

CHAPTER THREE

Wounded Attachments

If something is to stay in the memory, it must be burned in:
only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

. . . this craving for freedom, release, forgetfulness . . .

—Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*

TAKING ENORMOUS pleasure in the paradox, Jamaican-born social theorist Stuart Hall tells this story of the postwar, postcolonial “breakup” of English identity:

. . . in the very moment when finally Britain convinced itself it had to decolonize, it had to get rid of them, we all came back home. As they hauled down the flag [in the colonies], we got on the banana boat and sailed right into London. . . . [T]hey had ruled the world for 300 years and, at last, when they had made up their minds to climb out of the role, at least the others ought to have stayed out there in the rim, behaved themselves, gone somewhere else, or found some other client state. But no, they had always said that this [London] was really home, the streets were paved with gold, and bloody hell, we just came to check out whether that was so or not.¹

In Hall’s mischievous account, the restructuring of collective “First World” identity and democratic practices required by postcoloniality did not remain in the hinterlands but literally, restively, came home to roost. The historical “others” of colonial identity cast free in their own waters sailed in to implode the center of the postcolonial metropolises, came to trouble the last vestiges of centered European identity with its economic and political predicates. They came to make havoc in the master’s house after the master relinquished his military-political but not his cultural and metaphysical holdings as *the* metonymy of man.

Hall’s narrative of the palace invasion by the newly released subjects might also be pressed into service as metaphor for another historical paradox of late-twentieth-century collective and individual identity formation: in the very moment when modern liberal states fully realize their

secularism (as Marx put it in “On the Jewish Question”), just as the mantle of abstract personhood is formally tendered to a whole panoply of those historically excluded from it by humanism’s privileging of a single race, gender, and organization of sexuality, the marginalized reject the rubric of humanist inclusion and turn, at least in part, against its very premises. Refusing to be neutralized, to render the differences inconsequential, to be depoliticized as “lifestyles,” “diversity,” or “persons like any other,” we have lately reformulated our historical exclusion as a matter of historically produced and politically rich *alterity*. Insisting that we are not merely positioned but fabricated by this history, we have at the same time insisted that our very production as marginal, deviant, or sub-human is itself constitutive of the centrality and legitimacy of the center, is itself what paves the center’s streets with semiotic, political, and psychic gold. Just when polite liberal (not to mention correct leftist) discourse ceased speaking of us as dykes, faggots, colored girls, or natives, we began speaking of ourselves this way. Refusing the invitation to absorption, we insisted instead upon politicizing and working into cultural critique the very constructions that a liberal humanism increasingly exposed in its tacit operations of racial, sexual, and gender privilege was seeking to bring to a formal close.

These paradoxes of late modern liberalism and colonialism, of course, are not a matter of simple historical accident—indeed, they are both incomplete and mutually constitutive to a degree that belies the orderly chronological scheme Hall and I have imposed on them in order to render them pleasurable ironies. Moreover, the ironies do not come to an end with the Jamaican postcolonials sailing into London nor with the historically marginalized constructing an oppositional political culture and critique out of their historical exclusion. Even as the margins assert themselves as margins, the denaturalizing assault they perform on coherent collective identity in the center turns back on them to trouble their own identities. Even as it is being articulated, circulated, and lately institutionalized in a host of legal, political, and cultural practices, identity is unraveling—metaphysically, culturally, geopolitically, and historically—as rapidly as it is being produced. The same vacillation can be seen in the naturalistic legitimating narratives of collective identity known as nationalism. Imploded within by the insurrectionary knowledges and political claims of historically subordinated cultures, and assaulted from without by the spectacular hybridities and supranational articulations of late-twentieth-century global capitalism as well as crises of global ecology, nation formation—loosened from what retrospectively appears as a historically fleeting attachment to states—is today fervently being asserted in cultural-political claims ranging from Islamic to deaf, indigenous to Gypsy, Serbian to queer.

¹ “The Local and the Global,” in *Culture, Globalization, and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony King (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 24.

Despite certain convergences, articulations, and parallels between such culturally disparate political formations in the late twentieth century, this chapter does not consider the problematic of politicized identity on a global scale. To the contrary, it is, among other things, an argument for substantial historical, geopolitical, and cultural specificity in exploring the problematic of political identity. Thus, the focus in what follows is on selected contradictory operations of politicized identity *within* late modern democracy; I consider politicized identity as both a production *and* contestation of the political terms of liberalism, disciplinary-bureaucratic regimes, certain forces of global capitalism, and the demographic flows of postcoloniality that together might be taken as constitutive of the contemporary North American political condition. In recent years, enough stalemated argument has transpired about the virtues and vices of something named identity politics to suggest the limited usefulness of a discussion of identity either in terms of the timeless metaphysical or linguistic elements of its constitution or in terms of the ethical-political rubric of good and evil. Beginning instead with the premise that the proliferation and politicization of identities in the United States is not a moral or even political choice but a complex historical production, this chapter seeks to elucidate something of the nature of this production, in order to locate within it both the openings and the perils for a radically democratic political project.

Many have asked how, given what appear as the inherently totalizing and “othering” characteristics of identity in/as language, identity can avoid reiterating such investments in its ostensibly emancipatory mode.²

² “An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. . . . Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty” (William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991], p. 64).

I cite from Connolly rather than the more obvious Derrida because Connolly is exemplary of the effort *within* political theory to think about the political problem of identity working heuristically with its linguistic operation. As well, I cite from Connolly because the present essay is in some ways an extension of a conversation begun in 1991 at an American Political Science Association annual meeting roundtable discussion of his book. In that discussion, noting that Connolly identified late modernity as producing certain problems for identity but did not historicize politicized identity itself, I called for such a historicization. To the degree that the present essay is my own partial response to that call, it—as the footnotes make clear—is indebted to Connolly’s book and that public occasion of its discussion.

A short list of others who have struggled to take politicized identity through and past the problem of political exclusion and political closure might include Stuart Hall, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Aiwah Ong, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, and Anne Norton.

I want to make a similar inquiry but in a historically specific cultural-political register, not because the linguistic frame is unimportant but because it is insufficient for discerning the character of contemporary politicized identity’s problematic investments. Thus, the concerns framing the work of this chapter are these: First, given the subjectivizing conditions of identity production in a late modern capitalist, liberal, and bureaucratic disciplinary social order, how can reiteration of these production conditions be averted in identity’s purportedly emancipatory project? In the specific context of contemporary liberal and bureaucratic disciplinary discourse, what kind of political recognition can identity-based claims seek—and what kind can they be counted on to want—that will not resubordinate a subject itself historically subjugated through identity, through categories such as race or gender that emerged and circulated as terms of power to enact subordination? The question here is not *whether* denaturalizing political strategies subvert the subjugating force of naturalized identity formation, but *what kind* of politicization, produced out of and inserted into *what kind* of political context, might perform such subversion. Second, given the widely averred interest of politicized identity in achieving emancipatory political recognition in a posthumanist discourse, what are the logics of pain in the subject formation processes of late modern politics that might contain or subvert this aim? What are the particular constituents—specific to our time yet roughly generic for a diverse spectrum of identities—of identity’s desire for recognition that seem often to breed a politics of recrimination and rancor, of culturally dispersed paralysis and suffering, a tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, to disdain freedom rather than practice it? In short, where do the historically and culturally specific elements of politicized identity’s investments in itself, and especially in its own history of suffering, come into conflict with the need to give up these investments, to engage in something of a Nietzschean “forgetting” of this history, in the pursuit of an emancipatory democratic project?

