992).
18. My reading of kinship and positionality has profited from Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND
 REALIST THEORY: SEEKING THE
 “TRUE-TRUE”

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And what, praise goodness, happens to the complexity, the variety, and density
 of the black experience while the knee is so bent?

George Kent

The epigraph to this chapter represents the central question for African American literary theory. How can we understand the depth and complexity of living and being black in the United States if its aesthetic modes are subjugated to that which is not in dialogue with the complexity of African American social and cultural reality? Is the answer to measure African American aesthetics solely by Eurocentric standards, or to view African American literature as a response to predetermined “American” literary standards? This essay offers an extended realist theoretical reply to Kent’s question, in part through consideration of Barbara Johnson’s reading of identity as unified and double consciousness as a fragmented state of self-division in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.¹

My reply proposes that *rememory*, the vehicle for dialogue with the past in relation to the present; *double consciousness*, the cultural and psychological reflection of blackness and its adventure with Western culture; and *wholeness*, the continual dialogic process of comprehending and engaging the world from the vantage point of agency, are essential theoretical concepts in African American literary theory.² Rememory and double consciousness hold the key to understanding the dynamics of wholeness represented as either painfully lacking and elusive, or as sought through dialectical engagement of binary tensions of double consciousness, self/other, inside/outside, individual/community. But to turn the key, so to speak, realist understandings of experience, identity, and objectivity are necessary.

Realist theory, as espoused in the recent works of Satya Mohanty, Paula Moya, and Michael Hames-García, I propose, is consonant with African American literary expression in that it provides the most pertinent rationale for theoretical concepts and insights long implicit in African American

literary expression. Realist theory allows for the epistemic dimensions of the African American experience over time to serve as a dialogical basis for an objective understanding of lived experience and its literary representation. It allows for social realities or experiences to be considered referents, and their “varying degrees of socially constructed truth or error and can serve as sources of objective knowledge or socially produced mystification” (Mohanty, “Epistemic Status” 38).

Realist theory describes identities not as unities or fixed essences, but rather, as Moya explains, as being “both real and constructed,” suggesting “how they can be politically and epistemically significant, on the one hand, and variable, nonessential, and radically historical, on the other” (12). Realist theory allows for a theory-mediated objectivity from which identity is constructed. Unlike postmodernists who “rightly conclude that there is no such thing as context-transcendent, subject-independent, and theoretically unmediated knowledge, [and therefore] conclude that there can be no such thing as objective knowledge,” postpositivists “stake out a less absolutist and more theoretically productive position.” Objective knowledge “can be built on an analysis of the different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias or interest” distinguishing, as Mohanty explains, the limiting or counterproductive from the epistemically productive and useful. Truth claims then are possible for realists, for they admit the possibility of error and revisability (13–14).

African American literature presents a huge, multifaceted conundrum for critics: how to develop a theory or theories of African American literature in the context of the complex realities of African American life over time and within the hegemony of Western criticism and theory. This puzzle has been present in African American literary expression and criticism from their beginnings in the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it problematizes in particular double consciousness and rememory. It is impossible to discuss and develop understandings of African American aesthetics consistent with their value and significance within an *unacknowledged* context of the hegemony of Eurocentric criticism and theory, because in that unacknowledged hegemonic context, the African American self is always *other* and therefore, perceived ultimately as lacking in agency.

In regard to engaging, and perhaps solving this conundrum, realist theory justifies the explication of the dimensions, contexts, and specificity of African American experience, allowing for a theory or theories to emerge. The self, the other, the world, and the text as part of experience are complex in acknowledged and unacknowledged reflections of and groundings in self, family, and community, as well as American and Western European, African American, and African-based values and ways of being. Explication comes about from dialogical engagement of self and other, self and the world, the reader and the text.

Dialogic interaction and communication does not require synthesis, where dialectic does. I suggest that dialogue consists of an ongoing, integrated dialectic *and* dialogic communication that defines humanity. From this dialogue, this communication, evolves identity. For Bakhtin, “*To be is to communicate.*” A major characteristic of dialogue, according to Bakhtin, is

unfinalizability. This unfinalizability is not quite the same as what we have invoked as indeterminacy in our postmodern era, which has come to reduce the possibility of antecedent causes to a dismissal of the significance of history.³ Rather, unfinalizability indicates the ongoing characteristic of dialogue and its essential role in all social and psychological entities that are processual in nature. Resolution may result from theory-mediated objective knowledge, but over time and through other dialogical engagements (including distinguishing error from constructed truth), irresolution and contradiction may also result.

Communication continues to engage resolution, irresolution, and contradiction through the engagement of dialogue. Such a conceptualization of engaging social reality and binaries advances the reconsideration of the past, of work already done, and more importantly, provides a conceptual framework for identifying the theory implicit in African American literary expression. The agentive self dialogically (I am using the term inclusive of the dialectic, which I explain in the next section) engages the world (through rememory), theorizes experience (characterized, but not solely, for the African American by a Du Boisian double-consciousness), and generates while dialogically engaging knowledge, ideas, and concepts, as well as socially constructed truths, error, and obstacles to full humanization (Freire 91), read wholeness through agency.

Engaging double consciousness dialogically (inclusive of the dialectic) assumes and allows a working through of difference, with dialectic resolution arrived at through dialogue based on the exchanges and encounters of communication. Through this process—which is itself wholeness and which simultaneously has as its generative product wholeness—rememory and double consciousness can bring about both resolution and an ongoing, agentive recognition and engagement of tensions resulting from experience and irresolution.

REMEMORY AS THEORETICAL CONCEPT

Rememory as a literary concept in African American literature usually is seen as exploring collective and individual consciousness in a present in relation to a past and to the history of slavery as a pivotal part of the nation's history.⁴ I propose defining rememory in its literary theoretical context as the dialogic examination of experience and identity (in scholarship, in everyday life struggles with self and others, in teaching, in narrative, in artistic representations). Rememory as dialogic is then tantamount to theorizing about reality, separating the legitimate from the illegitimate toward the end of a theory-mediated objectivity. In this way, the aspects and dynamics of identity are illuminated, making possible resolution or active engagement of binary conflict.⁵ This objectivity is contingent in the philosophical sense and thus, contextualized. It is objective knowledge that is as accurate and reliable as possible because it involves, as Caroline S. Hau explains, a "theory-dependent objectivity . . . based on our complex and growing understanding of the various causes of distortion and mystification" (159–160). She continues, "The realist account foregrounds the question of error and mystification and

highlights the potential contribution of our understanding of error to the revision and reinterpretation of knowledge” (160). Regarding lives, history, culture, socioeconomic experiences, and artistic creations, rememory engages, analyzes, compares, discards, moderates and modulates experience as lived and as represented. Achieving “the closest approximation of the truth”⁶—or theory-mediated objective knowledge—for example, both for racialized Americans *and* for non-racialized Americans who, to various degrees enjoy rights and privileges not permitted to racialized Americans, demands the process of rememory on national, local, regional, group, individual levels so that folkways, legal ways, and policy reflect the fruits of the struggle for honest rememory.

Rememory is not the only process leading to objectivity, but it pervades African American fiction in which either the reader, the characters, or both struggle for resolution or understanding of pain or confusion that is experienced and meted out individually but that is also resonant with group experience and historical social, cultural, economic, and political realities that permeate the present. The resolution is in the form of powerful objective knowledge, arrived at by examining error and socially constructed truth, helping us understand and work through the complexities of human life.

Realist theory allows for the process of rememory to help define an African American literary theory that reflects sociocultural experience and illuminates texts in relation to other texts and in relation to the social, political, cultural, and economic experiences out of which aesthetics emerge. The objectivity achieved from the raw material of experience “is profoundly theory dependent and thus postpositivist. It is based on our developing an understanding of the various causes of distortion and mystification. . . . Since error in this view is opposed not to certainty but rather to objectivity as a theory-dependent, socially realizable goal, the possibility of error does not sanction skepticism about the possibility of knowledge” (Mohanty 215). The process of rememory in scholarship and theory demand this kind of contextualized objectivity; an understanding and engagement of identity as simultaneously categorical, constructed, and multiple; and an acceptance of the validity of experience and a perception of experience as informative—as correct, mistaken, clear, distorted—as interconnected and complex, as complicated.

Realist theory provides a conceptual framework that admits the epistemic status of cultural identity and experience, the mechanisms that turn the key to rememory. In regard to African American literature, this framework is utilized within the context of African American sensibility. That sensibility, which informs identity, consists of the multiple and varied ways African Americans presently and over time sense and apprehend reality, their characteristic emotional, psychic, and intellectual response to existence.⁷

Objectivity gleaned from epistemic theorizing about cultural identity and experience informs rememory that taps the African American sensibility that is simultaneously Western and black, with black having the connotation of experience based on racialization, American slavery, and racism, as well as both the denial and assertion of African diasporic connections.

James Cone interprets African American religion as “wrought out of the experience of the people who encounter the divine in the midst of historical realities” and argues that the spirituals and the blues are manifestations of that encounter (29). This divine encounter with historical reality also describes the consequences of African American sensibility as it continually encounters historical reality (understood multiply) not only through everyday life’s struggles and triumphs, joys and sorrows, but also through the physical and spiritual oppressive hegemony that extends from slavery through freedom and racism—to Jim Crow segregation through integration and assimilation, and to the vexed positioning of the African American in American democracy and American politics and culture as other. The conundrum in African American literary theory, therefore, emerges from the sociopolitical and cultural positioning of the African American in lived as well as literary experience. Rememory, then, allows for literary constructs to reveal the products of and obstacles to an objectivity arrived at by investigating and exploring dialogically the distinctions between, for example, science and nonscience and the binary of facts and values, as well as providing a vehicle for objective knowledge as an analysis of the subjective, the social, and the political toward the end not of certainty but of a theory-dependent, socially realizable goal.⁸

Through dialogue, rememory is engaged and double consciousness mediated, yielding epistemic knowledge from identity that is multiple (see Hames-García). As a dialogic strategy, rememory investigates the binaries of the general and the particular, the past and present, the present and the projected future; it analyzes interconnections, contradictions, overlaps, and intersections that become apparent when historical and folk narratives, literature, music, politics, economics, visual arts, and theory and life events are read next to one another.

Truth, according to Bakhtin “is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between* people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.”⁹ This dialogic truth or objectivity that both results from and informs rememory is astutely described in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* when Marie-Sophie recalls her father’s recounting of the history of the blacks in Martinique:

In what I tell you, there’s the almost-true, the sometimes-true, and the half-true. That’s what telling a life is like, braiding all of that like one plait with the Indies currant’s hair to make a hut. And the true-true comes out of that braid. And Sophie, you can’t be scared of lying if you want to know everything (122).¹⁰

THE DIALOGICS OF DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND WHOLENESS AS THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

“You can’t be scared of lying if you want to know everything” can serve as the guiding maxim for encountering and mediating double consciousness.

One has to take risks in order to get to the true-true—that is the objective truth as it is experienced, felt, represented, and as it affects you and others. The dialogic strategy of rememory allows for critique of the binary of double consciousness and makes wholeness—or comprehending and engaging the world from the vantage of agency—possible.

Rememory shapes *The Souls of Black Folk* as Du Bois draws on song, poetry, historical narrative, lyrical narrative, and nonfiction to “sketch, ‘in vague, uncertain outline,’ the spiritual world in which ‘ten thousand thousand’ black Americans live” (Rampersad xi). The profound reflection it took for Du Bois, as Jessie Fauset put it, “to voice the intricacies of the blind maze of thought and action along which the modern, educated colored man or woman struggles” (Rampersad ix) mirrors the demands of rememory, that is not only learning about the past, but engaging it affectively and cognitively in relation to self and the present, contextualizing the self individually and communally simultaneously. The individual and communal contextualization of the African American self, one can arguably speculate, led to Du Bois’s formulation of African American double consciousness.¹¹

The distinction and relationship between dialectics and dialogics, discussed earlier, is an important one and is reflected in how one reaches the “true-true.” We frequently use dialogic and dialectic interchangeably. However, I think that despite the fact that Du Bois may have been inspired by the Hegelian dialectic, he does something quite different with it, something that is more akin to the Bakhtinian dialogic, in that the very structure of *The Souls of Black Folk* and the often-quoted description of double-consciousness demand a dialogic engagement with the slave past, Reconstruction, and the present of the text, on the one hand, and a dialogic interaction between the African or Negro and the American on the other, so that African Americans can be both (Du Bois 8–9). Being both is, of course, a huge act of resistance to the cultural imperative of assimilation. Dialogue encompasses both a dialectic reckoning with binaries and a dialogic reckoning with binaries, contradictions, and conflicts, through dialogue, the context in which dialectics and dialogics occur. For the African American, reckoning with double-consciousness means encountering the binary conflicts and all they represent of Negro and American, Africa and America and engaging them. The cultural imperative of assimilation privileges and enforces (through cultural norms, stereotypes, etc.) the dialectical engagement; communication or being, in the Bakhtinian sense, involves encounter with others, the other, and the world and all it holds in a dialogical, unfinalizable sense, where identity is spawned in the processes of theorizing experience. This is the communication and negotiation between Negro and American and between African and American that is implicit in Du Bois’s formulation of African American double-consciousness and that results in interrogating assimilation, the outcome of the dialectical engagement, as it encounters conflicts and contradictions in experience, historical understanding, and self and other.

I am making a crucial point here, for interpreting double-consciousness solely dialectically leads to forced synthesis or unreconciled and conflicting

binaries with no hope for resolution. Difference becomes reified and multiplied; fragmentation and self-division becomes a norm. Instead, the multiplicity of identity allows a process that generatively engages unreconciled opposites between the individual and the community, humankind and the environment, that is both human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. In this way, identity is epistemic, yielding theory-mediated knowledge. While Du Bois uses the word “merge” as a goal of reconciliation of double-consciousness, which is generally interpreted as a fusion into a oneness, he actually demonstrates that he means not solely a dialectical synthesis, but also dialogical interaction that may or may not yield synthesis at some points and that may produce more ideas, new obstructions, new possibilities.

Du Bois’s own words indicate that the merger that he envisions of the “two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” into “a better and truer self,” is a dialogic process and has a dialogic goal. The double-consciousness demands cultural dialogue between Africa and America as they teach each other; it demands everyday dialogue between the Negro and the American, figuratively and literally. It demands co-worker status “in the kingdom of culture” where Du Bois knows very well, the standards for human life and achievement are set: “In this merging he [the Negro] wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message to the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American . . . to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture” (9).

What he parses is a dialogic expressed within the problematic of the dichotomous, dialectic color-line that struggles over time to express itself as a dialogic (jazz, literary, and visual expression, black English), and that even in post-civil rights, postcolonial, multicultural, global times struggles with boundaries informed by the color-line. As I have noted elsewhere, “Du Bois signals the borderlands when he calls for a consciousness based on a merger that he well knows and demonstrates is fraught with ethnocentrism, racism, and sexism. And he signals and lives the dogged battle of self-assertion and agency in the face of the dehumanizing ‘other’ ” (Butler, “African American Studies” 150). This is why Fauset writes to Du Bois, “It hurt you to write that book didn’t it? The man of fine sensibilities has to suffer exquisitely, just because his feeling is so fine” (Rampersad ix).

The oppositions and contradictions of the conundrum lie in the nexus of what George Kent called “Blackness and the adventure of Western culture.”¹² Invoking the Latin connotation of the word, this nexus indeed *binds* blackness and Western culture together physically and spiritually, making merger/dialogue difficult, painful, and often impossible, given cultural, social, political, and economic power imbalances. The dialectic bonds therefore form both the central problem of double consciousness that hinders merger as well as the generative possibilities that advance dialogue.¹³ The

dynamic bonding of cultural, social, and political syncretisms, transformations, and transmogrifications constitutes the experience of blackness upon which rests the epistemic status of black cultural identity. African American agency lies in the complexities of those so racialized who simultaneously challenge, accept, reshape and divert physically and spiritually, the accumulated effects of oppression in its more and less extreme manifestations over time. The trope of Blackness as a matrix of experiences manifests itself in distinct yet connected ways in Africa and her diaspora and corresponds to Mohantyan identities as the matrix results from theory-dependent epistemic knowledge (*Literary Theory* 202–203, 213–214).

This matrix of experience that generates ideas, values, concepts, and hopes as well as obstacles that impede full humanization (Freire 91), results from, creates, comprehends, and evolves agentive identity through dialogue. The result is wholeness, continual dialogic engagement of binaries, the process of identity engaging experience, the ongoing reconciliation of self and other toward greater understanding and knowledge. This wholeness is not unitary or originary. Rather the trope of wholeness engages the multiplicities of experience and identity and the dialogics of rememory. It is characteristic of most African American literature and is explored most explicitly in works by Gloria Naylor, Paule Marshall, and Toni Cade Bambara. The discussion of Barbara Johnson's influential 1986 article on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, will make more explicit the theoretical concept of the trope of wholeness in African American literature.

DELINEATING THE CONUNDRUM IN AFRICAN AMERICAN THEORY: THE GHOST CHASING THE MACHINE

Maintaining binaries between theory and the sociopolitical, between theory and practice, allows only for a struggle for domination of one literary theory over the other, dialectic rather than dialogic conceptualizations of rememory, double-consciousness, and wholeness, and the distortion or negation of agency. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, three literary discussions took place that both demonstrate the conundrum of African American theory and move toward the largely ignored challenge Toni Morrison states in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken": "[T]he development of a theory of literature that truly accommodates Afro-American literature: one that is based on its culture, its history, and the artistic strategies the works employ to negotiate the world it inhabits" (377). The three discussions took place in the nexus of blackness and Western culture and reveal the complexity of responding to Morrison's challenge: Joyce Joyce's 1986 essay "The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism" and Houston Baker's and Henry Louis Gates's responses. Joyce questions Baker's and Gates's concern for the political and proposes an Afrocentric approach to theory. Baker and Gates counter by attacking her for reading "race" as more than a pure signifier or arbitrary function of language" and for her "alleged unexamined resistance to theory," ignoring some of her more salient questions about theory and context (McDowell 565).¹⁴

Sandra Adell, in her 1994 study, *Double Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature*, examines the “relation between the black literary tradition” and what she terms “the ensemble of Western literature and philosophy,” a relationship that has spawned fierce conflicts among black critics as to their “presumed opposition between the social and political and the aesthetic beyond the great Afrocentric/Eurocentric divide” (3–4).¹⁵ In sum, she concludes that “the critic must take into consideration the extent to which the discourse he employs helps to determine that position and, as in this case, may in fact remove him from the very tradition he is trying to establish” (129). She ably demonstrates this in her final chapter, “The Crisis in Black American Literary Criticism and the Postmodern Cures of Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.” remarking that it is both “risky business” and maybe, even in her own analysis “hasn’t the pot once again called the kettle black? Perhaps. Or perhaps what is being demonstrated is how difficult it is for any critical or theoretical enterprise to support its claim against eurocentrism [*sic*]. Perhaps what is being suggested is that for a literary tradition that has been established by dint of exclusion, eurocentrism is the only ground” (130). Deborah McDowell traces the conundrum in relation to black feminist theory in a brilliant essay that examines the whiteness of feminism and the masculinity of black theory.

Her isolation of “the salient terms of black feminist criticism and post-structuralist theory for [a] historical narrative” of black feminist criticism is revealing:

- (1) While black feminist criticism was asserting the significance of black women’s experience, poststructuralism was dismantling the authority of experience.
- (2) While black feminist criticism was calling for non-hostile interpretations of black women’s writings, poststructuralism was calling interpretation into question.
- (3) While black feminist criticism required that these interpretations be grounded in historical context, deconstruction denied history any authoritative value or truth claims and read context as just another text.
- (4) While the black woman as author was central to black feminist writers’ efforts to construct a canon of new as well as unknown black women writers, poststructuralism had already rendered such efforts naïve by asking, post-Foucault, “What *Is* an Author?” (1969) and trumpeting post-Barthes, “The Death of the Author” (1968).
- (5) While black feminist critics and African Americanists more generally were involved in recuperating a canon of writers and outlining the features of a literary tradition, a critical vocabulary emerged to question the very idea of canons and traditions. (567)

To ignore or relegate to secondary, tertiary, or even lower status in theory the African American experience, amounts to the ghost chasing the machine, playing on Morrison’s invocation of the ghost: African American theory chasing about for ways that African American literary expression *fits* Western theory.

Considering Johnson's 1986 article, "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (*TEWWG*) demonstrates the need for respecting and utilizing theories and theoretical concepts that emerge from the African American experience and literature itself, placing them in dialogue with Eurocentric concepts.¹⁶ Barbara Johnson argues that Janie Crawford ultimately finds not wholeness (defined as totalizing not dialogic), but self-division; not self-identity (defined as unitary not multiple), but self-difference. Johnson details Roman Jakobson's description of the opposition between metaphor and metonymy, the ambiguity of that opposition (it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other), and the necessity for the four poles of the opposition—similarity, contiguity, semantic connection, and syntactic connection—to be operative for fully functional speech. Without the full operation of the four poles in speech, aphasia results, which she defines simply as "speech dysfunction." In regard to narrative, Johnson reasons, "to privilege metaphor over metonymy is thus to run the risk of producing an increasingly aphasic critical discourse," and "authentic voice" must be redefined in terms of the full operation of the four poles of metaphor and metonymy. Therefore, Janie's achievement of self-difference demonstrates the need to redefine "authentic voice" (238–239).

She is emphatic that although Hurston was "acutely conscious of, and superbly skilled in, the seductiveness and complexity of metaphor as privileged trope and trope of privilege" (235), and demonstrates this awareness in the narrative, the ending of *TEWWG* ends in metaphoric totalization¹⁷:

Janie's acquisition of power of voice thus grows not out of her identity but out of her division into inside and outside. Knowing how not to mix them is knowing that articulate language requires the copresence [*sic*] of two distinct poles, not their collapse into oneness. . . . The search for wholeness, oneness, universality, and totalization can nevertheless never be put to rest. However rich, healthy, or lucid fragmentation and division may be, narrative seems to have trouble resting content with it, as though a story could not recognize its own end as anything other than a moment of totalization—even when what is totalized is loss. The ending of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is no exception: . . . The horizon, with all of life caught in its meshes, is here pulled into the self as a gesture of total recuperation and peace. It is as though self-division could be healed over at last, but only at the cost of a radical loss of the other. (239)

Informing Johnson's analysis are several assumptions on which she elaborates in her discussion of "unification and simplification" which ends the article (239–244). The first assumption is that Janie's situation as Jody's wife and the mayor's wife is devoid of human understanding and compassion and so damaging and destructive of her agency that it results in a speech dysfunction akin to aphasia. Aphasia, rather than a speech dysfunction, is more completely characterized by the inability to understand or produce speech because of brain damage.¹⁸ The implication here is that Janie is psychologically ill and is cured by recognition of her divided self, a division Janie engages and the narrative reflects in "a kind of chiasmus, or crossover"

in which the inner (a metaphorically grounded metonymy) is externalized, and the outer is internalized (a metonymically grounded metaphor) (238). To support this assumption, Johnson works with two passages from the novel to illustrate the relation that is set up between an inner image and outward, domestic space.¹⁹ She explains how she sees the first paragraph she chooses:

The parlor, bedroom, store full of shelves already exist in the narrative space of the novel: they are figures drawn metonymically from the familiar contiguous surroundings. Each of these paragraphs recounts a little narrative of, and within, its own figurative terms. In the first, the inner spirit of the marriage moves outward from the bedroom to the parlor, cutting itself off from its proper place and replacing itself with an image of virginity, the antithesis of marriage. . . . The entire paragraph is an externalization of Janie's feelings onto the outer surroundings in the form of a narrative of movement from private to public space. While the whole of the figure relates metaphorically, analogically, to the marital situation it is designed to express, it reveals the marriage space to be metonymical, a movement through a series of contiguous rooms. It is a narrative not of union but of separation centered on an image not of conjugality but of virginity. (238)

The second passage on which Johnson focuses reveals, she posits, "an internalization of the outer: Janie's inner self resembles a store. The material for this metaphor is drawn from the narrative world of contiguity." After Jody slaps her, "something fell off the shelf inside her." Janie's image of Jody is broken and revealed as "not a metaphor but only a metonymy" of her dream. It is at this point, according to Johnson, that the chiasmus occurs. Janie's outside enters her inside "which resembles a store," the image of Joe shatters, and her inside moves outside and the outer is internalized because in both instances, "The quotient of the operation is the revelation of a false or discordant image. Janie's image, as Virgin Mary, acquires a new intactness, while Joe's lies shattered on the floor" (238). Thus is Johnson's explanation of the reversal of power relations that occurs in the novel and Janie's acquisition of an authentic voice through self-difference.

The second assumption is that double-consciousness is an unreconcilable, binary double-voiced expression of African American, as the "veil" that divides the black American in two" with clearly no other option other than binary self-division and self-difference. She does gesture to another option at the end of the article when she refers to Gates's discussion of *TEWWG* in *The Signifying Monkey*, noting that "[T]he self-division culminates in the frequent use of free indirect discourse, in which, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., points out, the inside-outside boundaries between narrator and character, between standard and individual, are both transgressed and preserved, making it impossible to identify and totalize either the subject or the nature of discourse" (244). Nonetheless, all prior to this gesture negates any "transgression" and supports the acute preservation of the boundaries in regard to both narrative and character.²⁰

The third assumption in her analysis of *TEWWG* is that the relation between black men and black women is a divided one, with the female voice divided in multiple ways. Discussing the last chapter of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Johnson argues the authentic woman's voice "must incorporate and articulate division and self-difference" and that "Auerbach's urge to unify and simplify is an urge to resubsume female difference under the category of the universal, which has always been unavowedly male. The random, the trivial, and the marginal will simply be added to the list of things all men have in common." By analogy, she assumes a similar double-voicedness in Afro-American literature, quoting Gates's "reformulation" of W. E. B. Du Bois's famous image of the "veil that divides the black American in two" (239). Hence, she reads the ending of *TEWWG* as a failed effort to reconcile this divide (which should stand as divided as a prerequisite for authentic voice) because the ending suggests that "self-division could be healed over at last, but only at the cost of a radical loss of the other" (239).

A realist reading—one that engages identity, the referent of experience and social reality that is in the text itself, and objective truth, through a close textual reading revealing Hurston's sketching of the dialectical and dialogical struggle between African Americans and the dominant culture—reads the ending quite differently. In fact, it reads the novel quite differently. While I do not have the space here to do a lengthy close reading of the novel, I believe I can make my case quite well by showing the connection to the larger narrative of the passages Johnson selected to make her argument for fragmentation or self-division as characteristic of an authentic self.

Interpreting identity as unified and indivisible, Johnson ignores Janie's progression from living her grandmother's image of womanhood to her own. Janie's progress is gained through theoretically mediated knowledge as she marries and leaves Logan Killicks, lives with Jody and refuses to be suppressed, and realizes after "something fell off the shelf inside her" that

she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (112–113)

Janie's inside and outside refer not only to her relationships with Jody and the store, but also to Jody's and the community's expectations of her as the mayor's wife. Within the Joe Starks story there are numerous indications that Janie's outside was also one of conforming to social convention. Interestingly, Johnson omits the sentences preceding "She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them," giving the impression that rather than protecting herself from Jody and exploring her own thoughts and emotions, she somehow is splitting her interior and exterior lives. It becomes immediately clear in the lines that follow, however, that "the outside" refers to appearances, demands, and visions of others: "She

bathed and put on a fresh dress and head kerchief and went on to the store before Jody had time to send for her. That was a bow to the outside of things" (113). Nonetheless, we see, at Jody's death, despite his recriminations, that she understood that Joe Starks sought his voice as mayor, store-owner, and authority to raise his status in a town that before him had no mayor, no store, no street lamp, and certainly no Mrs. Mayor Starks. At another point in direct discourse we learn that "She didn't read books so she didn't know that she was the world and the heavens boiled down to a drop. Man attempting to climb to painless heights from his dung hill" (119). Class issues, sexist social conventions that defined manhood in a world aside from whites but still defined by the effects of white racism ("Us talks about de white man keepin' us down! Shucks! He don't have tuh. Us keeps our own selves down." [63]), shaped their relationship with Jody's domineering outside, his hidden emotional inside remaining divided. He had no dialogue, and thus no communication, with Janie, nor with the community. He had placed himself on a pedestal.

When Jody dies, Hurston gives us another of the several passages in which Janie distinguishes between real knowledge and social mystification, theorizing from experience. In these passages, she often reflects upon who she is and puts that in dialogue with the outside—the expectations. Gradually, we see her becoming ready to recognize the possibility for communication and love with Tea Cake, a partner who accepts her dialogue among the inside, the outside, and all the possibilities of the horizon. Her self, her identity, is not monologic, but rather is evolving and multilayered: Janie the granddaughter, the young wife, the mayor's wife, the person with the shining jewel inside. Hurston, however, has Janie build up to this point, at several times verbalizing to Jody her angst, but always being cut off. The "good-natured humor at the expense of women" (121) combined with Janie feeling "Plenty of life beneath the surface . . . kept beaten down by the wheels," put Janie in a rut. Nonetheless, "[S]he learned how to talk some and how to leave some" (118). This is how Janie dealt with the harsh dialectic of man v. woman; yet, throughout, her sympathy for Jody allows her to have glimpses of why he behaved the way he did—through one-sided communication and always thwarting the possibility of a dialogic relationship.

Janie reveals, however, that compassion and understanding for Jody tempers her anger and frustration: "Dis sittin' in de rulin' chair is been hard on Jody," she muttered out loud. She was full of pity for the first time in years. Jody had been hard on her and others but life had mishandled him too. Poor Joe! Maybe if she had known some other way to try, she might have made his face different, but what that other way could be, she had no idea" (134). Johnson views that "the reduction of discourse to oneness, identity—in Janie's case, the reduction of woman to mayor's wife—has as its *necessary consequence* aphasia, silence, the loss of the ability to speak" (238; my emphasis). "She pressed her teeth together and learned to hush" (111). The use of aphasia, the inability to understand or produce speech as a result of brain damage is distorting, for it reduces Janie's agentive response to the

oppression of Jody's sexism (with the metaphorical implication of Black women's response to sexism) to an illness.

And Johnson's equating Janie's identity to Jody's and the town's one-dimensional perception of Janie is reductive, ignoring her analysis of the oppressive situation and the action she *determined* to take. Fighting back with her tongue, the narrator tells us, did her no good: "It just made Joe do more. He wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he had it" (111).

