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**New
Positions
in Black
Cultural
Studies**

Welcome to the
Jungle
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"1968": PERIODIZING POLITICS AND IDENTITY

Identity has become a keyword in contemporary politics. Like any other keyword, it bears not one unitary meaning but a range of competing definitions and uses, as different actors invest different meanings in one and the same sign. So, even if we are not sure about what "identity" really is, we can say that it acts as an essentially contested concept (Gallie, 1963). In this sense, whatever it is, identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis.

Politically, identities are in crisis because traditional sources of membership and belonging inscribed in relations of class, party and nation-state have been called into question. After more than ten years of Thatcherism, the political identity of the Left in Britain has been thrown into crisis by the radical transformations associated with the New Right. Indeed, as a metaphor for the opposition between progressive and reactionary forces, the figurative meaning of the Left/Right dichotomy has been totally reversed: over the past decade the Right has faced the future as an agent of radical historical change, while the Left—and what used to be called the New Left—has experienced a crisis of agency that has left it disaggregated and fragmented: fading away into the past, like a forgotten memory of something that happened a long time ago. The vocabulary of Left, Right and Center is no longer adequate to the terrain of postconsensus politics.

Intellectually, the prevailing name for this predicament has been "post-modernism" (Lyotard, 1984). Just as the traditional assumptions and attitudes of the postwar Left have been thrown into question, a whole

generation of postwar intellectuals have experienced an identity crisis, as philosophies of Marxism and modernism have begun to lose their oppositional or adversarial aura. The loss of faith in the idea of a cultural avant-garde parallels the crisis of credibility in political notions of the vanguard party. What results is a mood of mourning and melancholia, or else an attitude of cynical indifference that seeks a disavowal of the past, as the predominant voices in postmodern criticism have emphasized an accent of narcissistic pathos by which the loss of authority and identity on the part of a tiny minority of privileged intellectuals is generalized and universalized as something that everybody is supposedly worried about.

Values and beliefs that were once held to be universal and transcendental have indeed been relativized and historicized: but far from being the end of the world, this predicament has brought a whole range of experiences and identities into view for the first time.

The relativization of the oppositional aura of Marxism and modernism actually enables us to appreciate the diversity of social and political agency among actors whose antagonistic practices have also contributed to the sense of fragmentation and plurality that is said to characterize the postmodern condition. Over the past decade, developments in black politics, in lesbian and gay communities, among women and numerous feminist movements, and across a range of struggles around social justice, nuclear power, and ecology have pluralized the domain of political antagonism. There is no satisfactory common noun that designates what these so-called "new social movements" (Touriane 1981, 1988) represent, and it is my impression that "identity" is currently invoked as a way of acknowledging the transformations in public and private life associated with the presence of new social actors.

But, like the New Left or the New Right, the new social movements are not so "new" anymore: which is to say that, at the level of theory, it is no longer possible to map the terrain in terms of simple binary oppositions. It is here that we encounter the impoverished condition of cultural studies, in that its ability to theorize questions of identity and difference is limited by the all-too-familiar "race, class, gender" mantra, which is really only a weak version of liberal multiculturalism. Insofar as contemporary enthusiasm for "identity" replays previous debates on what used to

be called "consciousness" in the 1960s or "subjectivity" in the 1970s, the challenge is to go beyond the atomistic and essentialist logic of "identity politics" in which differences are dealt with only one at a time, and which therefore ignores the conflicts and contradictions that arise in the relations *within* and *between* the various movements, agents, and actors in contemporary forms of democratic antagonism.

In this sense, the challenge of radical pluralism has a double sense of urgency. As Dick Hebdige (1987, 1988) has shown, one way of clarifying what is at stake in postmodernism is to point out that the prefix "post" simply means the noun it predicates is perceived as "past." The cultural forms of postmodernism problematize perceptions of the past by creating an ironic sense of distance between "then" and "now." Through the pervasive mode retro/nostalgia/recycling aesthetic, the sixties and seventies are effectively historicized and periodized in much the same way as historians treat the twenties or the forties. Following this path, Lawrence Grossberg (1988) has argued that popular memory is a key site of postmodern politics, as popular consent for the policies and program of the New Right is not imposed from above, but rather draws from below on the mood of disillusionment and disenchantment with the utopian ideals of the 1960s. The ideological onslaught against the myth of the "swinging sixties" has been a key theme of neoliberal hegemony both in Britain and the United States: neoconservatism hegemonizes our ability to imagine the future by identifying its adversaries with the past. The selective erasure of the recent past serves to disarticulate not only the postwar vocabulary of social democracy, but the rhetorical vocabularies of the various "liberation" movements within the New Left and the new social movements that once defined themselves in opposition to it.

The erasure of the recent past plays an important role in clearing the ground for the reconstruction of collective identities once embedded in systemic relations of class, party and nation-state. Thus, in Britain, we have seen the neoconservative remythification of the imperial past as Victorian values and Raj nostalgia movies, like *Royal Weddings* and *Falklands War*, invoke a scenario of "regressive modernization" (Hall, 1988) in which the nation and its people are invited to travel back to the future through the revival and recycling of images from the lost age of Empire—"it's great to be Great again," as the 1987 Tory election manifesto

put it. In this version of the past, entirely fabricated to answer the crisis of national identity in the present, sources of democratic antagonism and opposition within the postwar period are written out of the account, as it is precisely the denial of difference that unifies "Little England," and the miserable combination of racism, nationalism and populism that underpins its dominant versions of who does and who does not belong.

What makes matters worse is the legitimation provided by ex-leftist intellectuals eager to repudiate the oppositional fantasies of the past (in England, Peter Fuller would be a good example), or more importantly, the inability of the left to produce a more pluralistic account of the past which recognizes the diversity of movements and actors implicated in the democratic revolutions of the 1960s. In this more general situation, what is in danger of disappearing is the desire for a dialogue about the common ground that used to articulate shared interests across the New Left and the new social actors.