Such questions should make clear that this is not an essay about the general worth or accomplishments of identity politics, nor is it a critique of that oppositional political formation. It is, rather, an exploration of the ways in which certain aspects of the specific genealogy of politicized identity are carried in the structure of its political articulation and demands, with consequences that include self-subversion. I approach this exploration by first offering a highly selective account of the discursive historical context of the emergence of identity politics in the United States, and then elaborating, through a reconsideration of Nietzsche’s genealogy of the logics of *ressentiment*, the wounded character of politicized identity’s desire within this context.

The tension between particularistic "I's" and a universal "we" in liberalism is sustainable as long as the constituent terms of the "I" remain unpoliticized: indeed, as long as the "I" itself remains unpoliticized on one hand, and the state (as the expression of the ideal of political universality) remains unpoliticized on the other. Thus, the latent conflict in liberalism between universal representation and individualism remains latent, remains unpoliticized, as long as differential powers in civil society remain naturalized, as long as the "I" remains politically unarticulated, as long as it is willing to have its freedom represented abstractly—in effect, subordinating its "I-ness" to the abstract "we" represented by the universal community of the state. This subordination is achieved by the "I" either abstracting from itself in its political representation, thus trivializing its "difference" so as to remain part of the "we" (as in homosexuals who are "just like everyone else except for who we sleep with"), or accepting its construction as a supplement, complement, or partial outsider to the "we" (as in homosexuals who are just "different," or Jews whose communal affiliations lie partly or wholly outside their national identity). The history of liberalism's management of its inherited and constructed others could be read as a history of variations on and vacillations between these two strategies.

The abstract character of liberal political membership and the ideologically naturalized character of liberal individualism together work against politicized identity formation.³ A formulation of the political state and of citizenship that, as Marx put it in the "Jewish Question," abstracts from the substantive conditions of our lives, works to prevent recognition or articulation of differences as political—as effects of power—in their very construction and organization; they are at most the stuff of divergent political or economic interests.⁴ Equally important, to the extent that political membership in the liberal state involves abstracting from one's social being, it involves abstracting not only from the contingent productions of one's life circumstances but from the *identificatory* processes constitutive of one's social construction and position. Whether read from the frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, in which the many are made one through the unity of the sovereign, or from the formulations of tolerance codified by John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and, more currently,

³ Locke's (1689) *Letter Concerning Toleration* signals this development in intellectual history. The 300-year process of eliminating first the property qualification and then race and gender qualifications in European and North American constitutional states heralds its formal political achievement.

⁴ "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. R. C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 34.

George Kateb, in which the minimalist liberal state is cast as precisely what enables our politically unfettered individuality, we are invited to seek equal deference—equal blindness from—but not equalizing recognition from the state, which is itself liberalism's universal moment.⁵ As Marx discerned in his critique of Hegel, the universality of the state is ideologically achieved by turning away from and thus depoliticizing, yet at the same time *presupposing*, our collective particulars—not by embracing them, let alone emancipating us from them.⁶ In short, "the political" in liberalism is precisely not a domain for social identification: expected to recognize our political selves in the state, we are not led to expect deep recognition there. Put slightly differently, in a smooth and legitimate liberal order, if the particularistic "I's" must remain unpoliticized, so also must the universalistic "we" remain without specific content or aim, without a common good *other than* abstract universal representation or pluralism. The abstractness of the "we" is precisely what insists upon, reiterates, and even enforces the depoliticized nature of the "I." In Ernesto Laclau's formulation, "if democracy is possible, it is because the universal does not have any necessary body, any necessary content."⁷

While this détente between universal and particular within liberalism is riddled with volatile conceits, it is rather thoroughly unraveled by two features of late modernity, spurred by developments in what Marx and Foucault respectively reveal as liberalism's companion powers: capitalism and disciplinarity. On the one side, the state loses even its guise of universality as it becomes ever more transparently invested in particular economic interests, political ends, and social formations—as it transmogrifies

⁵ John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*; John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*; George Kateb, "Democratic Individuality and the Claims of Politics," *Political Theory* 12 (1984), pp. 331–60.

⁶ In the "Jewish Question," Marx argues, "far from abolishing these *effective* differences [in civil society, the state] only exists so far as they are presupposed, it is conscious of being a *political state* and it manifests its *universality* only in *opposition* to these elements" (p. 33). See also Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. J. O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 91, 116.

⁷ "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity," *October* 61 (Summer 1992), p. 90. Laclau is here concerned not with the state but with the possibility of retaining a "universal" in social movement politics where a critique of bourgeois humanist universalism has become quite central. Interestingly, Laclau's effort to preserve a universalist political ideal from this challenge entails making the ideal even more abstract, pulling it further away from any specific configuration or purpose than the distance ordinarily managed by liberal discourse. Laclau's aim in voiding the universal completely of body and content is only partly to permit it to be more completely embracing of all the particulars; it is also intended to recognize the *strategic* value of the discourse of universality, the extent to which "different groups compete to give their particular aims a temporary function of universal representation" (p. 90). But how, if universal discourse may always be revealed to have this strategic function, can it also be taken seriously as a substantive value of democracy?

fies from a relatively minimalist, “night watchman” state to a heavily bureaucratized, managerial, fiscally enormous, and highly interventionist welfare-warfare state, a transformation occasioned by the combined imperatives of capital and the auto-proliferating characteristics of bureaucracy.⁸ On the other side, the liberal subject is increasingly disinterred from substantive nation-state identification, not only by the individuating effects of liberal discourse itself but through the social effects of late-twentieth-century economic and political life: deterritorializing demographic flows; the disintegration from within and invasion from without of family and community as (relatively) autonomous sites of social production and identification; consumer capitalism’s marketing discourse in which individual (and subindividual) desires are produced, commodified, and mobilized as identities; and disciplinary productions of a fantastic array of behavior-based identities ranging from recovering alcoholic professionals to unrepentant “crack mothers.”⁹ These disciplinary productions work to conjure and regulate subjects through classificatory schemes, naming and normalizing social behaviors as social positions. Operating through what Foucault calls “an anatomy of detail,” “disciplinary power” produces social identities (available for politicization because they are deployed for purposes of political regulation), which cross-cut juridical identities based on abstract right. Thus, for example, the welfare state’s production of welfare subjects—themselves subdivided through the socially regulated categories of motherhood, disability, race, age, and so forth—potentially produces political identity through these categories, produces identities *as* these categories.