Janie determines not to mix the inside with the outside, and at the beginning of the next chapter following the passage Johnson isolates, the narrator explains that Janie was thinking through just what inside and outside meant, that "she had learned how to talk some and leave some"; that she had "thought of a country road at sun-up and considered flight"; that she had decided to lie to herself and say that Jody meant something to her, because if not, "life won't be nothin' but uh store and uh house" (118). Choice and social demystification rather than aphasia prompt Janie's behavior.

Other passages leading up to Jody's death indicate that inside and outside is the way Janie characterizes her dialogic engagement with her circumstances. When something "fell off the shelf" after Jody slaps her for ruining dinner, Janie begins actively to demystify her social situation, separating constructed truth from error. The narrator tells us that dinner was a refuge to Jody from other things. By not considering the immediate circumstances that initiate Janie's response, Johnson does not consider the full context and misses the fact that Hurston has Janie not simply stand and think, but does so for "unmeasured time." After that not only does she grow, in the articulation of her situation and in her resistance as Johnson points out, but she also expresses an understanding of and empathy toward Jody. When he realizes he is ill, Jody begins to berate her for being young; however, "she saw that he was hurting inside so she let it pass without talking" (120).

Janie is on the way to achieving wholeness, a constitution of the whole self "by the mutual interaction and relation of its parts to one another" (Hames-García 103) that comes from recognizing the multiplicity of one's self and theorizing from experience. Janie had been allowed only to be the mayor's wife. We see her doing "what she never did before, that is, thrust[ing] herself into the conversation" in the store (Hurston 116).²¹ She is on her way to becoming a wife, lover, partner in work and play—all the things she can be with Tea Cake.

Rather than arriving at the authentic voice of self-difference or self-division, Janie has arrived at self-identity through theory-mediated objective knowledge in the engagement of rememory and the dialogue of double-consciousness. This self-identity is multiple and dynamic as reflected in her relationship with Tea Cake. Throughout the novel she is in dialogue through the strategy of rememory with her grandmother's insistence that the horizon is limited:

It was all according to the way you see things. Some people could look at a mud-puddle and see an ocean with ships. But granny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps. Here Nanny had taken the best thing God ever made, the horizon—for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you—and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she

could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love. . . . she had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. . . . Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine. (138–139)

Through her marriages to Logan Killicks and Joe Starks, through her interactions with the community that defines itself among other things through story, education or lack thereof, male/female dynamics, sexism, and through the white world that looms beyond, and then through telling her story to Pheoby, Janie, through the strategy of rememory, continues the dialogue between denial of possibility (her grandmother's interpretation of the horizon), and the affirmation of possibility, the shine of the jewel inside herself.

To interpret Janie's inside and outside only in relation to Joe is not only limiting but is also not consistent with the text. Janie has now, through experience, come to recognize the validity of her *own* feelings and desires, despite the impositions of others. She can now effect a dialogue, and not simply live in the dialectic, between the outside (how people see her, what they expect of her) and the inside (what she wants, how she wants to shine). In realizing that, she anticipates finding a man who will appreciate and enter that dialogue with her—which is what characterizes her relationship with Tea Cake.

With Jody and her grandmother, her “own mind,” as she says to Jody as he lay dying, “had to be squeezed and crowded out to make room for yours in me” (133). Rather than through a divided self, Janie expels the divisions in her between the outside (Jody, grandmother, community expectations) and inside (her “own mind”), divisions that demand synthesis through force (Jody's with physical and verbal force; the grandmother through a love that demanded reduction of her self to her grandmother's vision of life). Janie's change in voice is not one of moving from literal speechlessness to speech, but rather from consciously chosen silence to self-assertion.

Janie does not dialectically engage her inside and outside, but rather dialogically engages the dialectic. Before meeting Tea Cake, at Jody's death, she consciously engages the inside with the outside, preparing herself to embrace the horizon, through Tea Cake.

She thought back and forth about what had happened in the making of a voice out of a man. *Then thought about herself.* Years ago, she had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass. It had been a long time since she had remembered. Perhaps she'd better look. She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. . . . then she starched and ironed her face, forming it into just what people wanted to see, and opened up the window and cried, “Come heah people! Jody is dead. Mah husband is gone from me” (135, my emphasis).

Her reckoning with Jody moves her inside and outside to another level of dialogue, so that when she meets Tea Cake, who treats her as an equal, who is one with whom she can communicate, play checkers, dance, pick beans

with, have a give and take, she is secure in the multiple levels of her identity—Janie Starks, older woman, friend to Phoeby, owner of the store, Joe Starks's widow, her grandmother's grandchild. She is ready to embrace the horizon. As she tells Pheoby, "Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine" (171).

Janie's description of her Grandma's philosophy is an expression of double-consciousness solely dialectically engaged, with the synthesis being a fusion—approximating assimilation—that puts her on the stool on the porch like "de white madam."

She was borned in slavery time when folks, dat is black folks, didn't sit down anytime dey felt lak it. So sittin' on porches lak de white madam looked lak uh mighty fine thing tuhher. Dat's what she wanted for me—don't keer whut it cost. Git up on uh high chair and sit dere. She didn't have time tuh think whut tu do after you got up on de stool us do nothin'. De object was tuh git dere. So Ah got up on de high stool lak she told me, but Pheoby, Ah don nearly languished tu death up dere. Ah felt like to world wuz cryin' extry and Ah ain't read de common news yet (172).

She got off the stool through rememory and dialogic engagement of the inside and outside, of double-consciousness, and dialogue able to see and seek the outside, and seek the expansive horizon, with a dialogical wholeness that emanates from her vantage of agency. Perhaps Tea Cake's death reflects Hurston's loss of the man she loved in her doomed love affair on which she modelled the novel, or perhaps his death signals Janie's being able to live productively and with agency without a man who recognizes her value—or perhaps its both. For Janie, her relationship with Tea Cake revealed the possibilities of the horizon, so in his memory, was peace, and "She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net"—the net bringing in life's possibilities.

Johnson privileges a poststructuralist reading of *TEWWG*, and in so doing fails to incorporate in her interpretation the dialogical struggles at the core of the novel. Thus, she attenuates and severely undermines Janie's agency and the human interactions with their limitations and possibilities. The novel, as well as the African American theoretical concepts of double-consciousness and rememory in the novel and that emerge from African American sociopolitical and historical realities suggest a postpositivist realist reading of experience, identity, and objective truth. The reading of experience involves the reckoning with life through dialogue that is both dialectic and dialogic that yields objective fallibilistic knowledge out of which identity is multiply constructed, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Through this dialogue, Janie achieves movement from narrow self-identity as her grandmother's granddaughter and mayor's wife, to her multiple self-identity as Tea Cake's widow who embraces possibility. From the vantage of agency, Janie is whole.

While figurative language representative of Janie's inside and outside operates in the context of metaphoric and metonymic opposition and connection, it operates also in the context of experience writ both small and large. Similarly, the metaphors and metonyms must be considered not simply

within the dimension of the quotations Johnson chooses to read, but simultaneously in the context of the larger narrative in order to reach the closest approximation of accuracy. Depending so heavily on dialectical linguistic analysis endangers this accuracy, allowing Johnson in effect to dismiss the larger narrative, except in a brief reference to the connection between the use of free indirect discourse and inside-outside boundaries that Gates identified.

I am suggesting in this reading of *TEWWG* that rather than a dialectical reading of double-consciousness, a dialogical reading—that is, one that acknowledges both the dialectic and dialogic processes to comprise communication—is how we theorize identity from experience and gain agency. Resolution, Janie's leaving Logan and beginning anew with Jody, spawns conflict and contradiction in her life with Jody. Resolution comes again with Janie's reconciliation of self when she tells Jody Starks that his demand for submission "squeezed and crowded out" her mind, and generates tension, contradiction, and conflict as she now negotiates her inside and outside with Tea Cake, leading to resolution in her ability to embrace the expanding horizon. The unfinalizability of the dialogue (not a dialectic indeterminacy), which is both dialectic and dialogic, is the nature of the expanding horizon, the nature of possibility, the process of wholeness.

REALIST THEORY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN "BEING"

George Kent argues that perhaps the best articulations of the human need, ability, and inability to achieve "amid the dislocations and disintegrations of the modern world, true functional being" are in the works of James Baldwin.

For Baldwin, the Western concept of reality, with its naïve rationalism, its ignoring of unrational forces that abound within and without man, its reductivist activities wherein it ignores the uniqueness of the individual and sees reality in terms of its simplifications and categorizations is simply impoverishing. He who follows it fails to get into his awareness the richness and complexity of experience—he fails to be. And freedom is unattainable, since paradoxically, freedom is discovery and recognition of limitations, one's own and that of one's society, to deny complexity is to paralyze the ability to get at such knowledge—it is to strangle freedom (140).

The consonance of Kent's description and contextualization of Baldwin's work with Mohanty's proposal about theorizing cultural identity is striking. Kent's description emphasizes the engagement with "the richness and complexity of experience" as necessary for "true, functional being" or identity that presupposes agency, that is "experience as the source of both real knowledge and social mystification . . . open to analysis on the basis of empirical information about our social situation and a theoretical account of our current social and political arrangements" (Mohanty 216). In the broadest sense, "the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location" is Baldwin's recognition of both the limitations and impositions of the Western concept of reality and of

the “universe of forces” which [rage (W)ithin the breast of each individual] with which he must become acquainted, often through the help of an initiated person, in order to direct them for the positive growth of himself and others.” To achieve this, Kent demonstrates, in his discussion of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, is what Baldwin meant by identity—making sense of the world through “theoretical constructions that enable us [to] read the world in specific ways” (Mohanty 216).

Kent, echoing Baldwin’s clarity and precision, is less polite than Mohanty when he says, in what is analogous to “a cognitivist conception of both legitimate and illegitimate experience enabling” the perception of the value of the epistemic knowledge of experience, that to achieve identity, “one must not be hindered by the detritus of society and one must learn to know detritus when one sees it” (140). One must through dialogue engage the inside and the outside of self. The theoretical analogy is obvious: we must engage what is useful and consonant with the African American sensibility, discard what is not, and identify what experience and sensibility offer as theory.

The definition of freedom that Kent provides is from Baldwin himself, as Kent acknowledges in a footnote. It contributes to realist theory a precisely stated connection to freedom. But this freedom is one that grows from an intimate interaction of the individual with the community. It is the recognition of the limitations of self and society, and the awareness and engagement of complexity in order to get at the epistemic knowledge that brings freedom/wholeness/agency. This conceptualization of freedom is not consonant with that of freedom in America, defined and enacted as unbounded individual liberty. It is the freedom that Janie experiences once she begins to be, to communicate, to enter the dialogue of experience.

The struggle to understand the significance of a past that births one’s family and community, that is used to discriminate against African Americans, a past that is embodied in the sign of race and the struggle to extricate the repression of the self in the Christian imposition within the divine encounter with historical reality—all this forms the spiral-like group and individual historical consciousness of African Americans that shapes group and individual experience in the quest for freedom. Janie’s grandmother’s message to her that her goal should be to sit on the porch like Miss Anne; the black community’s indictment of Janie because she shot Tea Cake, an indictment born from envy and their disgust at her, as they saw it, abusing her good fortune in her relationship with Tea Cake; as well as the white jury’s acquittal of Janie, reflect the historical consciousness that Janie engaged in order to embrace the horizon, to be a free being.

CONCLUSION

Realist theory reveals the paradigms of identity and experience and truth-seeking at the core of the current theoretical conundrum. Because it takes seriously experience that ranges from the prosaic to historicity, it allows for the revelation of the worldview present in “folk” and contemporary urban

African American experiences and expression. It validates the process of rememory that demands not only learning about the past, but engaging it affectively and cognitively in relation to the self and the present, as Janie did, once she theorized her insideness and outsideness. Because it recognizes the possibility of a contextualized objectivity, realist theory allows for wholeness to be a dialogical process informed by and reinforcing agency.

As a theoretical and social construction, identities “are ways of making sense of our experiences.” To seek the “true-true” is to have a “cognitive conception of experience, . . . that will allow for both legitimate and illegitimate experience, enabling us to see experience as source of both real knowledge and social mystification,” both of which are “open to analysis on the basis of empirical information about our social situation and a theoretical account of our current social and political arrangements” (Mohanty, “Epistemic Status” 43). The process of seeking the true-true is one that is akin to Bakhtinian dialogue except in one important respect. While Bakhtin eschews dialectics, I suggest that the process is both dialectic and dialogic, with an unfinalizability that finds resolution that generates conflict and contradiction to resolution and that repeats the process. The word,²² voicing the self amid and in dialogue with other—communication—is the essence of being, of agency, of freedom. Rememory, and the dialogics of double-consciousness and wholeness are pivotal theoretical concepts and strategies in African American literary expression, which can keep us, unlike the Invisible Man, above ground.

NOTES

1. In Paula Moya’s introduction to *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), she describes postpositivist realism as providing “an interpretive approach that resolves the dilemmas that attend absolutist conceptions of identity, objectivity, and knowledge, going beyond both dogmatic certainty and unyielding skepticism. Moreover, the postpositivist realist theory of identity . . . can account for the causal influence that categories of identity like race, sex, and socioeconomic status have on the formation of identity, even as it accounts for how identities can adapt to changing historical circumstances” (16–17).
2. In fact, rememory, double consciousness, and wholeness would be key concepts in U.S. American literary theory—and not only African American literary theory—if we were to take seriously Toni Morrison’s challenge in “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” to examine and reinterpret the American canon, “for the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure—the meaning of so much American literature” (377). Indeed, rememory, double consciousness, and wholeness have key roles to play in both mainstream and American racialized ethnic literatures as we probe the significance of the dynamics of assimilation and racism, of self and other, of U.S. American identity, ethnic and racial identity, and intersectionality and the multiplicity of identity.
3. I am drawing here on Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson’s discussion of Bakhtinian dialogics in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 15–62. I find Bakhtin’s conceptualizations of dialogue and history particularly consonant with the realist concept of identity and experience.

4. I am building here on Toni Morrison's concept of rememory that she develops in the novel *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1987).
5. For the extended discussion of this point, and a realist discussion of the novel, *Beloved*, see Satya Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity," *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 29–66.
6. Hau uses the phrase "the closest approximation of the truth" to define accuracy in her essay "On Representing Others: Intellectuals, Pedagogy, and the Uses of Error," in Moya and Hames-García, pp. 133–170. In the conclusion to *Transforming the Curriculum: Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies*, ed. Johnella E. Butler and John C. Walter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), we use the phrase "the closest approximation of truth" in the context of the goal of a generative pedagogy, one based on dialogics, as implied and developed in the essays in that volume (326).
7. This definition of sensibility is an adaptation of George Kent's definition in *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972) of the sensibility of the writer: "By the term *sensibility*, I mean the writer's means of sensing, apprehending; his characteristic emotional, psychic, and intellectual response to existence" (17).
8. Here I am paraphrasing Mohanty's discussions of positivist objectivity (*Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 18, 215).
9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 110.
10. Patrick Chamoisean, *Texaco*, trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Pantheon, 1997).
11. See Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) and Johnella Butler, "African American Studies and the 'Warring Ideals': The Color Line Meets the Borderlands," in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals confront the African American Experience*, ed. Manning Marable (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 141–152.
12. Kent's *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture*, a collection of essays now 30 years old, anticipates, identifies, and responds presciently to the complexities and contradictions of African American literary expression and theory. In "Richard Wright: Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture," Kent focuses on "three sources of Wright's power: his double-consciousness, his personal tension, and his dramatic articulation of black and white culture" (76). His work, while not definitive, is not passé and offers very useful insights today to discussions about the postmodern directions of African American theory. Most useful is his identifying so early on and so precisely the cultural and psychic struggle of the African American with a culture he/she simultaneously embraces and expresses, rejects and expresses alienation toward, and constantly seeks to reconcile its oppressive elements with his/her sensibility. The awareness of and ability to critique this struggle through rememory is an integral part of agency and is what I term "wholeness."
13. And merger is not fusion. Fusion, more akin to assimilation, denotes blending to form a single entity, a joining. It does not suggest the generation of something else that is multiple and complex—hence generative. Freire, in *Pedagogy of the*

- Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), describes generative themes as the results of dialogue, “the concrete representation of the ideas, values, concepts, and hopes as well as the obstacles which impede man’s full humanization” (91).
14. McDowell’s superb essay, “Black Feminist Thinking” offers a perceptive discussion of this exchange which she categorizes as “wasteful” despite her illumination of its usefulness in understanding the dimensions of opposition to Black feminist theory. While some of Gates’s and Baker’s responses she sees as warranted, “they were less so in dismissing as naïve and anachronistic her questions about ‘the historical interrelationship between literature, class, values, and the literary canon’ ” (565). See Deborah McDowell, *“The Changing Same”: Black Women’s Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
 15. Sandra Adell, *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
 16. Barbara Johnson, “Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” *Textual Analysis: Some Readers Reading*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: MLA, 1986), pp. 232–44. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978).
 17. While metaphor is related to similarity and metonymy to contiguity, metaphor is often closer to reality, yet without closeness to metonymy (hence, the difficulty of distinguishing them), it is prone to totalization, unification, which Johnson relates to privilege and dominance through universalization.
 18. Aphasia, according to the *Cambridge Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), is a “disorder of language caused by brain damage; also (especially in the U.K.) known as dysphasia. The patient appears intellectually and physically capable of using language (e.g., there is movement of the tongue and lips and no deafness) but suffers from a variety of linguistic disabilities. There are many different types; one important distinction is between Broca’s aphasia (a disorder of production, characterized by word-finding difficulties and telegraphic speech) and Wernicke’s aphasia (a disorder of comprehension, characterized by fluent but largely nonsensical speech). The study of the disorder is known as aphasiology” (74–75).
 19. Johnson selects the following passage, “concentrating on the two paragraphs that begin respectively “So gradually . . .” and “Janie stood where he left her . . .” In these two paragraphs Hurston plays a number of interesting variations on the inside-outside opposition:

“Dat’s cause you need tellin’,” he rejoined hotly. “It would be pitiful if Ah didn’t. Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don’t think none theirselves.”

“Ah knows uh few things, and womenfolks thinks sometimes too!”

“Aw naw they don’t. They just think they’s thinkin’. When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don’t understand one.”

Times and scenes like that put Janie to thinking about the inside state of her marriage. Time came when she fought back with her tongue as best she could, but it didn’t do her any good. It just made Joe do more. He wanted her submission and he’d keep on fighting until he felt he had it.

So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned how to hush. The spirit of her marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never went back inside the bedroom again. So she put something in there to represent the spirit like a Virgin Mary in a church. The bed was

no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to Play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired.

She wasn't petal-open anymore with him. She was twenty-four and seven years married when she knew. She found that out one day when he slapped her face in the kitchen. It happened over one of those dinners that chasten all women sometimes. They plan and they fix and they do, and then some kitchen-dwelling fiend slips a scrochy, soggy, tasteless mess into their pots and pans. Janie was a good cook, and Joe had looked forward to his dinner as a refuge from other things. So when the bread didn't rise and the fish wasn't quite done at the bone, and the rice was scorched, he slapped Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains before he stalked on back to the store.

Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further. She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (110–113)

20. Interestingly, in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Gates references Johnson's article and speaks of Janie reaching synthesis—as if their discussions are in agreement (204). There is more to say about Johnson's analysis; however, space does not permit. For example, Johnson says Janie's image is *as* the Virgin Mary (238), when in fact, Janie “put something in there (the bedroom) to represent the spirit *like* a Virgin Mary image in a church” (my emphasis). Then, there are the many passages in which either the narrator or Janie recognizes social causes connected to Jody's behavior, and the fact that in hushing she began to see her relationship with Jody clearer. Failure to deal with the text itself, to go beyond the boundaries of poststructuralism and explore experience either in the text or otherwise, results in a limited and distorting analysis.
21. Michael Hames-García, “Who Are Our Own People? Challenges for a Theory of Social Identity,” in Moya and Hames-García, pp. 102–129.
22. Morrison invokes the West African concept of the word, *nommo*, in the penultimate paragraph in “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”: “I hope you understand that . . . how I practice language is a search for the deliberate posture of vulnerability to those aspects of Afro-American culture that can inform and position my work. I sometimes know when the work works, when *nommo* has effectively summoned, by reading and listening to those who have entered the text” (397). For a discussion of the dialogics of *nommo*, the word as distinguished from *logos*, see Butler, “*Mumbo Jumbo*, Theory, and the Aesthetics of Wholeness,” in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, eds. Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 175–193, esp. pp. 180–81.

ON FORMING DIALOGIC - ANALYTIC
COLLABORATIONS: CURATING SPACES
WITHIN/BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND
COMMUNITIES*

John Kuo Wei Tchen

This essay theorizes New York University A/P/A Studies' efforts to develop a participatory process of critical knowledge-building with undergraduate students. In my larger project, I seek to work toward a practical approach to cultivate the embodied knowledges of people to name and critique their omnipresent realities. Building on the work of feminist standpoint and intersectional theories, I seek to forge a productive link between post-positivist realism and dialogic theory. By so doing, I believe mutually beneficial, democratic collaborations can build the knowledges by, for, and of marginalized communities and peoples.¹

In 1996, I was hired to start a new "ethnic" studies program and institute at New York University. As a historian I have focused on the past juxtaposed against contemporary experiences of Asian and Pacific New Yorkers operating within both the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. As a teacher I have engaged students to locate themselves experientially, socially, historically, and politically. And as a cultural activist I've been interested in how we as faculty and students can collaborate with the renaissance of community-building and creative work exploding in New York City today.

In this process, I've come to realize the pedagogic strategy of fostering processes of democratic participatory dialogue and critical analysis. Both need to be enacted, since neither without the other is sufficient. Yet, creating a trusted free space for marginalized students to voice their experiences requires a very different classroom political dynamic than that which typically displays a professor's exposition of their researched analysis. In theory, the lecture and the discussion section might embody both practices in the same class. However, the lecture dominates in the great majority of such courses. On the other hand, undergraduate discussion sessions and seminars committed to encouraging students who don't normally talk in class often

reduces the role of the professor to discussion facilitator and shortchanges students eager to gain more perspective and probe more deeply.

This essay explores our efforts to build a curriculum that attempts both wrapped within a fourteen-week semester.² I explore two questions:

1. How can students learn to self-critically think about their relationship to inequity, knowledge-making, and power?
2. How can we articulate pedagogies in which undergraduate Asian and non-Asian U.S. students can democratically engage with marginalized and emergent communities in NYC?

RELATIVISM AND REALISM

In the late 1970s, relativist and pluralistic critiques of Eurocentric claims of reality opened up important spaces for new thinking and practices. The Combahee River Collective's 1977 "A Black Feminist Statement" and subsequent international critiques by Latina, Asian, and other feminists of color pushed U.S. and European white, middle-class feminists to recognize that their claims to universal sisterhood were severely bounded. Consequently, feminist standpoint theory came to recognize multiple types of oppression and their intersectional complexities. These epistemologies of "realism" revealed unexamined dominant hierarchic norms.

Yet, in relativism's practical and theoretical forms, the claim of any particular position to redress inequity and injustice could also be easily blunted. Any analysis of the genealogy of power could be lost. The celebration of difference could easily become ahistorical. Filipino/a Americans, for example, can be celebrated as part of New York City's "gorgeous mosaic" decontextualizing ongoing issues of U.S. colonialism and neocolonialism in the Philippines (Shaw and Francia, 2002). Recognizing the constructedness of all points of view could too easily unmoor critiques of power, rendering any political stance on human rights a matter of point of view and making coalition-building near impossible.

These two problematics, the prying open of dominant normative spaces to create places for fresh dialogue and the increased difficulty of taking on a moral-analytic stance, has framed the challenges of teaching in the 1990s.

Just to complicate matters, the U.S. state's reaction to 9/11 has imposed a renewed spirit of vigilante Americanism (Tchen, 2004). The rapidly shifting 1990s demographics of the U.S. toward majority "minority" cities have been juxtaposed with the re-racialization of perceptions and policies of national danger and internal security. The efforts, therefore, to rethink minority studies within the context of this post-9/11 moment is especially urgent. The project of participatory democracy, so easily traded in the name of patriotism and security, becomes a central project translocally and transnationally.

It is for this set of circumstances that I welcome the work of Satya Mohanty and colleagues' efforts to theorize what they call "postpositivist realism" (which I'll hereafter refer to as PPR). Their foundational explorations of the reliability of experience, from an antiracist and postcolonialist vantage, are central to a

productive intervention on realist-relativist debates. I'll focus on Mohanty's foundational essay "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity" which manages to be both highly theoretical and grounded in "real" life. Mohanty's layered reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, for example, is at once a valuable literary analysis within the most insular confines of the academy and more significantly an outward reading linking to progressive intellectual discourses. His strongest argument references the extra-literary—of an "Alice" coming to awareness about her anger. He writes of these examples with a surety and clarity—a nuanced contrast to cloistered intellectuals. His exposition on experience and the emotions are particularly strong and insightful (S. Mohanty, *Reclaiming*, 35–55). I believe these qualities emerge from the synergies of Satya and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's mutual experiences and discussions elaborating the cognitivist dimensions of feminist standpoint epistemology.³

From my vantage, if experience and personal location in matrices of temporal and spatial geographies can be mapped as reliable knowledge-building starting points, a theory and practice of participatory student-centered pedagogy can be further developed. Hence, I wish to focus on Satya Mohanty's central point that "'personal experience' is socially and 'theoretically' constructed, and it is precisely in this mediated way that it yields knowledge." Borrowing Naomi Scheman's analysis of a woman's anger as not being an isolated individual problem, Mohanty emphasizes Alice's recognition of her emotion within the context of a consciousness-raising group. It is through the trusted and socially shared expression of her guilt and depression that "Alice is urged to recognize her anger as legitimate and justifiable in this situation" (Mohanty, *Reclaiming*, 34). This "new theoretical picture" emerges from reinterpreting her older feelings. Mohanty emphasizes that "Alice's anger is not merely a personal or private thing inside, as it were, her own 'innermost' self; rather, her anger is the theoretical prism through which she views her world and herself in it correctly. Hers is then an objective assessment of her situation, and in this strong sense, her anger is rational and justified" (36–7). With the primary objective of critiquing a rigidly positionless postmodernist attitude, Mohanty emphasizes a less-relativist stance: "there are better or worse social and political theories, and we can seek less distorted and more objective knowledge of social phenomena by creating the conditions of the production of better knowledge" (41). Furthermore, those in the position of having been marginalized by the powerful gain an insight about the workings of authority: "epistemic privilege."⁴

If this is a fair assessment, then I will ask a series of questions critical to the elaboration and application of the PPR project yet undertheorized. (These comments serve as improvisational plays on the central claim of PPR. In this sense my comments are efforts to engage in preliminary discussions that might lead to more systematic and sustained theory.) Certainly PPR theory is not to be enacted only in and from the U.S. academy from a traditional "banking" approach to knowledge production, circulation, and reception. Clusters of hermeneutic questions immediately bubble to the surface.

How might PPR be articulated as a pedagogic practice?⁵ If students and the public have some but not all abilities to become critical interpreters of

their own experience, then what role do intellectuals and technical specialists play? Where will these exchanges take place other than the classroom? Who will curate these spaces? Will experience be expressed differently, sometimes in seemingly opposite terms, from one situational context to another? Is the arrival at an objective content most important, as implied by the emphasis of *Reclaiming Identity*, or is the spatial process also important? Perhaps most important, who adjudicates what is most objective?

Post- and anticolonialist questions must also be asked: How can cultural-historical differences be fully appreciated before a judgment of objectivity is rendered? What of how identity is presented differently in one linguistic-historical culture to another? What of the emphasis some cultures place on the nonverbal, the oral/aural, and the performative? Does a cognitivist approach also recognize emotive performative silences or does it tend to privilege dramatically expressive written (and published) forms to make it more “real?” Who decides? Who sets the agenda? How can a minority (or unarticulated) reality be protected?

Clearly, it is important to engage in the particularities of any given life experience to embody these questions, much in the way we would with our students. In this spirit: What are the possibilities for Alice if she were, for the sake of new demographic realities, Latina, Caribbean, or Asian? Alice could be the Anglicized public name for Alicia Rodriguez from Brooklyn attending SUNY as an undergraduate or Ai Ling Lau from Hong Kong working in a Chinese immigrant-owned garment shop in Queens. How might these additional Alice stories of a “consciousness raising” process to emote anger compare and contrast with the first Alice? How might their culturally specific trust and trusted places be different and/or overlap? Might fundamental questions about the constructed nature of selfhood and otherness that they cannot formally explain be so different that long-term, cross-cultural brokering is necessary to reach any accurate mutual understanding? What institutions might facilitate such long-term, or short-term processes? Even if both were in colleges, are we capable of dealing with such issues in or out of the classroom? If not, how have or how might community-based organizations help? Even in this age of globalized U.S. multimedia, how might individuality be constituted differently, especially in relation to how propertied selfhood is omnipresent and taken for granted in U.S. and western/north European political cultures? How might Alicia and Ai Ling switch codes from one context to the next? How might they create new cultural expressions?

These questions can be grouped into three areas that need more theoretical development.

- A. A theory linking institutional/organizational context and standpoint, especially regarding what happens when a person regularly crossing two or more sites, such as academia and “real” life.
- B. A theory of engagement and interaction, especially related to method, pedagogy, and judgment, but also of the phenomenological encounter (emotions are a starting point, but what of embodiment, performance, etc.?).
- C. A theory of transcultural zones within any or across sites, especially related to processes of negotiation, translation, transvaluation, etc.

These three areas also constitute nodes of engagement with other theorist/practitioners—a means for PPR theory to enter into substantive discussions with ongoing work in other interpretive communities. How does this literary-centered theory relate to the field-oriented work of oral historians, ethnographers, and field researchers? How might it relate to public performers, such as spoken word artists, DJs, or curators? Furthermore, all three areas, to my mind, represent aspects of dialogic methodology and ethics. Having spent some time developing dialogic practices in community museums and now university curricula, I find post-positivist realist theory useful. I believe the converse is also true. Dialogic theory can be useful to postpositivist realism. It is on this point that I'll now focus my comments.