Considering the recent historiography produced in Europe and the United States as part of the anniversary of "1968" in 1988, the predominant tone was one of nostalgia for the good old days when the good old boys could act out their heroic identities as student revolutionaries.¹ As Michele Wallace (1989) has pointed out, the passion of remembrance invoked in most of these accounts effectively "whitewashed" the diverse range of democratic struggles around race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality that also contributed to the moment of rupture against the consensual "center." In my view, what is at stake in contemporary representations of 1968 is not just the question of who is excluded and who is included in the story, but the way in which organic connections between the New Left and the new social actors are subject to a process of selective erasure and active forgetting.

Alternatively, the challenge of radical pluralism demands a relational and dialogic response which brings us to a perspectival view of what antagonistic movements have in common, namely that *no one has a monopoly on oppositional identity*.² The new social movements structured around race, gender, and sexuality are neither inherently progressive nor reactionary: which is to say that, just like the old social movements, they are subject to what Claude Lefort (1986) describes as "the political indeterminacy of democracy." Just like everyday people, women, black

people, lesbian and gay people, and people who worry about social justice, nuclear power or ecology can be interpellated into positions on the Right as much as they can be articulated into positions on the Left. As antagonistic elements in ideological struggle, political identities have no necessary belonging on either side of the great divide between Left and Right. Even if such either/or metaphors of Left and Right are inadequate, the point is that once we recognize the indeterminacy and ambivalence that inhabits the construction of every social identity—to use the vocabulary with which Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) have opened up this domain of analysis—we encounter the downside of difference, which could be called *the challenge of sameness*.

Different actors appropriate and articulate different meanings out of the same system of signs; or, to put it another way around, in Raymond Williams's (1976) vocabulary, the meaning of the keywords that signify the things that really matter—such as culture, community, justice, equality, or democracy—are never finally fixed in closed dictionary definitions, but are constantly subject to antagonistic efforts of articulation as different subjects seek to hegemonize discourses which support their versions of each signified over alternative versions proposed by their adversaries and opponents. If we take the metaphor of language games seriously, that is, literally, we recognize that, like any game with winners and losers, what matters most are the moves, strategies, and tactics by which opponents play the game.

Speaking from the specificity of postimperial Britain, what was important about the "redefinition" of black identity that became generalized in the early 1980s was the construction of a political identity made out of differences. When various peoples—of Asian, African, and Caribbean descent—interpellated themselves and each other as /black/ they invoked a collective identity predicated on political and not biological similarities. In other words, the naturalized connotations of the term /black/ were disarticulated out of the dominant codes of racial discourse, and rearticulated as signs of alliance and solidarity among dispersed groups of people sharing common historical experiences of British racism. The empowering effect of the transformed metaphor, which brought a new form of democratic subjectivity and agency into being, did not arise out of a binary reversal or a closed antiwhite sensibility, but out of the inclusive character

of Afro-Asian alliances which thus engendered a pluralistic sense of "imagined community."

No one has a monopoly or exclusive authorship over the signs they share in common: rather, elements from the same system of signs are constantly subject to antagonistic modes of appropriation and articulation. What was important and empowering about the redefinition of black identity in British society in the 1980s was that it showed that identities are not found but *made*; that they are not just there, waiting to be discovered in the vocabulary of nature, but that they have to be culturally and politically *constructed* through political antagonism and cultural struggle. If this applies to "us" it also applies to those who are "not us" because, in the shared space that constitutes our common home, the dominant rearticulation of collective identities in Thatcherite Britain—with its exclusionary boundaries that have restructured the relations between state and civil society—is nothing if not thoroughly arbitrary and conventional, contingent and constructed in character.

The challenge of sameness entails the recognition that we share the same planet, even if we live in different worlds. We inhabit a discursive universe with a finite number of symbolic resources which can nevertheless be appropriated and articulated into a potentially infinite number of representations. Identities and differences are constructed out of a common stock of signs, and it is through the combination and substitution of these shared elements that antagonism becomes representable as such.

By taking this analytical approach, my aim is to open up an archaeological rereading of 1968 which starts from the recognition that the New Right, the New Left, and the new social movements inhabited a shared discursive universe within which the same signs produced radically different effects of meaning and value as they were subject to competing modes of appropriation and articulation. As someone who was eight years old at the time, I should emphasize that my aim is not so much to "articulate the past the way it really was," but to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger," in Walter Benjamin's (1973) phrase: that is, a "memory" encountered by subsequent generations, in 1977 or 1981, entirely in representations: books, conversations, films, records, television programs.

In this historical inquiry I will explore the privileged metaphor of race

as an element of central importance to the New Left, the New Right and the new social movements alike, precisely on account of its metaphorical character as a multiaccentual signifier. The purpose of privileging representations of race in this way is not to make foundationalist claims about who was central and who was marginal to the popular-democratic revolutions of the postwar period, but to open up a genealogical analysis of the contingent character of the *imaginary forms of identification* in what Laclau refers to as "the democratic imaginary" (see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 149–194).

STRUGGLES OVER THE SIGN

I want first to contextualize the redefinition of black British identity in more depth, before mapping out the broader significance of race within the postwar democratic imaginary in Western societies.