In this story, the always imminent but increasingly politically manifest failure of liberal universalism to be universal—the transparent fiction of state universality—combines with the increasing individuation of social subjects through capitalist disinterments and disciplinary productions. Together, they breed the emergence of politicized identity rooted in disciplinary productions but oriented by liberal discourse toward protest against exclusion from a discursive formation of universal justice. This

⁸ Jurgen Habermas’s *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1975), and James O’Connor’s *Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1973), remain two of the most compelling narratives of this development. Also informing this claim are Max Weber’s discussion of bureaucracy and rationalization in *Economy and Society*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Sheldon Wolin’s discussion of the “mega-state” in *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); as well as the researches of Claus Offe, Bob Jessop, and Fred Block.

⁹ I draw the latter example from a fascinating dissertation-in-progress by Deborah Connolly (Anthropology Board, University of California, Santa Cruz), which examines the contemporary production of “crack mothers” as a totalizing identity through a combination of legal, medical, and social service discourses.

production, however, is not linear or even, but highly contradictory. While the terms of liberalism are part of the ground of production of a politicized identity that reiterates yet exceeds these terms, liberal discourse itself also continuously recolonizes political identity *as* political interest—a conversion that recasts politicized identity’s substantive (and often deconstructive) cultural claims and critiques as generic claims of particularism endemic to universalist political culture. Similarly, disciplinary power manages liberalism’s production of politicized subjectivity by neutralizing (re-de-politicizing) identity through normalizing practices. As liberal discourse converts political identity into essentialized private interest, disciplinary power converts interest into normativized social identity manageable by regulatory regimes. Thus, disciplinary power politically neutralizes entitlement claims generated by liberal individuation, while liberalism politically neutralizes rights claims generated by disciplinary identities.

In addition to the formations of identity that may be the complex effects of disciplinary and liberal modalities of power, I want to suggest one other historical strand relevant to the production of politicized identity, this one twined more specifically to developments in recent political culture. Although sanguine to varying degrees about the phenomenon they are describing, many on the European and North American Left have argued that identity politics emerges from the demise of class politics attendant upon post-Fordism or pursuant to May ’68. Without adjudicating the precise relationship between the breakup of class politics and the proliferation of other sites of political identification, I want to refigure this claim by suggesting that what we have come to call identity politics is partly dependent upon the demise of a critique of capitalism and of bourgeois cultural and economic values.¹⁰ In a reading that links the new identity claims to a certain relegitimation of capitalism, identity politics concerned with race, sexuality, and gender will appear not as a supplement to class politics, not as an expansion of left categories of oppression and emancipation, not as an enriching augmentation of progressive formulations of power and persons—all of which they also are—but as tethered to a formulation of justice that reinscribes a bourgeois (masculinist) ideal as its measure.

If it is this ideal that signifies educational and vocational opportunity,

¹⁰ To be fully persuasive, this claim would have to reckon with the ways in which the articulation of African American, feminist, queer, or Native American “values” and cultural styles have figured centrally in many contemporary political projects. It would have to encounter the ways that the critique of cultural assimilation to which I alluded on pages 52–53 of this chapter has been a critical dimension of identity politics. Space prohibits such a reckoning but I think its terms would be those of capitalism and style, economics and culture, counterhegemonic projects and the politics of resistance.

upward mobility, relative protection against arbitrary violence, and reward in proportion to effort, and if it is this ideal against which many of the exclusions and privations of people of color, gays and lesbians, and women are articulated, then the political purchase of contemporary American identity politics would seem to be achieved in part *through* a certain renaturalization of capitalism that can be said to have marked progressive discourse since the 1970s. What this also suggests is that identity politics may be partly configured by a peculiarly shaped and peculiarly disguised form of class resentment, a resentment that is displaced onto discourses of injustice other than class, but a resentment, like all resentments, that retains the real or imagined holdings of its reviled subject as objects of desire. In other words, the enunciation of politicized identities through race, gender, and sexuality may require—rather than incidentally produce—a limited identification through class, specifically abjuring a critique of class power and class norms precisely insofar as these identities are established vis-à-vis a bourgeois norm of social acceptance, legal protection, and relative material comfort. Yet, when not only economic stratification but other injuries to the human body and psyche enacted by capitalism—alienation, commodification, exploitation, displacement, disintegration of sustaining albeit contradictory social forms such as families and neighborhoods—when these are discursively normalized and thus depoliticized, other markers of social difference may come to bear an inordinate weight; indeed, they may bear all the weight of the sufferings produced by capitalism in addition to that attributable to the explicitly politicized marking.¹¹

If there is one class that articulates and even politicizes itself in late modern North American life, it is that which gives itself the name of the “middle class.” But the foregoing suggests that this is not a reactive identity in the sense, for example, of “white” or “straight” in contemporary political discourse. Rather it is an articulation by the figure of the class that represents, indeed depends upon, the naturalization rather than the politicization of capitalism, the denial of capitalism’s power effects in ordering social life, the representation of the ideal of capitalism to provide the good life for all. Poised between the rich and poor, feeling itself to be protected from the encroachments of neither, the phantasmic mid-

dle class signifies the natural and the good between the decadent or the corrupt on one side, the aberrant or the decaying on the other. It is a conservative identity in the sense that it semiotically recurs to a phantasmic past, an imagined idyllic, unfettered, and uncorrupted historical moment (implicitly located around 1955) when life was good—housing was affordable, men supported families on single incomes, drugs were confined to urban ghettos. But it is not a reactionary identity in the sense of reacting to an insurgent politicized identity from below. Rather, it precisely embodies the ideal to which nonclass identities refer for proof of their exclusion or injury: homosexuals, who lack the protections of marriage, guarantees of child custody or job security, and freedom from harassment; single women, who are strained and impoverished by trying to raise children and hold paid jobs simultaneously; and people of color, who are not only disproportionately affected by unemployment, punishing urban housing costs, and inadequate health care programs, but disproportionately subjected to unwarranted harassment, figured as criminals, ignored by cab drivers.

The point is not that these privations are trivial but that without recourse to the white masculine middle-class ideal, politicized identities would forfeit a good deal of their claims to injury and exclusion, their claims to the political significance of their difference. If they thus require this ideal for the potency and poignancy of their political claims, we might ask to what extent a critique of capitalism is foreclosed by the current configuration of oppositional politics, and not simply by the “loss of the socialist alternative” or the ostensible “triumph of liberalism” in the global order. In contrast with the Marxist critique of a social whole and Marxist vision of total transformation, to what extent do identity politics require a standard internal to existing society against which to pitch their claims, a standard that not only preserves capitalism from critique, but sustains the invisibility and inarticulateness of class—not accidentally, but endemically? Could we have stumbled upon one reason why class is invariably named but rarely theorized or developed in the multiculturalist mantra, “race, class, gender, sexuality”?