CURATING DIALOGIC PLACES

PPR essays by Mohanty and in *Reclaiming* tend, as I read it, to focus on demonstrating analytic superiority in reading texts and reading lives. Yet, implicit and not sufficiently acknowledged are the preconditions surrounding such analytic activity. Consciousness-raising groups along with the pedagogic practices therein need to be explicitly foregrounded in and of themselves. In addition, analytic dialogic processes need to be understood as a double moment. First in relation to the roles they play in liberating individuals from the alienation experienced in isolation, misunderstood as simply having personal “problems.” And second as providing a supportive cognitive-spatial milieu within which a more integrative objective and subjective understanding of the social, historical, existential, and political dimensions of one's identity formation can be explored. Such interactive, organizational forms not only provide a trusted place for individual and group self-discovery and agency, but also act as a foundational participatory democratic political ethics. It must be emphasized that a physical and psychic place is critical for this activity.⁶

I must also point out my work on the dialogue-driven organizing of collaborative meaning making stems from my personal political experiences. I've been around conservative cultural nationalists, armchair Marxists, left movement politics, community politics, museum politics, and academic politics (of which the latter is by far the worst). My position, which can be loosely described as a radical daoist social democrat, is confounded by my authority as the professor, both of knowledge and of grades. I cultivate my own analysis, yet also want my students to arrive at their own analyses. As a consequence, my pedagogy is explicitly anti-authoritarian, always demanding of self-reflexivity, and insistent on constant conversations with emergent counter-normative sensibilities and knowledges. Indeed, the Marxist left's overarching emphasis on dialectical analysis has tended to privilege an intellectual vanguard preaching to the unenlightened “false consciousness” of the masses. Dialogical theories and practices can provide forums within which dialectical analysis can become more democratic and participatory. And the dialogical organizational space can produce important new critical perspectives, knowledge, and analysis. I'll briefly trace some of the genealogies of this

position as a means to suggest how postpositivist realists can further engage with other theorist-practitioners in order to cultivate a more critical hermeneutic perspective.

During the heat of my Midwest college anti-Vietnam war politics when various white, left, self-proclaimed vanguard men were declaring the correct position on this and that, I found Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's writings an important corrective. Teaching, Freire clarified, needs to be thought of as a two-way process—those being taught also teach the teacher. Teachers invited into a community could play a critical role in facilitating the naming of the students' realities in terms that could engage with the powers that be. This approach emphasizes the pedagogic process as a means of analytic capacity building so the student-citizens can organize against their oppression. They engage in levels of awareness-building as part and parcel to gaining various literacies. A primary virtue of this approach is its reworking of authority-experts into expert-collaborators. Building the capacity of students to find language to describe and act on their own realities in more effective ways can also be understood as cultivating a better realist account of their experience. (Freire's Brazilian colleague Clodomir de Moraes has extended this approach to social organization in workplaces.)⁷ A more objective understanding of power may be the end product, but the participatory means of getting there, how people name and interpret their own realities with their friends and colleagues, is also an end of the process-oriented means.

In this context, dialogic theory is useful. Fundamentally, the relationship between the self and the other is one of mutual, interdependent dialogue. The self gains a sense of selfness when its sense of itself is leavened with the other's perception of it. Lacan developed a dialogic theory based on the mother-newborn relationship. The baby discovers herself from her own developing senses and also from her mother's constant bodily and communicative feedback (Lacan, 2–6). The ideas of literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin elaborate the social mechanisms of dialogic relationships. Michael Holquist's emphasis on Bakhtin's dialogic explorations is particularly fruitful to explore here. For example, Bakhtin's dialogism articulates a set of foundational analytic tools to understand “how something is put together”—a text's architectonics (Holquist, 149). Among the most important of these tools are the chronotype and the relationship between the self and other. In contrast to Kant's transcendental categories of cognition, Bakhtin insisted that space and time formulate “the most immediate reality.” The specific situatedness of perception that any given author may consummate as a cultural expression, such as a novel or a performance, should be of central analytic concern. This artifact, therefore, always needs to be asked questions about position: “consummated by whom for whom?” “consummated where?” and “consummated when?” (Holquist, 150–51). The situatedness of nineteenth-century French novels, for example, opened up new spaces such as the parlor, and café society.

Furthermore, “as experienced by subjects, time and space are always tied up with judgments about whether a particular time or a particular place is good or bad, in all the infinite shadings those terms can comprehend.” Such

constant, everyday acts of judgment necessarily implicate relations between the self and an other (Holquist, 111–12, 151–52). Ai Ling's and Alicia's senses of their own reality can be either cultivated with an enriched environment of analytical feedback about their social, historical, cultural, and political positions and intersections or limited by systemic illiteracies. Anthropologist Dennis Tedlock argues that dialogue not only constituted the production of Bakhtin's novel but is fundamental to the human activity of storytelling, a much older and more pervasive form of cultural production (Tedlock and Mannheim, 285). In this sense all human communicative activity can be understood as implicitly dialogic. Everyone's chosen set of expressive repertoires, then, constitutes the basis for their identity-making and the standpoint from which others respond to them as well as the vantage from which their point of view formulates what they know (Taylor, 2003). Each person's particular culturally, historically, and personally defined dialogic circumstance is, therefore, important to understand.

Without a more explicit dialogic commitment, Satya Mohanty's use of Scheman's example can be misread as a turn toward a Eurocentric reading of Kantian universalistic claims. What specifically is universal about Kant's claims and what specific to his historical-cultural situation? Political freedom, Mohanty cites Kant, "follows from the inherent rights of reason, which recognizes no other judge but universal human reason itself. Here everybody has a vote, and as all improvements of which our state is capable must spring from these, such rights are sacred and must never be diminished." Mohanty then proceeds to link Kant to Habermas's bourgeois public sphere to sketch out the emergence of a critical space within Western cultures. Typically such European case studies are *de facto* assumed to be a template for any aspiring modern, democratic society.⁸ But is this the only trajectory for all peoples and all times? Clearly not, nor is this Mohanty's contention. Indeed, he seeks to open up Kant's ideas to more pluralist readings. Nonetheless, the specific historical circumstances that Kant qualifies "of which our state" needs to be pushed to accept the criticism in which "everyone has a vote" (Mohanty, *Literary* 2–3). Here Charkrabarty's postcolonial project of "provincializing Europe" is urgent (Charkrabarty, 2000).

In a parallel manner, Mohanty's cite of Scheman's rational anger emerging from a women's consciousness-raising group tends to be linear, ahistorical, and bounded by an Anglo-Euro-American field of references. The social space of dialogic process that enables reflexivity is insufficiently developed—leaving the door open for postcolonial critique and such misreadings. Scheman's depiction of white feminist consciousness-raising groups of the late sixties and seventies should also be theorized as a particular space that opens up at a particular time expressing certain relations between a Euro-American woman's emergent self against the norms of dominant white masculinities. A dialogic understanding of such experienced phenomenon as anger produced by a process of objective meaning-making provides, in my estimation, a fuller account of the social, cross cultural, and temporally specific context of a post positivist realist position. And without the reflexive

awareness of the dialogic context of this realist claim, the person believing she/he has a more objective insight than “another” risks making premature (and potentially authoritarian) judgments.

The work of Hans Herbert Kögler offers valuable suggestions for cognitivist dialogic methodologies, pedagogies, and ethics (Kögler, 1996, 2000). Paralleling Mohanty’s critique of positivism and postmodernism, Kögler finds a third way between Foucault’s emphasis on power and discourse and Gadamer’s emphasis on relativist self-understanding. He calls for a “critical hermeneutics” insisting on “the liberating, problematizing, innovative, and unpredictable potential of conversation capable of leading us to new insights and critical self-reflection through experiencing the other.” And he calls for being mindful of hegemonic power that constrains open discussion and “is capable of undermining the critical dimension of dialogue” (Kögler, *Power* 1). Dialogics, Kögler insists, is “a methodological imperative” that “pursues the goal of subjective self-distanciation so as to make possible greater self-realization” yet “it leaves to the subjects themselves the actual use of critique in terms of enhanced self-determination” (253–54). Kögler appears mainly to be addressing white students and mainly discusses the other as the minoritized person. Clearly the other also exists within any given self as theorized by the double consciousness of Du Bois. It should also be added that whiteness studies and queer studies offer theoretical means to explicitly examine the interdynamic of self and otherness and particularly hegemonic points of view for a range of normative and nonnormative self-identified students.

Here, the role of the theorist scholar is clear, politically and ethically. It is within this critical dialogic methodological commitment that I can fully endorse Linda Martín Alcoff’s critique of “strategic essentialism” as a “politically pernicious elitism and even vanguardism” which presumes “to divide ‘knowing’ theorists who deploy identity strategically and the ‘unknowing’ activists who continue to believe in identity” (Alcoff, 323; Kögler, *Power* 256). I should also add that it is traditional top-down, patriarchal pedagogy. From a dialogic point of view, Kögler states, “multicultural education advances cognitive capabilities that enable students to understand different cultural perspectives, to develop a reflexive understanding of themselves, and to represent structures shared by individuals in different experiential contexts” (Kögler, *New Arguments* 1).

Within dialogic pedagogy, there remains a valuable role for a lecturer with specialist knowledge, especially about naturalized structures of power. Yet, such practices as they exist now within the omnipresent U.S. version of the German research university generally operate within the “banking” approach and are invested ultimately in certain authoritarian (knowledgeable-ignorant, theorist-agent, professor-student) hierarchies. Even the best positioned of urban universities like NYU, not physically isolated by neo-medieval walls, reproduce the attitude and practice of a specialist’s aloofness from the life of the city around. Nonetheless, these institutions are not totalistic. On the ground, plenty of cracks are evident. Direct person-to-person dialogic spaces, in the classroom or conference or online, need explicit nurturing

within these corporate structures. In this sense, such initiatives also need curators of dialogic places constantly working to maximize the opportunities to foster a liberating spirit of curiosity about otherness and mutualist reflexivity. Freeing pedagogic spaces to voice and articulate one's position in the world, therefore, need to be curated. I use the museological term curator in a parallel dual sense. It's Latin root *curr* is apropos in this double moment—both as a safe space to care for alienation and isolation and as a place to solve a problem—to test out understandings and analysis (*OED*, 1262).

“A/P/A” IN NYC

In framing our intellectual approach at NYU we make three interrelated claims. First, it's important to unpack the spatial-geographic nomenclature we take for granted. Hence slashes between Asian / Pacific / American have us question how each have been constituted in historical and cross-cultural discourses. Second, the movement of people, things, and ideas between various parts of Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas through New York City offer important epistemic insights. And third, these insights can best be cultivated in dialogue with the individuals and communities who have been dealing with the legacy of power/knowledge formations of the metropolis and the nation.

The first claim insists on deconstructing received categories. The second claim insists on a chronotypic (present viewing the past) reframing. This third position embodies a coupling of research ethics and documentary objectivity. Dialogic knowledge production embodies a democratic commitment to an inclusive and resynthesized history of marginalized peoples. In addition, this approach expresses a foundational historical epistemological conviction. The meanings of past negotiations with power must be recovered as best possible, often only in document fragments and oral narrative traces, out of dialogic relations with those who have lived the experience.

For my course on “‘Chinatown’ and the American Imagination,” for example, the dialogic explorations between the present we take for granted and the undocumented past is a central problematic. Last fall, we examined the unrecognized legacy of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act on our NYC present.⁹ Hence, A/P/A, can best be understood as questioning and reconstructing how Asian and Pacific people, goods, and ideas have played a hitherto unacknowledged and significant role in the making of New York City, U.S., and American identities (Tchen, 1999). Each of the terms “Asian,” “Pacific,” and “American” bear the legacies of historical construction in negotiations with powerful interests. New York City, as a premiere constituting and constituted site of the nineteenth, the twentieth and now the twenty-first century world histories, is a rich, multilayered, and complex place to explore and analyze this neglected experience. This port city has become a place of patrician cosmopolitanism to be certain. But more important for my interests, this place is also one of intermingled port culture denizens engaged in experiencing two local cultures simultaneously—one

the imposed, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882–1965) and the other emergent of the local mixtures of peoples. This experience of “colonial difference” creates the conditions for what Walter Mignolo calls a critical “border thinking” in which subaltern knowledges emerge. “The colonial difference creates the conditions for dialogic situations in which a fractured enunciation is enacted from the subaltern perspective as a response to the hegemonic discourse and perspective” (Mignolo, ix–x).

A fundamental challenge in making the historical experiences of the excluded and marginalized manifest is extending the net of what historians have usually considered acceptable historical subject matter. When I first researched the history of Chinatown over two decades ago, not only was there scant historical work, there were no archives in the city’s major archival institutions. The few fragments that did exist were treated as curiosities. These systemic absences necessarily led us to a deeper critical analysis of systems of knowledge-making and the power embedded in extant (saved, valued, and made available) historical evidence. The New York Chinatown History Project (now the Museum of Chinese in the Americas) had to create its own documentary process and archives before we could even begin the usual process of gleaning through existing archives, including those underutilized sources supporting the “new” social history, to write our historical interpretations. For very conventional historians no “evidence” simply means no history is possible. For us, we had to open the range of what we would consider acceptable evidence and acceptable methodologies.

Beyond historical inquiry, the legacy of Chinese exclusion often lies dormant in descendants of those excluded. The story of Byron Yee is a good example. Yee, a stand-up comedian who grew up in Oklahoma as an all-American boy, tells of his discovering his father’s false immigration papers. He was the son of a “paper son.” This propelled him to more accurately understand his father’s history and his own positionality. His discovery was not simply archival, it was rediscovering the full meaning of his father’s accented English, his silences, his aspirations for Byron—in others words, the father’s repertoire of storytelling and nonverbal communication to the son. This process has unlocked Yee’s own creative work. His discovery of the relevance of his father’s sociohistorical context has enabled him to gain a critical understanding of his delimited American-ness and a vital connection with other Asian Americans. By so doing, he has found his own voice.¹⁰ Without such experiences becoming part of the public common sense of U.S. culture, Chinese Americans will continue to be perceived as alien and foreign.

The *frisson* of personal familiarity against active social ignorance is telling in and of itself. The omnipresence of the icon Chinatown in the U.S. urban imagination and yet its virtual absence from historical scrutiny and public understanding not only bears on PPR analysis but also warrants a critical hermeneutic understanding of how the history of New York City itself is enacted by the local/global history of particular power/knowledge formations.

Dominick LaCapra has been particularly mindful of the inherent dialogic nature of historical inquiry, posing a fruitful reflexivity between objectivity and subjectivity. “Empathy, dialogic exchange, and affective response” is foundational for fostering historical understanding. “Especially open to question,” LaCapra chides professional scholars, “is a strategy of objectification and sustained ironic distance allowing only for unargued subjective asides—a strategy that both induces a denial of transferenceal implication in the object of study and obviates the problem of the actual and desirable interactions between self and other, including the possibilities and limits of a discursive middle voice” (*LaCapra*, 37–9). Typically, U.S. professional historians have sought an objectivity that did not acknowledge their own subjective standpoint—a standpoint that often framed and skewed their perspective. LaCapra’s position potentially demystifies the everyday uses of historical “middle voice” insights by all people. The meaning-making activities we all engage in necessarily refer to past places and times. These chronotypic constructions are constantly combined and recombined, as so much social referential DNA, to give us some sense of “identity” in the here and now. In this context, what can be considered legitimate historical evidence needs to be understood as trans- and interdisciplinary. What are some typical fragments and silences? A particular construction of a textbook reference to “heathen” Chinese people. A telling omission from a diary. The lingering power of a Rogers and Hammerstein tune upon landing in Hawai’i. The casual comment of an “old timer.” The way a person’s body language changes when recounting a wonderful memory. All these fragments and traces need to be understood as potential phenomenological expressions of the past available for fresh interpretation within the present. As Donald Lowe has pointed out, perception (and therefore, by extension, an intellectual’s perceptive faculties) itself needs to be reflexively understood as an object of investigation (Lowe, 1982). Indeed, the document-archive orientation to historical reconstruction limits our ability to gain a more accurate understanding of everyday life. Diana Taylor productively points out the fuller performative resource of the repertoire. “Part of what performances studies allows us to do is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge. The repertoire, on a very practical level, expands the traditional archive used by academic departments in the humanities” (Taylor, 26). Alice, Alicia, and Ai Ling do not only speak a language of words!

This open analytic approach also insists on reestablishing spatial historical relationships beyond provincial bounds of New York City, the region, and the nation. By so doing we can also re-member historically crucial linkages with the Caribbean and the Americas of Atlantic world and the extension of that Anglo-North American worldview into the making of the Anglo-U.S. Pacific. People from various Asian and Pacific Islander heritages, henceforth, need to be understood as in movement between and within various cultural historical systems—always in the process of exchanging goods, desires, ideas, and practices. The “local” of New York City, therefore, literally embodies the

historical legacy of such global interactions in its built landscape, treasured belongings, stories, and systemic silences. It is within this historical and dialogical analytic frame, I believe, that Alice, Alicia, and Ai Ling can best locate themselves in the United States, the Americas, and the world.

What has this dialogic approach to historical inquiry focused on New York City meant? Our A/P/A Studies' curriculum attempts to empower students as interlocutors in recovering this historical legacy with communities these histories are about. Communication theorists would recognize this process as constructing cocultural theory (Orbe, 1998). As I write, I realize this approach involves a rather self-conscious three-dimensional triangulation process.

First, our core and elective courses insist that students locate their own positionality in the present and gain some sense of historical perspective. We as faculty and staff work with students to build their reflexive sense of their own personal-historical location by examining the historical and creative legacies of Asians in New York City and in the Americas. Their exploring and naming their own place demands that they generate themes important to their cognitive and emotive needs. It also means students must build on the experience and skills they bring to their themes. Many students, for example, focus on aspects of commercial youth culture such as music, fashion, the suburbs, and the like. Asian heritage students often bring their transnational insights about eyelid operations in Korea, Tommy Hilfiger relying on Hong Kong capital, conflicts over family obligation versus consuming youth-oriented commodities, ad infinitum. As faculty and staff, we work with the students' considerable strengths and unevennesses to build their skills and analytical abilities.

Second, we emphasize documenting and interpreting community formations. If students' inquiry were totally inward bound, it would lapse into a solipsistic psychologistic navel-gazing; however the object of our study is better manifesting, documenting, and interpreting Asians in New York City. By so doing, students' relationship to otherness is explored in at least three ways: as historically sedimented relationships which affect all who become "Americans" (Orientalism, suburbanization, Chinatown, etc. are all discussed as manifestations and constituting these dynamics); as necessary ways to learn about oneself and difference in the way Kögler discusses dialogic empathy; and as inner dialogues any person experiences with otherness of themselves. By examining the nonfictional and fictional stories of people who have struggled with dominant power/knowledges, students gain insights into how power structures have worked to exclude and marginalize. Such learning, if it ends here, however, tends to be passive, bookish, and abstract, leaving us only with a two-dimensional relationship. Instead, we seek to make this process of learning closer to an active knowledge-constituting or cognitive remapping process.

Third, we strive to make a modest intervention in the representation of what we study. We encourage our students to make their learning process more real by having them take on projects which involve working with an archive, or

experienced and articulate persons, or a creative work, co-producing an interpretation which can then be “published” as a multimedia work—essentially a John Dewey approach to learn by doing. These works, once made public, become new narratives and objects to analyze and critique. In this process, students can gain a sense of themselves as active interpreters of the sedimented past and its ongoing meanings in the present. This process also enables students to gain a clearer sense of how to critically locate themselves in a dialogic and analytic fashion. With a great deal of care taken in finding the community partnerships and faculty/staff taking on the ultimate responsibility, such co-productions add up to formulate a considerable teaching archive/repertoire embodying the strengths, and weaknesses, of student cognitive efforts. The best of the work helps to build a living archive of materials that will be put on the web and/or deposited in our virtual and physical NYU archives.

The student responsive approach we’ve taken to cultivating generative themes and the dialogue-driven approach to archives/repertoire-building has led us to focus on documenting the theories and practices of previous generations of youth. In effect, we’re creating archives that focus on how subaltern NYC youth of Asian and Pacific heritages have struggled with the various ways in which power/knowledge has delimited their lives. Some have struggled more explicitly and effectively than others, offering a very fruitful place for much exploratory comparative discussion about “choices” and limits. The various political, spiritual, creative, and performative options taken by the people they are in dialogue with provide a platform upon which they can conduct meaning-making in tandem with their dialogue partner. In this sense, a living archive is not simply a product of engagement to be put on a shelf, but also a form of action in the larger world.

This dialogic process is very demanding of students, but also very demanding of faculty/staff and community partners. It requires faculty to think of themselves differently while still operating within a traditional university system. It requires community collaborators to be available to student queries and pull together their own stories and documents. At A/P/A we are constantly reformulating courses, discussing what skills and levels of theory should be offered in introductory and advanced core and elective courses. We are constantly arranging partnership possibilities and learning the limits of what can be done within any given fourteen-week semester. It is truly a trilateral learning partnership full of difficulties and pitfalls, but also full of promise. For both a pedagogic and analytic point of view, I believe this also produces a radically democratic critical-analytic learning environment in which students, faculty, staff, and community members are exploring meanings, building archives/repertoires together, and working toward a better historical understanding.

Finally, and this is a point which necessitates extended future discussion, my dialogic challenges to postpositivist realist theory insist that we must critique and change the practice of the standard forms and terms of our everyday pedagogic engagements. I believe this co-production naming process has the potential to reformulate our still too Lockean convictions of

self—still largely defined by certain possessive logics of the hierarchic ownership of ideas, history, originality, etc. This theory of an analytic-dialogic practice represents my effort to link the reformulation of academic forms of interaction with historical reframings and reinterpretations. A better history, I believe, will emerge.

A reformulated ethnic and area studies might also help us answer affirmatively to the following political question: Can these cross cultural east/west-north/south engagements help build a new progressive movement in New York City and of the Americas?

NOTES

* I dedicate this essay to the memories of Amy Ling and Susan Olan.

1. This piece is written in relation to three other essays and my class “Chinatown and the American Imagination.” The essays are: Tchen, “Back to the Basics: Who is Researching and Interpreting for Whom?” in *The Practice of American History: A Special Issue, The Journal of American History* 81:3 (Dec. 1994), 1004–10; Tchen, “Toward a Dialogic Museum,” *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, 1992), and an unpublished essay “Curating Local/Global Interventions.” The work of my Fall 2003 Chinatown class can be viewed at www.apa.nyu.edu/Chinatown.
2. These ideas have been developed collaboratively with the staff and faculty at A/P/A Studies. I particularly want to acknowledge Margo Machida, Angel Velasco Shaw, Risa Morimoto, Gail Drakes, Sheelagh Cabalda, Laura Chen-Schultz, Fay Chiang, and Tarry Hum for our conversations on testing out dialogue-driven approaches toward teaching and research.
3. See Sandra Harding’s essay in this volume. I was introduced to PPR theory by Chandra Talpade Mohanty. I normally don’t like to assume an intellectual coupling of partners, but in this case, it is pertinent to understanding the theory more deeply. Because of Chandra’s unique grounding in local and international women’s movements, her critiques of the presumptions of white U.S. feminists, and her conceptualization of personal, political, and historical cartographies of struggle, for me she serves as an important conversationalist in Satya Mohanty’s work. There are stylistic contrasts to be certain. And they each locate themselves differently in their writings and their work. Satya Mohanty very much writes from within the academy from a literary-epistemic grounding most targeted toward various culture wars within gated towers. Yet, together their work can be read as academic and activist theory relating to progressive social movement-building.
4. Satya Mohanty’s students have developed some of his ideas further. Paula Moya and Michael Hames-García’s provocative *Reclaiming Identity* volume primarily focuses on critiquing postmodernism and making a literary and philosophical case for PPR—especially on how experience is not “raw” but testable, already theoretical, and can lead to a more objective understanding of the legacies of power. Given Mohanty, Moya, and Hames-García’s academic location within English Departments, the site of huge theoretical-political debates, this makes sense. Indeed, essays in *Reclaiming History* radiate from this core. Minh T. Nguyen’s essay critiquing misreadings of Joy Kogawa’s work clearly

demonstrates some of considerable strength of analyzing a particularly engaged and thoughtful creative writer. Throughout there are nods toward pedagogy, organizing, and community work. And I must commend the diversity of perspectives, generational and otherwise. Particularly relevant to my concerns are the following: Caroline Hau's essay on intellectuals and pedagogy in their representation of others, Amie Macdonald's essay on racial-cultural conflict in predominantly white college dorms, and Brent Henze's essay on the unique epistemic agency of an oppressed person and her relation to liberatory movements. Of these essays, Henze's explicitly ventures beyond the walls of the university as the primary assumed site of reference.

5. Since this essay was first written, Amie A. Macdonald and Susan Sanchez-Casal have edited a valuable volume on feminist pedagogy engaging PPR theory (see Macdonald and Sanchez-Casal, 2002). I believe this essay adds additional and compatible insights to their linking of PPR theory to pedagogic practice.
6. For more on the importance of place in relation to identity and knowledge generation, see Dolores Hayden's work on "the power of place," Lucy Lippard's discussion of "the local" and Morley and Robins' "spaces of identity."
7. Maria Lugones is correct in pointing out that Freire's pre-feminist binary construction of the oppressed and the oppressor tended not to acknowledge confounded intersectional subject positions and how the oppressed can also be oppressors. Furthermore, the Highlander Center developed by Myles Horton has paralleled Freire's work. Both Freire and the Highlander Center have been footnoted in *Reclaiming Identity*, yet the core strengths of what they do need to be explicitly engaged. What both emphasize is reflexive clarity on the variable role of the educator/collaborator in engaging in dialogic interactions of citizen students within trusted places.
8. With the end of the cold war in the 1990s, foundations and policy think tanks in the United States began formulating ways to support NGOs to augment the "civil society" and "public sphere" of nations as an explicit effort to foster Western-style democracies. For one perspective on this development, see Stanley Katz, "The Idea of Civil Society: New Agenda for U.S.-Japan Intellectual Exchange," Center for Global Partnership Paper Series, 1999, pp. 33-38.
9. See our class website: www.apa.nyu.edu/Chinatown.
10. See: <http://www.paperson.com/Variety.htm>.

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PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE
METAPHYSICS OF SEXUAL
IDENTITY: RECASTING
THE ESSENTIALISM AND SOCIAL
CONSTRUCTIONISM DEBATE

Raja Halwani

In gay and lesbian studies, the debate between essentialists and social constructionists is arguably the only serious debate that falls within metaphysics. No side has emerged as a clear winner, and today the debate seems to have died out, perhaps simply due to fatigue. My aim in this essay is to offer a fresh perspective on this debate by arguing that, contrary to what many think, it has been mostly at cross-purposes. My view is that whereas essentialists have in mind sexual *desire*, social constructionists have in mind sexual *identity*. Thus, they have not been arguing about the same thing. If this is correct, then a number of interesting results emerge. First, in discussing issues of identity, we need not take sides in the essentialist/social constructionist debate. Indeed, I will argue that one can be an essentialist and yet maintain a nonessentialist notion of identity. Second, because the two sides have been arguing mostly about two different issues, the political and moral implications of issues surrounding identity can be freed from the entanglement of this debate. Third, because much of the evidence for essentialism requires serious, and often controversial, historical, and anthropological research, we can continue to discuss issues of identity without having to worry about our discussion becoming moot, if it turns out, that essentialism is true. Divorcing the issue of identity from issues about essentialism, in other words, allows us to discuss the former notion without being fettered by the latter. Hence the title of this paper: before we can start to discuss issues about gay identity, we need to clear the grounds by clarifying the idea that there is no need to oppose essentialism to the view that identities are socially constructed.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Before delving into the argument, a few definitions and clarifications are in order. Let us define “homosexuals” as “people whose main sexual drive, fantasies, desires, and energies are directed towards members of the same sex/gender.” This definition does not beg any questions against either essentialists or social constructionists.¹ Indeed, social constructionists should accept it. For on their own account, this is what minimally goes into our understanding of homosexuality. Moreover, the definition is silent about issues of identity, that is, a homosexual need not have, or think of him or herself as having, a homosexual *identity*, given the definition.

Let us also define “essentialism” as the view that homosexuality and heterosexuality (and bisexuality) are cross-cultural and cross-temporal traits of individuals. That is, that homosexuals (and heterosexuals) have existed, and continue to exist, in some human societies across history and outside of the Western world. The idea is that we define “homosexuality” in such a way that it can intelligibly apply to people across cultures and times.² Social constructionism, on the other hand, is the view that the term “homosexuality” applies meaningfully only to particular people living within particular cultures in particular time periods, specifically, those of the Western world around the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, if we apply the term “homosexuality” to people outside the above cultural and temporal regions, we do so equivocally. If social constructionism is true, then prior to the late nineteenth century there were no homosexuals in the world—a very striking and interesting thesis, indeed.

Also, essentialism does *not* entail the view that homosexuality is biological in a deep sense.³ That is, it does not entail the view that it is genetic, for example. It is important to mention this point because many seem to think that essentialism is somehow necessarily wedded to the view that homosexuality is genetic. But this is not correct. If, for example, some psychological theory about the origins of homosexuality turns out to be true, for example, the Freudian one or the “First Encounter” one, then an essentialist can hold the view that homosexuality is nongenetic, because these psychological theories are not hostage to specific cultural and/or historical periods.

Another important point to keep in mind, especially for our purposes, is that essentialism does not entail the view—often the target of the ire of many social constructionists—that homosexuals all around the world will experience their homosexuality in the same ways, including, of course, calling it “homosexuality” or even having a name for it. All that essentialism is committed to is that it is entirely possible that homosexuals have existed across cultures and times, even if they themselves did not conceptualize it in the ways we do, and even if they did not—and this is crucial—give it the kind of importance that we do.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM (1): BRAY, CHAUNCEY, AND KENNEDY AND DAVIS

One would think that essentialism is hard to deny. After all, how can one reject the idea that homosexual people can exist outside the Western world? Moreover,

it seems to be supported by historical evidence.⁴ But essentialism has been denied, and it has been denied specifically because social constructionism is thought to be true. In this section, I will discuss three examples of such a denial.⁵ In the next section, I will discuss the views of David Halperin because Halperin is very articulate in his argument and so gives a good defense of social constructionism, and also because his views have been highly influential. In both this and the next section, my treatment will not be very detailed due to space limitations.

