

# Postpositivist Realism and the Return of the Same: The Rational Subject and Post(post)modern Liberalism

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**(Editor's Note:** This essay contributes to discussions of Paula M. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia's *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* that appeared in Volume 4, Number 2, under the heading "On Realist Theory." Paula M. Moya's introduction to *Reclaiming Identity* may be found in Volume 3, Number 2, along with Satya P. Mohanty's essay, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition.")



In the contemporary US academy, postmodern theory represents one of the more influential attacks against materialism. Whether in the form of semiotic postcolonial theory, ludic feminism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, new historicism, cultural materialism, desire-based queer theory, or tropological based theories of race, postmodern theory signifies the war against notions of social totality. Indeed, Jean-Francois Lyotard characterizes the postmodern as an incredulity toward metanarratives. Hence, postmodern theorists direct intellectual inquiries into the concrete and establish the local as the limit of intelligibility. Consequently, postmodern knowledges occlude any understanding of the determinate logic of capitalism.

By erasing the determinate logic of capitalism, "high" theory, by which I mean poststructuralism, could now offer a sustained meditation on the problematics of crisis, and, in particular, the crisis in subjectivity. Although poststructuralism retheorized the subject as an overdetermined discursive effect and not the origin of social meaning, as proposed by humanism, it still generated knowledge implicated in (re)producing the "subject effect," a knowledge practice necessary for the ideological legitimation and reproduction of capitalist social relationships. Postmodern theory recuperates a form of subjectivity more appropriate for late (postmodern) capitalism—the incoherent subject. Postmodern theorists effect a double move: they block any understanding of capitalism and, at the same time, recuperate an ideological narrative, the (incoherent) subject, necessary for capitalism.

At an earlier moment, poststructuralism provided ideological support for capitalism but, in this new moment, characterized by what Mas'ud Zavarzadeh calls a "post-al" logic (1), there is an increasing need to provide legitimacy for the subject in this "post-(high) theory" conjuncture. As the social crisis (of transnational capitalism) deepens, the urgency for articulating historically viable forms of subjectivity intensifies, and, at this time, I believe this need will be most effectively met by postpositivist realism—a knowledge practice which reconstitutes the humanist subject and suppresses intelligibility of the logic of capitalist totality. Despite its aim to provide an explanatory model, postpositivist theorists direct attention away from considering the cause of social oppression and exploitation: capitalism.

Paula M. Moya's and Michael R. Hames-Garcia's *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* provides the most coherent and systematic account of the postpositivist realist problematic. Moya's introduction and Satya Mohanty's lead essay cogently articulate the theoretical parameters of the postpositivist project. As Moya indicates, the postpositivist project responds to skepticism and constructivism in literary theory and cultural studies. In the service of a progressive politics, postpositivists purport to offer a more rigorous account of identity. This theory asserts that identities can be both real and constructed; that is, they can be "politically and epistemically significant, on the one hand, and variable, nonessential, and radically historical, on the other" (Moya 12). Thus for the postpositivists, knowledge is theory mediated and a theory-mediated objective knowledge is possible and desirable (12). Hence, postpositivists assert the possibility for an "accurate" account of the world.

At first glance, this seems like an effective intervention into and transcendence of the humanist/poststructuralist debate. Indeed, it is very seductive because it reaffirms a cultural obviousness: the subject knows. However, a deeper inquiry into the postpositivist project reveals some serious problems. To highlight the contradictory analytical assumptions of the postpositivist problematic, I open with a critique of Moya and Mohanty and here, by critique, I mean an investigation into the enabling conditions of possibilities for their discursive practices. Then, I engage some of the other essays in the volume in an effort to foreground the (liberal) political consequences of the postpositivist project. Although ostensibly opposed to postmodernism, the postpositivist realists produce a similar ideological effect: the suppression of the political economy of identity.

Moya's introduction announces the intention to reclaim identity within a postpositivist realist framework. In short, Moya's introduction reclaims the subject. Moya claims that postpositivist realism transcends the limitations of essentialist and postmodernist accounts of identity. The essentialist view assumes a self-evident, stable identity and therefore suppresses "internal heterogeneity" (10), and the postmodern view assumes the discursive character of identity and consequently, postmodernists reject the possibility of evaluative claims. For Moya, neither essentialist or postmodernist views effectively analyzes the "epistemic status" of identity. In foregrounding the epistemic status, postpositivists assert, as already noted, the theory mediated character of all knowledge and furthermore, they assert that objective knowledge, mediated by theory, is both possible and desirable (12).