The important point about the rearticulation of /black/ was its polyvocal quality, as different connotations were inscribed within the shared semantic space of the same signifier. The recoding of its biological signified into a political one thus vividly demonstrates Volosinov's conception of the "social multi-accentuality of the sign" in which

every living sign has two faces, like Janus. Any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to many people as the greatest lie. This inner dialectical quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes. In the ordinary conditions of life, the contradiction embedded in every ideological sign cannot fully emerge because . . . an established dominant ideology . . . always tries, as it were, to stabilize the dialectical flux. (1973 [1929]: 23–24)

Drawing on this model, Stuart Hall differentiates two strategies of articulation involved in black struggles over the sign:

Sometimes, the class struggle in language occurred between two different terms: the struggle, for example, to replace the term "immigrant" with the term "black." But often the struggle took the form of a different accenting of the same term: e.g., the process by which the derogatory colour "black" became the enhanced value "Black" (as in "Black is Beautiful"). In the latter case, the struggle was not over the term itself but over its connotative meanings . . . [as] the same term . . . belonged

in both the vocabularies of the oppressed and the oppressors. What was being struggled over was not the class belongingness of the term, but the inflexion it could be given, its connotative field of reference. (Hall, 1982a: 78–79)

For over four centuries in Western civilization, the sign /black/ had nothing but negative connotations, as it was structured by the closure of an absolute symbolic division between what was white and what was not-white. The primordial metaphor of classical racism, in which opposite poles on the spectrum of light—black/white—stand in for and thereby represent what Fanon (1980) called the “morphological equation” of racial superiority and inferiority, can thus be redescribed in Laclau’s (1980) terms as operating on the basis of a logic of equivalence, A:non-A, in contrast to a logic of difference, A:B.

Throughout the modern period, the semiotic stability of this nodal system in racist ideology has been undermined and thrown into a state of dialectical flux as a result of the reappropriation and rearticulation of signs brought about by subaltern subjects themselves. It is precisely around the symbolic displacements of the “proper name” that we can see the historical formation of new modes of democratic agency. In the United States, this is seen most clearly in the recoding of the proper name—Negro, Colored, Black, Afro-American, and more recently, African-American—each of which reinfect the connotational value of a given vocabulary in renaming a collective subjectivity in each historical period.

In Britain, a similar process underpins what Black Audio Film Collective called “the war of naming the problem.”³ This metaphor describes the war-of-position that turns on the displacement of previous ideological categories, most importantly /immigrant/ and /ethnic minority/, both of which articulate the postimperial problematic of membership and belonging inscribed in official definitions of subjecthood and citizenship in postwar Britain. During the 1950s and sixties, when race relations were constructed as a domain of social problems and state intervention, the connotations of the term /immigrant/ lay in its ideological *othering* of citizens who had every legal and formal right to equality. Paradoxically, it was precisely because of its deracialized content at the level of denotation that the connotations of /immigrant/ were saturated with specifically “racial” connotations to designate the nonbelonging of Afro-Asian citizens—

which was precisely the political goal of the immigration and nationality legislation that has redefined constitutional definitions of who is and who is not a British citizen.

Similarly, the term /ethnic minority/, associated with social democracy in the sixties and seventies, connotes the black subject as a minor, an abject, childlike figure necessary for the legitimation of paternalistic ideologies of assimilation and integration that underpinned the strategy of liberal multiculturalism. A member of a “minority” is literally a minor, a social subject who is *in-fans*, without a voice, debarred from access to democratic rights to representation: a subject who does not have the right to speak and who is therefore spoken for by the state and its “representatives.” Throughout the sixties and seventies, both of these terms were contested by the construction of a politics of Afro-Asian resistance, out of which the term /black community/ arose, itself partially out of a reappropriation of the categories of “community relations” by which the state sought to render race relations manageable and governable within the framework of social-democratic consensus.

The recoding of /black/, which simply became generalized in the 1980s, did not arrive out of the blue, therefore, but out of a set of determinate historical conditions in which new forms of cultural antagonism and political agency were constructed. In this sense, the range of activities brought to bear on “black representation”—and the diversification of blackness as such a key theme across black British artistic practices over the last decade—can be described in bell hooks’s terms as a process of finding a voice:

As a metaphor for self-transformation . . . [the idea of finding one’s voice] . . . has been especially relevant for groups of women who have previously never had a public voice, women who are speaking and writing for the first time, including many women of color. Feminist focus on finding a voice may sound clichéd at times. . . . However, for women within oppressed groups . . . coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak. (hooks, 1989: 12)

As a theory of the speaking subject, the metaphor of “coming to voice,” by which the objects of racist ideologies become subjects and agents of

historical change, enables us to approach the analysis of subject formation in the broadest possible sense—in terms of democracy as a struggle over relations of representation. On this view, black struggles over access to the means of representation in the public sphere, in cultural and political institutions alike, require an analysis that is not exclusively centered on individualizing or psychologizing theories of subjectivity, but which acknowledges the contingent social and historical conditions in which new forms of collectivity and community are also brought into being as agents or subjects in the public sphere.

By adopting such a broader, antiessentialist approach to the discursive analysis of subjectivity, it becomes possible to develop Chantal Mouffe's insight that

the progressive character of a struggle does not depend on its place of origin . . . but rather on its links with other struggles. The longer the chain of equivalences set up between the defense of the rights of one group and those of other groups, the deeper will be the democratization process and the more difficult it will be to neutralize certain struggles or make them serve the ends of the Right. The concept of solidarity can be used to form such a chain of democratic equivalences. (Mouffe, 1988: 100)

On this view, I would argue that signifiers of race came to act as an important influence on the articulation of a radical democratic chain of equivalences in the postwar period. The concept of solidarity encoded around representations of race empowered not only black peoples but subordinate subjects within white society itself. The migration of racial signifiers suggests that it was precisely because of their metaphorical character that the signifying practice of black struggles became universalized in the tactics and strategies of new social subjects and agents of democratic antagonism.

SPEAKING FOR THE SUBJECT

Cornel West offers a model for periodizing the postwar conjuncture in terms of three fundamental historical coordinates that concern "the aftermath and legacy of the age of Europe, the precarious yet still prominent power of the United States, and the protracted struggles of Third

World peoples (here and abroad)" (1989: 87). Above all, the moral and political significance of the two overarching events of the modern age—the Jewish Holocaust in Nazi Germany and the use of the atom bomb in the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—can only indicate the profound importance of the changed conditions of ideological struggles around race and ethnicity in the postwar period.