¹¹ It is, of course, also the abstraction of politicized identity from political economy that produces the failure of politicized identities to encompass and unify their “members.” Striated not only in a formal sense by class but divided as well by the extent to which the suffering entailed, for example, in gender and racial subordination can be substantially offset by economic privilege, insistent definitions of Black, or Queer, or Woman sustain the same kind of exclusions and policing previously enacted by the tacitly white male heterosexual figure of the “working class.”

The story of the emergence of contemporary identity politics could be told in many other ways—as the development of “new social antagonisms” rooted in consumer capitalism’s commodification of all spheres of social life, as the relentless denaturalization of all social relations occasioned by the fabrications and border violations of postmodern technologies and cultural productions, as a form of political consciousness

precipitated by the black Civil Rights movement in the United States.¹² I have told the story this way in order to emphasize the *discursive political context* of its emergence, its disciplinary, capitalist, and liberal parentage, and this in order to comprehend politicized identity's genealogical structure as comprising and not only opposing these very modalities of political power. Indeed, if the ostensibly oppositional character of identity politics also render them something of the "illegitimate offspring" of liberal, capitalist, disciplinary discourses, their absent fathers are not, as Donna Haraway suggests, "inessential" but are installed in the very structure of *desire* fueling identity-based political claims: the psyche of the bastard child is hardly independent of its family of origin.¹³ And if we are interested in developing the politically subversive or transformative elements of identity-based claims, we need to know the implications of the particular genealogy and production conditions of identity's desire for recognition. We need to be able to ask: Given what produced it, given what shapes and suffuses it, what does politicized identity want?

We might profitably begin these investigations with a reflection on their curious elision by the philosopher who also frames them, Michel Foucault. For Foucault, the constraints of emancipatory politics in late modern democracy pertain to the ubiquity and pervasiveness of power—the impossibility of eschewing power in human affairs—as well as to the ways in which subjects and practices are always at risk of being resubordinated through the discourses naming and politicizing them. Best known for his formulation of this dual problem in the domain of sexual liberation, Foucault offers a more generic theoretical account in his discussion of the disinterment of the "insurrectionary knowledges" of marginalized populations and practices:

Is the relation of forces today still such as to allow these disinterred knowledges some kind of autonomous life? Can they be isolated by these means from every subjugating relationship? What force do they have taken in themselves? . . . Is it not perhaps the case that these fragments of genealogies are no sooner

¹² See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 161; Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), chap. 9; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), chap. 26; and Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table: Woman of Color, 1983), p. 362.

¹³ In "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson [New York: Routledge, 1990]), Donna Haraway writes: "cyborgs . . . are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" (p. 193).

brought to light, that the particular elements of the knowledge that one seeks to disinter are no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation? In fact, those unitary discourses which first disqualified and then ignored them when they made their appearance are, it seems, quite ready now to annex them, to take them back within the fold of their own discourse and to invest them with everything this implies in terms of their effects of knowledge and power. And if we want to protect these only lately liberated fragments, are we not in danger of ourselves constructing, with our own hands, that unitary discourse?¹⁴

Foucault's caution about the annexing, colonizing effects of invariably unifying discourses is an important one. But the question of the emancipatory orientation of historically subordinated discourse is not limited to the risk of cooptation or resubordination by extant or newly formed unitary discourses—whether those of humanism on one side, or of cultural studies, multiculturalism, subaltern studies, and minority discourse on the other. Nor is it reducible to that unexamined Frankfurt School strain in Foucault, the extent to which the Foucaultian subject originally desirous of freedom comes to will its own domination, or (in Foucault's rubric) becomes a good disciplinary subject. Rather, I think that for Foucault, insofar as power always produces resistance, even the disciplinary subject is perversely capable of resistance, and in practicing it, practices freedom. Discernible here is the basis of a curious optimism, even volunteerism in Foucault, namely his oddly physicalist and insistently nonpsychic account of power, practices, and subject formation. His removal of the "will to power" from Nietzsche's complex psychology of need, frustration, impotence, and compensatory deeds is what permits Foucault to feature resistance as always possible and as equivalent to practicing freedom.

In an interview with Paul Rabinow, Foucault muses:

I do not think that it is possible to say that one thing is of the order of "liberation" and another is of the order of "oppression." . . . No matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings. On the other hand, I do not think that there is anything that is functionally . . . absolutely liberating. Liberty is a *practice*. . . . The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. . . . Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because "liberty" is what must be exercised. . . . The guarantee of freedom is freedom.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 86.

¹⁵ "Space, Knowledge, and Power," interview by Paul Rabinow in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 245.

My quarrel here is not with Foucault's valuable insistence upon freedom as a practice but with his distinct lack of attention to what might constitute, negate, or redirect the desire for freedom.¹⁶ Notwithstanding his critique of the repressive hypothesis and his postulation of the subject as an effect of power, Foucault seems to tacitly assume the givenness and resilience of the desire for freedom, a givenness that arises consequent to his implicit conflation of the will to power in the practice of resistance with a will to freedom. Thus, Foucault's confidence about the possibilities of "practicing" or "exercising" liberty resides in a quasi-empirical concern with the relative *capacity* or space for action in the context of certain regimes of domination. But whether or not resistance is possible is a different question from what its aim is, what it is for, and especially whether or not it resubjugates the resisting subject. Foucault's rejection of psychoanalysis and his arrested reading of Nietzsche (his utter neglect of Nietzsche's diagnosis of the culture of modernity as the triumph of "slave morality") combine to define the problem of freedom for Foucault as one of domain and discourse, rather than the problem of "will" that it is for Nietzsche. Indeed, what requires for its answer a profoundly more psychological Nietzsche than the one Foucault embraces is not a question about when or where the practice of freedom is possible but a question about the *direction of the will to power*, a will that potentially, but only potentially, animates a desire for freedom. Especially for the Nietzsche of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the modern subject does not simply cease to desire freedom as is the case with Foucault's disciplinary subject but, much more problematically, loathes freedom.¹⁷ Let us now consider why.

Contemporary politicized identity in the United States contests the terms of liberal discourse insofar as it challenges liberalism's universal "we" as a strategic fiction of historically hegemonic groups and asserts liberalism's "I" as social—both relational and constructed by power—rather than contingent, private, or autarkic. Yet it reiterates the terms of liberal discourse insofar as it posits a sovereign and unified "I" that is disen-

¹⁶ John Rajchman insists that Foucault's philosophy is "the endless question of freedom" (*Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], p. 124), but Rajchman, too, eschews the question of desire in his account of Foucault's freedom as the "motor and principle of his skepticism: the endless questioning of constituted experience" (p. 7).