Moya's introduction highlights the limitations of essentialist and postmodernist views and, at first glance, her conceptual privileging of "objective knowledge" suggests a commitment to materialism—a view which highlights the materiality of labor practices. However, her discussion of objective knowledge is quite misleading—her project, actually, occludes a materialist understanding of identity because it reifies the subject. Like postpositivist realism, a materialist view also registers the theory-mediated character of knowledge, but materialism does not reduce knowledge to the subject. In short, as a conceptual articulation, knowledge production occupies a transpersonal space. However, a commitment to the transpersonal would undercut Moya's project of reclaiming epistemic privilege, so she rewrites materialism; it no longer indexes the objectivity of labor—which would point one toward contemporary capitalism—rather she fetishes the subject's role in knowledge production.

Consequently, postpositivists offer an idealist understanding of the social, and this is clear in Moya's theorizing of identity. For example, Moya asserts that identity determines access to resources: "[t]he significance of identity depends partly on the fact that goods and resources are still distributed according to identity categories" (8). To what extent does identity shape distribution? Are we to assume that, if one changes her identity category, then that would give one access to resources? Where does "identity" determine distribution of goods and resources? In the US, ethnic groups are divided along class lines and ultimately, class position determines access to goods and resources. In Mexico, to take another example, where a Mexican ruling class controls society, their class position and not their ethnic identity determines their access to resources. If this is not the case, then the Mexican ruling class would be denied resources based on their identity and this is simply absurd. Hence, goods and resources are not distributed according to identity categories in any significant way; identity is not the cause of distribution patterns but its legitimation. In other words, resources are distributed according to class and (dominant notions of) identity provide an ideological legitimation of class and social inequality. Moya's (idealist) view that identity determines access to good and resources mystifies the class logic of social relations.

I stress the determinate class logic of identity to distinguish it from Moya's vague notions about the "present structures of inequality" (8) or "the underlying structures of social conflict" (9), or the equally vague notion of "social location," all of which appear in her essay (69). What exactly does Moya mean by such vague formulations? Is she talking about class or some other structure of inequality? How does she account for these structures? And why the failure to fully theorize these apparently crucial ideas? I doubt that Moya really wants to engage the determinate logic of class structures because this would take her away from the core of her project: rehabilitating the voluntarist (and moral) subject. By talking about "present structures of inequality" but downplaying the determinate logic of class, Moya can gesture toward a radical politics. In effect, though, she theorizes identity as merely an epistemological matter whereby the subject meditates on the accuracy of the cognitive, as if this is a space removed from the context of capitalist exploitation and the resulting ideological/political determinations, which operate to naturalize the capitalist context. To be sure, Moya situates the cognitive in a social context, but if the cognitive is social, and I believe it is, then how are we to

theorize this social context? For example, are there historically determinate structures-like class-within the social context? And if so, what might be the impact of exploitative class conditions on the "cognitive"? How does such an exploitative condition shape perceptions of "truth" and "falsity"? Furthermore, what might be the analytic mechanism for discerning "truth" and "error" if the central aim of ideological interpellation is to construct, not a true or false identity, but a coherent, self-same subject position. From my position, questions of right and wrong, or true and false, are implicated in ideology; hence, what one considers to be "right," or "true," at any given moment, is what provides the subject a sense of coherency. Postpositivists tend to down play the issue of ideology and abstract the issue of the cognitive, as Mohanty does with his notion of "epistemic privilege," a notion that is very is problematic.

Moya's introduction sets the stage for reclaiming the subject, an entity not of essences but one with epistemic value, and Satya Mohanty's lead essay (ideologically) solidifies this retheorized or postpositivist humanist project. In this essay, Mohanty examines what he calls the "epistemic status of cultural identity" (30). For Mohanty, experience has a cognitive component, and therefore, experiences can yield reliable knowledge. In short, for Mohanty, experiences can be "true" or "false" and thus experience provides the raw material for constructing identities and is not the foundation for "self-evident authenticity" (32). However, this begs the question: true or false according to whom? What is the criteria? For the postpositivists, it is an immanent logic-it develops from experience of the subject-and this excludes a (theoretical) outside to examine the experiential claims. A subject may claim a view is accurate and consider such a position reliable, but this does not mean that the view is necessarily true; the view is true only within the governing discursive framework. To point outside the governing discursive framework requires a theoretical inquiry-an outside-but this would be outside of postpositivist analytic structure because they fetishize an immanent logic.