I would locate in this context the historical rupture or break from a classical to a modern regime of truth with regards to the representation and signification of race. In its earlier formations, during the periods of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, the black/white metaphor at the center of racist ideologies was characterized by its relative stability, and was naturalized by the hegemony of a Eurocentric world-system. In the modern period, by contrast, its transcendental signified was debiologized, as it were, and the fixity of the primordial racial metaphor was thrown into a state of dialectical flux. It was in this context that the metaphorical character of "race" was recognized in the human and social sciences. It was precisely because of the recognition of the meaninglessness of race that the signifier itself became the site for the making and remaking of meanings. I turn first therefore to the way in which black struggles subverted the signification of difference through strategies that operated "in and against" the same symbolic codes that had once circumscribed their subjection and oppression.

Frantz Fanon's (1980) brief essay, "West Indians and Africans," written in 1955, shows how contradictory meanings intersected across the semantic space of the same term /Negro/. "In 1939," he wrote, "no West Indian proclaimed himself to be a Negro," as the Caribbean subject identified with the dominant position of the European subject: "As we see, the positions were clear-cut: on the one hand, the African; on the other, the European and the West Indian. The West Indian was a black man, but the Negro lived in Africa" (1980: 21). After the war, however, these positions were reversed: "In 1945 [the West Indian] discovered himself to be not only black but a Negro and it was in the direction of distant Africa that he henceforth put out his feelers."

What brought about the change? Fanon says it was the German occupation of Martinique in which "the West Indian" saw the subordination of his French colonial masters at the hands of fellow Europeans. Insofar as

this undermined the naturalized authority of the Other, and the binary system of colonial racism on which it was based, such dislocation opened the space for the dissemination of Negritude as a counter-hegemonic ideology based on an imaginary and symbolic strategy of inversion and reversal that would revalorize elements of African origin that had been previously devalorized in relation to elements of European origin. In this sense, the poetics of identity textualized by Aime Césaire (1972) served to formalize the oppositional logic of binary reversal that articulated the more general "strategic essentialism" of black cultural nationalism that developed within the African diaspora in the 1940s and fifties.

Here, in the context of the widening Pan-African movement, the logic of reversal and inversion associated with earlier forms of black cultural nationalism (in the Garveyite movements of the 1920s, for example) were displaced in favor of an inclusive and expansive form of "national liberation," whose discursive strategies were described by Richard Wright (1958) in his report on the Bandung Conference of 1955. Within the geopolitical metaphor of First, Second, and Third Worlds, the anti-imperialist struggles in Africa and Asia appropriated the Western form of nation-state to unify previously disparate regional, traditional or "tribal" loyalties and identities. In this respect, like the strategy of reversal in cultural nationalism, the mimetic reproduction of Western forms of nation-state was deeply contradictory, because although it empowered subordinate subjects in the name of national-popular sovereignty, it did so within the matrix of relations that remained within the binary system inherited from Western imperialism, now redefined in the articulated hierarchy between metropolitan center and dependent periphery.

On the other hand, however, insofar as these different struggles passed through the mediation of the West, it was precisely this shared system of relations that brought about the transnational dispersal of new forms of democratic agency associated with Gandhi's role in the movement for Indian independence. Notwithstanding the specific cultural and religious traditions in which Gandhi's doctrine of nonviolent protest was developed, the central point is that it not only influenced the anticolonial movements for national liberation in Asia and Africa, but was taken up by movements at the metropolitan center that had no necessary relation to the postimperial periphery. In the United States, nonviolence was taken up by the

Civil Rights Movement, but in Britain it was taken up by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which was *not* specifically defined by its racial or ethnic character.⁴

In relation to the black Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s, it was this widening of the chain of democratic equivalences—by which strategies such as nonviolent protest were metaphorically transferred from one struggle to another—that underlines Mouffe's point about the progressive character of democratic struggles. In this sense, the solidarity between these different struggles is best understood not in naturalistic terms, as the spontaneous expression of aspirations to justice and equality, but in terms of the construction of a wider system of alliances and equivalences that strengthened the new forms of democratic agency. On this view, in contrast to the strategies of appropriation and rearticulation in cultural nationalism based on inversion and reversal, the progressive character of the Civil Rights Movement involved a strategy for the rearticulation of black identity around the subversive logic of the demand for "equality."

Within the conditions of a developed capitalist society, the demand for "equality" can be seen as the effect of a "contradictory interpellation." Institutional forms of segregation meant that black Americans could not become what they were—American citizens—because their access to democratic rights to equality was denied by racism. Race was overdetermined as a symbol of democratic antagonism because social democracy placed values of equality and justice at the center of public life and yet denied black peoples' access to them. As historical accounts have emphasized (see Marable, 1984), the equal participation of black Americans in the two world wars that were fought in Europe exacerbated mass movements for racial equality, whether in the 1920s or in the 1940s and fifties, as black subjects were interpellated as equal in one set of discourses and yet repositioned as unequal in others.

In this sense, such contradictory interpellation can be seen as a decisive factor in relation to the politics of race in postcolonial Britain. Like the equal participation of the colonies in the war, which gave further momentum to the demand for independence and self-determination, black settlers in postwar Britain were interpellated as equal citizens before the law, but in the labor market, in housing, education and state welfare, and in politics, racism denied the possibility of such equality. The histori-

cal formation of /community/ as a site of survival and empowerment must be seen in relational terms of power and resistance, and not as the spontaneous expression of an innate desire for solidarity. As C.L.R. James (1984) commented, during the era of the "color-bar" in the forties and fifties, such solidarity between, say, Africans and West Indians simply was not there. So, if the "black community" was not always already there but something that had to be constructed, what did people use to construct it with?

In no small measure, they used the representations encountered in the everyday forms of mass culture—newspapers, radio, cinema, television, literature, music—as it was the commodification of social relations associated with the overdevelopment of postwar capitalism that paradoxically *enabled* the transnational movement and migration of racial metaphors. Moreover, if such mediated representations were important for black subjects, who appropriated empowering identifications with other black people of the diaspora, they were also important for white subjects as well. I therefore want to turn to the other side of these struggles over the sign, to look at how the strategies of inversion and reversal based on binary opposition, and the strategies of equivalence and ambivalence based on equality, reconstituted antagonistic identities in white society itself.