¹⁷ "This *instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent— . . . this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself . . ." (*On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollindale [New York: Vintage, 1969], p. 87).

franchised by an exclusive "we." Indeed, I have suggested that politicized identity emerges and obtains its unifying coherence through the politicization of *exclusion* from an ostensible universal, as a protest against exclusion: a protest premised on the fiction of an inclusive/universal community, a protest that thus reinstalls the humanist ideal—and a specific white, middle-class, masculinist expression of this ideal—insofar as it premises itself upon exclusion from it. Put the other way around, politicized identities generated out of liberal, disciplinary societies, insofar as they are premised on exclusion from a universal ideal, require that ideal, as well as their exclusion from it, for their own continuing existence as identities.¹⁸

Contemporary politicized identity is also potentially reiterative of regulatory, disciplinary society in its configuration of a disciplinary subject. It is both produced by and potentially accelerates the production of that aspect of disciplinary society which "ceaselessly characterizes, classifies, and specializes," which works through "surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment, and classification," through a social machinery "that is both immense and minute."¹⁹ An example from the world of local politics makes clear politicized identity's imbrication in disciplinary power, as well as the way in which, as Foucault reminds us, disciplinary power "infiltrates" rather than replaces liberal juridical modalities.²⁰

Recently, the city council of my town reviewed an ordinance, devised and promulgated by a broad coalition of identity-based political groups, which aimed to ban discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of "sexual orientation, transsexuality, age, height, weight, personal appearance, physical characteristics, race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sex, or gender."²¹ Here is a perfect instance of the universal juridical ideal of liberalism and the normalizing principle of disciplinary regimes conjoined and taken up within the discourse of politicized identity. This ordinance—variously called the "purple hair ordinance" or the "ugly or-

¹⁸ As Connolly argues, politicized identity also reiterates the structure of liberalism in its configuration of a sovereign, unified, accountable individual. Connolly urges a different configuration of identity—one that understood itself as contingent, relational, contestatory, and social—although it is not clear what would motivate identity's transformed orientation. See *Identity/Difference*, especially pp. 171–84.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 209, 212.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²¹ From an early draft of "An Ordinance of the City of Santa Cruz Adding Chapter 9.83 to the Santa Cruz Municipal Code Pertaining to the Prohibition of Discrimination." A somewhat amended form of the ordinance was eventually adopted by the city council in 1994.

dinance" by state and national news media—aims to count every difference as no difference, as part of the seamless whole, but also to count every potentially subversive rejection of culturally enforced norms as themselves normal, as normalizable, and as normativizable through law. Indeed, through the definitional, procedural, and remedies sections of this ordinance (e.g., "sexual orientation shall mean known or assumed homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality") persons are reduced to observable social attributes and practices defined empirically, positivistically, as if their existence were intrinsic and factual, rather than effects of discursive and institutional power; and these positivist definitions of persons as their attributes and practices are written into law, ensuring that persons describable according to them will now become regulated through them. Bentham couldn't have done it better. Indeed, here is a perfect instance of how the language of recognition becomes the language of unfreedom, how articulation in language, in the context of liberal and disciplinary discourse, becomes a vehicle of subordination through individualization, normalization, and regulation, even as it strives to produce visibility and acceptance. Here, also, is a perfect instance of the way in which "differences" that are the effects of social power are neutralized through their articulation as attributes and their circulation through liberal administrative discourse: what do we make of a document that renders as juridical equivalents the denial of employment to an African American, an obese woman, and a white middle-class youth festooned with tattoos, a pierced tongue, and fuchsia hair?

What I want to consider, though, is why this strikingly unemancipatory political project emerges from a potentially more radical critique of liberal juridical and disciplinary modalities of power. For this ordinance, I want to suggest, is not simply misguided in its complicity with the rationalizing and disciplinary elements of late modern culture; it is not simply naive with regard to the regulatory apparatus within which it operates. Rather, it is symptomatic of a feature of politicized identity's *desire* within liberal-bureaucratic regimes, its foreclosure of its own freedom, its impulse to inscribe in the law and in other political registers its historical and present pain rather than conjure an imagined future of power to make itself. To see what this symptom is a symptom of, we need to return once more to a schematic consideration of liberalism, this time in order to read it through Nietzsche's account of the complex logics of *ressentiment*.

. . .

Liberalism contains from its inception a generalized incitement to what Nietzsche terms *ressentiment*, the moralizing revenge of the powerless,

"the triumph of the weak as weak."²² This incitement to *ressentiment* inheres in two related constitutive paradoxes of liberalism: that between individual liberty and social egalitarianism, a paradox which produces failure turned to recrimination by the subordinated, and guilt turned to resentment by the "successful"; and that between the individualism that legitimates liberalism and the cultural homogeneity required by its commitment to political universality, a paradox which stimulates the articulation of politically significant differences on the one hand, and the suppression of them on the other, and which offers a form of articulation that presses against the limits of universalist discourse even while that which is being articulated seeks to be harbored within—included in—the terms of that universalism.

Premising itself on the natural equality of human beings, liberalism makes a political promise of universal individual freedom in order to arrive at social equality, or achieve a civilized retrieval of the equality postulated in the state of nature. It is the tension between the promises of individualistic liberty and the requisites of equality that yields *ressentiment* in one of two directions, depending on the way in which the paradox is brokered. A strong commitment to freedom vitiates the fulfillment of the equality promise and breeds *ressentiment* as welfare state liberalism—attenuations of the unmitigated license of the rich and powerful on behalf of the "disadvantaged." Conversely, a strong commitment to equality, requiring heavy state interventionism and economic redistribution, attenuates the commitment to freedom and breeds *ressentiment* expressed as neoconservative anti-statism, racism, charges of reverse racism, and so forth.

However, it is not only the tension between freedom and equality but the prior presumption of the self-reliant and self-made capacities of liberal subjects, conjoined with their unavowed dependence on and construction by a variety of social relations and forces, that makes *all* liberal subjects, and not only markedly disenfranchised ones, vulnerable to *ressentiment*: it is their situatedness within power, their production by power, and liberal discourse's denial of this situatedness and production that cast the liberal subject into failure, the failure to make itself in the context of a discourse in which its self-making is assumed, indeed, is its assumed nature. This failure, which Nietzsche calls suffering, must either find a reason within itself (which redoubles the failure) or a site of external blame upon which to avenge its hurt and redistribute its pain. Here is Nietzsche's account of this moment in the production of *ressentiment*:

²² A number of political theorists have advanced this argument. For a cogent account, see Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, pp. 21–27.