Alan Bray states in the introduction of his book (1995, 9) that he intends his book to fall under the social constructionist camp. Bray argues that the phenomenon of the Molly houses appeared in London by the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The Molly houses were private or public places where homosexual men could meet. The homosexual world of that time, moreover, had its own social and cultural norms that separated it from the homosexual cultures that preceded it. The society of the Molly houses had its own distinct conventions: “ways of dressing, of talking, distinctive gestures and distinctive acts with an understood meaning, its own jargon” (86). Specifically, what characterized the homosexuals of the Molly houses was the high degree of effeminacy and transvestitism involved (86). More importantly, Bray argues that with the emergence of the Molly houses, there also emerged a new perception of homosexuality, namely, the focus was no longer on the *act*, but on the *person*. In other words, the focus was now on homosexuality as a trait that people have, rather than a vice that anyone can fall prey to.

Bray claims “that there is no linear history of homosexuality to be written at all, any more than there is of ‘the family’ or indeed of sexuality itself. These things take their meaning from the varying societies which give them form; if they change, it is because these societies have changed” (104). What I would like to argue is that from what Bray has written, he has no good reason for accepting social constructionism because he is conflating the concept of homosexual desire with that of identity.

It is obvious that the people of the Molly houses that Bray refers to are homosexual, and he himself claims as much. Why then does he claim that there is no linear history of homosexuality? One line of thought could be that because prior to the Molly houses the focus was on acts rather than on persons, there were no homosexuals. But this line of reasoning is fallacious. That the social and cultural focus in a certain time period or culture is on acts does not show that there are no homosexuals in that period or culture. At best, it shows that that culture did not *classify* people as homosexual or heterosexual. What I think is a better way of understanding Bray’s claim is to begin by recalling the idea that essentialism is not committed to the view that all homosexuals in all time periods and in all cultures will experience their homosexuality in the same way. Nor is essentialism committed to the idea that homosexuals have the same mannerisms, behavior, and identities across cultures and times. Add to this the possibility that Bray might be talking about identity, and we get the result that there is no linear history of homosexual *identity*. This result is plausible, given the various cultures and norms and given that these strongly influence how people carry themselves, how they think of themselves, and how society thinks of them.⁶

Indeed, effeminate gay men exist in our own time, in the Western and non-Western parts of the world. Moreover, many of today's transvestites are gay. My point is that we do not claim that these types are not homosexual. Rather, we claim that they are homosexuals but with a particular type of identity. In this respect, it is highly plausible to think of the members of the Molly houses as homosexuals but also with an identity unique to their time and culture. If so, if Bray is indeed speaking of identity—or should be construed as speaking of identity—then we get an important piece of evidence. Here is one social constructionist whose views are properly construed as being about homosexual identity, rather than homosexual desire.

Let me turn now to the views of George Chauncey. Chauncey, in his seminal paper “Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion?” (1985),⁷ discusses an investigation conducted by the Newport (Rhode Island) Naval Training Station in 1919 into the supposed immoral conduct of a number of sexual “perverts.” The Station did so by sending a number of young enlisted men into this “immoral” community as decoys. According to Chauncey, this community sustained “a complex system of personal identities and structured relationships,” and that few of the men engaging in homosexual sex “identified themselves or were labeled by others as sexually different from other men on that basis alone. The determining criterion in labeling a man as ‘straight’ or ‘queer’ was not the extent of his homosexual activity, but the gender role he assumed” (190). In other words, those who played the gender role of women were those who labeled themselves as queer.

Equally interesting is the variety of roles and identities found within the queers and the straights. For example, among the queers there were fairies (those who performed fellatio), pogues (those who liked to be anally penetrated), and two-way artists (those who liked to do both). Among the straights—those who adopted masculine roles—there were “husbands” (those who entered into steady relationships with queers) and there were “trade” (those who had sex with queers, with differing degrees of actual participation in the sex act). This Newport community or subculture was highly diverse and contained intricate roles and identities. The question is what this shows about the debate between essentialism and social constructionism.

In concluding his essay, Chauncey claims that the Newport evidence offers new insight into the connection between homosexual behavior and identity. Specifically, the evidence helps us to see that, unlike contemporary homosexuals “whose *primary* personal and political ‘ethnic’ identification is gay and who have organized a multidimensional way of life on the basis of their homosexuality,” there were other social forms of homosexuality, “other ways in which homosexual relations have been organized and understood, differentiated, named, and left deliberately unnamed” (205). The point is that even though we might be tempted to call fairies, pogues, trade, and husbands “homosexuals,” they and the people around them were careful to “draw distinctions between different modes of such behavior.” Chauncey continues, “To classify their behavior and character using the simple polarities of ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ would be to misunderstand the complexity of their sexual system” (205).

But Chauncey is attacking a straw man. No one would want to claim that other, and previous, forms of gay subcultures were organized in the same way as ours. Today, for example, we label all sorts of different gay people as “homosexual,” but this does not make us somehow erode the distinctions between them. We are fully aware, for example, of the varieties of identities among gay men (leather people, bears, house-boys, “rice queens,” “snow queens,” drag queens, top, bottom, etc.). This indicates that something strange is happening in Chauncey’s analysis, for surely Chauncey could not have missed this obvious point. One clue is found in the conclusion of his essay, where he offers us only two alternatives: homosexual behavior and homosexual identity. If we call the Newport men “homosexual,” we thus force them to conform to identities different from ours. We are then, according to Chauncey, better off using their own categories.

But what is missing here is a third option, namely, homosexual desire or orientation. There is no difficulty, in principle, of claiming that some types of the New Port men were homosexuals, *in the sense of having a homosexual sexual orientation*, and not in the sense of having what we today consider a gay identity. Of course, some of these men, for example, trade, might not be easy to classify. But this might turn out to be simply an epistemological difficulty: because we have no access to their psyches, we cannot determine whether they were homosexual. And it might very well be, of course, that not all the trade men as a class were either homosexual or heterosexual. It might be, rather, that some were homosexual and others were not, depending on the individual case. My point is simply that there is no theoretical difficulty in classifying some of these men as homosexual (and some as heterosexual and some as bisexual). Chauncey is right that we ought to be sensitive to the way their roles were constructed and not quick to assume that these matched or mirrored our own. But this is an issue of *identity*, not sexual orientation, and it is because Chauncey neglects the third option of sexual orientation that he is driven to attack a straw man.⁸

If I am correct, then we have yet another example of a social constructionist whose views are best understood as being mainly about identity, and so should not be opposed to essentialism, because essentialism does not deny that homosexuals may have different identities across cultures and across times. But let us consider one more example.

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1989) begin their essay on butch-fem roles among 1920 and 1930 lesbians in *Buffalo* by aligning themselves with social constructionism. They argue that “social constructionism provides a *necessary* dimension for understanding how butch-fem *roles* have operated in the community and in the development of individual *identity*” (241, my emphasis). While they never give a definition of “essentialism,” they identify the phenomenon historically with the medicalization of sexuality, and they claim that even today essentialism has a grip on the minds of people as is evident in the popular view that lesbians and gay men form a distinct category of people (241–242). The thrust of their argument regarding butch-fem roles is that these are intricate and yet constructed identities.

They are intricate because they “constituted a code of personal behavior, particularly in the areas of image and sexuality” (244), and because they constituted a “social imperative”: they were “the organizing principle for this community’s relation to the outside world and for its members’ relationship with one another” (244). But these roles are also constructed, because they were derived from “their contribution to lesbian social organization, not the inherent biological or psychological makeup of every lesbian” (247). This is further supported by the fact that many of the lesbians in this community did not find themselves somehow stuck with a butch or a fem identity. Rather, many of them adopted such identities, and many switched their identities.

I have no difficulty accepting the view that butch-fem roles are socially constructed, nor do I have a problem accepting the main claim by Kennedy and Davis that social constructionism is a *necessary* dimension for our understanding of sexuality. For, if we are to understand sexuality in its different forms across times and cultures, we cannot do so fully and well without having recourse to the way cultural norms allow for the construction of sexual roles and identities. As I have been arguing, essentialism does not deny that social norms have a crucial role to play in the formation of sexual identities. Kennedy and Davis do not deny that the women in their study are lesbians. They regarded these women as homosexual, and in this respect, their research does not refute the popular idea that lesbians and gay men are a different type of person (simply in virtue of being homosexual). If this is so, then they have no argument with essentialism as such. Their argument is with the claim that there are no differences between sexual identities across times and cultures, and with the claim that all of our sexual identities are somehow rooted in biology.⁹ Again, we have an example of a social constructionist writing that is about identity and is hence not opposed to essentialism.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM (2): HALPERIN

The views of David Halperin have been extremely influential. Hence, a somewhat detailed discussion of these views is in order. If it turns out that Halperin indeed was speaking of identity rather than sexual orientation, we would have scored a major victory in support of the thesis that essentialists and social constructionists are not really arguing about the same thing.

Halperin begins his influential essay “One Hundred Years of Homosexuality” (1990) with the stunning claim that “before 1892 there was no homosexuality, only sexual inversion” (15).¹⁰ Because prior to this time sexual preference for members of one’s own sex was not clearly distinguished from other forms of sexual behavior that did not conform to the social norms, it is only after 1892 that homosexuality has been ushered, so to speak, into existence. Halperin, then, is in agreement with Alan Bray as to whether homosexuality has a history: “It may well be that homosexuality properly speaking has no history of its own outside the West or much before the beginning of our century” (18).

The words “properly speaking” in the above quotation should give us pause, for they bring up the possibility that Halperin may have something specific in mind regarding the notion of homosexuality. This is actually the case, and it gets us to the heart of the matter. To Halperin, both homosexuality and heterosexuality are species of sexuality. And “sexuality,” to Halperin, not only is a “recent invention,” but is also not simply a descriptive term: “Rather, it serves to interpret and to organize human experience, and it performs quite a lot of conceptual work” (25). Sexuality, first, “defines itself as a separate, sexual domain within the larger field of man’s psychophysical nature.” Second, sexuality is used to separate the sexual domain of human beings from other domains of social and personal life that have “traditionally cut across it,” such as carnality, love, desire, and appetite (to give a few of Halperin’s examples). Third, “sexuality generates sexual identity: it endows each of us with an individual sexual nature, with a personal essence defined (at least in part) in specifically sexual terms” (25). In short, sexuality, including homosexuality and heterosexuality, is socially constructed because it is not “a universal feature of human life in every society. For as the word is used today . . . sexuality does not refer to some positive physical property—such as the property of being anatomically sexed—that exists independently of culture” (25).

My suspicion that the words “properly speaking” should give us pause is vindicated. Because Halperin does not think of the terms “sexuality,” “homosexuality,” and “heterosexuality” as being descriptive, then when he speaks of homosexuality “properly,” he means to use the concept in the normative, prescriptive, and nondescriptive way in which he thinks it is used today.

Halperin’s argument for this claim relies on an analogy with dietary preferences and goes as follows. Sexuality, according to Halperin, holds “the key to unlocking the deepest mysteries of the human personality; it lies at the center of the hermeneutics of the self” (26). Indeed, prior to the scientific venture into sexuality, sexual *acts* could be evaluated, but there was “no conceptual apparatus available for identifying a person’s sexual *orientation*” (26; emphasis in original). Today, differences between sexual orientations are considered to be revealing about people’s temperaments and sexual identities. Nevertheless, it would not “occur to us to refer a person’s dietary object-choice to some innate, characterological disposition or to see in his or her strongly expressed and even unvarying preference for the white meat of chicken the symptom of a profound psychophysical orientation, leading us to identify him or her in contexts quite removed from eating food as, say . . . a ‘pectoriphage’ or a ‘stethovore’ ” (26–27). In other words, since sexual preferences are not more fundamental than dietary ones to people’s personalities, and since we do not take the latter to be determinant of people’s identities, the choice of sexual preferences to be such a determinant seems to be simply a socially constructed view, with no necessary connection to our natures as human beings.¹¹

Halperin supports his conclusion by using ancient Greek society as an important example of a society that differs from our own in the status it

accords homosexuality and heterosexuality. I will discuss this example briefly below.¹² I want to now focus on the relevancy of the above argument to the issue between social constructionism and essentialism, rather than the argument's merits.¹³

It should be somewhat evident that Halperin has in mind the normative uses of "sexuality," "homosexuality," and "heterosexuality;" he is not necessarily arguing against the idea that sexual orientations are real and are found within people's personalities. What he is arguing against is the elevation of such orientations to an important status *and* the idea that such a status tells us a certain truth about human beings. Indeed, Halperin is quite explicit about this: "But the issue before us is not captured by the problematics of reference: it cannot be innocently reformulated as the issue of whether or not we can accurately apply our concept of homosexuality to the ancients—whether or not, that is, we can discover in the historical record of classical antiquity evidence of *behaviors or psychologies that are amenable to classification in our own terms (obviously, we can, given the supposedly descriptive, trans-historical nature of those terms)*" (28, my emphasis). Aside from the word "supposedly" which Halperin really has no right to (since he *is* discussing the normative uses of those terms), the quotation is clear: there can be homosexuals and heterosexuals in ancient societies. On another page, Halperin states that "although there have been, in many different times and places (including classical Greece), persons who sought sexual contact with other persons of the same sex as themselves, it is only within the last hundred years or so that such persons (or some portion of them, at any rate) have been homosexuals" (29). The parenthetical "or some portion of them" is important. It indicates that when Halperin speaks of persons "who sought sexual contact," he is not simply referring to the general practice of pederasty among Greek males. He is referring to a possible narrower class of such men, namely, those who would fit our category of homosexual men.

If Halperin is indeed speaking of "homosexuality" as it is used in a normative sense, then his views are not opposed to essentialism. The idea is simply this. Though Halperin does not outrightly speak of homosexual identity, he does speak of a notion of homosexuality that is normative, not simply descriptive, and that is close to—"generates" as he puts it—that of identity. But essentialism is not committed to the view that homosexual orientation is necessarily a determinant of identity. In other words, essentialism leaves room for the historical (and so logical) possibility that there could have been societies in which homosexuals and heterosexuals existed, but such that they had no homosexual and heterosexual identities. If so, then Halperin's views are really not at odds with those of essentialism.

It might be suggested that because sexuality to Halperin is socially constructed, then the concept of sexuality and its satellite concepts cannot also but function in a normative, prescriptive way.¹⁴ The general idea underlying this claim might be that entities that are socially constructed are constructed (intentionally or unintentionally) to perform certain functions, and so their concepts cannot but function in a prescriptive way, even if they also function

in a descriptive way. This, however, will not do. I am not convinced that concepts referring to socially constructed entities cannot but function in a prescriptive way. For even if originally they are to have such a prescriptive function, it does not follow that they must continue to do so. Halperin needs to prove first that sexual orientation is socially constructed before this claim can be convincing, since the latter claim, given this suggestion, logically depends on the former one. Moreover, part of what I have been arguing is that social constructionists have failed to make a good case for the claim that sexual orientations are socially constructed. Either they are better construed as speaking about identity (most clearly with Chauncey, Bray, Kennedy and Davis), or they are best construed as alerting us to the dangers of the political use of the notion of sexual orientation (Halperin).

But it is important to also pay attention to the claim that essentialism is compatible with the idea that in some societies homosexuality and heterosexuality are not considered to be matters of people's identities. I will address this claim via Halperin's example of ancient Greece. Doing so allows us to see how homosexuality and heterosexuality can exist in a society that did not consider them to be matters of identity. Briefly, we can find three main features of sexual norms among the ancient Athenians that are different from ours, according to Halperin.¹⁵ First, unlike our view that sex is an act that two people have *with* each other, to the ancient Athenians sex was an act that was performed by one (the active party) *on* another (the passive party, the recipient). Second, the participants in a sexual act were classified differently. There was the man who penetrated the boy (or the woman), and there was the boy (or the woman) who was penetrated by the man. And if no penetration was involved, the distinction was still generally made between the active party (the giver), and the passive one (the receiver). Third, the active and passive distinction reflected the social status of each. The active was an Athenian adult male citizen, whereas the passive was a boy, a woman, a foreigner, or a slave. Since these distinctions are not with us anymore, or, more guardedly, they are mostly not found within the gay sexual norms of the Western world, we ought to pay attention, according to Halperin, to how sexual norms and social practices affect each other in different societies. In ancient Athens, sexual behavior "did not so much express inward dispositions or inclinations (although, of course, it did also do that) as it served to position social actors in the places assigned to them, by virtue of their political standing, in the hierarchical structure of the Athenian polity" (32). Halperin concludes, "the sexual identities of the classical Athenians . . . seem to have been inseparable from, if not determined by, their social identities, their public standing" (33).

The question now is how an essentialist can possibly locate homosexuals and heterosexuals within such a society. If most adult Athenian males had sex with boys but also had sex with women (with their wives and with prostitutes, for example), how are we to classify them? Are they homosexuals? Are they heterosexuals? Or perhaps they were all bisexuals?¹⁶ The trap that an essentialist must avoid is thinking that the answer to these questions *must* be

either “they were all homosexuals” or “they were all heterosexuals” or “they were all bisexuals.” There is another more plausible answer: it depends on each case. *Some* of these men were homosexuals, *some* were heterosexuals, and *some* were bisexuals. Consider an Athenian adult male who was a heterosexual. How do we account for his sleeping with boys? We do so via the idea that pederasty was a cultural norm. Consider another such male who was a homosexual. How do we account for the fact that he was married and so slept with at least one woman? We do so, again, via the idea that adult males were expected to marry and have children.

This answer might seem to be far-fetched to someone who agrees with Halperin, but perhaps the following consideration should ease her mind. We must not lose sight of the fact that in our day and age, in the very geographical cradle that social constructionists consider to be the home of homosexuality, namely, the West, there are gay men who sleep with women, and there are lesbians who sleep with men. I do not have in mind gay people who like to experiment, but married men who realize much later that they are indeed gay, and married women who undergo the same type of experience. I have in mind gay teenagers who go through the charade of having a sexual partner from the opposite sex just because this is what they are socially expected to do. If this can, and does, happen in the Western world, why think that it could not happen in ancient Athens and other cultural societies?¹⁷ We must also remember that we lack many data about ancient societies that would help us with this issue. For example, we have very little data about the actual, day-to-day lives and thoughts of ancient Greek men and women. We do not know how most of them lived their sexual lives with their partners, whether they were happy, satisfied, or disgruntled.

One might claim that in our Western world today, examples of gay people that I have just given are not that frequent. This is debatable, but even if true, one important explanation for it would precisely be the fact that we have underscored the idea of homosexuality as one type of sexuality, and so more and more people are identifying themselves this way. But this does not defeat my point. Because the kind of society ancient Athens was—and Halperin here is correct, of course—being homosexual or heterosexual was not the way one’s sexual identity was determined. But this does not deny at all the possibility of homosexuals and heterosexuals existing back then.

To sum up, Halperin’s views are about sexual identity (or should be taken to be about identity), and he himself seems to acknowledge as much. If so, then once again social constructionists and essentialists are not in disagreement. For the core idea of essentialism is fully compatible with the idea that one’s sexual identity is determined by factors other than one’s sexual orientation.

SOME OBJECTIONS

Before drawing some conclusions, it is worthwhile to consider three objections. The first is that my thesis is mistaken: the debate between social

constructionists and essentialists *is* one about identity. In other words, the objection agrees that the former are talking about identity, but insists that the latter are *also* talking about it. The second objection is the opposite: it agrees that essentialists are talking about sexual orientation or desire, but it insists that social constructionists are also talking about these rather than identity. The third objection is that given some of my remarks, it seems that social factors can result in homosexual desire, and this is an odd result, because it raises the issue of how and in what ways essentialism can assert that sexual desire is not socially constructed.

In response to the first objection, it should be noted that there is no evidence for this claim in the literature by essentialists. Some of the most noteworthy ones have explicitly argued that their position is compatible with that of identity. Boswell, for example, claims that, given his remarks about essentialism, “their [his remarks’] purport is that ancient *societies* did not distinguish heterosexuality from homosexuality, not that all, or even most individuals failed to make such a distinction” (1989, 24; emphasis in original). Indeed, essentialism is not even committed to the view that individuals need to recognize their own homosexuality. But Boswell’s remarks are clear in their acceptance of the idea of societies that do not make much of people’s sexual orientations. Furthermore, it is hard to see why any essentialist would insist that her position is about identity, for it is obvious that sexual identities differ across ages and cultures. Essentialists, to put the point bluntly, are not stupid.

In response to the second objection, the literature in general does not support the claim that social constructionists are speaking about orientation, despite some wayward remarks here and there. For example, Halperin states that each “act of sex in classical Athens was no doubt an expression of real, personal desire on the part of the sexual actors involved, but *their very desires had already been shaped by the standard cultural definition of sex as an activity that generally occurred only between a citizen and a non-citizen*” (1990, 32; my emphasis). This remark might be thought to be about the very social construction of sexual desires *in the sense that* back then there was no such thing as homosexual or heterosexual desire (as we understand it today). But the remarks are actually ambiguous: they could also mean that though ancient Athenians had homosexual and heterosexual desires, they nevertheless understood them and acted on them within their culturally licensed social contexts. In any case, even if these remarks are in line with what this objection claims, one can respond that Halperin has given no argument for them, and that his arguments, as this essay shows, support the much weaker claim that the ancient Athenians had no notion of identity remotely similar to ours. Indeed, one can generalize this point: even if most social constructionists intended to speak about sexual orientation and desires, their arguments fall short of reaching the conclusion that sexual orientations are constructed, and at best support the conclusion that sexual identities are constructed.¹⁸

The third objection goes as follows. In my discussion of Bray’s views, I stated that cultural norms influence how people carry themselves, how they

think of themselves, and how society thinks of them. This ushers in the possibility that societies can influence how people desire, and that, indeed, they might produce homosexual and heterosexual desires. If so, how would essentialism be opposed to social constructionism? In reply, note that the claim that societal norms influence sexual desires is not the same as the claim that they produce homosexual, heterosexual, and other types of basic sexual desires. But let us suppose that it is possible that societal norms do fully produce such desires. I have defined “essentialism” as the view that homosexuality is a cross-cultural and cross-temporal trait, the idea being that the term “homosexual” can refer to individuals in different cultures and in different times. But this is fully compatible with the claim that the *causes* of homosexuality—as I have hinted at in note 1—could be diverse. Indeed, they could be so diverse that they might be dependent on the particular cultures from which they stem. Essentialism, then, would be opposed to social constructionism not in the sense that homosexuality is not socially produced, but in that its causes need not be confined to particular times and places. This is, moreover, not much of a departure from the terms of the debate, because the heart of social constructionism is the claim that homosexuality is the product of particular times and places. In short, we should not conflate essentialism about definitions with that about causes. The former is compatible with the possibility that homosexuality is caused fully by social factors, while the latter is not.

However, having said this much, I am not fully convinced that homosexual and heterosexual desires are the products of merely social factors. The case can be easily made for heterosexual desire: our rationality notwithstanding, we are also biological beings, and it would be incredible if it turned out that heterosexual desire was nothing but a product of social causes, precisely because our biology exerts a pull on us in many ways. The case for homosexuality is more difficult to make, because one can argue that precisely because of our biology, homosexual desire would have to be the product of cultural, not noncultural, factors. This may be true, but my hunch is that the jury is still out on this issue. The scientific research on homosexuality is still in its infancy, and we need to be patient for the results, if any can be conclusive. But also saying how culture can influence desire without fully producing it can go *some* way into indicating how homosexuality can have noncultural factors and yet be shaped by culture. The idea is simple: what we desire, sexually and non-sexually, is dependent to a large extent on our culture. Homosexual and heterosexual desires can be influenced by culture: many homosexuals and heterosexuals today desire specific types of people or sexual acts, and their desires are specific because of the culture they live in. Consider the following examples: desires by straight men for women in high heels, by men or women for leather-wearing men (or women), by straight men for wearing women’s underwear during sex acts (or while at work), and by men or women for feet clad in flip-flops. All of these are desires shaped by culture, yet they can all have the basic constituents of being either homosexual or heterosexual in orientation. My point is that the claim that

homosexuality and heterosexuality are not fully produced by cultural causes does not commit one to the claim that they are not influenced at all by such causes. And so my discussion about the influence of such causes does not commit me to the claim that homosexual desire is fully culturally produced.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Identity is a concept difficult to define (hence my sagacious avoidance of offering a definition). It has descriptive connotations, as when we describe someone as “white” or “middle-aged.” It also has normative connotations, as when we assert that ethnic heritage is important to people’s lives, to who they are. Identity also has personal dimensions, those that are part of how one thinks of him or herself. It also has public dimensions, when one, for example, is categorized by others as belonging to such-and-such a group (Alcoff, 2000, 335–36). These two distinctions—which are not exhaustive aspects of identity—are not orthogonal to each other. For example, one can be described as “white” without being publicly categorized by others as white. One can be described as “white” without also thinking of oneself, making sense of oneself, in terms of one’s whiteness. In addition, while identity is important to who people are, there might be individuals who belong to the group in question who do not use the identity in question to make sense of their lives. Also, while identity is important to who people are, yet, for certain reasons (e.g., political ones), we might refuse to categorize people into such identity categories.

It is this complexity of identity that ought to make us suspicious of claiming that it is somehow opposed to essentialism. In regard to sexual orientation, we ought to be suspicious of the claim that essentialism is false because sexual identity is complex and because it differs from one culture to another. Consider what essentialism does not commit us to. Essentialism simply claims that it is possible for people with certain sexual orientations to exist in different social formations in different time periods. Because essentialism is a view about sexual orientations, in and of itself, it says nothing about identity. If we consider the two distinctions of identity offered above, the point can be made clearer. First, and in regard to the descriptive connotations of identity, essentialism does not entail the claim that, descriptively speaking, so-and-so’s identity is that of a homosexual. For one thing, one might be a homosexual and yet not consider his homosexuality as relevant to who one is, not even descriptively. Moreover, in a society that does not consider homosexuality to be a matter of identity (like eye color in our society), one can be a homosexual and yet not have, as part of the description of one’s identity, the “item” that one is a homosexual. Incidentally, this last point implies that essentialism is silent about the public dimension of identity: one can be a homosexual and yet not be categorized by one’s society as having a homosexual identity.

Second, in regard to the normative dimension of identity, essentialism does not entail that if one is a homosexual, then one’s homosexuality will be important

to how one makes sense of one's self. This holds true even in a society that uses homosexuality as a normative criterion to categorize people into gay and straight. To offer the usual example, a priest living in a society such as ours might simply not consider his homosexuality to make sense of who he is.

Third, essentialism does not entail the view that a society that recognizes people as homosexual and heterosexual would also consider these categories to be normative components of people's identities. We can imagine a society in which the categories of homosexual and heterosexual are recognized and conceptualized but such that, like eye color in our society, no normative claims follow from this about people's identities. Even if in this society these categories were used to descriptively delineate people's identities, say, for statistical purposes, it would not follow that they would be used normatively. To use an example different from that of eye color, it might be the case that being a waiter is part of one's descriptive identity. But nothing need follow from this about whether in a particular society "waiterhood" is an oppressive category. Nor would it follow that any moral and other nonmoral behavioral patterns, thoughts, and emotions would be expected to ensue from that person just because he or she is a waiter.

It is also important to keep a few additional points in mind. First, in societies in which sexual orientation is used descriptively as part of people's identities, essentialism is not committed to the claim that this would be exhaustive of a person's descriptive identity. In other words, the claim, stated accurately, would be that one's homosexuality is *part* of one's overall identity—even of one's overall sexual identity—descriptively speaking.

Second, in societies in which sexual orientations are used as part of people's normative, and not just descriptive, identities, we need to be careful how essentialism fits in with the notion of identity as exhaustive of an individual. From the perspective of the individual, essentialism is not committed to the claim that a person's sexuality is the only important fact about one's identity. If one happens to be also an Arab in addition to being a homosexual, then we have another ingredient that goes into one's sense of self. Nor does essentialism claim that these different aspects sit side by side or intersect each other. Essentialism is happy with the claim that such aspects, to use Hames-García's metaphor (2000, 103), *blend* with each other. These points are also as true from the public, social perspective of identity.¹⁹

Essentialism, then, is silent about how, under what conditions, and why, people who have particular sexual orientations come to acquire, or not to acquire, particular identities. It leaves open issues regarding the individual's leeway in determining her identity, societies' power to, for good or ill, impose or not impose identities on their members, types and varieties of sexual identities, and, among other things, how sexual orientations combine and mix with other aspects of people to form more complex identities. It can also, of course, accommodate the claim that depending on the society, sexual orientation might not figure in any issues about identity.

If social constructionism properly understood is not opposed to essentialism, we can be essentialists about sexual orientations and yet nonessentialists

about identity. Moreover, we are now free to discuss issues—to my mind, the most interesting ones—about the politics and ethics of identity without having to be fettered by spurious claims denying the existence of homosexuality and heterosexuality across different cultures and times. Indeed, agreeing that, say, many ancient Greek men were homosexuals, we can be in a position to compare their sexual identities with ours and see what consequences emerge regarding our interest in identity. Finally, because social constructionism about sexual orientation (not identity) is a thesis that must rely for its truth on historical and social evidence, freeing it from its opposition to essentialism allows us to think about identity without having to worry that social constructionism might be refuted by the evidence. We can simply rest and say, “The truth of essentialism shall not henceforth bother me.” If so, then our prolegomena would have been accomplished.²⁰

NOTES

1. For some other competing definitions of “homosexuality” and why they fail, see Stein 1999, especially 41–49.
2. We have to be very careful not to confuse two kinds of essentialist views. The first, which is not my concern here, is about the *causes* of homosexuality. It states that there are sufficient causes in nature, as opposed to culture, to explain the sexual desires of homosexuals and heterosexuals. The second type of essentialism, which is my focus, is about definitions. (On this, see Mohr 1992, ch. 7.) The relationship between the truth of these two definitions is tricky. Essentialism about causes, if true, would entail the truth of essentialism about definitions, though its truth is very doubtful. However, the truth of essentialism about definitions does not entail the truth of essentialism about causes, since the latter is not committed to the view that there are sufficient causes in nature to lead to the formation of homosexual people. (Indeed, essentialism about definitions is not committed to any view about the etiology of sexuality.)
3. I say “deep sense” because homosexuality is biological in a shallow sense: because we are biological entities, homosexuality is going to be rooted in our biology, much like every other trait about us is also rooted in our biology.
4. See, for example, Boswell 1981.
5. For more views on social constructionism, see Stein 1992, Katz 2001, and Weeks 1991.
6. Thus, I am in *general* agreement with those who argue that coming out is a contextual process and that one’s understanding of one’s homosexual desires and experiences is mediated by one’s culture and context, though such mediation need not deny the truth of such experiences (i.e., it does not render them entirely subjective). William Wilkerson (2000) argues for such a position, but I think that he takes the claim too far. The basic idea in his essay is that experiences do not come self-labeled and self-evident. While this might be true, Wilkerson seems to think that it entails the view that whenever one decides to come out as gay (or adopt a gay identity), then one somehow has to retroactively re-interpret one’s gay desires (264). But this need not follow. One can experience sexual desires for members of the same sex, rationalize them in such a way that one does not conclude that one is gay, and, when one ends up coming out, one can realize that those experiences were simply evidence for his gay orientation. Wilkerson seems to be aware of this

(261–63), but claims that such experiences are only potentially homosexual experiences. The reason seems to be that one has to interpret them (or re-interpret them) when adopting a gay identity. I find this to be unconvincing, for it is hard to see why one should latch onto some experiences as opposed to others when coming out as gay, unless the former experiences are clearly of homosexual desires. Thus, I agree that experiences are contextually mediated, but I do not see why this has to entail the strong claim that Wilkerson makes. Furthermore, that experiences are contextually mediated is fully compatible with essentialism. To use a simple example, an ancient Roman man would not think of his homosexuality in terms of the English word “gay.” (I suspect that what misleads Wilkerson to make such strong claims are two ambiguities in his essay. The first is between using “identity” to refer to sexual orientation and to full-fledged identity. The second is found in his use of “meaning,” which covers both the *interpretation* of one’s experiences and the basic *meaning* of that experience. For example, thinking of myself as straight, and being aroused by a scene in a heterosexual pornography film, I might understand my experience in a basic way: “I am aroused by this naked man.” But I might interpret it in a different way: “I find him arousing because he is engaging in sex with a woman.” These are two different levels of meaning and I think that Wilkerson conflates them.)