MYSTERIES OF THE ETHNIC SIGNIFIER

The elements of periodization mapped out by Cornel West resonate with those offered in Andreas Huyssen's (1986) account of the cultural development of "postmodernism," which backdates the "break" with modernity to the postwar period of the 1950s and sixties. In his description of the migration of the modernist avant-garde from Europe to the United States, Huyssen also describes the gradual displacement of the hierarchy between "high" culture and "popular" culture. It was in this context of displacement, in the literary bohemia of the "underground" and in vernacular youth subcultures of the time, that we see the appropriation and articulation of black signs as iconic elements in the cultural expression of oppositional identities within white society, a process that came into the open between 1956 and 1966.

Here, the very concept of "identification" is problematized in the figure of "the White Negro," who appeared not only in the pages of *Dissent* in Norman Mailer's (1964) article of 1957 and among the beatniks and bebop freaks, but in Elvis Presley's hips and Mick Jagger's lips and indeed across the surface of postwar youth culture. The enigma of the White Negro raises the question: *What is it about whiteness that made them want to be black?* To the extent that the constitutive identifications of white subjectivity have not yet been constructed as an object of theoretical inquiry, the point of the question is simply to try and clarify the ambivalence that arises when white subjects appropriate signs from the other side of the "morphological equation."

On the one hand, there is a mode of appropriation that results in a form of *imitation*, based on a mimetic strategy of inversion in self-representation whereby the white subject identifies with the devalored term in the black/white metaphor. In the iconic figure of the nineteenth century "nigger minstrel," in which white actors were blacked up to become other than what they were, there is a complex psychic economy in the masquerade of white ethnicity. Alternatively, within high cultural traditions such as romanticism in European art, the logic of reversal that overvalorizes an identification with racial otherness is also profoundly expressive of a disaffiliation from dominant self-images, a kind of strategic self-othering. As Arthur Rimbaud put it in "A Season in Hell" (1873), "I am a beast, a Negro. You are false Negroes, you maniacs, fierce, miserly. I am entering the true kingdom of the Children of Ham."⁵ In this sense, from noble savages to painterly primitives, the trope of the White Negro encodes an antagonistic subject-position on the part of the white subject in relation to the normative codes of his or her own society.

Thus, on the other hand, the question of political appropriations that result in forms of democratic *alliance* entails analysis of the way white subjects disidentify with the positions ascribed to them in racist ideologies. It may not be possible to develop such an analysis here, but it is important to note the alliances sought by the New Left, which emerged in Britain and the United States, as a political subculture and as an intellectual counterculture, precisely within this period between 1956 and 1966.

In this respect, the construction of popular-democratic alliances in the Civil Rights Movement under Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s charismatic

leadership (culminating in the "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington in 1963), opened onto similar transracial identifications among postwar youth implicated in collective disaffiliation from the "American Dream" through mass protest against the war in Vietnam. In place of a chronological history, I merely want to draw out three privileged points between 1964 and 1968 in which new forms of antagonism were overdetermined by the ambivalence of the ethnic signifier.

First, the radical reconstruction of black subjectivity inscribed in the transformation of the proper name, from /Negro/ to /Black/, can be seen as an expression of widening forms of counter-hegemonic struggle in which the liberal goal of equality was displaced in favor of the radical democratic goal of freedom. Urban insurrections, religious and cultural nationalism, and student movements contributed to a situation in which the demand for legal or social equality was deepened into an existential affirmation of negated subjectivity—precisely that which was signified under erasure as simply "X" in Malcolm Little's symbolic renaming (1966). At the level of the imaginary and symbolic dimension of popular-democratic antagonism, what Manning Marable (1984) describes as the "second reconstruction" must be seen also as the turning point in the subjective reconstruction of black consciousness and black identity. The process of "coming to voice" which transformed the objects of racist ideology into subjects empowered by their own sense of agency was inscribed in the dialectical flux of slogans such as Black is Beautiful and Black Power, signs that were characterized by their radically polyvocal and multiaccidental quality.

What made /Black Power/ such a volatile metaphor was its political indeterminacy: it meant different things to different people in different discourses. It appeared in the discourse of the right, where even Richard Nixon endorsed it as a form of black capitalism, as much as in the discourses of the Left or the liberal center, whose enthusiasm for radical "mau-mau chic" was parodied by Tom Wolfe (1969).

The emergence of the Black Panther Party in 1966 played an important role in channeling the indeterminacy of /Black Power/ into progressive positions on the left, and as such played a pivotal role in influencing the direction of popular-democratic antagonism across both white and black society. The "revolutionary nationalism" advocated by the Black Panthers

emphasized a theory of oppression answered by an identificatory link with the armed struggles and guerrilla tactics of anti-imperialist movements in the Third World. This imaginary equivalence was underlined by the aura of their highly visible oppositional appearance, which clearly differentiated the Panthers from other strands in black politics (see Newton, 1973; Foner, 1970). In this respect, the political positions of the Black Panthers had an empowering effect in extending the chain of radical democratic equivalences to more and more social groups precisely through their dramatic and provocative visibility in the public sphere. At the level of political discourse, it was this system of equivalences that helped generate the form of women's liberation and gay liberation out of strategic analogies with the goals, and methods, of black liberation, which were themselves based on an analogy with Third World struggles for national liberation.