For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering—in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy. . . . This . . . constitutes the actual physiological cause of *ressentiment*, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to *deadens pain by means of affects*, . . . to *deadens*, by means of a more violent emotion of any kind, a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unendurable, and to drive it out of consciousness at least for the moment: for that one requires an affect, as savage an affect as possible, and, in order to excite that, any pretext at all.²³

Ressentiment in this context is a triple achievement: it produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms the hurt; it produces a culprit responsible for the hurt; and it produces a site of revenge to displace the hurt (a place to inflict hurt as the sufferer has been hurt). Together these operations both ameliorate (in Nietzsche's term, "anaesthetic") and externalize what is otherwise "unendurable."

In a culture already streaked with the pathos of *ressentiment* for the reasons just discussed, there are several distinctive characteristics of late modern postindustrial societies that accelerate and expand the conditions of its production. My listing will necessarily be highly schematic: First, the phenomenon William Connolly names "increased global contingency" combines with the expanding pervasiveness and complexity of domination by capital and bureaucratic state and social networks to create an unparalleled individual powerlessness over the fate and direction of one's own life, intensifying the experiences of impotence, dependence, and gratitude inherent in liberal capitalist orders and constitutive of *ressentiment*.²⁴ Second, the steady desacralization of all regions of life—what Weber called disenchantment, what Nietzsche called the death of god—would seem to add yet another reversal to Nietzsche's genealogy of *ressentiment* as perpetually available to "alternation of direction." In Nietzsche's account, the ascetic priest deployed notions of "guilt, sin, sinfulness, depravity, damnation" to "direct the *ressentiment* of the less severely afflicted sternly back upon themselves . . . and in this way exploit[ed] the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming."²⁵ However, the desacralizing tendencies of late modernity undermine the efficacy of this deployment and turn suffering's need for exculpation back toward a site of external agency.²⁶ Third, the increased fragmentation, if not disintegration, of all

²³ *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 127.

²⁴ *Identity/Difference*, pp. 24–26.

²⁵ *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 128.

²⁶ A striking example of this is the way that contemporary natural disasters, such as the 1989 earthquake in California or the 1992 hurricanes in Florida and Hawaii, produced popu-

forms of association not organized until recently by the commodities market—communities, churches, families—and the ubiquitousness of the classificatory, individuating schemes of disciplinary society, combine to produce an utterly *unrelieved* individual, one without insulation from the inevitable failure entailed in liberalism's individualistic construction.²⁷ In short, the characteristics of late modern secular society, in which individuals are buffeted and controlled by global configurations of disciplinary and capitalist power of extraordinary proportions, and are at the same time nakedly individuated, stripped of reprieve from relentless exposure and accountability for themselves, together add up to an incitement to *ressentiment* that might have stunned even the finest philosopher of its occasions and logics. Starkly accountable yet dramatically impotent, the late modern liberal subject quite literally seethes with *ressentiment*.

Enter politicized identity, now conceivable in part as both product of and reaction to this condition, where "reaction" acquires the meaning Nietzsche ascribed to it: namely, an effect of domination that reiterates impotence, a substitute for action, for power, for self-affirmation that reinscribes incapacity, powerlessness, and rejection. For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* itself is rooted in reaction—the substitution of reasons, norms, and ethics for deeds—and he suggests that not only moral systems but identities themselves take their bearings in this reaction. As Tracy Strong reads this element of Nietzsche's thought:

Identity . . . does not consist of an active component, but is reaction to something outside; action in itself, with its inevitable self-assertive qualities, must then become something evil, since it is identified with that against which one is reacting. The will to power of slave morality must constantly reassert that which gives definition to the slave: the pain he suffers by being in the world.

lar and media discourse about relevant state and federal agencies (e.g., the Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA]), that came close to displacing onto the agencies themselves responsibility for the suffering of the victims.

²⁷ In a personal communication (Spring 1994), Kathy Ferguson suggested that given "all the people I know, from a variety of classes, colors, and sexualities, who struggle mightily, and often happily, to create and maintain families and communities—might the death of families be greatly exaggerated?" I want to affirm the existence of these efforts and at the same time note that the struggle she cites is taking place precisely because the family is a disintegrating social form (a process that is several centuries old and not, as the Christian Right would have it, a recent tear in the social fabric). Moreover, the numbers grow annually for those who have lost or abandoned such struggles, those who live without any significant geographically based familial or community ties. "Internet communities" notwithstanding. And it is this nonemancipatory individuation that renders late modern subjects more intensely vulnerable to social powers that in turn undermine their capacity for self-making. Indeed, it is the increased vulnerability attendant upon this kind of individuation that most powerfully exposes the fallacy of the sovereign subject of liberalism.

Hence any attempt to escape that pain will merely result in the reaffirmation of painful structures.²⁸

If the “cause” of *ressentiment* is suffering, its “creative deed” is the reworking of this pain into a negative form of action, the “imaginary revenge” of what Nietzsche terms “natures denied the true reaction, that of deeds.”²⁹ This revenge is achieved through the imposition of suffering “on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as he does”³⁰ (accomplished especially through the production of guilt), through the establishment of suffering as the measure of social virtue, and through casting strength and good fortune (“privilege,” as we say today) as self-recriminating, as its own indictment in a culture of suffering: “it is disgraceful to be fortunate, there is too much misery.”³¹

But in its attempt to displace its suffering, identity structured by *ressentiment* at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection. This investment lies not only in its discovery of a site of blame for its hurt will, not only in its acquisition of recognition through its history of subjection (a recognition predicated on injury, now righteously revalued), but also in the satisfactions of revenge, which ceaselessly reenact even as they redistribute the injuries of marginalization and subordination in a liberal discursive order that alternately denies the very possibility of these things and blames those who experience them for their own condition. Identity politics structured by *ressentiment* reverse without subverting this blaming structure: they do not subject to critique the sovereign subject of accountability that liberal individualism presupposes, nor the economy of inclusion and exclusion that liberal universalism establishes. Thus, politicized identity that presents itself as a self-affirmation now appears as the opposite, as predicated on and requiring its sustained rejection by a “hostile external world.”³²

Insofar as what Nietzsche calls slave morality produces identity in reaction to power, insofar as identity rooted in this reaction achieves its moral superiority by reproaching power and action themselves as evil, identity structured by this ethos becomes deeply invested in its own impotence, even while it seeks to assuage the pain of its powerlessness through its vengeful moralizing, through its wide distribution of suffering, through its reproach of power as such. Politicized identity, premised

²⁸ Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 242.

²⁹ *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 36.

³⁰ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 252.

³¹ *Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 123, 124.