7. Similar views by Chauncey are found in his 1994 book.
8. Chauncey is not the only social constructionist who neglects the alternative of sexual desire or orientation and sticks with only sexual behavior and sexual identity. See, for example, Weeks (1989, 70); Padgug (1992, 58).
9. A word of caution: Essentialism does not entail the view that sexual orientation is determined, for it conceptually allows for the possibility of choosing one’s sexual orientation. It is important to mention this because some of the social scientific literature (e.g., Golden 1987) and some of the philosophical literature (e.g., Card 1995, especially chs. 1 and 3) on lesbians emphasize the fact that many women choose to become lesbians. For a discussion of essentialism and choice, see Stein 1999, ch. 9, especially 263–65.
10. Halperin chooses the year 1892 because it is the year during which the word “homosexuality” was introduced into the English language (its German cognate is twenty years older), thus ushering in the age in which sexuality was medicalized and treated as a separate drive in people’s psyches. This opening claim by Halperin, however, may have been intended only for rhetorical force, since he says later on page 17 of the same essay that “it is not exactly my intention to argue that homosexuality, as we commonly understand it today, didn’t exist before 1892. How indeed could it have failed to exist?” I am not sure how to reconcile these two claims.
11. I am here paraphrasing Halperin’s own, much clearer, re-wording of his argument in an asterisk footnote (27–28).
12. I have discussed this example, along with others and with Halperin’s interpretation of the speech of Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium* in more depth in Halwani 1998.
13. The argument is not convincing because it concludes that only recently has sexuality come to be considered an important trait about people’s psyches and characters. But this conclusion cannot be asserted with such confidence. Ancient philosophers also recognized the fact that sexuality is an important part of people’s psyches. Even if ancient philosophers did not separate sexuality from other appetites—a debatable point by all means Halperin’s conclusion nevertheless

requires much more scrutiny, by way of historical comparison with claims such as the above, before we can be assured that it is indeed true that this normative view of sexuality is recent. (Mohr's discussion of Halperin alerted me to this point. See Mohr 1992, ch. 7.) Another reason for my dissatisfaction with the analogy Halperin uses stems from two sources. First, to focus on one who loves the white meat of chicken is not proper, because love of white chicken meat is not quite parallel to sexual preferences. Rather, it is more parallel to one who is gay and who prefers blond men. A more appropriate parallel would be between a meat-lover and one who sexually prefers members of his or her own sex, since these two types correspond more closely to each other as far as the generality of their categories is concerned. But then, it is not so obvious that one's love for meat can be easily dismissed as having nothing to do with one's character. After all, and to venture a thought, given the way we treat animals today, one's love for meat might just say quite a bit about one's character. But the second source, and the more important and plausible one, has to do with the fact that sexual activity is different in important ways from eating activity. To give just a couple of instances, sexual activity is often conducted privately, and it is usually associated with any of a number of emotions and passions (e.g., love, domination, lust, and tenderness), whereas eating does not usually have these aspects. Moreover, these seem to be universal features of sexual activity. At least, one cannot easily claim that they are not; much careful empirical research needs to be done to either deny or establish the claim that they are universal. If this is correct, and given the conceptual connection between sexual activity and sexual preference, there is a *prima facie* reason for treating the latter differently from treating dietary preference. If so, then the analogy fails.

14. Linda Alcoff suggested this point.
15. I should note that most historians are in agreement with the general picture of sexual norms among the ancient Athenians offered by Halperin.
16. This is a challenge that Halperin himself raises for the essentialist in his essay "‘Homosexuality’: A Cultural Construct" (1990).
17. In my 1998 essay, I have also dealt with more extended examples from countries that have machismo cultures, such as Lebanon, and from Renaissance Italy.
18. Some philosophers have argued for the claim that sexual desires are socially constructed, but their arguments are not convincing. See for example Hacking 1992; Davidson 1992; and Nussbaum 1999, ch. 10. My criticisms of Halperin's views also apply to Davidson's. For criticisms of Hacking's views, which are about essentialism as causes, see Mohr 1992, ch. 7.
19. In the discussion of this section, I have used "normative" to basically mean "evaluative." However, one can argue that Halperin and Foucault, among others, use it to mean "standard, or a way by which we make distinctions and categories." This, of course, is not a problem in and of itself. The problem is when such norms are used to make value judgments about the entities within those distinctions and categories. In some cases, such judgments are okay, when they are morally justified. In others, they are not and often tend to serve politically pernicious agendas. However, even if this is correct, my basic points in the last section of this paper will not be affected, because essentialism is not committed to the claim sexual orientations need to be used as norms in such ways.
20. Special thanks are owed to Linda Alcoff and Michael Hames-García for excellent comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks are also owed to my colleagues Gregg Bordowitz, George Roeder, Claire Pentecost, and Jeffrey Skoller for calling to my attention a number of points and questions.

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EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY

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Contributors to the recent volume, *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, join in a postpositivist, realist project and argue that the key concepts of experience and identity need not be essentialized and that their critique or deconstruction went too far, often having counterproductive effects both intellectually and politically.¹ Hence the time has come for a cogent recuperation of these and related concepts (such as objectivity and realism) in a concerted effort of epistemological and sociopolitical reconstruction. Contributors have also objected to extreme forms of radical constructivism as the dubious opposite of essentialism, especially in certain versions of the so-called linguistic turn in which experience and identity become discursive constructs, and objectivity is evacuated in favor of exaggerated notions of performativity, fictionality, relativism, and incommensurability.²

There are significant ways in which I am in general agreement with more qualified approaches to performativity and incommensurability and with caveats or even objections concerning radical constructivism and deconstruction. I would, however, like to examine the concept of experience and, to some extent, that of identity in a manner that may allow for an acknowledgement of aspects of constructivism and deconstruction which, if not unguardedly taken to extremes, compulsively fixated upon, or inserted into an all-or-nothing response to problems, are instructive.³ I shall especially insist on the importance of more or less performative processes, including elaboration, construction, work, and play, with respect to experience and identity. Hence, I shall stress experiential processes and processes of identity-formation (not reducible to fixated postulations of identity). Identity should be neither idealized as always beneficent nor demonized and seen as a (if not the) source of the political ills of the modern world. Nor should it be conflated with identification in the sense of total fusion with others wherein difference is obliterated and criticism is tantamount to betrayal. But identity does involve modes of being with others that range from the actual to the imagined, virtual, sought-after, normatively affirmed, or utopian. Moreover, it is important to explore the relations and articulations among various qualifiers of identity, especially group identity, which may be ascribed by others, taken up or confronted by the self or by members of the group,

deconstructed, refunctioned, affirmed or acknowledged in more or less revised fashion, earned through collective activity, and recognized, validated, or invalidated by others. One issue here is the extent to which a group is what may be termed an existential group eliciting and demanding commitment in contrast to a statistical category which “groups” together those sharing some objective characteristic such as height or weight. (For the latter characteristics to be relevant to an existential group, such a group would have to be formed at least in part on their basis.) In addition, experiential processes, including processes of identity-formation, may and ideally should involve reality-testing and its relation to what in psychoanalytic terms may be termed working over and through problems (an often intricate process that does not entail definitive closure or obviate the role of play and laughter, including gallows humor in responding to traumatizing events).

Hence a complex, process-oriented notion of identity-formation does not exclude the importance of difference and differentiation with respect to experience, the experience of both self and other, or analyst (historian, critic, theorist) and object of study—an issue that is especially important in the study of the past or of other cultures and that may be obscured when the subject and object of research are presumed to be identical (a presumption active in much research related to identity politics).⁴ Joan Scott may have gone too far in stressing the construction, especially the discursive construction, of experience and in seeing the role of experience as foundational in those she criticized (notably John Toews). But one may recognize the value of her insistence on the importance of processes of construction, at least insofar as constructivism does not become an all-encompassing secular creationism in which the human being is assumed to be, or is postulated as, the source of all meaning and value in the world, often with the non-human, including other animals, as the ignored, excluded, or scapegoated other (a tendency that may also exist in humanistic forms of realism).

Experience. In ordinary and even some scholarly usage, experience often remains a black box or an extremely loose and encompassing concept which is not defined because one has had it and presumes to know what is meant by it. It is used to discuss or define other problems while itself remaining impervious to definition or perhaps strategically vague. In John Toews’s important essay, “Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn,” despite the admirable care and complexity of the argument, there is never an attempt to define the key concept of experience or even to differentiate among types and subjects of experience (e.g., historians and their objects of study). Experience seems even to function as a residual concept—what remains or is left over when meaning and language do not exhaust their objects. Experience as undefined residue might be argued to hold a position analogous to that of divinity or the sacred in negative theology, to wit, “something” that may only be defined by what it is not. The seeming paradox is of course that experience is in phenomenology and neo-Hegelian dialectics the mainstay of a secular mode of thought that is often sharply separated from religion but may in important respects be its displacement. In any event, it may be useful in discussing

“experience” to resort to what has almost become a classical gesture: listing the meanings of a term from the Oxford English Dictionary.⁵

The OED, a traditional if not venerable source, is of special interest in that it often does not smooth over difficulties in a concept, or meld different meanings into a unified narrative, but instead enunciates tensely related or even conflicting meanings that at times almost seem to deconstruct, or raise questions for, one another. It is thus of special interest for an open, internally dialogized, essayistic approach to problems such as the one I am trying to take. Let us then look to the OED’s definitions of “experience.”

OED: 1. “The action of putting to the test; trial.”

2. “Proof by actual trial; practical demonstration.” I would simply point out, in the first two definitions of experience, the role of process, specifically the process of testing—or putting to the test—self or other. I would also note the juridical dimension of the concept, arguably related to judgment, and even the proximity of experience to the ordeal. With the notion of “practical demonstration” there is a movement or even slippage toward a meaning obsolete in English but not in French: experience as experiment, which suggests an active, indeed performative, implication or even intervention of the observer in the observed—an implication that cannot be reduced to observation alone since it also changes what is investigated.

3. “The actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge.” Here I am reminded of Satya Mohanty’s oft-quoted definition of experience: “ ‘Experience’ refers very simply to the variety of ways humans process information.”⁶ I would note that this is a definition, apparently restricted to humans, that may refer to a necessary dimension of certain forms of experience, but it does not seem to get at either additional senses in the OED or still others one might offer. Thus it may have to be supplemented by other considerations before it can qualify more comprehensively as one definition of experience. Would the way a computer processes information count as experience? If one answers in the negative, is it because for something to qualify as experience (say, what occurs in a cyborg), it would have to be related to affect and perhaps to at least the possibility of understanding, including mutual understanding? (Recall the significance of the ability of the replicant to cry in *Blade Runner* and its relation to the rapport—in certain ways the undecidable rapport—between human and other-than-human.) Is processing information, even when construed as or complemented by knowledge, too narrow and epistemocentric as a criterion of experience?⁷ Can nonhuman animals be said to be devoid of experience or would such an anthropocentric idea of experience be too restrictive, based on too narrow a conception of affect and mutual understanding, and even too related to the primacy of science in however postpositivistic a form?⁸

4. “The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event. Also an instance of this; a state or condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected.” Here the OED explicitly links experience to consciousness as well as to subjectivity. The linkage with subjectivity sits somewhat uneasily with the stress on “the actual observation

of facts or events” which would seem aligned with objectivity. In addition, one may note the typical linkage of experience with the subject and subjectivity as well as its extremely problematic nature, indicated by the appearance of objectivity with the attendant double binds of the subject–object aporia. But one may also argue that one should not oppose subjectivity and objectivity, notably when one introduces the question of subject positions that are crucial in identity-formation and mediate the relation between the self and society, as I shall later suggest. The OED’s stress on consciousness would seem to exclude unconscious processes from experience. One may find this exclusion, frequent in phenomenology, to be definitional of a certain conception of experience. But one is then left with a limited concept of experience that ignores the problem of the unconscious and of that which impinges upon, indeed internally differentiates or even splits, yet is not encompassed by the conscious control of, the presumably unified subject—a problem I shall address when I ask the question: What is not experience or at least not entirely derivable from, or reducible to, experience (or at least a certain conception of experience)?

5. “In senses 3, 4 often personified; esp. in various proverbial phrases.” The wonderful example given of personification or *prosopopoeia* might lead one to believe that the authors of the OED entry had read Paul de Man: “If experience be the mistress of fools, I am sure it is the mother of wisdom.” Is one supposed to infer from this puzzling if not mystifying statement that the mother of wisdom, prone to fooling around with fools, is identical with the mistress of fools—a promiscuous identity that might provoke an identity crisis in proponents of reason as the sober-sided father of wisdom? Or is there some intimation of the relation between reason or serious understanding, indeed wisdom, and the carnivalesque role of the fool and the jester—or, more broadly, between work and play? Might this intimation be of interest to a defensible form of identity politics in which the concept of identity remained problematic, and the identification between self and other was countered by the recognition of alterity related both to internal self-questioning and to empathy or compassion attentive to difference and to the requirements of respect for the other as other?⁹

6. “What has been experienced; the events that have taken place within the knowledge of an individual, a community, mankind at large, either during a particular period or generally.” This is a very expansive definition of experience, but it at least serves to bring up the question of the relation between those who have directly experienced a series of events (e.g., slavery, apartheid, or the Holocaust) and those who are related to them through memory or at times through a shared heritage or subject position (say as African-American, black South African, or Jew or as non-African American, white South African, or German).¹⁰ I doubt whether knowledge in a delimited sense would be enough of a basis for arguing that a later generation’s relation to the past is in some significant sense experiential or related to complex processes of identity-formation. At least there would have to be memory not reducible to (but also not excluding) objective knowledge claims, and perhaps one might also require affective response—a feeling for the history of a group and one’s

inherited, acquired, or earned involvement in it. Another experiential and existential dimension not reducible to knowledge would be bearing witness in a secondary, nonidentitarian way to that past and its primary witnesses while recognizing and respecting their difference from oneself. By circumscribing a relation to the past within delimited forms of knowledge and representation, commentators such as Peter Novick and Walter Benn Michaels have (I think mistakenly) argued that there is nothing experiential in any relevant sense about “memory” of a past one did not personally and directly live. Indeed, for them, what is at issue in movements beyond delimited claims to knowledge is only a misguided identity or memory politics. The latter misappropriates past experience as symbolic capital in the service of current political and social self-interest.¹¹ Benn Michaels sees such identity-politics at play even—indeed paradigmatically—in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, a novel that might be read instead as a significant, critical staging of the relation of a community to its past in terms of shared traumatic memory and the inevitable acting out of collective and individual trauma, with the possibility that art, in its specific (often highly mediated, indirect, darkly playful, powerful but other than narrowly documentary or informational) forms of bearing witness or testifying to that past, might assist in partially working that past over and through, thereby making more available other possibilities in the present and future.¹² Morrison’s novel also features what Novick and Benn Michaels ignore or deny: the transgenerational transmission of trauma whereby, through often unconscious processes of identification particularly with intimates, one may be possessed by the past and relive the hauntingly post-traumatic symptoms of events and experiences one may not have directly lived through.

7. “Knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone.” The OED combines two quite different definitions here. Actual observation may be that of an eye-witness who remains a bystander distanced from events. Undergoing something characterizes someone having the experience, those (perhaps unconsciously) identifying with (even being haunted or possessed by) him or her or, in distinguishable ways, those empathizing with him or her while recognizing and respecting alterity and even resisting identification. I think the process of undergoing or “going through” is crucial for an acceptable definition of experience, and it would involve an affective, not only a narrowly cognitive, response, with affectivity having a significant relation to an attempt (however cautious, constitutively limited, nonleveling, imperfect, and at times failed) at understanding the other (who may sometimes be, in the most significant respects, opaque or standoffish). It is also crucial for giving an account of the relation between one directly having the experience, belated effects of certain experiences in later life (notably traumatic experiences), and the response to the experience of various third parties, including those born later—an issue that involves the question of subject positions vis-à-vis identities.

8. “The state of having been occupied in any department of study or practice, in affairs generally, or in the intercourse of life; the extent to which, or the length of time during which, one has been so occupied; the aptitudes, skill, judgment, etc. thereby acquired.” We here, perhaps

inevitably, veer once again toward the extremely general and “spongiform.” But one can give many ordinary examples of what seems to be suggested in this definition: the experience of a doctor or businessman, the experience of childbirth, the experience of a graduate student, and so forth. It is also common to refer to someone with much or little experience in a given activity. Fortunately, the OED stops with this definition about which there seems relatively little of interest to say that has not already been said about the other definitions.

In his important article, John Zammito adds elements to the OED’s definitions of experience that introduce important considerations but also tend to idealize the concept and to obscure other possibilities: “The appeal to agency and to the materiality of context both stand, in my view, indispensably at the center of the historian’s task, and ‘experience’ is the theoretical term Toews invokes to identify them . . . It is essential to recognize learning, acknowledgement of error, changing one’s mind, as elements of experience” (291, 295). Agency, context, learning, acknowledgement of error, changing one’s mind, and fallibility in general are indeed important considerations—and not only for historians. What do they ignore or obscure, and what do they have to engage to be effective? I would mention: disempowerment, decontextualization or disorientation, meaninglessness, and impermeability to learning related to dogmatic belief, fixation, and even fanaticism. These too are important experiences. Disempowerment that may return one to the helplessness of a child is particularly important with respect to those traumatized by certain experiences, but it may also in other respects (e.g., economically or politically) characterize people in oppressed positions. The actuality and possibilities of agency are key issues in understanding behavior and enabling action, and one should neither hypostatize the victim nor simply impute agency (typically along with responsibility and a tendency to blame the disempowered) when it is unavailable or at least severely limited.

Along with disempowerment, trauma may bring radical disorientation, confusion, fixation on the past, and out-of-context experiences (such as flashbacks, startle reactions, or other forms of intrusive behavior). (One crucial feature of the post-traumatic symptom is to be an out-of-context experience.) Working through trauma involves gaining critical distance on those experiences and recontextualizing them in ways that permit a re-engagement with ongoing concerns and future possibilities. But I shall have more to say about trauma in a moment. I would simply note here the ways in which agency is placed in question, and reason along with it, notably with respect to unconscious processes and uncontrolled, even delirious, aspects of thought and action. The latter literally take one out of the furrow of ordinary and idealized expectations yet in certain respects may not be altogether avoidable or even undesirable as experiences. In fact, there may be a problem with an overly circumscribed conception of reason that is too readily conflated with reasonableness, including a stylistic reasonableness or equanimity, that does not somehow engage affect in general and more extreme, disorienting, or ecstatic possibilities in particular.

I would also note that the meaningless experience is very significant. It may help to delegitimize a status quo and prompt a search for alternatives in which reason and reasoning have a role to play. It may also be put to work and play in forms of art and political contestation that stress or introduce anxiety or doubt with respect to the familiar in ways that enable one to take critical distance on standard practices or see them in a different light.

Here, I would like to explore the question I brought up earlier: what is not, or not entirely, derivable from, or reducible to, (a certain conception of) experience?

Commodified experience. Does commodified experience, so important in modern and postmodern society, count as experience? If one answers in the negative, is one necessarily indentured to an essentialized or exclusionary concept of “authentic” experience? I think one can take a critical approach to the commodification of experience without holding up, or at least assuming, some idea of truly authentic experience. (I prefer the notion of desirable experience that requires one to make norms or values, especially as they bear on public life, as explicit as possible yet does not imply the utter transparency of intimate relations or rely on an ontology, however weak or commonsensical.) But the critique of commodified experience would have to be part of a general critique of commodification rather than a general critique of experience or the concept thereof. In other words, one would see the commodification of experience as a stage or aspect of commodification along with the commodification of goods and services. And one’s critique would be economic, social, and political—not simply experiential.

I initially intended to entitle this paper “Experience: You’ve lived the book—now see the movie!” The title seemed to get at the problem of the commodification of experience. I am referring to such things as the experience of being a Club Med South Sea Islander for a week, of getting an identity card for (and presumably identifying with) a survivor at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, or even watching *Schindler’s List* as a non-survivor who is moved by the experience. (Apparently many survivors have also been moved by the experience and liked the film, but here one has the question of the status of the survivor with regard to the experience of different events—events such as the Shoah or events such as representations of it which may, for example, be therapeutically uplifting—in contradistinction from his or her role as viewer and critic of certain representations. One may respect or even honor the survivor with respect to the former experiences but take issue with him or her as viewer and critic of certain representations of those experiences and related events.) Commodified experience poses many issues that are difficult to address in a critically informed manner, but these issues should be brought up and considered in any discussion of experience, notably the so-called meaningful experience.

Virtual experience. In the present context, there often seems to be in practice an identity between commodified and virtual experience, but the two may nonetheless be analytically distinguished. There are many varieties of virtual experience of which I shall mention a few. One is utopian experience

that always goes beyond actual experience or realism in the representation of experience. Indeed the more utopian the experience, the more distant it would seem to be from the actual or the realistic. At the limit the utopian may be empty, vacuous, or totally open-ended and even defended as such insofar as one desires a complete rupture or break with existing conditions and a radically different form of life or civilization. Here the utopian may be close to the transcendental or quasi-transcendental. And one may argue that without reality-testing that requires a certain realism, the utopian amounts to wishful thinking or at least to a secular analog of creation *ex nihilo* or even the other-worldly.

Objectified, structural processes. I shall simply mention these processes that include such phenomena as price fluctuations, demographic movements, climatic changes, and the long-term process of commodification. These processes, quite important in history, have experiential effects but are not directly objects of experience. Hence, one may experience the effects of commodification in the commodity as fetish, but there is an important sense in which one does not experience the long-term structural process of commodification in the transformation and functioning of an economy and a society (e.g., as analyzed by Marx in *Capital*). One might also include among objectified processes certain linguistic developments such as transformations on the phonemic level or even in grammar, syntax, and perhaps semantics. One may in some sense experience the obsolescence of a word but does one experience, other than in retrospect, its becoming obsolete? How to articulate cogently the analysis of structural processes with that of experience is a crucial problem in that one without the other is necessarily one-sided and often misleading.

Trauma. Anxiety is related to trauma and to the idea that at least humanistic and interpretive social-scientific disciplines should in certain significant ways always be in a state of crisis, including a kind of post-traumatic identity-crisis wherein what is open for debate bears on the identity or constitution of the discipline itself. Such a view is especially pertinent when the most important problems are themselves not simply interdisciplinary (in that they require the cooperation or combination of various existing disciplines to “solve” them) but crossdisciplinary in that they cut across existing disciplines and are owned by, or adequately addressed in the terms of, none of them. Trauma itself is one such problem.

I would note that John Toews does not treat the problem of trauma, and Joan Scott touches on it but does not thematize it. It arises with respect to her second interpretation or reading of Sam Delaney’s experience of “an undulating mass of naked male bodies” seen under a dim blue light in a bathhouse.¹³ In contrast to her first interpretation in terms of a rather pat experience of identity, Scott notes that Delaney himself prompts a different reading: “Another kind of reading, closer to Delaney’s preoccupation with memory and the self in this autobiography, sees this event [in the bathhouse] not as the discovery of truth (conceived as the reflection of a prediscursive reality), but as the substitution of one interpretation for another. Delaney

presents this substitution as a conversion experience, a clarifying moment, after which he sees (that is, understands) differently” (34–35). It is not clear in Scott how a conversion experience, related to repetition with transformative change (here a second reading or substitution of interpretations) and bringing a possibly traumatic difference or disjunction in (self)understanding, bears on a theory of radical discursive constructivism, but the role of this shift in her account is noteworthy.

The shift in Scott’s interpretation of Delaney is not noted in John Zammito’s spirited critique, and he tends to pass very lightly over trauma. Zammito writes: “Psychological ‘opacities’ are an important problem, but the very existence of such *categories* [underlined in the original] as ‘trauma’ suggests that we are not utterly without resources, and that to employ them we must use other ‘experiences’ to give us purchase on the repressed ones” (292–293). Here Zammito himself seems to take the linguistic turn or to be a pantextualist in a rather conventional sense. One could of course parody his statement by asserting: “The prevalence of undernourishment is an important problem, but the very existence of such *categories* as ‘food supplies’ suggests that we are not utterly without resources.” The basic point is that the relation of experience to trauma poses problems that require much more serious and extended treatment than an affirmation that we can appeal to certain categories or even to other experiences in order to get beyond silence and approximate the experience of trauma. Indeed how to approach and study the traumas of others or of oneself in the past is a vexed issue that raises many problems, including the role of identification, compulsive acting out, empathy, working over, and working through. I doubt if it would be desirable (although it may well be awe-inspiring) to actually relive or even approximate the experience of certain traumas (say, of victims of the Holocaust or of child abuse), but I would defend being unsettled by them and empathizing with their victims.

With respect to identity-formation, one should make special mention of the founding trauma in the life of individuals and groups. The founding trauma is the actual or imagined event (or series of extreme or limit events) that poses in accentuated fashion the very question of identity yet may paradoxically become the very basis of an individual or collective identity. It may be undergone in the form of the deconversion or the conversion experience, even the sequence or coming together of the two, and it disorients and may reorient the course of a life. It may be related to—or more or less problematically be converted into—a “mystical” experience of seemingly unmediated insight, witnessing, or revelation, and it may also become the basis of a new identity. One thinks, for example, of Paul on the road to Damascus being interpellated by God and undergoing as well as performatively enacting transformation from persecutor of Christians to follower of Christ and institution-builder of a church. One might also think of secular analogues of the deconversion/conversion experience such as Sartre’s original choice of being, its often opaque imbrication in *le vécu* (lived experience), and its implications for the rearticulation of a life’s course. Some of the most

extreme and dire experiences, including those involving radical loss, may become or be transfigured into founding traumas as the (variably earned or unearned) foundations for personal and collective life. Hence slavery and the Holocaust have become markers of group identity and, in contested ways, founding traumas for groups living in their fraught heritage. One may ask whether every group that is in some significant sense an existential group or locus of commitment whose members affirm (and may be pressured to affirm) a collective identity has in its past or in its mythology (often its mythologized past) a trauma that becomes foundational and is a source of identity both for those who actually lived through it and in different ways for those born into its aftermath. In perhaps its most politically pointed dimension, the founding trauma may be a way for an oppressed group or an abused person to reclaim a history and to transform it into a more or less enabling basis of life in the present. But, insofar as it fixates one obsessively on old grievances or dubious dynamics and even induces compulsive re-enactment of them, it may also function to undermine the need to come to terms with the past in a manner that constructively engages existential, social, and political demands and possibilities of a current situation.

The Unconscious. Another major set of problems not entirely encompassed by (a certain conception of) experience is the unconscious or, more precisely, unconscious processes such as displacement, condensation, repression, denial, disavowal, and compulsive repetition (related to the acting out of trauma). These processes, to which I can only allude, have experiential effects but, insofar as they are unconscious, are in one sense not directly experienced. Especially interesting in this respect is the role of belatedness or what Freud termed *Nachträglichkeit*. For Freud there was a period of latency between an initial, potentially traumatizing event and a later event that in some sense recalled it and triggered a traumatic response. The trauma depended on the interval or period of latency between events—an interval that was not itself experienced but related to a very intense form of experience in the acting out or compulsive repetition of the past itself experienced as if it were fully present. One may also refer here to the role of belated recognitions related to a passage of time and a series of subsequent developments that enable one to see something in the past that agents in the past (including oneself) could not see in that way themselves. For example, one reads Heidegger differently after the disclosure of aspects of his past that were either not known or not deemed relevant in an earlier reading, and even if one returns to previous readings one is constrained to provide different defenses of them which come to terms with later disclosures if only to deny their relevance. One also sees certain movements or orientations of the inter-war period differently in the light of later happenings such as the events of the Nazi regime. These belated recognitions do not imply a teleological vision of history, and they would be misunderstood as mere anachronisms. But they do allow one to ask questions of the past that its actors did not ask of themselves. But neither they nor we necessarily experienced the intervening events or variables that enable belated recognitions. These enabling

events are curiously in the quasi-transcendental position of Kantian conditions of possibility.

Subject positions. One may have a subject position without experiencing it, and often one's experience of it depends on a recognition, at times an insulting recognition, coming from others. But subject positions are crucial for both experience and identity. *Identity-formation might even be defined in non-essentialized terms as a problematic attempt to configure and, in certain ways, coordinate subject positions-in-process.* This attempt would involve a limited, variable, but significant role for the responsible agency of individuals and groups, with the possibility of creating new subject positions (ones not beholden to victimization, for example). With respect to subject positions and their role in social life, one may ask whether there has ever been a politics that has not in some significant sense been an identity politics and whether criticisms of certain forms of identity politics are, often implicitly, made in favor of other (often idealized past or utopian) forms of identity politics (e.g., a nostalgia for the 1960s idealized or selectively remembered as a period of universalistic values and alliance politics).