The ten-point platform of the Black Panther Party, articulated by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966 (in Foner, 1970: 2-3), formed a discursive framework through which the women's movement and the gay movement displaced the demand for reform and "equality" in favor of the wider goal of revolution and "liberation." The ten-point charter of demands of the Women's Liberation Movement, 1968, and the Gay Liberation Front, 1969, were based on a metaphorical transfer of the terms for the liberation of one group into the terms for the liberation of others. It was on the basis of such imagined equivalences that the connotative yield of slogans such as Black Power and Black Pride was appropriated to empower movements around gender and sexual politics. Black pride acted as metonymic leverage for the expression of "gay pride" just as notions of "brotherhood" and "community" in black political discourse influenced the assertions of "global sisterhood" or "sisterhood is strength."⁶

If this form of solidarity depended on analogy, which implies an identification based on equivalence, there was also another form of identification, inscribed in the more ambiguous appropriation of black expressive culture, which culminated at one point in the Woodstock Festival in 1969. As a countercultural event, and as a commodity spectacle, it constituted its audience as members of a separate, generationally defined, "imagined community," as the predominantly white, middle-class youth who went thought that they constituted a "nation within a nation"—the Woodstock

Nation. On the day it was over, Jimi Hendrix performed the "Star Spangled Banner," or, rather, his sublime deconstruction of this hymn to national identity gave voice to an antagonism that questioned its own conditions of representability.

Insofar as it is possible to represent the ambivalence of white identities theoretically, one might contrast the forms of identification based on imitation to those based on alliances that created new forms of political solidarity. At its liminal "far-out" degree, such ambivalence underpinned versions of white identity produced in the counterculture that were almost parodic imitations of black subjectivity, such as when the anarchist John Sinclair formed the short-lived White Panther party in 1969 and managed a rock group whom he thought would ignite the revolutionary consciousness of "lumpen" youth in Detroit—the MC5.

On the other hand, I would like to recall Jean Genet's (1968) wild and adventurous story of being smuggled over the Canadian border by David Hilliard and other members of the Black Panther Party, in May 1968, to give a speech at Yale University in defence of Bobby Seale. Rather than act out imitative fantasies, Genet participated as an equal member of this "elective community," as he did among the fedayeen and the Palestinian freedom fighters in whose communities he lived between 1969 and 1972. What intrigues me about the way this wretched, orphaned, homosexual thief was adopted into these "imagined communities" is the ambivalent intermixing of eroticism in the political desire for solidarity and "community." The libidinal dimension is certainly there in Norman Mailer's *White Negro*, who went into black culture in search of sex, speed and psychosis; but in Genet's case it leads to a radically different subject-position which does not attempt to master or assimilate difference, but which speaks from a position of equality as part of a shared struggle to decolonize inherited models of subjectivity.

As merely an other amongst others, Genet was able to recognize the way in which black struggles were remaking history: "In white America the Blacks are the characters in which history is written. They are the ink that gives the white page its meaning" (1989: 213). Genet adds, "[The Black Panther Party] built the black race on a white America that was splitting," and it was precisely this process of polarization that split the field of political antagonism in 1968. As Stuart Hall describes it, "It is

when the great consensus of the 50s and early 60s comes apart, when the 'politics of the centre' dissolves and reveals the contradictions and social antagonisms which are gathering beneath" (1978:28).

This splitting engendered a new set of "frontier effects" (see Laclau, 1977; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) in the representation of political antagonism, most notably between "the people," unified as a counter-hegemonic bloc, against "the state." In the United States, the election of Richard Nixon on a "law-and-order" platform consolidated the repressive response of the central state to the escalation of ungovernability. But the populist slogan of "Power to the People" was inherently ambivalent, as it did not belong exclusively to the Left. In Britain, popular discontent with consensus found another form of populist expression: in the public response to the anti-immigration speeches made by Enoch Powell in April 1968. Through these speeches, a marginal Conservative politician dramatized the crisis of the center by producing a form of discourse which helped polarize the multiaccultural connotations condensed around the metaphor of race.

THE REVERSIBLE CONNECTING FACTOR

The historical importance of "Powellism" lies less in the story of an individual politician and more in the ideological transformations which his discourse made possible. In this sense, the discourse of Powellism had a dual significance: on the one hand, the issue of immigration provided symbolic leverage for the broader articulation of neoliberal anti-statism, and on the other, the discursive combinations of populism and nationalism that Powell performed in speaking on immigration displaced the old biologizing language of racism, whose "morphological equation" of superiority and inferiority was associated with Nazi ideology, in favor of a culturalist vocabulary that depended on a binary system for representations of ethnicity in terms of identities and differences. In other words, Enoch Powell fully recognized that there are no such things as "races," which is to say that he contributed to the authorship of the new racism by entering into the semantic universe of liberal multiculturalism and reappropriating the concept of ethnicity into an antidemocratic discourse of right-wing populism (see Nairn, 1981; Barker, 1982).

As Powell put it in November 1968⁷, referring to his earlier speech:

The reaction to that speech revealed a deep and dangerous gulf in the nation. . . . I do not mean between the indigenous population and the immigrants. . . . Nor do I mean the gulf between those who do, and those who do not, know from personal experience the impact and reality of immigration. . . . I mean the gulf between the overwhelming majority of people throughout the country on the one side, and on the other side, a tiny minority, with almost a monopoly hold on the channels of communication, who . . . will resort to any device or extremity to blind both themselves and others. (Powell, 1969: 300)

The "conspiracy theory" expressed here already acknowledges the populist rupture created by the April "rivers of blood" speech: moreover, the splitting which Powell reveals is not the antagonism between whites and blacks but the antagonism between "the people" as silent majority, against the media and the "establishment" which thus represent "the state." Through this bipolar division, Powell's discourse set in motion a system of equivalences predicated on a textual strategy of binary reversal, which culminated in his "enemies within" speech on the eve of the 1970 General Election.

This text marked a crucial turning point in the popularization of a New Right perspective in British politics. In it, Powell depicts the nation under attack from a series of enemies, thereby linking the "anarchy" of student demonstrations, the "civil war" in Northern Ireland, and the racially codified image of the "United States engulfed in fire and fighting." The signifying chain is underpinned by the central issue in the conspiracy: "The exploitation of what is called 'race' is a common factor which links the operations of the enemy on several different fronts."⁸ It is through this equivalence that Powell's conspiracy theory posits the reversibility of racial metaphor as the liminal site of a crisis of national identity—"The public are literally made to say that black is white." In relation to immigration, the strategy of reversal proposed "repatriation" as the narrative solution to the problem of citizens who had the right of permanent settlement: while, in relation to race relations, it proposed "reverse discrimination," and the suffering of the silent (white) majorities, to undermine the consensual goal of "integration."