³² *Ibid.* p. 34.

on exclusion and fueled by the humiliation and suffering imposed by its historically structured impotence in the context of a discourse of sovereign individuals, is as likely to seek generalized political paralysis, to feast on generalized political impotence, as it is to seek its own or collective liberation through empowerment. Indeed, it is more likely to punish and reproach—“punishment is what revenge calls itself; with a hypocritical lie it creates a good conscience for itself”³³—than to find venues of self-affirming action.

But contemporary politicized identity’s desire is not only shaped by the extent to which the sovereign will of the liberal subject, articulated ever more nakedly by disciplinary individuation and capitalist disinternments, is dominated by late-twentieth-century configurations of political and economic powers. It is shaped as well by the contemporary problematic of history itself, by the late modern rupture of history as a narrative, history as ended because it has lost its end—a rupture that paradoxically gives history an immeasurable weight. As the grim experience of reading *Discipline and Punish* makes clear, there is a sense in which the gravitational force of history is multiplied at precisely the moment that history’s narrative coherence and objectivist foundation is refuted. As the problematic of power in history is resituated from subject positioning to subject construction; as power is seen to operate spatially, infiltrationally, “microphysically” rather than only temporally, permeating every heretofore designated “interior” *space* in social lives and individuals; as eroding historical metanarratives take with them both laws of history and the futurity such laws purported to assure; as the presumed continuity of history is replaced with a sense of its violent, contingent, and ubiquitous *force*—history becomes that which has weight but no trajectory, mass but no coherence, force but no direction: it is war without ends or end. Thus, the extent to which “the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living”³⁴ is today unparalleled, even as history itself disintegrates as a coherent category or practice. We know ourselves to be saturated by history, we feel the extraordinary force of its determinations; we are also steeped in a discourse of its insignificance, and, above all, we know that history will no longer (always already did not) act as our redeemer.

I raise the question of history because in thinking about late modern politicized identity’s structuring by *ressentiment*, I have thus far focused on its foundation in the sufferings of a subordinated sovereign subject. But Nietzsche’s account of the logic of *ressentiment* is also linked to that

³³ *Zarathustra*, p. 252.

³⁴ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 595.

feature of the will that is stricken by history, that rails against time itself, that cannot “will backwards,” that cannot exert its power over the past—either as a specific set of events or as time itself.

Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? “It was”—that is the name of the will’s gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. . . . He cannot break time and time’s covetousness, that is the will’s loneliest melancholy.³⁵

Although Nietzsche appears here to be speaking of the will as such, Zarathustra’s own relationship to the will as a “redeemer of history” makes clear that this “angry spectatorship” can with great difficulty be reworked as a perverse kind of mastery, a mastery that triumphs over the past by reducing its power, by remaking the present against the terms of the past—in short, by a project of self-transformation that arrays itself against its own genealogical consciousness. In contrast with the human ruin he sees everywhere around him—“fragments and limbs and dreadful accidents”—it is Zarathustra’s own capacity to discern and to make a future that spares him from a rancorous sensibility, from crushing disappointment in the liberatory promise of his will:

The now and the past on earth—alas, my friends, that is what I find most unendurable; and I should not know how to live if I were not also a seer of that which must come. A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future—and alas, also, as it were, a cripple at this bridge: all this is Zarathustra.³⁶

Nietzsche here discerns both the necessity and the near impossibility—the extraordinary and fragile achievement—of formulating oneself as a creator of the future and a bridge to the future in order to appease the otherwise inevitable rancor of the will against time, in order to redeem the past by lifting the weight of it, by reducing the scope of its determinations. “And how could I bear to be a man if man were not also a creator and guesser of riddles and redeemer of accidents?”³⁷

Of course, Zarathustra’s exceptionality in what he is willing to confront and bear, in his capacities to overcome in order to create, is Nietzsche’s device for revealing us to ourselves. The ordinary will, steeped in the economy of slave morality, devises means “to get rid of his melancholy and to mock his dungeon,” means that reiterate the cause of the melancholy, that continually reinfect the narcissistic wound to its capa-

³⁵ *Zarathustra*, p. 251.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 250–51.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

sciousness inflicted by the past. “Alas,” says Nietzsche, “every prisoner becomes a fool; and the imprisoned will redeems himself foolishly.”³⁸ From this foolish redemption—foolish because it does not resolve the will’s rancor but only makes a world in its image—is born the wrath of revenge:

“that which was” is the name of the stone [the will] cannot move. And so he moves stones out of wrath and displeasure, and he wreaks revenge on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as he does. Thus the will, the liberator, took to hurting; and on all who can suffer he wreaks revenge for his inability to go backwards. This . . . is what *revenge* is: the will’s ill will against time and its “it was.”³⁹

Revenge as a “reaction,” a substitute for the capacity to act, produces identity as both bound to the history that produced it and as a reproach to the present which embodies that history. The will that “took to hurting” in its own impotence against its past becomes (in the form of an identity whose very existence is due to heightened consciousness of the immovability of its “it was,” its history of subordination) a will that makes not only a psychological but a political practice of revenge, a practice that reiterates the existence of an identity whose present past is one of insistently unredeemable injury. This past cannot be redeemed *unless* the identity ceases to be invested in it, and it cannot cease to be invested in it without giving up its identity as such, thus giving up its economy of avenging and at the same time perpetuating its hurt—“when he then stills the pain of the wound *he at the same time infects the wound.*”⁴⁰

In its emergence as a protest against marginalization or subordination, politicized identity thus becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity and because the formation of identity at the site of exclusion, as exclusion,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 251–52.

⁴⁰ *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 126. In what could easily characterize the rancorous quality of many contemporary institutions and gatherings—academic, political, cultural—in which politicized identity is strongly and permissibly at play, Nietzsche offers an elaborate account of this replacement of pain with a “more violent emotion” that is the stock in trade of “the suffering”:

The suffering are one and all dreadfully eager and inventive in discovering occasions for painful affects; they enjoy being mistrustful and dwelling on nasty deeds and imaginary slights; they scour the entrails of their past and present for obscure and questionable occurrences that offer them the opportunity to revel in tormenting suspicions and to intoxicate themselves with the poison of their own malice: they tear open their oldest wounds, they bleed from long-healed scars, they make evildoers out of their friends, wives, children, and whoever else stands closest to them. “I suffer: someone must be to blame for it”—thus thinks every sickly sheep. (pp. 127–28)

augments or “alters the direction of the suffering” entailed in subordination or marginalization by finding a site of blame for it. But in so doing, it installs its pain over its unredeemed history in the very foundation of its political claim, in its demand for recognition as identity. In locating a site of blame for its powerlessness over its past—a past of injury, a past as a hurt will—and locating a “reason” for the “unendurable pain” of social powerlessness in the present, it converts this reasoning into an ethicizing politics, a politics of recrimination that seeks to avenge the hurt even while it reaffirms it, discursively codifies it. Politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain. The loss of historical direction, and with it the loss of futurity characteristic of the late modern age, is thus homologically refigured in the structure of desire of the dominant political expression of the age: identity politics. In the same way, the generalized political impotence produced by the ubiquitous yet discontinuous networks of late modern political and economic power is reiterated in the investments of late modern democracy’s primary oppositional political formations.