Among standard subject positions that one has to take into account in any discussion of identity are at least the following (which may themselves be multiple or internally divided): sexuality, gender, family, language, nationality, ethnicity, class, "race," religion or secular ideology, occupation, and at times disciplinary affiliation. Debates about identity and identity-formation often concern the actual and desirable prioritizing or, more generally, the relation and possible coordination or integration of subject positions. They also concern the possibilities of communication and cooperation or conflict between subject positions within the self or distributed among different individuals or groups. Changing some subject positions is more difficult than changing others. For example, for most people a sex-change operation, with all of the attendant modifications it involves, reaches very deep into identity as most of us presently understand it. A change of occupation would be less telling, although a drastic change (from wealthy banker to vagrant, say) would be related to major changes in identity.

I noted at the outset that the problem of how to relate one's experience to that of others does not seem to arise for, and is often not salient in the work of, someone who studies his or her own group or people.¹⁴ But there is an important sense in which it should be of critical interest. There are always more or less significant and subtle differentiations between oneself and those one studies as well as differences within oneself (and within others) that both render problematic any identity and may enable one to address identity in more subtle and cogent terms, indeed to envisage and work toward different subject positions and identities. I have intimated that identity-formation is a matter of recognizing and coming to terms with one's subject positions, coordinating them, examining their compatibility or incompatibility, testing them, and either validating them by a process of reproduction and renewal or transforming them through questioning and related work on the self and in society. Any resultant identity would have at most an internally dialogized and

self-critical coherence. Moreover, insofar as experience is a (if not the) basis of identity, the problematics of experience carry over into identity.

I have also remarked that a useful concept is signifying practice and that language is a crucial signifying practice (or congeries of signifying practices) but not the only one. Often language is privileged in our culture in ways one may want to interrogate. It (like reason or even affect) is one of the criteria invoked to differentiate humans from nonhumans, typically in an invidious fashion, and one becomes uneasy when the differentiation is rendered unstable (as it should be). And we typically make language pivotal by using it to discuss all other signifying practices and to limit, see as second-best, or exclude the use of other signifying practices to comment on one another or on it. (One would be more than surprised—and I most of all—if I started to dance or play a musical instrument, much less occasionally growled, in the attempt to address the problem of experience and identity.)

It is worth noting that in Toews, experience and meaning remain the basic if not the foundational concepts. In his triangulation, language—perhaps signifying practice in general—is located on what seems to be a significantly different level as a mediation. (One is led to picture a triangle with meaning and experience at its base angles and language at its apex with language transforming experience into meaning.) This gesture serves the fruitful function of not privileging language albeit at the expense of leaving both experience and meaning undefined. But how then does one situate the often complex experience of using language itself—say, the experience of speaking, listening, reading, or writing? Take, for example, the experience of a lower-class child speaking in an upper-class environment, of the lone woman speaking in a meeting of executives, or of a bi- or multilingual person addressing a monolingual official (or reader) complacently competent only in the dominant language. For many academics, writing, or speaking in public, may be an experience as demanding as many other experiences. In addition, the constraining processes in learning to speak and, perhaps even more, to read and write involve arduous, albeit in part empowering, undertakings for anyone, particularly for the oppressed or disabled.¹⁵ (The legitimate deconstruction of the binary opposition between speech and writing should not be made to obscure the “experiential” demands and exigencies of acquiring literacy in any culture.) Why are these not experiences as experiential as any other experience such as listening to music? I have intimated that the problem of using language to discuss music (invoked by Zammito) presents difficult issues in translation, intersubjectivity, and objectivity that are not addressed by the seemingly self-evident assertion that listening to Mozart is not—or at least not exclusively or primarily—a linguistic event. How does objectivity apply to the analytic and critical discussion of music? In what sense is music a signifying practice? To what extent may it be seen as an articulation of subjectivity? Or is the conjunction of experience, emotion, and subjectivity, as well as the explicit or implicit privileging of subjectivity and the subject, basically misguided? If one retains the concept of subjectivity, what is required of a seemingly paradoxical “objective” history of experience that includes—and

in some uses seems identical with—subjectivity? Should certain explicitly problematic concepts, including that of subject position, be understood as destabilizing and criticizing a notion of the subject and subjectivity as unified and privileged?

Memory. The concept of experience also raises the problem of memory and of the relation between history and memory. What we refer to as experience is typically the memory of experience. Memory has recently become a “hot” topic among historians, often generating more heat than light. Debates about it are like fallout of the culture wars, and when memory is mentioned, identity and identity politics are never far behind. But historians, I think, often ignore the role of what might be termed disciplinary identity politics, which they may enact without thematizing as a problem and addressing critically. Indeed critiques of identity politics in society are often themselves instances of disciplinary identity politics which attempt to shore up the professional identity of historians, often by contrasting their enlightened, rational, or objective methods with the political motivations and quest for symbolic capital of those they analyze critically. This dynamic is quite evident in Peter Novick’s *The Holocaust in American Life*, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacobs’s *Telling the Truth about History*, Richard Evans’s *In Defense of History*, or Gerard Noiriel’s *Sur la “crise” de l’Histoire*.¹⁶ Indeed in *Telling the Truth about History*, multiculturalism and poststructuralism are presented as destroying a putative earlier consensus on how to narrate the American past, while in Noiriel it is Americans (i.e., foreigners) who are destroying the authentic unity of the Annales school of historiography in France—in spite of the fact that it is often those affiliated with that school who are raising some of the most pointed questions. In brief, recent tendencies justify a certain skepticism about the seaworthiness of at least some ships that sail under the banner of professional historiography or even under that of a chastened, ascetically self-denying objectivity.

Since memory is a prominent part of (indeed at times a metonym for) experience, the problem of the relation between history and memory is a somewhat smaller scale version of the problem of the relation between history and experience. I would simply reiterate the point I develop at length in the first chapter of *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. History and memory should neither be opposed in binary fashion nor conflated. Their relations are complex. One key argument I try to make is that historiography most directly impinges on the public sphere and is not purely professional or technical in nature when it touches on problems of memory, including of course problems of forgetting, repression, and avoidance. At its best historiography contributes to the public sphere a critically tested, accurate memory that groups in society may possibly internalize as the remembered past. In any case, memory as part of the experience of a group is bound up with the way that group relates to its past as it bears on its present and future. One may deny the status of shared memory as a mode of experience in relating to the past if one takes up a neo-Adamic individualistic, if not anarchistic, or narrowly presentist, so-called pragmatic, point of

view. I find this denial with its premises to be more open to question than what it criticizes. I would also observe that experience of a certain sort, including differentially shared or collective memory, initially enables one to speak in certain voices and can give one a prima facie claim to knowledge and understanding, including their role in scholarship—something that includes but goes beyond narrow cognition in the sense of facts, dates, and their analysis. But this prima facie claim has to be spelled out and argued for in a larger discursive context.¹⁷

Objectivity. Here an important issue is the possibility and limits of objectification and the relation of objectification to other modes of signification, notably stylistic variations elicited by the attempt to address traumatic, limit events. Objectification is a process through which the other is positioned as an object of description, analysis, commentary, critique, and experiment. It distances one from the experience of the other, notably in terms of empathic or compassionate understanding, and it restricts one's own experience in the production of knowledge to the process of objectification itself, hence to aloofness and at times ironic or critical detachment. Objectivism carries this process to extremes and makes it the exclusive basis of valid knowledge, particularly within certain disciplinary contexts. It also excludes other countervailing modes of signification. A postpositivist orientation remains neopositivistic if it confines itself to objectification and does not engage the problem of other modes of signification that may complement, be intimately bound up with, and also test objectification as well as place in question the binary opposition between objectivity and subjectivity (or the external and the internal).

Objectification is connected with certain forms of predication which are generally recognized as conveying knowledge about the other. Processing information is often construed as an objectifying procedure. With respect to extreme or traumatizing events and experiences, objectification not only functions to produce knowledge but also serves as a protective shield for the investigator which may be necessary in warding off possibly disorienting types of identification. But, in its unmitigated form, it may also impede empathy and affective response in general, thereby putting the investigator in the untenable or at least questionable position of the bystander if not the fully knowledgeable subject (the "subject-supposed-to-know" analyzed and criticized by Lacan). Unmitigated objectification or objectivism may render one insensitive to the problem of the transferenceal implication of the investigator in the object of investigation, including the tendency (typically acted out in objectivism) to repeat processes operative in, or projected into, that object.

One always has some tendency to project or to identify (whether positively, negatively, or ambivalently), and one may also be tempted to repress or deny any involvement in the other. Objectivity in a desirable sense should be seen as a process of attempting to counteract identificatory and other phantasmatic tendencies without denying, or believing one can fully transcend, them. Rather, limited but significant objectification should be

cogently related to other discursive and signifying possibilities depending on the nature of the object of study and how one is able to negotiate one's own subject positions. Objectification is bound up with reality-testing that does not eliminate affect or involvement in one's responsive attempt to understand the other but may check unmediated identification and related modes of phantasmatic investment, including being haunted or possessed by the other (something I indicated may be inevitable for victims of trauma and perhaps for those empathetically unsettled by their experience). Moreover, the distance required for critical analysis becomes deceptive if it is not itself tested and contested by an empathic attempt at understanding others and their contexts of behavior. The relation between critical analysis and empathic or compassionate response, as well as their articulation with more comprehensive forms of sociopolitical and historical explanation, raises complex questions of language use, voice, and subject position that vary with disciplinary perspectives but are not simply determined by them. In any case, questions of voice, subject position, affect, and empathic response complicate, without simply contradicting, affirmations of realism and objectivity and require a sustained engagement with a set of problems often absent in a restricted epistemological treatment of issues.¹⁸ They also situate the role of experience in knowledge of self and other and thus assist in estimating its significance and limits. Attention to such issues may be the next step in trying to elaborate a postpositivist perspective that critically and fruitfully engages poststructural initiatives.

NOTES

1. *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). I am especially concerned with the articles of John H. Zammito, "Reading 'Experience': The Debate in Intellectual History among Scott, Toews, and LaCapra" and Linda Martin Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" As intimated by her title, Alcoff provides an extended defense of identity politics that is informed by concepts of experience, objectivity, and realism. Zammito finds that much in my own work is compatible with postpositivist realism but thinks that I err in the direction of hyperbole. Joan Scott is for him even more excessive. By contrast John Toews strikes the right dialectical balance in his neo-Hegelian project of triangulating experience, meaning, and language. The relevant articles to which Zammito refers are Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991), 773–97, and, in a more widely circulated shorter version to which I shall make reference, "Experience" in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22–40; John Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review* 92 (1987), 879–907. My own works to which Zammito refers are *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); "History, Language and Reading: Waiting for Crillon," *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995), 799–828; *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); *Rethinking Intellectual*

History: Texts, Contexts, Language (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and *Soundings in Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). I would note that three of my later books are also relevant to the topics discussed by Zammito and by me in the present essay: *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); and *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

2. I would note that I have never defended a linguistic turn in a radically constructivist sense or in the sense deriving from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Instead I have stressed the importance of the concept of signifying practice of which language is one crucial or even paradigmatic—but not privileged—instance, and I have insisted on a notion of language in historical use owing more to Mikhail Bakhtin than to Saussure. Bakhtin's understanding of language does not conform to the binary opposition between *langue* (formal linguistic system or code) and *parole* (individual usage that presumably instantiates codes with the possibility of error or variation that is related to change). Bakhtin does not see usage only as individual or change as always a matter of deviation or error with respect to codes. His notion of language (or the word in use) focuses on the role of language and other signifying practices in history and society, including the problems of ideology and social conflict. This notion mediates the abstract, analytic categories of *langue* and *parole* and is not beholden to the quasi-transcendental idea of the arbitrariness of the signifier.
3. An especially dubious gesture is arresting deconstruction at the stage or moment of reversal whereby a rejection of essentialism or foundationalism seems to leave only its binary opposite: the idea that experience or identity is a mere construct or even an invariably unreliable product of ideology. One may note that the most cogent aspect of the critique of foundationalism is addressed to absolute foundations or an uncontested, sovereign principle or criterion from which particular positions, decisions, or judgments are presumably derived or even deduced. The alternative is not the total absence of grounds but the need to elaborate good or cogent grounds for a non-absolute position, decision, or judgment, for example, discursively, argumentatively, and even through an appeal to narrative. In general, absolutism and varieties of relativism have always been mutually reinforcing complements not viable alternatives. For a thought-provoking discussion of related issues, see Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989) and *Identity Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995) as well as the discussion of the earlier book, in *Reclaiming Identity*, by Satya Mohanty, Paula Moya, and William S. Wilkerson, esp. 57–58n, 80n, and 270–75. (Wilkerson combines a discussion of Fuss and Joan Scott.)
4. For a subtle exploration of important dimensions of difference involving multi-cultural contestations of monocultures, see Doris Sommer, *Proceed with Caution, when Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
5. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* vol. I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). All references are to p. 430.
6. *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 204–05. Quoted by Zammito, 305. Mohanty does examine the role of affect or emotion within a broad conception of the epistemic. See his “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition” in *Reclaiming*

- Identity*, esp. pp. 33–38. There are of course cases more ambiguous than the one Mohanty focuses on—that of a woman who through consciousness-raising comes to convert her depression into (or see it as “really” being) anger that provides greater insight into her objective situation. It is also conceivable that a thicker account of the case he discusses would reveal complexities (including affective and epistemic complexities) in it.
7. I would nonetheless note that the emphasis on knowledge may be justified in cases where one is contesting the delegitimation as sources of knowledge of groups or individuals who are seen at most as witnesses or “native informants” providing something analogous to raw material that experts or scientists must process into “real” knowledge.
 8. Is John Zammito close to this restricted definition in the OED when he tends to conflate experience with evidence? I would note that the conflation is questionable in that evidence may contradict experience, for example, the remembered experience of eye-witnesses or survivors of an event.
 9. Contributors to *Reclaiming Identity*, particularly Linda Alcoff, are justifiably concerned with knee-jerk appeals to internal difference or alterity whenever identity is at issue. One might formulate this dubious kind of reaction thus: whenever I hear “identity,” I reach for my internal alterity. The problem is rather to articulate alterity with a nondogmatic notion of identity in a manner that does not obscure tensions between the two.
 10. One may add the complex case of those who have earned an identity or partial identity through engaging in activities (from shared social life or political action to research) that are recognized by members of a group as constituting bases of an identity-claim. Hence a non-African American, non-Jew, and so forth may, on “achieved” rather than “ascribed” grounds, come to have and to claim a problematic identity that is accepted by members of the relevant group who may of course be divided both factionally and internally over the question of acceptance of the other as one of “one’s own.”
 11. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); Walter Benn Michaels, “‘You Who Never Was There’: Slavery and the New Historicism—Deconstruction and the Holocaust,” *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 181–97.
 12. Such a reading is elaborated in Satya Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*.
 13. Quoted in Scott, “Experience,” 34.
 14. It should of course be observed that the study of one’s own group is justified to the extent it has been neglected, downplayed, or tendentiously represented and its study is part of a broader process of putting forward legitimate claims, particularly with respect to oppressed or subaltern groups. Moreover, a dubious form of self-directed if not narcissistic study has been typical of dominant groups that have taken their own activities to be either the primary or even exclusive object of concern or the center to which all else is referred. Canons as well as various area studies, even when presumably directed at the investigation of others, have often had this self-directed orientation as one of their most questionable features.
 15. See, for example, Peter Carruthers and Jill Boucher, eds., *Language and Thought: Interdisciplinary Themes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America*

(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Joseph P. Lash, *Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan* (New York: Delta/Seymour Lawrence, 1980); and Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *Lost Prince: The Unsolved Mystery of Kaspar Hauser* (New York: Free Press, 1996). See also the excellent article by James Berger, "Helen Keller and Implementation H[elen]," *Arizona Quarterly* 58 (2002), 109–37 in which Berger provides a sensitive and broad-ranging analysis of the life of Helen Keller as prototype or intertext for the creature of artificial intelligence in Richard Powers's novel, *Galatea 2.2*.

16. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacobs, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994); Richard Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); Gérard Noiriel, *Sur la "crise" de l'histoire* (Paris: Belin, 1996).
17. I think this is a basic point that Linda Martin Alcoff, sharing a perspective with Satya Mohanty, develops at length in "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?"
18. There is an initial attempt to address issues raised in this section in my *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, esp. chaps. 1 and 6.

TRANSFORMATION VS. RESISTANCE
IDENTITY PROJECTS: EPISTEMOLOGICAL
RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
MOVEMENTS

Sandra Harding

What kinds of knowledge-seeking projects will best serve the pro-democratic, identity-based, new social movements? Such movements include some but not all forms of feminism and race-, ethnicity-, class-, and sexuality-based projects, and perhaps some forms of more recent movements such as those representing the interests of the disabled, prostitutes, and the elderly.¹

These movements have arisen as part of a shift in capitalism's structure, as sociologists such as Manuel Castells (1997, 2000) point out. In the last three decades, capitalism's economy, politics, and culture increasingly have moved from forms characteristic of the industrial society to those of the "Net Society." Here I argue that for the social and natural sciences, epistemologies and methodologies that capture the "logic" of standpoint theories can provide powerful (perhaps even the most powerful) resources for serving these pro-democratic, identity-based, new social movements.² Standpoint projects have the potential to help move positions of resistance into the social transformation ones that are so badly needed to serve the economically and politically disadvantaged groups represented by these movements.

This is a controversial claim for a variety of reasons (Harding, ed. 2003b). Castells does not pursue the issue of what kinds of epistemologies or philosophies of science we should develop for this new world emerging around and through us, a world of local and global social relations based on the production and management of information. Yet, he offers some useful clues to some aspects of this issue, as we shall see. Certainly readers can use his account to draw the conclusion that the familiar classical Western epistemologies and philosophies of science were not designed and do not have the necessary resources to guide or account for the kinds of knowledge production or management that have emerged on a global scale through the new forms of economic, political, and cultural relations which the internet has

made possible. For one thing, political, economic, and cultural power—to be excluded from idealized knowledge production and management in the classical philosophies—escapes the kinds of scientific and epistemological controls in the Net Society that those philosophies prescribed.³

Those happy with contemporary class, race, gender, sexual, and global social hierarchies, in spite of their lip service to social justice ideals, are disinterested, at best, in the transformative projects to which pro-democratic standpoint approaches are committed. However, many researchers and scholars who are actively concerned to advance social justice through democratic social relations also either distance their projects from standpoint ones or adopt only a weak and partial form of standpoint logic. These weak programs recognize standpoint theory's argument for the necessary social situatedness of any knowledge project, in contrast to other epistemologies and philosophies of science which resist recognition that even the best knowledge systems must also be socially located. To be sure the weak programs often adopt a valuable protest mode that resists universalist claims about the superiority of dominant projects and the inferiority of those of marginalized groups. But they do not take on the additional task of critically "studying up"—of struggling to identify the precise conceptual practices through which oppressive economic, political, and cultural power relations are exercised and legitimated, thereby pointing to a crucial site for pro-democratic social change. The weak programs make clear that something is wrong with conventional scientific and epistemological conceptual frameworks, but they do not identify the precise conceptual practices from which different kinds of oppression flow and are given social legitimacy. Interestingly, both kinds of pro-democratic resisters—both those who don't "study up" and those who do—can be found among traditional socialist researchers and scholars no less than among those who distance themselves from marxian perspectives. My argument is that oppositional resistance, though it is a valuable step in either case, does not go far enough.

Of course it would be arrogant and wrongheaded for any individual or group to presume to be able definitively to specify appropriate knowledge-seeking projects now or at any time in the future even for any one of these movements, let alone for all of them. The knowledge needs and best strategies of all social groups change over time as they and their natural and social environments affect each other. Moreover, encouraging continual critical scrutiny of what those needs are and how best to satisfy them is itself an important contribution to the necessary ongoing reformulation of both democratic and scientific goals and practices.

Yet, the mainstream research disciplines and the social institutions that they serve do not hesitate to insist that they know precisely what are, and how to serve, the knowledge needs of everyone, including those represented by such new social movements. They insist that maximizing rationality, objectivity, and good research requires assuming prevailing disciplinary conceptual frameworks and following their prescribed methods. One of the distinctive features of the standpoint projects of the new social movements is the way they take on the natural sciences and their influences and reactions

in the social sciences by challenging such ideals, conceptual frameworks, and methods.

So it has been important for the new social movements to attempt to articulate as clearly as possible how they could and should define for themselves their knowledge-seeking goals and processes. Indeed, one canonical statement of what identity politics is emerged from just such a project. Thus this essay asks how the “logic of the standpoint” can be situated as a resource at the conjunction of recent controversies over identity epistemologies and politics, and over the possibilities for pro-democratic politics and knowledge required in our current post-industrial social relations. These still-emerging relations must engage with the fact that the manufacture and control of knowledge increasingly provides the “base” of the economy and politics, and that power circulates in kinds of ways not addressed in older philosophies of science and epistemologies. The next section clarifies the focus here on only new social movements, and on ones that adopt pro-democratic agendas and are identity-based. Section 2 outlines standpoint “logic,” especially as it has been articulated in feminist work, and what is distinctive about it. Section 3 points to the value of a more sociological notion of identity than tends to be centered in controversies over identity politics and identity knowledge projects. Here, I draw on Castells’ account of the power of identity movements in the emerging “Net Society.” Finally, the concluding section returns to pull together these themes in order to argue for the desirability of “strong” standpoint knowledge projects for pro-democratic, identity-based, social movements and their intellectual agendas.

PRO-DEMOCRATIC, IDENTITY-BASED, NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

First, a clarification of the three features of the movements of interest here. The focus here is on the “new social movements” which have arisen in the last four decades in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. As Castells (1997) points out, the peoples represented by these groups have not been able to benefit equitably from industrial society’s distribution of material and symbolic “goods,” and some of them, destined to form the new social class of the “unlinked” (to the World Wide Web), are already undergoing further immiseration through the institutions and practices of the Net Society.⁴ Though some of these new social movements, such as feminist, anticlass and antiracist ones, can claim legacies of political activism that extend into the nineteenth century at least, others have come into existence only recently. Moreover, older ones have taken distinctive new forms since the 1960s, and through the limitations and resources provided by the emerging Net Society. So these movements are here distinguished from older voluntary organizations of industrial capitalism’s civil society, such as labor unions, religious groups, and political parties through which people agitated for social (including sometimes spiritual) benefits and gave meaning to their lives. As

indicated earlier, not everyone in the new groups has adopted standpoint knowledge-seeking projects. Yet, central segments of these groups have done so in order to produce kinds of knowledge that they want and need for projects of transforming the social order—possibilities which were only fleetingly glimpsed in any of the older social movements.

The focus is also on pro-democratic groups, in contrast to many democracy-resisting new social movements, such as the American Patriot movement, neo-Nazis, and religious and territorial fundamentalist groups around the globe. It is important to recognize that the latter also represent marginalized groups that have not been able to benefit equitably in either industrial society or, recently, the emerging Net Society. Both industrial and the Net societies have threatened their fundamental values and, often, left them marginalized economically, socially, and politically. These other movements seek a return to less-democratic social relations where they think that their goals can better be met. The standpoint writings have usually failed to recognize how the “logic of the standpoint” can be available to antidemocratic groups no less than to pro-democratic ones (Pels 2003).⁵ Thus, the politically progressive aspect of new social movements’ knowledge production projects, when they achieve it, cannot in principle be provided entirely by the “logic of the standpoint” itself. Standpoint logic shows how to identify and critically analyze a distinctive aspect of power, namely its conceptual practices. Yet, more than pro-democratic groups are marginalized by contemporary political economies. Ironically, the “logic of the standpoint” achieves a certain limited political neutrality in this respect, though such neutrality is different from that found in the positivist ideal.⁶

Finally, the focus here is on identity-based groups, in contrast to non-identity-based ones such as environmental or antimilitarist groups. The latter claim to represent the interests of humanity in general, and do not much focus on the different interests and desires of oppressed “minorities” in the kinds of protest and social transformation that they advocate.⁷ Yet, it is distinctive kinds of knowledge that are claimed to become available through the strategies of the identity-based groups, and it is on controversies over that claim to the epistemic importance of difference that this paper is concerned.⁸

Finally, my focus will be on the theory and politics of knowledge production within and for these movements, rather than on their political and intellectual agendas more generally. Philosophers who work on such issues think of this as a concern with epistemology and philosophy of science, while social researchers tend to think of the relevant fields here as sociology of knowledge and methodology.⁹ In discussions of standpoint theory, elements of all four fields can (and must) be found. Clean distinctions between the fields are neither possible nor desirable, though disciplines tend to get going distinctive controversies and discussions of such issues. Thus there are understandable disciplinary reasons for focusing on one or another of them.

Let us turn to the logic of standpoint theory and its congeniality to the transformative projects of identity-based new social movements.

SITUATED KNOWLEDGE AND EPISTEMIC PRIVILEGE: TWO STANDPOINT PROJECTS¹⁰

The intellectual origins of standpoint theory are usually traced to Karl Marx (1970), from whom they were developed as the proletarian standpoint by the Hungarian theorist Georg Lukács (1971). Some contemporary sociologists cite the work of Mannheim (1936), Merton (1972) and Simmel (1921) as their inspiration. The marxian project had been abandoned by the 1940s because of insoluble problems with the way it was then formulated. As Frederic Jameson (1988) points out, it was only the feminists who have overtly taken up Lukács's "unfinished project," moving it in new directions that resolved or avoided its earlier limitations.¹¹

One can identify central standpoint themes through the work of its early theorists. Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith was the first to develop an analysis of the potential of a "standpoint of women" to serve as a powerful criticism of the "conceptual practices of power" (Smith 1990a) in a particular discipline, sociology in her case. She proposed using a standpoint of women as an alternative method of research that could generate empirical and theoretical resources for a "sociology for women"¹² (Smith 1987, 1990a, b, 1999). This sociology was to be *for* women in the sense that its goal was to answer the kinds of questions about dominant social relations and how they were conceptualized that arose in women's lives, rather than to pursue the questions favored by the conceptual frameworks of sociology. Research that started off from women's everyday lives, that took its questions and problematics from their lives—in domestic life, workplaces, public life and community activities—had the potential to detect sexist and androcentric interests embedded in sociology's conceptual frameworks and thereby in the economic, political, and social institutions that sociology serves. These conceptual frameworks were claimed to be value-neutral and thus universally valid, but women's standpoint revealed their androcentric specificity.

Thus, standpoint theory's target was from the beginning the abstract conceptual frameworks that function mostly out of reach—beyond awareness—of the everyday observation and reasoning that they guide. Such frameworks delineate what is and is not intelligible within any particular cultural discourse or way of life. Standpoint project findings could not be simply the reports of what women say or think, valuable as women's voices are to such projects. Women, like men, have to learn how to detect such frameworks in patterns of public policies, everyday beliefs and practices, institutional policies, practices and their meanings, and other aspects of social relations. Sociology makes assumptions about the differing natures and social roles of women and men, the nature of and relation between private and public spheres, about what constitutes social deviance, poverty, and violence against women, models of rationality and agency. Such assumptions appeared reasonable and universally valid only from the perspective of men's characteristic activities (which are themselves differentiated by class, race, and other such social structures).

Smith argued that sociology was complicitous with administrative/managerial forms of ruling as it worked up everyday life into categories and patterns of them such that women and other devalued groups could be administered, managed, and governed by others. Women's everyday activities—as wives, nurses, secretaries, cooks, office cleaners, and so forth—made men's worlds possible. Women's work provided the ongoing material conditions for men's worlds to take their characteristic shapes. Women relieved all men of the dominant groups and, often, men who were not in such groups, of the labor of mothering, feeding, clothing, cleaning up after and emotionally supporting men and the children that were theirs, too, and doing the infrastructural work in such men's workplaces as hospitals, universities, transnational corporations, state houses, and militaries. Women's labor made it possible for administrative and managerial class men (the “ruling class” in our kind of society) to imagine their abstract labor as the only truly human labor. Thus Smith argued that the standpoint of women provided a radical perspective on sociology.

Independently, U.S. political philosopher Nancy Hartsock returned to Marx and Engels to construct a feminist standpoint theory that, like Smith's work in sociology, explained the political importance of, and intellectually legitimated a powerful critical focus on, some of the most fundamental assumptions of her own discipline. Moreover, this epistemology was seen by her, too, also as a distinctive method of research that could advance the growth of knowledge while also serving feminist ends (Hartsock 1983, 1998).

An important contribution of Hartsock's work was her focus on the significance of engagement, of political struggle, to obtaining knowledge of the conceptual practices of power. It takes both science and politics to see the reality “behind,” “beneath,” or “from outside” the oppressors' institutionalized vision.¹³ Thus a standpoint is an achievement, not an ascription. It must be struggled for against the apparent realities made natural and obvious by dominant institutions, and against the ongoing political disempowerment of oppressed groups. Dominant groups do not want revealed either the falsity of their beliefs and claims or the unjust political consequences of their material and conceptual practices. They usually do not know that their assumptions are false (that slaves are fully human, that men are not the only model of the ideal human, that non-Western cultures have developed sophisticated and competent scientific and technological systems, etc.). It takes “strong objectivity” methods to locate the practices of power that appear only in the apparently abstract, value-neutral conceptual frameworks favored by dominant social institutions and the many disciplines that service them (the phrase is mine; see my 1992, 1998).¹⁴

Other feminists worked up similar accounts, sometimes independently, and in other cases stimulated by the work of Smith and Hartsock and other early feminist standpoint authors. They were able to develop innovative insights in part because of the way they worked against the conceptual frameworks of their particular disciplines. British sociologist of science Hilary Rose (1983) positioned her independently-developed standpoint account of

an epistemology for the natural sciences as a critique of the conceptual frameworks of mainstream philosophies of science and of the prevailing radical science studies movement within which she had been working. She pointed out that the latter in effect conjoined forces with the sociobiology they otherwise criticized in the way they left sex and gender relations outside their social accounts of the sciences, and thus as part of nature. African American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1991) produced an influential account of what one learns by starting off from Black women's lives to delineate racist and sexist conceptual practices of power in sociology and the institutions sociology serves. Third World development critics Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993) articulate "the subsistence perspective" that identifies oppressive conceptual features of Third World development policy and the capitalist, Eurocentric and sexist thinking that guides it.¹⁵

Thus standpoint theory re-emerged in feminist work both from a particular Western theoretical trajectory as it overtly revived marxian insights lost even to contemporary marxists, and also as a kind of organic epistemology and methodology of identity-based new social movements, a spontaneous alternative to mainstream positivism and its hoary debates with phenomenological and other hermeneutical research projects in the social sciences.