Mohanty claims that "personal experience" is socially and theoretically constructed, and "it is precisely in this mediated way that it yields knowledge" (33). However, from Mohanty's formulation, the nature of this knowledge remains unclear. What kind of knowledge does personal experience yield? Mohanty aims for explanatory knowledge but the project actually produces descriptive and not explanatory knowledge, which is conceptually based and not reducible to or contingent upon the subject. With Mohanty's project, at best, the subject (accurately) redescribes her conditions but, without a well-theorized account, this amounts to a reification of the real. If the subject's description is "true," then it is only so under existing capitalist conditions, and not a transhistorical truth; this "truth" is a "truth effect" of actually existing exploitative social relations and thus the epistemological focus on "truth" puts the existing social arrangements, which produce that truth, beyond critique. The real does not adequate the true but rather marks an historical actuality, which is open for social transformation through collective praxis. To move beyond (personal) description requires a knowledge of social totality, and, to repeat, this is a conceptual, that is transpersonal, and not a personal enterprise nor simply a cognitive matter.

Mohanty locks the subject into the prison house of the cognitive, even though he

asserts that "experiences do not have self-evident meanings, for they are in part theoretical affairs, and our access to our remotest personal feeling is dependent on social narratives, paradigms, and even ideologies" (35). If experience depends upon theory, social narratives, paradigms, and ideologies, then the cognitive is social and not in any meaningful sense, personal. If the cognitive is a socially coded space, then why the focus on the personal as opposed to, for instance, a critique of ideology? Furthermore, by what analytic procedure does one discern the operation of the ideological which, according to Mohanty, traverses the cognitive?

The dominant ideology would saturate the cognitive, and if this is true, then the cognitive would reproduce the dominant ideology and consequently, support capitalist social relations. The dominant notions of the "real" and the "true," would be what is always already ordained as such by the dominant ideology. Thus the problem for Mohanty: the cognitive provides basis for objective knowledge, and yet it also encodes the dominant ideology. This problem, I believe, results from Mohanty's implicit assumption that the cognitive, an experientially based modality, equates with the conceptual, a non-experientially based modality.

Mohanty exhibits an awareness of this theoretical-political problem as he also questions the "reliability" of personal experience. He asks: if experience is "unreliable," then "[w]hy, . . . , speak of the cognitive component of personal experience, as though we might be able to glean objective knowledge from it?" (36). His answer is quite ideologically revealing for it collapses the conceptual and the cognitive. He argues that all knowledge is necessarily dependent upon theories and perspectives (36), and on this point, I agree with him. However, this would situate knowledge, then, in a conceptual space, which would undermine his view that the oppressed may have "epistemic privilege" (58). If knowledge is conceptual, then it would be available to the oppressed and the oppressor; consequently, the notion of epistemic privilege (of the oppressed) loses analytic efficacy.

As I see it, Mohanty wants to have it both ways: on the one hand, he claims knowledge is objective, that is conceptual, but on the other hand, he also wants to claim that knowledge is subjective, that is cognitive. This contradiction is at the core of Mohanty's project: if ideology saturates the cognitive, as Mohanty insightfully suggests, then how could the cognitive be the site of knowledge? He is aware of this problem, but does not provide an effective conceptual resolution because of his (ideological) commitments to rescuing the subject. Mohanty's own logic suggests an outside via theory, a transpersonal conceptual modality, but he reconfigures theory as cognitive, and then he asserts that ideology traverses the cognitive. This aporia haunts his text and the texts of the other contributors. Mohanty's move toward the experiential characterizes the empiricist-idealist problematic, which underwrites Mohanty's project, and this sets the stage for reclaiming agency.

Because of his focus on the subject, Mohanty's theory can only offer a liberal political project, and this sets the political trajectory for the rest of the contributors. Specifically, Mohanty limits politics to the possibility of redescription of the subject's experience.

Mohanty calls for "consciousness raising," and not structural transformation, in the interest of moral growth. But what is the point of such moral growth? Is the point for the subject, "Alice," in the case of Mohanty's example, to become aware of her oppression and accurately describe it? Now "Alice" cognitively knows she is oppressed, and she is justified in her anger, but what does this do for transforming the (patriarchal and capitalist) conditions of possibility that produce her oppression? Even if Alice oppressed may accurately describe her experiences of oppression, this does not provide access to a conceptual understanding of the causation of oppression and exploitation, and hence it does not provide the theoretical basis for collective transformative praxis. What does "Alice" have to say about capitalism? For that matter, Mohanty has very little to say, if anything at all about capitalism-the origin of exploitation-and why is he so silent on this matter?