What might be entailed in transforming these investments in an effort to fashion a more radically democratic and emancipatory political culture? One avenue of exploration may lie in Nietzsche’s counsel on the virtues of “forgetting,” for if identity structured in part by *ressentiment* resubjugates itself through its investment in its own pain, through its refusal to make itself in the present, memory is the house of this activity and this refusal. Yet erased histories and historical invisibility are themselves such integral elements of the pain inscribed in most subjugated identities that the counsel of forgetting, at least in its unreconstructed Nietzschean form, seems inappropriate if not cruel.⁴¹ Indeed, it is also possible that we have reached a pass where we ought to part with Nietzsche, whose skills as diagnostician often reach the limits of their political efficacy in his privileging of individual character and capacity over the transformative possibilities of collective political invention, in his remove from the refigurative possibilities of political conversation or transformative cultural practices. For if I am right about the problematic of pain installed at the heart of many contemporary contradictory demands for political recognition, all that such pain may long for—more than revenge—is the chance to be heard into a certain release, recognized into self-overcoming, incited into possibilities for triumphing over, and hence

⁴¹ This point has been made by many, but for a recent, quite powerful phenomenological exploration of the relationship between historical erasure and lived identity, see Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

losing, itself. Our challenge, then, would be to configure a radically democratic political culture that can sustain such a project in its midst without being overtaken by it, a challenge that includes guarding against abetting the steady slide of political into therapeutic discourse, even as we acknowledge the elements of suffering and healing we might be negotiating.

What if it were possible to incite a slight shift in the character of political expression and political claims common to much politicized identity? What if we sought to supplant the language of “I am”—with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social with moral positioning—with the language of “I want this for us”? (This is an “I want” that distinguishes itself from a liberal expression of self-interest by virtue of its figuring of a political or collective good as its desire.) What if we were to rehabilitate the memory of desire within identificatory processes, the moment in desire—either “to have” or “to be”—prior to its wounding?⁴² What if “wanting to be” or “wanting to have” were taken up as modes of political speech that could destabilize the formulation of identity as fixed position, as entrenchment by history, and as having necessary moral entailments, even as they affirm “position” and “history” as that which makes the speaking subject intelligible and locatable, as that which contributes to a hermeneutics for adjudicating desires? If every “I am” is something of a resolution of the movement of desire into fixed and sovereign identity, then this project might involve not only learning to speak but to *read* “I am” this way: as potentially in motion, as temporal, as not-I, as deconstructable according to a genealogy of want rather than as fixed interests or experiences.⁴³ The subject understood as an effect of an (ongoing) genealogy of desire, including the social processes constitutive of, fulfilling, or frustrating desire, is in this way revealed as neither sovereign nor conclusive even as it is affirmed as an “I.” In short, if framed in a political language, this deconstruction could be that which reopens a desire for futurity where Nietzsche saw it foreclosed by the logics of rancor and *ressentiment*.

Such a slight shift in the character of the political discourse of identity eschews the kinds of ahistorical or utopian turns against identity politics

⁴² Jesse Jackson’s 1988 “keep hope alive” presidential campaign strikes me as having sought to configure the relationship between injury, identity, and desire in something like this way and to have succeeded in forging a “rainbow coalition” *because* of the idiom of futurity it employed—want, hope, desires, dreams—among those whose postures and demands had previously had a rancorous quality.

⁴³ In Trinh T. Minh-ha’s formulation, “to seek is to lose, for seeking presupposes a separation between the seeker and the sought, the continuing me and the changes it undergoes” (“Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference,” *Inscriptions* 3–4 [1988], p. 72).

made by a nostalgic and broken humanist Left as well as the reactionary and disingenuous assaults on politicized identity tendered by the Right. Rather than opposing or seeking to transcend identity investments, the replacement—even the admixture—of the language of “being” with “wanting” would seek to exploit politically a recovery of the more expansive moments in the genealogy of identity formation, a recovery of the moment prior to its own foreclosure against its want, prior to the point at which its sovereign subjectivity is established through such foreclosure and through eternal repetition of its pain. How might democratic discourse itself be invigorated by such a shift from ontological claims to these kinds of more expressly political ones, claims that, rather than dispensing blame for an unlivable present, inhabited a necessarily agonistic theater of discursively forging an alternative future?

 CHAPTER FOUR

The Mirror of Pornography

Too much freedom seems to change into nothing but too much slavery, both for private man and the city. Well then, tyranny is probably established out of no other regime than democracy, I suppose—the greatest and most savage slavery out of the extreme of freedom.

—“Socrates,” in *Plato’s Republic*

To lead a life soaked in the passionate consciousness of one’s gender at every single moment, to will to be a sex with a vengeance—these are impossibilities, and far from the aims of feminism.

—Denise Riley, “*Am I That Name?*”

THIS EFFORT to apprehend the *rhetorical* power of Catharine MacKinnon’s social theory of gender is compelled by an aim that exceeds critique of her depiction of women as always and only sexually violable, her pornography politics, or her arguments about the First Amendment. Insofar as MacKinnon’s work has extraordinary political purchase, this essay seeks to discern something of the composition and constituency of this power in her theoretical project. How and why does MacKinnon’s complicatedly radical political analysis and voice acquire such hold? And what are the possibilities that other feminisms could rival such power with analyses more multivalent in their representation of gender subordination and gender construction, more attentive to the race and class of gender, more compatible with the rich diversity of female sexual experience, more complex in their representations of sexuality and sexual power, more extravagant and democratic in their political vision? In other words, while MacKinnon might be “wrong” about Marxism, gender, sexuality, power, the state, or the relation between freedom and equality, those issues are of less concern here than the potent order of “truth” she produces. How did MacKinnon so successfully deploy a militant feminism during the 1980s, a decade markedly unsympathetic to all militancies to the left of center?

Whether developing antipornography ordinances in midwestern cities and, more recently, Canada, or articulating an analysis of sexual harassment on the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour, Catharine MacKinnon has been taken up and taken seriously by those in mainstream judicial and

States of Injury

POWER AND FREEDOM IN
LATE MODERNITY

Wendy Brown

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For Sheldon S. Wolin

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction: Freedom and the Plastic Cage	3
CHAPTER TWO	
Postmodern Exposures, Feminist Hesitations	30
CHAPTER THREE	
Wounded Attachments	52
CHAPTER FOUR	
The Mirror of Pornography	77
CHAPTER FIVE	
Rights and Losses	96
CHAPTER SIX	
Liberalism's Family Values	135
CHAPTER SEVEN	
Finding the Man in the State	166
<i>Index</i>	197