For a variety of reasons standpoint accounts have—and should have—developed in different directions in different social and intellectual contexts. To mention just one cause of this diversity, they are always critically focused "up," on some particular powerful disciplinary or other institutional conceptual framework, as I have been indicating. Consequently, each author articulates a standpoint logic in the context of traditions and contemporary preoccupations in sociology, or political philosophy, or New Left science studies, or judicial principles and practices about rape and sexual harassment, or studies of moral reasoning, or Third World development policy. Thus, it is dangerous and can be misleading (as Smith [2001] points out) to try to summarize what is distinctive about standpoint theory in general. Nevertheless, it would be hard to resist the claim that there are three central features that appear explicitly or implicitly in all of the standpoint writings.¹⁶

First, standpoint projects start off research from the lives (interpreted as experiences, structural social positions, and/or discourses) of structurally exploited groups rather than from prevailing disciplinary frameworks or the frameworks of public policy provided by disciplines. All knowledge is socially situated and thus makes visible distinctive aspects of nature and social relations. But the social situation of exploited groups can give rise to precisely those questions and perceptions that dominant institutions, their practices and cultures, have blocked.

Second, standpoint projects "study up," seeking to identify the conceptual practices of power in some particular context—a disciplinary framework, a historical phenomenon, a political rhetoric, a welfare, health, education, legal, or economic policy or practice, and so on. Thus, standpoint approaches are part of post-Frankfurt School critical theory. Standpoint theory provides an epistemic and scientific argument for starting off thought

from marginalized lives rather than from disciplinary or institutional conceptual frameworks. In modern kinds of administrative/managerial forms of ruling, the conceptual practices of power are produced and/or legitimated by sciences, natural and social, and their philosophies.

Thus, while identifying, that the situatedness of knowledge is a necessary condition for a standpoint project, it is not sufficient, as I have already indicated but cannot stress enough. Standpoint findings are not, contrary to widespread perceptions, ethnographies or phenomenologies of “others” and their life-worlds. Standpoint projects take a second step in using the view from the specific ways a group is oppressed critically to illuminate how power relations work in that particular respect. This is its “scientific” project. Standpoint projects learn to identify the specific aspects of a group’s oppression that can reveal precisely the conceptual practices of power responsible for that kind of oppression. They turn an actual and particular oppressive kind of condition into a source of insight about dominant social relations.

Thus, studies of the ways that police and courts understand battery and rape of women reveal that “the State is male” in the sense that it understands violence against women only from the perspective of the perpetrator’s experiences of heterosexual relations (MacKinnon 1982). Starting off from women’s experiences of their bodies and of their interactions with biologists and medical and health care professionals provides an illuminating, and more objective, understanding of both women’s and men’s bodies, and also of biological, medical, and health care conceptual frameworks (Fausto-Sterling 1985). Standpoint projects have looked at how women are exploited and oppressed through policies and practices legitimated by standard institutional and disciplinary interpretations of evolutionary theory (Hubbard 1983), women’s moral development (Gilligan 1982), young and poor African American women’s life choices (Ladner 1971), African American women’s political activism and educational leadership (Collins 1991), Third World peasants’ and women’s economic and social activities (Shiva 1989), what constitutes international relations (Tickner 2001), and a host of other social phenomena. Feminist standpoint theory was overtly developed in part to explain better how to account for the fact that politically engaged research projects were producing empirically and theoretically better, by conventional standards, results of research than could projects that claimed social neutrality.

This brings us to the third commonality. Political struggle is understood as necessary to generate the kind of group consciousness—subjectivity—that can produce the information and insight oppressed groups need and seek. To be sure, politics can be an obstacle to the advance of knowledge, but it can also be productive of it.¹⁷ Such struggle helps to bring into existence and empower a kind of consciousness of a group “for itself.” Such a group consciousness directs its efforts to define for itself, among other goals, the kinds of knowledge the group needs in order to flourish, and to get that knowledge. As Jameson (1988) has argued, this is a different notion of group consciousness than the deterministic one usually attributed to marxists or collection of voluntaristically chosen individual consciousnesses characteristic

of Liberal philosophy. Here, it is political struggle that enables a group to learn exactly how and for what reasons it is oppressed, to create its consciousness as a group “for itself,” to bring into being a new, collective subject of history and knowledge.

There is much more to be said about the nature, diversity, and limitations of standpoint approaches. I will not take space here to repeat the responses I and others persistently have advanced against charges that standpoint theory either embraces or inadvertently falls into Eurocentric essentialism and a damaging judgmental relativism.¹⁸ Instead, we can bypass these arguments and observe how standpoint theory escapes such problems through focusing on the sociological understanding of identity which it assumes and requires, and which has made it especially valuable to the pro-democratic, identity-based, new social movements.

SOCIOLOGICAL IDENTITIES

Of course one is not born Black or African American, mulatto, Chicana/o, mestiza, poor, working class, or “white” any more than one is born a woman.¹⁹ Both individual and collective identities are constructed, though only through complex social negotiations and never as a matter of completely free individual choice. Recent accounts have focused on how identities are dynamic, always changing as we (and the groups to which we feel accountable) interact in new ways with our changing natural and social environments. Some are ascribed—given to us by others, without our consent. Others are achieved, the result of struggles to discover and create shared histories and visions with others.²⁰

For both individuals and groups, identities are always multiple, contradictory and partial or incomplete; I claim identity as a woman, of European descent, economically advantaged, a teacher, a philosopher, a feminist, an antiracist and anti-Eurocentrism scholar, a daughter, a mother, and so forth. Such identities sometimes conflict with each other—a woman philosopher has through the ages been considered a contradiction in terms, and a feminist philosopher a threat to the conventional goals of philosophy. There are always additional groups and activities through which I discover additional aspects of my identity, and through which others assign me identities, whether or not I want them.

The notion of identity provided in the preceding overview is a great improvement over the popular notion of identities as either externally constituted by “social structures” or freely chosen by individuals, and in either case perfectly coherent (no contradictions or tensions) and static—fixed for life. Yet, it is hard to see from just this kind of description how it is that distinctive identities appear at one moment in history and disappear at others, or how to help distinctive kinds of identities to emerge. Here, we are concerned to understand how and why new kinds of identity-based, social movements have emerged only recently.²¹ And we want to know how to create

“subjects” of the kind of knowledge that the new social movements need to change social relations. How are such identities created?

Here, I turn to another useful way to think about identities, their origins, uses, and possibilities—a sociological account that situates the new identity movements in the global political economy and its changing forms. We need an account where the “subjects” of the knowledge being created for the new social movements are collective, not individual. We need an account of processes of identity formation that are historically specific, to this time and place, without being completely determined by social structures. And we need an account of subjects—collective identities—that are capable of transforming society and history. For such an account I turn to Castells’s *The Power of Identity* (1997). My argument is that Castells enables us to grasp more clearly the political necessity of the full or “strong” standpoint project for pro-democratic, identity-based, new social movements.

Castells contrasts the emerging Net Society with the older, industrial society that is still present though in increasingly less powerful forms. The Net Society began to emerge with the creation three decades ago of the internet, and has made possible a new stage of capitalist organization of labor, new challenges and possibilities for Liberal political relations, and new cultural forms that can support the continuation of Liberal capitalist agendas.²² However, it has also made possible the organization of effective resistance to such agendas, as has been visible in the recent globally organized protests against the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and against the U.S. government’s intention to make war on Iraq. And it makes possible international and local economic, political, and cultural projects—electronic journals, bulletin boards, list-serves, and more. Castells develops this argument, with huge empirical support from urban and rural studies around the globe, throughout the three volume series of which his focus on identity occupies only the second volume. However, we do not need to explore further his fascinating account in order to make use of his insights about identity-building processes and the new social movements they have created.

For Castells, identities are ways in which people give meaning to their lives. He makes a useful distinction between three origins and forms of identity-building processes (as pointed out by various social theorists on whom he draws), each of which “leads to a different outcome in constituting society.” The first is “legitimizing identity”:

Legitimizing identity generates a civil society, that is, a set of organizations and institutions, as well as a series of structured and organized social actors, which reproduce, albeit sometimes in a conflictive manner, the identity that rationalizes the sources of structural domination. (8; his emphasis)

In industrial society, such institutions have included churches, labor unions, political parties, cooperatives, and civic associations

which, on the one hand, prolong the dynamics of the state, but, on the other hand, are deeply rooted among people. It is precisely this double character of civil society that makes it a privileged terrain of political change by making it possible to seize the state without launching a direct, violent assault. (9)

Yet these institutions of industrial civil society never could deliver the social benefits that they promised. In the global capitalist political economy and its emerging Net Society, however, it is no longer plausible to look to such identities as sources of progressive social change (though they have not completely lost their abilities at least to ameliorate the worst excesses of oppression).

[T]he sources of . . . *legitimizing identities* are drained away. The institutions and organizations of civil society that were constructed around the democratic state, and around the social contract between capital and labor, have become, by and large, empty shells, decreasingly able to relate to people's lives and values in most societies. (355)

Many people still claiming such identities may have progressive intentions and can still function to advance progressive agendas. Moreover, I would argue, there are still valuable elements in Liberal democratic civil society. However, the organizations, institutions, and social actors that could support such intentions cannot now engage effectively with the new forms of power produced by internet social relations. Current forms of legitimizing identities are now part of the problem.

Castells proposes that as the Net Society undermines the legitimacy of existing civil society, it also generates its own challenges in the form of resistance and transformative identities ²³:

[I]dentity for resistance leads to the formation of *communes* or *communities*. . . . This may be the most important type of identity-building in our society. It constructs forms of collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression, usually on the basis of identities that were, apparently, clearly defined by history, geography, or biology, making it easier to essentialize the boundaries of resistance. . . . The third process of constructing identity, that is [*transformative*] *identity*, produces *subjects*. . . . Subjects are not individuals, even if they are made by and in individuals. They are the collective social actor through which individuals reach holistic meaning in their experience. In this case, the building of identity is a project of a different life, perhaps on the basis of an oppressed identity, but expanding toward the transformation of society . . . (9–10)

In Castells' distinction here, and his own reflections on it, are resources for thinking about the new social movements and the knowledge-projects they need and desire. First of all, Castells points to the almost historic inevitability of the emergence in oppressive social relations of resistance identities. Secondly, he draws our attention to the fact that resistance is not itself sufficient to create (collective) historical agents capable of changing society itself. Such change requires that resistant identities become transformative

ones. We could say that the Black women to whom the Combahee River Collective Statement was addressed were already resistant identities, but that the "Statement" was calling for them to become the kind of collective transformative subject that could change the social order.

Moreover, Castells goes on to point out that neither resistance nor transformative identities are inherently politically progressive (as intimated earlier). Moreover, I would add that neither is inherently scientifically or epistemologically progressive either. There turns out to be no progressive logic of history that insures the triumph in the end of either "the truth" or the Good Society as "we" envision it. The Patriots, various territorial and religious fundamentalisms, no less than environmental, feminist, gay and lesbian, and multicultural movements, form communities of resistance which may or may not lead toward social transformations, let alone toward progressive ones. Those that today we think of as socially progressive (whichever those are for you or me) may turn out not to be so. For Castells, the future is open for every resistance or transformative identity and its social movement.

It is certainly unsettling to contemplate the possibility of a triumphant future for neo-Nazis or for territorial or religious fundamentalist movements. Yet, it is important to recognize this possibility in order to make wise political and epistemological choices. Older political philosophies, both Liberal and marxian, have often claimed a historical inevitability for their own goals, which their calls to political activism intend merely to hasten. In the case of Liberalism, its method of reasoning (howsoever this is defined) is often claimed to have the power to insure social benefits. Yet, Castells' considerations show that progressive potential must be continually struggled for in the context of the constantly changing political, economic, social, and cultural terrain of social relations and relations with nature. Moreover, what constitutes progressive potential must itself continually be scrutinized and debated.²⁴ Castells' analysis leads us to see the need to think carefully about what processes can contribute to the shift from resistance to effective progressively transformative identities and their social movements. How can (collective) subjects that are willing and equipped to struggle maximally effectively for social justice in today's complex local and global social relations be produced and provision themselves?

One necessary resource for transforming unjust and oppressive social relations that are linked on a global scale is a diversity of resistance and transformative movements that can focus on the different ways that oppression is experienced and structured for different groups. Men and women experience poverty in at least some different ways, and are forced into it through at least some different structural features. Moreover, they have partially different resources with which to resist it and to become collective subjects of social transformation aimed at reducing the economic and political gaps between rich and poor. So, too, do such differences exist between racial/ethnic groups, between gays/lesbians/queers and "straights," first- and third-world cultures, and between different cultures within the first- or third-world. And there are other differences in religion, culture, and physical

ability such that social movements representing their yearnings for social justice can contribute evidence of these different origins and experiences of oppression and develop resources for resistance and transformation. From this perspective, multiculturalism is both a reality and a resource.

Indeed, Castells notes that he is especially interested in multiculturalism as a potential source of transformative subjects. He writes that he has

a deliberate obsession with multiculturalism, with scanning the planet, in its diverse social and political manifestations. This approach stems from my view that the process of techno-economic globalization shaping our world is being challenged, and will eventually be transformed, from a multiplicity of sources, according to different cultures, histories, and geographies intertwined. (1997, 3)

It is the multiplicity of potentially progressive resisting identities and the cognitive diversity of their standpoints that multiculturalism promises to provide for social justice transformations.

STANDPOINTS FOR PRO-DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION

Yet, for such promise to be fulfilled, resistant (collective) identities must move beyond mere resistance. They must understand, first, that the kinds of knowledge that their oppressors produce are socially situated. Next, they must also understand that the distinctive kinds of knowledge that they themselves can produce are made possible by the particular forms of their oppression. Howsoever “true” their own insights may be, they are socially situated no less than are the “truths” claimed by their oppressors. But knowing that one’s oppressors and one’s own understandings are socially situated is not enough. In the third place, they must “study up” to identify the particular concepts and practices through which their distinctive forms of oppression are enacted and maintained. And, fourth, they must engage in political struggles to change those concepts and practices, struggles that will produce collective “subjects” of knowledge and history. The transformative promise of multiculturalism requires the “strong” standpoint program.

I have been arguing that a sociological understanding of the new pro-democratic identity movements and of how they are situated in today’s global political economies enables a richer understanding of the kinds of knowledge projects that will serve their social justice goals. However, if it is indeed the case that we should try to analyze more clearly the political potential of particular kinds of epistemological projects for the pro-democratic, identity-based, new social movements as they exist in today’s global political economy, then we can see an important role for higher education in this project.

CONCLUSION

Colleges and universities in the United States, at least, are a fortuitous site where identity-based departments and programs are expected to train

students to produce knowledge. Moreover, most such institutions are no longer bastions of elite prestige available only to the sons of the wealthiest and most powerful members of society. Instead, their by now several-decade commitments to admitting students regardless of their wealth or social status has resulted in truly multicultural student bodies with deep connections into most U.S. subcultures. This is especially evident at the large city, state, and urban colleges and universities, though visible also across the spectrum of institutions. At the same time, such institutions of higher education are a rare site of possible meaningful political discussion in a surrounding world where such possibilities have been severely deteriorated in recent decades. National political elections, congressional debates, and media political reporting and analysis, all of which used to offer opportunities for informative (though, to be sure, never perfect) political education and discussion, have all been “dumbed down” such that disinformation and misinformation now constitute an increasingly large proportion of their output. Yet universities, for all their increased corporatization and privatization, remain an important site for both meaningful political discussion and for the production of knowledge. Given the deterioration of their political surround, their potentiality in this respect is even enhanced.

The “logic of the standpoint”—its reliance on political struggle to produce knowledge for oppressed groups of how the social order works—and Castells’ reminder about the lack of a progressive “logic of history” both highlight the importance of meaningful political discussion. It is a sad but important fact that U.S. colleges and universities today provide perhaps the most available sites to engage in the exchange of ideas that is so crucial to figuring out just what are the effective and desirable pro-democratic social transformations. We need optimistic but realistic assessments of the importance of producing knowledge for social justice projects and engaging in the political struggles which that requires. Students and faculty at U.S. colleges and universities have especially important roles to play in such projects.

NOTES

1. “Some but not all” forms of these movements since other tendencies in them seek not democratic social relations even for the whole group that they claim to represent but only that their own interests, as identified only by the dominant groups within those movements, be served. Thus there still exist racist forms of feminism, sexist forms of anti-racist movements, etc.
2. I am uncomfortable with all the least controversial ways of characterizing the progressive politics of such movements. “Social justice,” “pro-democratic,” “liberatory,” “emancipatory”—these all have been criticized as part of the conceptual apparatus of Liberal political philosophy, which is also part of the problem that these movements attempt to resist. I shall continue to shift back and forth between, primarily, the first two of these terms, but am not invested in them.
3. Indeed, power-as-flow or patterns of circulation existed long before it was harnessed by the internet. Philosophers of science such as Bruno Latour (1987) and Joseph Rouse (1987, 1996) have explored modern Western sciences’ participation in power as directed flows vs. as exercised forces.

4. Castells pointed out (in a 2000 lecture in the Information Studies Department at UCLA) that the three classes formed by the ways the internet functions are the designers and users of the internet, and those not linked to it at all.
5. Castells (1997) stresses this dark side of new social movements, though he does not address this in epistemological terms.
6. "Studying up" cannot be politically neutral. My point here is that both regressive groups longing for a less democratic past and progressive groups longing for a more democratic future can identify obstacles to achieving their goals in the conceptual practices of modern sciences and their philosophies, which were originally and remain today framed primarily within Liberal political assumptions.
7. Exceptions to this generalization may be found in the environmental racism and feminist environmentalist movements (see, e.g., Shiva 1989, and Seager 1993), the feminist anti-militarist movement (e.g., Enloe 1990), and no doubt other radical components of such movements.
8. "Identity politics" has a largely different meaning within the Civil Rights foci of the new social movements than it does in the focus on creating a collective consciousness that goes back to the Combahee River Collective and, no doubt, earlier. See Gamson (1996) for a discussion of the strengths and limitations of such Civil Rights identity movements vs. the social constructivist ones.
9. For critics of such projects, the categories are frequently reversed: philosophers dismiss such work as "merely empirical sociology," and social researchers dismiss it as "merely abstract philosophy."
10. An earlier, longer, and differently framed version of this section is in my 2003b.
11. See my 2003b for many of the original feminist standpoint essays as well as subsequent debates over the strengths, limitations, and possible future uses of standpoint theory and research.
12. Smith and other theorists often describe standpoint approaches to research as a method of inquiry, though other theorists refer to it as a methodology in contrast to such techniques ("methods") as collecting and manipulating quantitative data, observation, archival research, and interviews, which are the focus in methods courses in the social sciences.
13. Of course one's understanding can never completely escape its historical moment—that was the positivist dream that standpoint approaches deny. All understanding is socially located or situated (in Donna Haraway's (1991) phrase). The success of standpoint research requires only a degree of freedom from the dominant understanding, not complete freedom from it.
14. It is hard to overstate the importance of keeping clear that a standpoint is an achievement. If this point is lost, and even some standpoint defenders sometimes lose it, "standpoint" seems like just another term for a perspective or viewpoint. Yet, the standpoint claim about the epistemic value of some kinds of political struggle—the epistemic value of the engagement of the researcher—for creating a group consciousness, a subject of history, for an oppressed group, rather than only a sociological fact in itself, is thereby made obscure when its technical use, which I retain here, is abandoned. This point is related to the disagreement over whether the theory is best articulated as about a feminist or a women's standpoint. Hartsock has opted for the former, and D. Smith for the latter for reasons which probably have to do with distinctive disciplinary concerns, as Smith (2001) has suggested, which is a topic for another place.
15. Other important contributions to this feminist standpoint account, whether or not they so labeled their analyses, can be found in Anzaldúa 1981, Haraway

- 1991, Jaggar 1983, MacKinnon 1982, C. Mohanty 1986, Hooks 1983, Ruddick 1989, Sandoval 1991.
16. Yet other observers would pick out other features of standpoint logic as central.
 17. Elsewhere I have talked about culture as a toolbox, not just as a “prison house,” for the advance of scientific knowledge. See my 1998, Chapter 4.
 18. Many of the essays in Harding 2003b provide compelling refutations of such claims.
 19. It is common to say that infants are “born into poverty.” Yet that even what counts as poverty is socially defined, as critics of Third World development policies have pointed out.
 20. See, e.g., Alcoff 2001, S. P. Mohanty 2001, and the rest of the essays in Moya and Hames-García 2001.
 21. Or, in their contemporary forms only recently.
 22. It has also made possible new resources for globally organized crime, and various other undesirable projects.
 23. Castells refers to the latter as “project identities.” I rename them here as “transformative identities,” more clearly to capture for the purposes of this paper the distinction I take Castells to intend. Resistance identities, valuable though they be, are not directed toward large-scale transformations of civil society (and thus the state). When they do take this focus, they become something else, namely “transformative identities.”
 24. As historians have pointed out, what were extolled as paradigms of progressive movements in the past have often, intentionally or not, supported what turned out to be politically regressive projects. After all, recollect what were at least progressive elements intended to support such goals as religious tolerance, anti-feudalism, labor activism, and the establishment of political parties committed to democratic governance in the origins of today’s “legitimizing identities,” identities that now “rationalize the sources of structural domination” as Castells put the point (above). Indeed, such goals still appear as the only hope for social justice in many parts of the world even in the face of capitalism’s persistent success at dissipating their social justice potential.

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INTERNATIONALISM AND THE AMERICAN INDIAN SCHOLAR: NATIVE STUDIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF PAN-INDIGENISM

Sean Teuton

Suppose, in considering the nature of your claim (and in justice to my nation I shall and will do it freely), I were to ask one of you, my brother warriors, under what kind of authority, by what law, or on what pretense he makes this exorbitant demand of nearly all the lands we hold between your settlements and our towns, as the cement and consideration of our peace . . . I answer, *none!* Your laws extend not into our country, nor ever did. You talk of the law of nature and the law of nations, and they are both against you.

Corn Tassel, Cherokee statesman, 1785

At the end of the Revolutionary War, the Cherokees had already become skilled diplomats in treaty negotiations with European nations. Like many past American Indian leaders, Corn Tassel employs the rhetoric of law to oppose the encroachment of white settlers and to protect Cherokee land and life. Corn Tassel and other Cherokee leaders invoke an international relationship by adjudicating *among* laws, between those humanitarian laws that Cherokees believe should transcend national borders—Natural Law and the Law of Nations—and those laws, such as the Right of Conquest, that shall not.¹ Such adjudication is a fact of legal discourse, and Native nations have worked through the centuries to better shape international law, or as it is called, “federal Indian law,” with the United States of America. Like other countries, Indian tribes have long rooted their sense of nationhood and identity in land, and maintain these through the recognition of territorial borders and property: “*We are a separate people!*,” Corn Tassel exhorts. “[Our game] is . . . as much our property as other animals are yours. . . .” Such cries of American Indian nationhood, territory, and property might surprise scholars in the humanities unfamiliar with Indian law. Though theory decries the “essentialist” exclusions of “borders” in Postcolonial Studies, Indian law has, and continues to recognize national borders as a necessary and productive legal reality.

Driving through west Arkansas, USA citizens will discover road signs reading "Entering Cherokee Nation." Because they are often not educated about Native international legal history, they might wonder why an Indian "reservation" that they believe the United States has "given" to Native Americans would call itself a "nation" and claim territory within the territorial borders of the United States. Or perhaps they overlook the term nation and its legal status as simply another name for "a people." In truth, however, Indian nations are both peoples and legal entities. Long before Europeans arrived in North America, Indian tribes, like other groups around the world, employed a notion of "the people" as the basis for the nation. Separate Native cities on this continent, over time, grew into modern nation-states, as they did in Europe, complete with governments and international agreements. Indian people then and today derive their belief in national sovereignty not from European colonists, but from the people's right of collective human self-determination.² Legal scholars Vine Deloria Jr. and David Wilkins state: "Tribal rights of self-government predate the Constitution and derive not from the American people or the Constitution but from the inherent sovereignty of a given tribe" (70).

By its own terms, the United States federal government recognizes the national status of American Indian tribes. Section 8, paragraph 3 of the Constitution gives Congress the power "to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes." In over six hundred treaties and agreements, Indians declared their legal interest with the United States not only as a recognition of peace or territory, but as a proclamation of national independence and international relationship: "The promises of self-government found in a multitude of treaties, the promises of protection by the United States from wrongs committed by its citizens, the promises that tribes would be respected as nations on whose behalf the United States acted as a trustee before the eyes of the world, were all vital parts of the treaty rights which Indians believe they have received from the United States," writes Deloria (*Trail* 136). In 1831, Chief Justice Marshall declared that because Cherokees had sufficient political status to enter into treaties with the USA, but were also surrounded enclaves, they could not be *completely* independent. Instead, he would invent for Indian nations the diminished category of "domestic dependent nations." Throughout the long siege of USA colonial power, however, American Indian tribes have asserted their sovereign status as self-governing nations. While colonization certainly limits tribal sovereignty, it bears mentioning that no nation in the world enjoys unlimited sovereignty; even "the United States is bound, as a nation, by the terms of its treaties with other sovereign nations . . ." (Wilkins and Lomawaima 4). Today, Native nations, though colonized, operate with some independence. They do not coin their own currency or print postage stamps, but they do possess constitutional governments, grant citizenship to tribal members and nontribal members alike, regulate their economies, preside legally over territories and crimes, and send delegates to international engagements.³

Despite these historical and legal realities, the issue of indigenous nationhood has drawn considerable disagreement in American Indian literary studies. Scholars such as Louis Owens recommend that, in considering Native nationhood, we ignore actual legal borders and concentrate instead on the ambiguous margins between cultures, “the zone of the trickster, a shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into question” (26). Gerald Vizenor describes a similar, landless view of Indian nationhood: “Native sovereignty is the right of motion, and transmotion is personal, reciprocal, the source of survivance, but not territorial” (182). Influenced by poststructuralism, these scholars investigate the ways dominant colonial power imagines the American Indian nation, and claim that by denying national borders and appropriating and subverting such dominant constructions, they ultimately aid the production of Native cultural knowledge. But when scholars deconstruct nationhood, they risk undermining actual Native nation sovereign status and the legal rights secured by hard-won treaties. After all, tribal peoples continue to conceive of themselves as citizens of distinct nations. Like many Native scholars, I take my own citizenship in the Cherokee Nation seriously enough to support or to question what we stand for or against. Beyond literary studies, American Indian scholars of law and governance, as well as Native activists, continue to maintain the nation as a productive means of organizing social activity, seeking political redress with the United States, and distributing resources.⁴ Most importantly, I will argue, the emancipated nation provides a place for the free production and international distribution of cultural knowledge.

Scholarly attempts to deconstruct Indian nationhood and intellectual traditions pose serious problems in American Indian Studies, for beyond university walls, real Native nations today remain extremely colonized. While scholars in Postcolonial Studies and American Indian Studies, despite the legal history, raise doubts about employing the nation as a concept, in reality, actual people suffer the abrogation of treaty rights and the human rights to ancestral lands, health, nutrition, and housing. Clearly, we need a workable concept of nationhood, one which is both grounded in land and people, yet viable in a changing world and political scene. In this essay, I will employ a concept of American Indian nationhood, in which the nation is neither static and isolated from the world, nor disbanded in a borderless space that provides no framework for the cultural formation of ideas. The nation is indeed a social construction, but a construction nonetheless indispensable to tribal peoples to explain their origins, their pasts, and the world today. Like all nations, the tribal nation forms and reforms to meet the growing needs of community members, who have always contended with cultural change. New challenges to tribal living encourage us to revise our collective understanding of the nation; and this adaptation is actually built into the concept of Native nationhood.

The indigenous nation remains a reasonable construct exactly because it functions like a theory, referring to specific peoples but also outward to a greater human context.⁵ Recently, Native scholars have begun to compose a nation-based critical theory, but have received considerable resistance in the field, perhaps because such national positions do not explicitly recognize the universal appeals that often underlie a people's claim to nationhood. Robert Warrior suggests that American Indian scholars should develop a body of criticism from within Native national cultures: "A guiding principle of my work . . . has been to produce a book that explores the extent to which . . . critical interpretation of [Native writing] can proceed primarily from Indian sources" (xvi). Craig Womack intensifies Warrior's call for critical independence: ". . . [Native people] *are* the canon . . . Let Americanists struggle for *their* place in the canon . . . I see them as two separate canons" (original emphasis 7). Native scholars advocating national sovereignty likely understand the universal desire for cultural self-determination as a basis for diplomacy, but I feel they have underdemonstrated its importance. Perhaps for this reason, such scholars have come under attack.⁶

Here, I wish to build on these intellectuals' insights with a theoretical defense of the nation and internationalism. We may redefine the nation as a flexible construct that allows multiple social groups to produce vital, culturally located knowledge of and for a world all of us inhabit. This position grounds nationhood in a universal conception of humankind, but also attends to the specific social locations of our own particular national communities. Rooted in the normative value of preserving human diversity, for example, this view of nationhood can support global humanity and local tribalism to benefit each other. My internationalist position overcomes essentialism, on the one hand, and poststructuralist indeterminacy on the other, and instead seeks to justify and benefit from external cultural influence, through a flexible national border. In this manner, we encourage alliances across nations not only to resist oppression and promote world justice, but also to produce better knowledge. Nations are rich sites of cultural knowledge production, which can continue to flourish only if we protect their intellectual and actual borders. A diversity of nations and a commitment to internationalism, in other words, help ensure that the world we inhabit produces more reliable knowledge. In fact, as I will explain, one argument for the recognition of Indian nationhood is that only with equitable international relations can there be a fair exchange of cultural knowledge. Because nationhood is so closely tied to what we can know about our selves, our tribes, and the world, I will consider the nation in these epistemological terms. National theoretical positions thus may be evaluated as views of knowledge of which we can ask epistemological questions relevant to a broader humanity. To contribute to this understanding of American Indian nationhood and internationalism, I turn to some indigenous philosophical concepts presented in treaties and oratory, and also draw on a theory of decolonization developed recently by Third World and USA minority scholars, a "realist" conception of knowledge and its exchange.