Insofar as the whole system turned on a coherent theory of national identity, the antagonistic logic of binary reversal in the discourse of Pow-

ellism was based not on genetic or essentialist notions of racial difference, but on the *cultural* construction of Little England as a domain of ethnic homogeneity, a unified and monocultural "imagined community." Enoch Powell's enunciative modalities in his rhetoric of race and nation merely reiterated what Rudyard Kipling meant when he wrote:⁹

All the people like us are We/ And every one else is They.

By drawing on such textual resources Powellism encoded a racist vision of English cultural identity, not in the illegitimate language of biologizing racism, but through literary and rhetorical moves that enabled the dissemination of its discourse across the political spectrum, to the point where it became legitimized by being gradually instituted in common sense and in state policies.

In this sense, Enoch Powell's most revealing speeches are those made between 1961 and 1964, in which he sought to come to terms with the crisis of British national identity in the postcolonial period by demystifying the ideology of Empire itself. By showing that the British Empire was the product of culturally constructed "myths" invented in the 1880s, he would clear the space for the self-conscious construction of new "myths" in the 1960s. Powell's conception of myth—"The greatest task of the statesman is to offer his people good myths and save them from harmful myths; and I make no apology if Plato happens to have said just that in *The Republic*"—was grounded in a reflective theory of national identity in which Powell held that, "The life of nations, no less than that of men, is lived largely in the imagination."¹⁰

It may be difficult for cultural studies to grasp, but Enoch Powell's political practice in the demythification and remythification of English ethnicity in the 1960s was fully theorized in a relational logic that is not incompatible with that which underpins the concept of "myth" found in Antonio Gramsci or Claude Levi-Strauss:

. . . all history is myth. It is a pattern which men weave out of the materials of the past. The moment a fact enters history it becomes mythical, because it has been taken and fitted into its place in a set of ordered relationships which is the creation of the human mind and not otherwise present in nature. (Powell, 1969: 325)

To the extent that Powell was able to act on this theory in 1968, as the myth-prince of the New Conservatism, we could say that it was the New Right, and not the New Left nor the new social movements, that got hold of what the Situationists used to call "the reversible connecting factor." This was a term coined by Guy Debord in his theory of "detournement," or the bricolage of bits and pieces found in the streets.¹¹ Enoch Powell's bricolage of racism, nationalism, and populism was based on a similar textual strategy (see Mercer, 1990).

"The liberation of the imagination is the precondition of revolution," or so the Surrealists used to say in the 1920s. When the heroic protagonists of "Paris May '68" adopted similar slogans—Let the Imagination Seize Power—they might have known that their opponents and adversaries, the enemies of freedom and democracy, were perfectly capable of doing more or less the same thing. But, by virtue of the narcissistic conceit in its historical self-image, the Left—what is left of it—still cannot bring itself to think that its enemies are any more capable than it is when dealing with the imaginary and symbolic dimensions of hegemonic politics.

To the extent that cultural studies remains caught up within the attitudes, assumptions and institutions created in the wake of that moment in 1968, I cannot see how it will get very far, now and in the future, in negotiating a commitment to theory around this area of cultural and political difficulty, without letting go of some of those identifications and hanging on to some of the others.

NOTES

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Tabloid headlines from the following newspapers, "Why? Why? Why?" *The Evening Standard* (April 13, 1981); "The Battle of Brixton," *The Sun* (April 11, 1981); "The Blitz of '81," *The Sun* (April 13, 1981); "Black War on Police," *Daily Mail* (July 6, 1981).

2. On the central importance of policing to the development of postwar racism and community resistance see Paul Gilroy (1982a) and A. Sivanandan (1982). Documentation of police racism has been important since Joseph Hunt's self-published report to the West Indian Standing Conference, *Nigger Hunting in England* (1966), and Derek Humphrey's *Police Power and Black People* (London: Panther, 1970), which features photographs by Horace Ove that served as legal evidence in the defence of the Mangrove Nine trial in 1970 to 71. Ove's photographs are more extensively reproduced in *Savacou* 9/10 (1974), "Writing Away from Home," pp. 105–108. *Savacou* was the key journal of the Caribbean Arts Movement, featuring work by John La Rose, Andrew Salkey, Edward Brathwaite and Stuart Hall, among others. When the history of black British cultural politics comes to be written, many contemporary issues will be seen to have been anticipated in Hall's early work on "race," such as "Black Men, White Media," (*ibid.*, 97–100) and *The Young Englanders* (London: National Council for Commonwealth Immigrants 1967).

3. The "new racism" was a critical term introduced by Martin Barker (1982) and elaborated by Gilroy and others (CCCS, 1982; Gilroy, 1987) to differentiate forms of "racialization" that depend on ideologies of cultural, rather than merely biological, differences. Hence, the importance of the reconceptualization of ethnicity (Hall, 1985) and "ethnic absolutism" (Gilroy, 1990a). Enoch Powell's role as an author of the new racism is examined in my PhD thesis, *Powellism: Race, Politics and Discourse* (Mercer, 1990a).

On the history of black British settlement prior to the postwar period, see Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Edward Scobie, *Blacks Britannica* (Chicago: Johnson Publications,

Critical Difference: Race, Ethnicity and Culture, Southampton University, October 22, 1988; organized by John Hansard Gallery to accompany the exhibition, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Rasheed Araeen, Retrospective 1959-1987*, Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 1988.

5. See the exchange between Salman Rushdie, Stuart Hall and Darcus Howe, *The Guardian* (January 12, 15, 19, 1987); reprinted in *Black Film/British Cinema* (ICA, 1988): 16-18. Similarly hostile responses came from Tony Sewell in *The Voice*, and Michael Cadette in *Race Today*, see chapter three above.

6. C.L.R. James, "Black Studies and the Contemporary Student," *At the Rendezvous of Victory* (London: Allison & Busby, 1984).

7. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1869), quoted in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1978), xiii.

8. Gilane Tawardos, "Beyond the Boundary: The Work of Three Black Women Artists in Britain," *Third Text*, 8/9 (Autumn/Winter 1989), offers an important discussion of aesthetic strategies that is, in my view, somewhat delimited by the recourse to a binaristic logic influenced by the argument for "populist modernism."

9. Conservation with Keith Piper, Hayward Gallery, January 1990. See, also, various black British artists' contributions to the documentary film, *Black Visual Arts: "Race," Culture and Society* (director Ann Diack), Open University, 1992.

10. See Sivanandan, "R.A.T. and the Degradation of Black Struggle," *Race and Class*, XXIX, 3 (Autumn 1987). See, also, Ahmed Gurnah, "The Politics of Racism Awareness Training" *Critical Social Policy*, 11 (1987).

11. See William Bryce Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," in Max Black, ed., *The Importance of Language* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963); for an analysis of "community" in these terms, see Raymond Plant, *Community and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1974); and for a theoretical revision of Gallie's concept, see William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983) (2nd edition). I have drawn on this approach with regards to "race" as an essentially contested concept in British political discourse in my PhD thesis, *Powellism: Race, Politics and Discourse*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

"Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics," first published in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990).

1. Cited in a leaflet by Haringey Black Action, coorganizers of the Smash the Backlash demonstration, May 2, 1987. My thanks to Savi Hensman, Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, London, for access to materials on the "Positive Images" campaign.

2. "Welcome to the Jungle," from Guns 'N Roses, *Appetite for Destruction*, Geffen Records, 1988.

3. See, also, Claus Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson, 1984).

4. Written by David Bowie (1972), performed by Mott the Hoople, *Mott the Hoople Greatest Hits*, CBS Records, 1976.

5. Jacques Donzelot, "The Apprehension of Time," in Don Barry and Stephen Mueke, eds., *The Apprehension of Time* (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1988).

6. Cited in Jon Savage, "Do You Know How to Pony? The Messianic Intensity of the Sixties," (1982) reprinted in Angela McRobbie, ed., *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 121.

7. Stuart Hall, "Popular Democratic vs. Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of Taking Democracy Seriously," (1980) in Hall (1988); the concept of frontier effects is originally developed in Ernesto Laclau (1977).

8. *Melody Maker* (August 19, 1989), 41.

9. Judith Williamson, "The Problem with Being Popular," *New Socialist* (September 1986).

10. The riddle comes from a review of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Andrew Ross, *m/f*, 11/12 (1986), 99-106.

11. See Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom: An African Ideology* (London: Heineman, 1961); and Frantz Fanon, 1970 [1952] and 1967 [1961].

12. The White Panther manifesto, the "Woodstock Nation," and other documents from the countercultures in Britain, Europe and the United States are collected in Peter Stansill and David Zane Mairowitz, eds., *BAMN (By Any Means Necessary): Outlaw Manifestoes and other Ephemera, 1965-1970* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971). On the "alternative society" in Britain, see David Widgery, *The Left in Britain, 1956-1968* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). On feminist and gay equivalences, see Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," in *BAMN*; and Aubrey Walter, ed., *Come Together: The Years of Gay Liberation, 1970-1973* (London: Gay Mens Press, 1980).

13. Key speeches of the 1960s are gathered in Enoch Powell, *Freedom and Reality* (Farnham: Elliot Right Way Boojs, 1969); see, also, John Elliot, ed., *Powell and the 1970 Election* (Farnham, Elliot Right Way Books, 1970); and for a Marxist account, see Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (London: New Left Books, 1981), especially chapter six, "English Nationalism: The Case of Enoch Powell."

14. Advertisement in *Black Enterprise* magazine (January-February 1989).

15. See John Keane, ed., *Democracy and Civil Society* (London: Verso, 1988).

16. An important exception is Franco Bianchini, "GLC RIP: Cultural Policies in London, 1981-1986," *New Formations*, 1 (Spring 1987).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

"1968': Periodizing Politics and Identity," first published in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

1. Some of the recent texts at issue here include, David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1988); Todd

Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); and Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephenson, Stanley Aronowitz, Fredric Jameson, eds., *The Sixties Without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984). Alternatively, a wider and much more inclusive perspective is offered by George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1988).

2. To paraphrase Paul Gilroy's important point that "none of us enjoys a monopoly on black authenticity," Gilroy, (1988: 44).

3. From *Handsworth Songs*, directed by John Akomfrah, Black Audio Film Collective, London, 1986.

4. On CND and the British New Left, see contributions by Stuart Hall, Michael Barratt Brown, and Peter Worsely, in Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group, ed., *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left 30 Years On* (London: Verso, 1989).

5. Arthur Rimbaud, "A Season in Hell" (1873) in Wallace Fowlie, ed., *Illuminations: Complete Works of Arthur Rimbaud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

6. See various contributions to Peter Stansill and David Zane Mairowitz, eds., *BAMN (By Any Means Necessary): Outlaw Manifestoes and Ephemera, 1965-1970* (1971); Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Strength* (1970); and Aubrey Walter, ed., *Come Together: The Years of Gay Liberation, 1970-1973* (1980).

7. Enoch Powell, speech at Eastbourne, November 16, 1968, *Freedom and Reality*, Powell, 1969: 300.

8. Enoch Powell, speech at Northfields, June 13, 1970, in John Wood, ed., *Enoch Powell and the 1970 Election* (Farnham: Elliot Right Way Books, 1970), 107.

9. Rudyard Kipling, *Barrack Room Verses* (London: Methuen, 1961 [1896]).

10. Enoch Powell, speech at Trinity College, Dublin, November 13, 1964, in *Freedom and Reality*, Powell (1969), 325.

11. The concept of the "reversible connecting factor" runs across the work of the Situationist International and is discussed in Guy Debord, "Detournement as negation and prelude," (1981 [1959]) and in Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Harvard: University Press, 1989).

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- and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism," (1984) in Amos et al., eds.
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