Mohanty's idealist politics becomes even clearer in his understanding of the colonial condition. For Mohanty, "the colonial condition continues unless it is faced as a fundamental ethical challenge" (46). Thus from his perspective, what is needed is "emotional labor" (51) to achieve a "moral universalism" (60). The unsaid of Mohanty's discourse is quite revealing: this "moral universalism" is to be achieved within existing capitalism. Here then is the ideological significance of Mohanty's discourse: he effectively erases any trace of the exploitative socio-economic conditions and this sets the stage for abstract discussions about moral consciousness; humanism is a given a new lease on life. In short, Mohanty offers a theory that provides an ideological defense for the existing property holders.

As it turns out, for the contributors, reclaiming identity is nothing more than an updating of humanism. This neo-humanist is, perhaps, clearest with Minh T. Nguyen who argues for a "progressive humanism" (202) and with Amie A. Macdonald who argues for "humanist alliances" (208). It is quite striking that the "progressive" postpositivists would reclaim the very same ideas that provided historical legitimation for the bourgeoisie, and this is why Linda Alcoff opens her essay with a self-reflexive concern about the risks involved in the postpositivist project. For Alcoff, the project might be seen, by some, as "naïve," "uninformed," and "theoretically unsophisticated" (312). My project, of course, foregrounds the political effects of postpositivist project.

Since postpositivists are conceptually affiliated with bourgeois theory, it is not surprising that they generate a similar political effect: liberalism. I refer to this as "cognitive liberalism" and, in this essay, I will distinguish it from what I will call "cognitive materialism." Hence Paula M. L. Moya, following Cherrie Moraga, values "empathetic connection" (96). Likewise, Brent R. Henze also calls for an understanding of the oppressed "through a process of 'empathy'" (230) as well as John H. Zammito call for "mutual understanding" (302). Thus, the focus on personal experience foregrounds what I call a "politics of empathy," and how different is this from President George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism"? Like Bush's ideological program, the postpositivist project also completely dehistoricizes class antagonism at the heart of contemporary capitalist society.

Indeed, within postpositivist theory, "suffering" is given a transhistorical character. As Nguyen puts it, "suffering is the common denominator of what it means to be human" (199). Here she clearly articulates the (theological) metaphysics of postpositivism: "we have to start with the acknowledgment of human suffering and vulnerability and go from there, using this basic recognition as a compass to guide us in our conception of social justice and human ethics" (199). Nguyen's discourse symptomatically reflects the idealism pervading the postpositivists project. Human suffering is not an ontological state, but is produced by exploitative class societies, and hence suffering is not universal. For example, in contemporary capitalist society, the working class suffers and their suffering directly enriches the capitalist class. In repressing the class dimension of "suffering," Nguyen provides ideological immunity to capitalism, which has become a lost object within postpositivist theory. In dealing with capitalism, the resolution lies not in "empathy" but in class struggle; it is a struggle aimed at the social transformation of the profit based economy, which recognizes only one value, "surplus value," to a social order organized around the production of use values.

This discourse of empathy finds an ideological ally with the discourse of moral universalism, and this collusion is evident in Michael R. James Garcia's essay. In his discussion of moral truth, Garcia offers an ahistorical and depoliticized account of moral truth. Garcia claims that "moral truth can be evaluated in terms of the adequacy and coherence of the theory of society on which it is based" (112). Then, he offers the example of slavery, and, this example, I believe, exposes the political limits of the postpositivist's project. Garcia suggests that "the claim that slavery is morally wrong advances our understanding of the concept of freedom. It is a more accurate moral statement than the claim that slavery is not morally wrong" (112). However, from the postpositivist perspective, with its immanent logic, slavery would not be morally wrong from the view of slaveholders or contemporary racists.

The question of truth is not an abstraction nor a cognitive matter but an historical effect of social contradictions. Unlike many of the contributors, Garcia actually mentions capitalism and its "restrictive" impact on identity (104). By "restrictive" Garcia means that capitalist culture erases the multiplicity of the self and reduces, or restricts, a person's identity to that aspect with the most political salience (104). Hence, he usefully suggests that there are also political and material issues along with epistemological issues (104). Consequently, Garcia highlights the "social processes of domination and exploitation" (110).

However, the political reach of this insight, once again, is curtailed by his commitment to ahistorical and de-politicized notions of knowledge/theory and his underlying assumption that truth is a cognitive matter. Questions of truth are social questions and why some truths acquire truthfulness is a political matter and less so about cognitive truth or error, as Garcia and the postpositivists argue. At issue is the politics of knowledge: the class interest advanced by specific truth claims. Hence, a more relevant inquiry highlights the political economy of knowledge and, reveals, as Marx puts it, how the ruling ideas relate dialectically to the ruling class. This dominant truth, emerges from social contradictions, and, at the same time, operates to naturalize these very same social

contradictions. The dominant truth operates as an ideological fiction to conceal the historically objective truth of exploitation. Garcia calls for an "objective knowledge of universal human needs and interests" (127) but such a project is undermined by his focus on experiential based knowledge, which privileges the subject. Postpositivists limit knowledge to the subject, but how can this be the basis for articulating objective knowledge about universal needs and interests? Objective knowledge and universal needs would transcend the empiricist parameters of the postpositivist subject.