NATIVE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY AND MORAL UNIVERSALISM

Throughout our history of diplomacy, American Indian leaders have defended homelands and lifeways as basic rights that Indian and settler share as members of humankind.⁷ Upon the invasion of the Americas, Native peoples, like their invaders, at first debated whether Europeans were human beings: Assiniboine historian First Boy tells how Lone White Man had to be “humanized” before becoming a member of his community. When hunters discover Lone White Man, they exclaim: “Don’t any of you kill him, he is a different kind of man, let’s look him over” (27). Among Europeans, the recognition of human existence in the Americas actually reduced the potential for destruction during the conquest. Merely to be recognized as human beings, and not only biologically, but as rational agents who possess land, society, and history, has been a goal of subjugated peoples for centuries.

From their earliest writings, Native intellectuals appealed to the human worth of Indian people. Recognized as the first American Indian to publish in English, Mohegan minister Samson Occom wrote his *Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, an Indian* in 1772. Occom’s sermon was a best-seller perhaps because it drew on a concern for the self-respect of not only American Indians but also European colonists and enslaved African people. In fiery remonstrance of both white and Indian sinners, Occom opposed the sale and consumption of whiskey in Native communities as an affront to human dignity. In this first Native publication in English, Occom appeals to universal human vulnerability: “O let us all reform our lives, and live as becomes dying creatures, in time to come” (173). Pequot minister William Apess later implemented Christian definitions of humanity to defend Native autonomy. In *A Son of the Forest* (1829), Apess dramatizes the horrific conditions of his upbringing, arguing that no child of any color should endure such poverty and abuse, because all humans are capable of moral development: “I believe that it is assumed as a fact among divines that the Spirit of Divine Truth, in the boundless diversity of its operations, visits the mind of every intelligent being born into the world—” (8). Apess’s book was published a year before the 1830 Indian Removal Act that eventuated the forced march of over 100,000 American Indian people west of the Mississippi, and was thus instrumental to those opposing the displacement of Native nations on the basis of human rights. Throughout the nineteenth century, Native scholars and early activists drew on Christian principles of human dignity to make American Indian concerns understood by European Americans. Native political lecturers such as Cherokee leader Elias Boudinot and Piute lecturer Sarah Winnemucca spoke in USA cities against Indian Removal and for women’s rights.⁸ Christian arguments for the “brotherhood of man” still find present use in American Indian liberation theology.

This pattern of protest writing in the language of human rights laid the groundwork for the massive rebirth and mobilization of Indian nations in the twentieth century. Perhaps the most influential American Indian

intellectual of the past century, Vine Deloria drives his scholarship on contemporary Native political and cultural issues with a strong assertion of human rights. From the earliest moments of the Indian movement, Deloria frames the questions that American Indian intellectuals continue to ask. It is on this powerful basis of universal human worth and right to self-determination that Native activists and scholars such as Winona LaDuke, Ward Churchill, and Annette Jaimes mount convincing arguments for legislation to protect Native peoples.⁹ Whether Deloria is concerned with American Indian nationhood, religious identity, ecology, or science, he grounds his arguments in normative philosophical claims to human behavior and value. He persistently argues in the language of human rights, for the return of tribal burial remains, for example. In a 1989 article titled "A Simple Question of Humanity: The Moral Dimension of the Reburial Issue," Deloria engages the legal issue of whether Native people have property rights to "scientific resources" supposedly gathered to benefit humanity, by reclaiming the humanity of Indian ancestors. In 1990, a year after the publication of Deloria's article, Congress passed The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

In his influential 1981 essay "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism," Acoma poet Simon J. Ortiz shares Deloria's conception of human dignity, as one on which an internationalist struggle can be based:

The struggle to maintain life and the resistance against loss . . . illustrate a theme, national in character and scope, common to all American native people and to all people indigenous to lands which have suffered imperialism and colonialism. . . . Bob Hall in *Southern Exposure* wrote, describing the textile workers' struggle in the South, that the themes of family, community, religion, humor, and rage are the most common among the workers. . . . [H]e could have been commenting upon Indian people. . . . (11-12)

Because Ortiz expands his conception of indigenous dignity to greater humanity, he is able to share a history of struggle with other subjugated groups, and still maintain his particular perspective as an Acoma man. Such moral universalist positions on nationalism, I will argue, can help build an ethically grounded politics in American Indian Studies.

AMERICAN INDIAN INTERNATIONALISM AND ITS COLONIAL OBSTACLES

Simon Ortiz above outlines for us the shared cultural views on which what he calls a "national Indian literature" can be founded. A shared history of colonial resistance, and a common inventive oral tradition as a creative vehicle for this resistance, provide American Indian people, regardless of tribal particularity, with a shared cultural and political vision. For Native people, who often interact among tribal nations, this kind of pan-indigenism is

hardly a discovery. But at the end of his essay, Ortiz suggests that even those of other oppressed groups who are not indigenous, such as the textile workers in the South, nonetheless endure a similar exploitation by the colonial enterprise. Operating from an implicitly universalist conception of humanity and resistance, Ortiz is able to expand the anticolonial struggle of Native nations to include and benefit from the solidarity of other groups who share a similar oppression. But how are we to negotiate an international relationship in which colonial relations have decayed to become extremely unequal? Of course, the paradigm case for this investigation is that of Native nation–United States relations. Whether considering the historically vexed Indian–White relations or forming coalitions among American Indian nations and with other groups, I argue that international relationships can be fostered through our humanity and its attendant universal moral claims to human rights. But surely this relationship cannot develop into a productive form of cultural exchange until international relations have become more equitable.

To understand the history of this colonial relationship, we can consider the discourse of international diplomacy found in Indian law: oratory, a traditional part of all treaty engagements, and the treaties themselves. Both forms in this expressive legal tradition rely on a universal conception of humanity. American Indian oratory consecrates human rights in agreements that ethically justify the treaty making process,¹⁰ for Native peoples tended to consider treaties more than legal documents; they are made through hallowed ceremonies in which agreements between peoples are sanctioned by history and a higher power: “. . . [T]he idea of the treaty became so sacred to Indians that even today, more than a century after most of the treaties were made, Indians still refer to the provisions as if the agreement were made last week” (Deloria and Lytle 8).

One may view the process of treaty making and international relations as a model of internationalist identity and cultural knowledge exchange. Instances of American Indian internationalism abound, but among the most recognized is the Gayaneshakgowa, the famous Great Law of Peace of the League of the Iroquois. It is but one documented treaty of peace conferred *among* American Indian nations. Most interesting, the League’s democratic system of government grew out of this covenant, borne from a need for peace, friendship, and the exchange of knowledge among Native nations. Still in use to this day, the Confederacy is an intertribal government designed both to protect cultural pluralism and to promote international solidarity. The Six Nations which comprise the Iroquois Confederacy—the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, and, joining around 1721, the Tuscarora nations—viewed these concepts not as mutually exclusive, but in fact complimentary. According to Six Nations historians, before the organization of the Confederacy, nations were at war, and tyranny had eroded the social organization of Iroquoia. Leaders were abusing their power and refusing to prevent crimes against humanity. “These people lived at a time of dark despair and chaos. Their story recounts a period when humans had cast aside

the rules of coexistence, a period when bloodlust and vengeance overshadowed the goodness in human beings,” writes Oren Lyons (34). But a prophet known as Dekanawida or The Peacemaker and his speaker, Hayanwatah, began to unite tribal groups at war by explaining that their own autonomy would only be strengthened by his envisioned alliance, figured in the Iroquois house of government, the longhouse. In the Longhouse, each nation in the Iroquois Confederacy is metaphorically represented by a rafter, which helps to support this broader structure. Dekanawida reasoned that because all humans were capable of rational thought, when given the alternative of the end of violence and lasting peace, they would accept: “. . . [T]he Peacemaker said that humans have the gift of intelligence and that all humans ultimately desire that their people should live and prosper in peace and safety” (Lyons 34). The national leaders began to organize, but their progress was slowed by a stubborn leader named Tadodaho, who refused to join the League of the Iroquois. The leaders carefully reasoned with Tadodaho so that he eventually accepted the Great Law of Peace. As they say in Iroquois tradition, Hayanwatah “combed the snakes from Tadodaho’s hair.”

Thus the Iroquois Confederacy was established and, a number of scholars argue, adopted as a model for democracy in the United States.¹¹ Iroquois statesmen encouraged USA leaders to join their democratic society, and allocated a rafter in the Longhouse for the new European people. Built into the system of governance was the right to dissent and still support the principles of humanity and peace. Lyons explains: “Among the Haudenosaunee participatory democracy meant that on some level every individual had a right to voice an opinion and to agree or disagree on actions to be taken” (39). The Iroquois Confederacy helped solve the problem of abusive state power; sovereignty would be demonstrated among a collective of states and power regulated through the clans: “The Six Nations had solved the question of a divided sovereignty by allocating seats on its national council to the respective five, and later six, nations, and then limiting the power of the council. In different ways, each Indian nation was as powerful as the whole council of the league, but the pledge of peace and unity enabled the leaders of each nation to exercise national power responsibly” (Deloria, Conclusion 217). Most important, the people of the Longhouse recognized the capacity of all humans, regardless of tribal and social particularity, to make rational decisions regarding their collective national governance.

The Great Law provides a model of true participatory democracy grounded in the understanding that humans, regardless of cultural and social location, can act rationally. Members of the League concluded that, given the opportunity to self-govern, even those as intractable as Tadodaho would exercise their capacity to reason against mere self-interest: “The native philosophers who rationalized the League in later years conceived also a maximum purpose: the conversion of all mankind, so that peace and happiness should be the lot of the peoples of the whole earth, and all nations should abide by the same law and be members of the same confederacy”

(Wallace 42). According to The Great Law, the white pine tree of peace, planted to commemorate the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy, should metaphorically extend its white roots to all nations throughout the world. Underlying this vision is a universal claim regarding humanity, dignity, rational thought, and governance.

A viable American Indian internationalism can be founded in this understanding of universal humanity. From an internationalist position on identity, culture, and knowledge, Native scholars can not only justify and benefit from the creation of solidarity and the exchange of knowledge among Indian nations and other subjugated groups in powerful resistance collectives, but can also explain the preconditions and benefits of knowledge exchange with dominating groups such as the United States. From this acceptance of human value as absolute, that is, as existing independent of culture, history, and any other contexts, we can then value humans regardless of merit or economic status. The fact that humans possess intrinsic worth guarantees their dignity.¹² This is the human “worthiness” that Ponca activist Clyde Warrior defended in his 1967 essay “The War on Poverty”: “We are rarely accorded respect as fellow human beings . . . [In USA schools] [o]ur children are learning that their people are not worthy and thus that they individually are not worthy. . . . As you know, people who feel themselves to be unworthy and feel they cannot escape this unworthiness turn to drink and crime and self-destructive acts” (356, 357). By definition, humans possess moral and rational capacities, the attributes of what we call personhood.¹³ With this dignity comes rights: intrinsic entitlements that attend being human; they can neither be earned as privileges nor revoked as punishment. On this basis of human rights, subjugated peoples throughout the world have resisted their oppressors. So I find the moral authority of human rights to be one of our strongest arguments for decolonization in American Indian Studies.¹⁴

Recently, minority and Third World scholars have begun to draw on the strength of a moral universalist position, similar to that delineated above, to support a workable theory of knowledge, culture, and social equity. Scholars implementing what is called “postpositivist realism” do not struggle to overcome universalism but actually harness a general conception of humanity and its entitlements to defend cultural pluralism and international justice. For his thesis on knowledge, identity, and multiculturalism, Satya Mohanty relies on a universal conception of human agency which grows out of the Kantian idea of human worth and dignity. Like other scholars making similar claims, Mohanty is careful to distinguish his position on rational human thought from the arrogating Reason of the high Enlightenment, as presented in the writings of Husserl, for example, for whom “[t]hinking objectifies itself to become an automatic, self-activating process; an impersonation of the machine can replace it” (Horkheimer and Adorno 25). Hardly a mechanistic, unself-conscious reaction to the world, rational deliberation is a fundamental quality of human existence: “No matter how different [humans] are, they are never so different that they are . . . incapable of acting purposefully, of evaluating their actions in light of their ideas and previous experiences,

and of being 'rational' in this minimal way" (198). The human power to deliberate guarantees our ability to understand the past and to act on it as we build our national communities. This principle of universal human agency provides the incontrovertible argument for the liberation of the dominated. Reconsidering the capacities for rationality and agency as a universally shared faculty among all human beings of all colors and lands, we can develop a rich notion of cultural particularity. It is a view of location which allows for local specificity to avoid the dangers of marginalizing indigenous people to a "contact zone" of cultural destabilization.¹⁵ In fact, we should reconsider why so many postcolonial theorists privilege this space interstitial to nations as *the* site of cultural production. While this interactive region maintains fluid knowledge, privileging indeterminate cultural margins denies Native people the ideological tools to make general claims about their cultural knowledge, to explain their own lives as members of specific tribes with identifiable histories and homelands, to make sense of their colonized nations. But in an alternative conception of culture, universal humanity and cultural or social particularity do not conflict but complement; humanity calls for contexts.¹⁶

A universalist claim regarding human agency makes possible a critique of cultural relativism and at the same time fosters the development of cross-cultural inquiry as an aspect of social justice as well as normative social knowledge. American Indian intellectuals can develop this more expansive understanding of culture and knowledge to support a practical theory of internationalist justice and inquiry as an ideal of pan-indigenism and Indian-Western diplomacy. Setting out from the above view of humanity, moral universalists argue that cultural groups are never so different that they cannot understand each other as humans with a similar social existence. Scholars holding this progressive position thus oppose skeptical thinkers who reject all universal claims as necessarily exploitative. The recent support of extreme skeptical versions of cultural relativism—that a cultural episteme can be understood only in the specific context of its production—eventuates no reason to consider or learn anything from those who are not one of us, a citizen of our own nation. Relativism asks not that we seek to understand, but only, as Jean-François Lyotard asks, that we "gaze in wonderment at the diversity of discursive species" (26). True respect, however, the kind orators throughout Native history demand, asks more from other nations than exotic wonder. Indeed, the history of American Indian-USA relations illustrates an expressly anti-relativist relationship; nations, rather, endeavor to understand each other.

As a practical alternative to cultural relativism, we can formulate a theory of cultural interaction as a form of cross-cultural inquiry.¹⁷ We now widely recognize that the gathering of knowledge is a deeply social process. Philosophers like Sandra Harding have shown, for example, that a scientist's social location as a gendered observer of phenomena influences not only his conclusions, but also what he chooses to observe and value, and how he frames his experiment. But this need to attend to the social mediation of our ideas should not preclude the possibility of producing more objective

knowledge about the world. We cannot assume that all social involvement in human inquiry is necessarily obstructive in the search for truth. Instead, our challenge is to identify and nurture exactly those social attachments that support our empirical work. In this regard, some forms of social interaction, from research institutes to women's groups, can be conducive to the production of reliable knowledge. In the area of government, democracy is a social ideal exactly because the participation of all not only guards against tyranny but ensures good ideas get heard, introduced, and implemented in this good society, in the way the Six Nations envisioned the involvement of women and townspeople as well as sachems in their decision making process. Central to a truly progressive understanding of the exchange of cultural ideas is the view that the local knowledge of particular groups is not only unique, and thus vital, but also that because it is vital, it should be protected from interference or domination and suppression.

So, even when equality is achieved, cultural pluralism should remain an ideal to be maintained. We find this view of national synergy demonstrated in the Iroquois Confederacy, with the Onondaga Nation recognized for its unique law-making abilities and thus placed at the central fire of the Longhouse. Beyond the League, Indian nations often tend to be valued, though not in a simplistic way, for their particularly well-developed cultural fields of inquiry: the Navajo Nation for mathematics, the Cherokee Nation for literacy, Columbia River nations for social economies. Across North America and beyond, Native nations have exchanged knowledge with specializing nations, often in urban centers such as Cahokia, Chaco, and Huronia, which resemble universities.¹⁸ The preservation of American Indian national autonomy through peace accords is entirely necessary for the free production and exchange of ideas as we move toward objectivity as a goal of internationalist inquiry. And before the United States came to dominate indigenous nations, this exchange of knowledge—not only the Iroquois model of democracy, but also fields such as geography, medicine, botany, and astronomy, were an exciting aspect of international relations with colonial settlers. In fact, it is doubtful whether European settlers could have survived in the Americas were they not given the advanced knowledge of American Indian peoples. The early exchange of material goods was only a small part of this economy. Today, Westerners still seek the protected indigenous knowledge of medicines in the Amazon and astronomy in North America, for example.¹⁹ But the current embattled political relations between the West and indigenous nations complicate any attempt to exchange knowledge equitably. In the nineteenth century, for example, USA anthropologists routinely obtained the mystical and medicinal knowledge of impoverished tribal members, only often to popularize and market these secrets to the world. Not only did scientists often betray the trust of informants and wrongfully disclose sacred information, but in pursuing knowledge for profit, they also corrupted the principle of free thought so protected in the modern Western university. When power infiltrates the free flow of ideas, knowledge becomes restricted, inaccurate, and even dogmatic.²⁰

The ambitious democratic vision of justice and inquiry I have advocated cannot resume in a context of domination. I want to underscore this theoretical proviso in regards to international relations between Native nations and dominating countries such as the United States. Otherwise, what would be called cooperation would be at best only a veiled form of coercion. But since USA citizens may benefit from knowledge exchange, the promotion of intellectual internationalism should be an incentive to decolonize Indian nations. Explaining the usefulness of a legitimate international relationship with the USA would require some convincing, much as the Peacemaker had to convince Tadodaho. With the current rapine of dominating nations throughout the world of indigenous materials and knowledge, it is dangerous even to speak of cooperation. But if we imagine a decolonized world—for we must—the free exchange of knowledge is not only a benefit to particular nations but also to the goal of greater human inquiry. As all nations contribute particular knowledge, we gain a more global account of what it means to be human in the world. Native internationalism today presents a challenging opportunity for the production of vital knowledge about humanity, but internationalism with dominating nations cannot commence until decolonization is achieved. This is the crucial point I fear is missed by many scholars such as Martha Nussbaum and Arnold Krupat, who have promoted cosmopolitanism in theorizing cross-cultural interaction. A full account of power inequalities between nations must preface any call for world citizenship.²¹

American Indian national autonomy is thus the minimal condition for the production and international distribution of tribal knowledge. If the promotion of cultural diversity is not only an aspect of social justice but also an epistemological goal, then the preservation of state sovereignty can also be defended on these terms. Since Native communities are more likely to produce unique and useful knowledge when unobstructed by USA political power, the upholding of the nation-to-nation legal relationship between North American tribal nations and the United States should be a primary condition for intercultural inquiry. But such a claim about the relation between freedom and knowledge perhaps is not surprising, in view of the historical arguments for Native national independence which fill centuries of oratorical diplomacy and treaty documents. Historically, the most salient argument for national sovereignty has been made in the name of cultural preservation to benefit humanity. A powerful example of this argument comes from my own tribal cultural history. With the passing of the Removal Act in 1830, the USA Congress voted to displace American Indians from their eastern nations. By the fraudulent 1835 Treaty of New Echota, Cherokees were under threat of being driven into concentration camps and forcibly marched west of Arkansas. Out of this period came a body of Cherokee political writing directed toward opposing our dispossession on a philosophical basis. Again and again, Cherokee women and men wrote lectures, editorials, letters, and petitions explaining the human right to dwell in one's ancestral homeland. Cherokee statespeople faced the onerous task of

convincing white Americans of our mastery of Christian civilization yet also underscoring our maintenance of a unique culture that would be lost were we destroyed or absorbed. In the collection of letters by Cherokee leaders opposing the Removal, called the "Memorial of Protest of the Cherokee Nation," are statements arguing that, for the Cherokees to remain culturally vital, their nationhood must be recognized and the plans for Removal overturned. One letter thus opens: "It is the expressed wish of the Government of the United States to remove the Cherokees to a place west of the Mississippi. That wish is said to be founded in humanity to the Indians. To make their situation more comfortable, and to preserve them as a distinct people" (quoted in Perdue 78). The federal government suggested that cultural preservation is not only ethical but also an important value in maintaining a human history, if only as a burden of nineteenth-century salvage anthropology. One task of the Cherokee political writers, then, was to take the United States at their word and assert their distinctiveness, arguing that nationhood preserves culture.

My exploration of indigenous nationhood to serve knowledge development is supported by progressive thinkers who radicalize our understanding of the function of culture, who help us argue that the preservation of Indian nations allows them to act as cultural "think tanks" in which to generate and test new ideas, in which social activity is an opportunity for the production of knowledge.²² If only the least of the historical record is accurate, Native peoples long ago had developed the social mechanisms to foster the invention and testing of new ways of life.²³ When relations among nations are more equal, internationalism still requires we communicate across often different cultural and political lines. Scholars of political struggles in the Third World, for example, have often identified the problem of authority in organizing disparate groups into a unified force of resistance, and it has become a task that has drawn suspicion among poststructuralists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who question not only the possible exclusions required to streamline such a social movement but, most important, the unavoidable error in attempting to understand the experiences and needs of members of local communities. Organizing the Fourth World thus presents an epistemological challenge.²⁴ It is through intellectual process as well as political practice that activists and scholars come better to understand and clarify a collective destination for subjugated nations. In view of a universalist position on human worth, this solidarity among diverse groups appears all the more possible to achieve. Cultural and national diversity not only aid inquiry to produce a more comprehensive social vision, but also conserve the political force of the particular. American Indian internationalism, then, is an achievement which requires not only intellectual planning but also political and empirical practice.

We receive an additional benefit from this theory of American Indian international identity: it supports and is supported by allegiances that reach beyond our own local commitments. For we inhabit more than one social location as citizens of tribal nations as well as members of humankind. In this

manner, we accept the kind of challenge posed to groups planning social movements. This is a lesson in revolution: the task of “nationalizing” the people cannot be achieved by enforcing a reduction in partisan interests. Rather, members of groups must undergo not a consolidation but an expansion of group self-understanding.²⁵ Theorizing coalitions, Cherríe Moraga declares: “If we are interested in building a movement that will not constantly be subverted by internal differences, then we must build from the inside out, not the other way around.” American Indian leaders, activists, and intellectuals can look to a history of pan-tribal internationalism, from the messianic movements of The Prophet and Tecumseh, to the late-nineteenth-century Ghost Dance movement of Wovoka. Our courageous leaders encouraged the spreading of a shared consciousness throughout Indian America, but without demanding we set aside our differences. Rather, Native people, through council and public debate, came to reconsider how they conceived of themselves collectively. In the current of such movements the collective notion of being “Indian” in North America was invigorated. Being Indian at the turn of the twentieth century required we expand our identitarian definitions. “From the inside out,” Native people grounded their social and political vision in a particular tribal community, land, and oral history and then expanded tribal location by recognizing a universal human definition of dignity, worth, and respect. Through this expansive conception of tribal humanity, Native peoples were able to confer politically as well as culturally with other dominated groups such as Africans and African Americans.²⁶ This kind of internationalism made it possible for Angela Davis to meet with Oren Lyons in defense of Wounded Knee in 1973, when the FBI’s COINTELPRO sought to destroy *all* resistant groups in the United States (Churchill and Vander Wall, esp. 155).

Through a grounding of the tribal national identity in humanity, Native people can support internationalism as a political vision and epistemological goal. It should be clear why we need neither enact essentialist exclusions nor embrace postmodernist fragmentation to defend Native nations, but instead we can expand, without erasing, the American Indian national experience. An internationalist identity accommodates and benefits from the added complexity of a more encompassing national consciousness. According to Michael Hames-García, understanding one’s membership in more than one social group does not entail separating and identifying categories of the self. Instead, the self is a blend of multiple social and political commitments, an account of social identity he calls “multiplicity” (103–104). With this theory of the interrelatedness of social identities, we may expand and organize the way we conceive of national membership in Indian Country. From this view of the tribal national citizen, we are able to explain the internationalist political transformation of American Indian human beings, avoiding simplistic or reified notions of how people participate in indigenous or human communities, modifying in fact as a consequence of complex allegiances. Knowledge of the self changes and even grows through this kind of engagement, reconstituting in response to one’s surroundings in the midst of social change. As

I see it, the challenge facing social theorists in Indian Country is to create the conditions in which an expanded tribal national identity may emerge to consider previously unknown political commitments with other nations, social groups, and humanity.

INTERNATIONALISM AND AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES

In American Indian Studies, Native scholars often feel overwhelming pressure to provide a pristine portrait of indigenous life and art. These demands for authenticity and corresponding, veiled accusations of fraudulence often frustrate our justifying the entrance of new values and practices into our nations and bodies of Native thought. In this essay, I myself have been drawing on some ideas made available through Western philosophy, but I hope I have made clear why doing so does not demonstrate a diminishment of the indigenoussness of my claims. With the view of internationalism I have been developing here, we no longer need to concern ourselves with the origin, but only the relevance, of our ideas. For internationalism benefits Native literary studies as it provides a universal moral basis through which to evaluate the incorporation of new knowledge. One such principle is that our ideas strive to protect and promote the expression of our Native nations. But this local claim garners global support, because it is also shared by many peoples throughout the world. Indeed, American Indian scholars can support a legitimate form of protectionism on this universal basis: when nations are dominated, they must defend themselves. From an internationalist approach, Native nations can defend local community action with universal claims regarding human worth and rights. We scholars and activists can gather at home, among tribal nations, and with other resistant groups who share and value this principle of human flourishing. For these reasons, as an American Indian scholar still new to this field, I find internationalism to be our best intellectual ally.

NOTES

1. The Law of Nature dictates that humans are innately capable of rational thought; see Leibniz. Growing from the Law of Nature, the Law of Nations holds that natural reason qualifies humans to govern themselves as nations; see Vattel. In the sixteenth-century Right of Conquest, a nation that conquers another nation rightfully possesses that land. The nineteenth-century Doctrine of Discovery claims that indigenous rights to lands are “impaired” by conquest so that Indians are not “possessors” but “occupants” of lands in a landlord-tenant relationship. See Cohen, 46.
2. I use the term “sovereignty” broadly to denote the preservation and practice of collective self-determination or autonomy. For debates on sovereignty in Native Studies, see Forbes 1998; Deloria 1998; Alfred, 53–60; Cook-Lynn 1997; Strickland; Krupat, 1–4.
3. On the criminal jurisdiction of Indian nations, see Harring. For a discussion of Native international delegations, see Allen.

4. See Deloria 1994, 1999; LaDuke; Wilkins; Biolsi.
5. To focus this essay, I will be writing of humanity, but I realize humans are part of a greater living world also in need of inquiry and defense. See Pierotti and Wildcat.
6. Owens finds Warrior's view to "suggest[] a poorly defined kind of Indian 'intellectual sovereignty' arising from direct attention to a community of Indian intellectuals" (52). Though not addressing nationhood, Wilson offers a philosophical defense of Native cultural "authenticity" and change as a rebuttal to Krupat. See also Cook-Lynn 1996b. Weaver is one of the few to avoid Krupat's censure, by drawing connections with other anticolonial struggles. See also Shanley, 676.
7. Deloria and Lytle argue the recognition of "aboriginal title" and hence implicit humanity is a founding principle of what came to be called Indian law in the United States (2). American Indian leaders and scholars have been aware of the hazards of arguing one's own humanity: human worth is absolute; it cannot be debated. But Native humanity was debated, between Bartolome de Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda, for example, in the famous Council of the Indies in Valladolid, in 1550. Mohawk explains the significance of this European council regarding humanity in the Americas (50). See also Hanke.
8. See Boudinot; Hopkins. For a study of Iroquois women and USA feminism, see Wagner.
9. See LaDuke; Churchill; an entire volume of essays devoted to Native (human) rights and entitlements edited by Jaimes.
10. For Native orators arguing human rights, see Powhatan; Red Jacket; Peau de Chat.
11. See the collection of essays edited by Lyons and Mohawk; Barreiro; Johansen.
12. This is also a well-known Kantian idea out of which grows arguments for self-governance; see *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals in Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 35–40; Anderson-Gold, pp. 20–27; and Rawls. See also a similar conception of Native governance by McLeod.
13. This view of minimal human rationality is necessarily abstract and thus resists the relativization of cultures; see Sahlins.
14. Dunbar Ortiz also frames the Native struggle in the language of human rights (132).
15. Pratt defines this prevalent view as "the space of colonial encounters" (6). This contact zone tends to shift the focus from the production of vital knowledge within dominated Native nations to the less crucial space between nations' cultures and histories.
16. Eagleton claims that the universal actually underlies the defense of the particular (30).
17. Mohanty calls this social-empirical process "epistemic cooperation" (240–47).
18. See Jennings, 48–77.
19. For specific Native contributions to the Old World, see Weatherford.
20. For instance, in regards to the autobiography of Crashing Thunder, Nancy Lurie finds that "an element of coercion was involved" in the ethnographer Paul Radin's obtaining of the impoverished Ho Chunk man's statement (93); see Lurie. I owe this idea about the principle of free thought in nations to Chomsky.
21. Such historical and cultural blindness in the USA can stem from a colonial psychological dependency. See Memmi, 45–76. I share all of Cook-Lynn's 1999 concerns regarding the colonial trade of culture.
22. See Mohanty, 240–41.
23. It is quite possible that the rich production of indigenous knowledge in North America owes a great deal to Native societies' ability to enable complex patterns of social expression. This is the "freedom" or "liberty" that European intellectuals such as Montaigne and Rousseau, Franklin and Thoreau romanticized. See

- Pearce; Berkhofer; Carr. Its valorization aside, the indigenous protection of social freedom in a society allows for the free production of new ideas. For a description of pre-Columbian social inquiry, see Vento. On the concept of national identity developing in the Americas, see Anderson.
24. On the Fourth World, see Dyck. For recent organizing, see Masaquiza and B'alam; Duffié; Porter and Yellow Bird.
 25. Hau describes the goal of the intellectual in political struggles as the "nationalizing of popular consciousness" (134).
 26. See Forbes 1993; Littlefield. I understand the concern among Native scholars of ethnic studies absorbing American Indian issues and causes, but Native intellectuals can certainly prioritize the defense of indigenous nations in internationalist alliances with other scholars in minority studies. For this concern, see Stevenson; Cook-Lynn 1996a.

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