For the postpositivists, knowledge of the social world consists of a plurality of disconnected personal narratives-incidentally, this is where postmodern theory also ends up--and furthermore there would be no way to adjudicate competing claims because postpositivists limit understanding of the real to the cognitive. Essentially, postpositivists argue that experience is not the criterion of truth. They suggest that some experience, based in certain social locations, provide insights, which are not self-evident. But this opens the question: why some do some experiences, in some social locations, provide (potential) insights? Who determines which experience is significant (and why)? Which location is significant (and why)? And which insights are insightful (and according to whom)? For postpositivists, these questions and answers are situated within immanent logic of the subject's experiences, his location, and his insights. Consequently, postpositivists cut off the possibility of external critique, and thus from the postpositivist position, it would be very difficult to question a person's position, if that person finds his explanation rational. Thus postpositivists call for an objective realist framework but slip into a relativism.

In a particularly relevant passage in *Reclaiming Reality*, Mohanty attempts to address the issue of relativism. Mohanty distinguishes between Alice's feminist identity and the fundamentalist religious identity. As Mohanty puts it:

It would be hasty to dismiss both Alice's feminist identity and the fundamental religious identity in the same way, simply because both appeal to personal experience and make some claim to epistemic privilege. As I have been emphasizing, realism about identity requires that we see identities as complex theories about (and explanations of) the social world and the only way to evaluate such theories is to look at how well they work as explanation (64).

Mohanty implies that one identity, Alice's, is superior to the other, the religious fundamental identity, and he may wish this to be the case, but it does not stand on firm analytical grounds. The postpositivists rely on the cognitive and ground their discourse in an immanent logic, so who is to say the fundamental religious person's identity does not offer a "complex theories about (and explanations of) of the social world? And who is to say the fundamental religious identity does not work well as explanation? The fundamental religious person would certainly believe that he/she had an effective and true explanation of the social world. Indeed, presumably, the fundamental religious person would consider Alice's feminist consciousness a "false" identity. While this identity may not be self-evident, one may acquire a fundamental religious identity, just as Alice may



acquire a feminist identity, and this acquisition of identity provides the basis for generating relevant knowledge for the subject, and since it is immanent knowledge it is off limits from external critique.

Another example from the domain of race, I believe, highlights (unintended) effects of postpositivist immanent logic. For instance, the views of a white racist concerning the inferiority of African-Africans would acquire cognitive privilege. An alternative view proposed by African-Americans to contest such a racist view, in turn, would be limited by their cognitive framework. Postpositivists call for universalism but there is no way for them to transcend the cognitive specificity that they advocate. Here, then, is a very disturbing implication from postpositivist theory: the cognitive claims of a white racist would have as much epistemological validity as the cognitive claims of an African-American. If the cognitive provides the criteria for knowledge claims, then on what analytical grounds can a postpositivist say that the white racist is "wrong"? Is not a white racist, in his own mind, oppressed? And, presumably, as a member of the working class, he is also certainly exploited. Since postpositivists are concerned with the oppressed, how could postpositivists not grant epistemic privilege/value to the oppressed white racist?

The example of the white racist points up how postpositivist position silently underwrites relativism. The experiences of a white racist provide cognitive claims and, in effect, the white racist, and only the white racist, could evaluate the veracity or falsity of these claims. If the white racist asserts the biological inferiority of African-Americans, then the white racist, from his cognitive vantage point, could verify this claim. Experience may not be self-validating, as postpositivists propose, but the evidence used to justify knowledge claims certainly ends up being self validating. The pragmatic framework of postpositivism blinds us to the work of ideology in constituting the subject. Indeed, the concept of ideology, I believe, provides an analytical link between the universal and specific cultural location. In evading, and in some cases minimizing the issue of ideology, postpositivist do not have an analytical mechanism to theorize properly the relationship between the global and the local.

The white racist, like any working class subject, would be subject to exploitation and material deprivation, such as inadequate health care and housing to name only two, and these material concerns are historical. Race, as an ideological apparatus, provides an imaginary resolution to the existing social contradictions in the daily lives of whites, but these contradictions can not be wished away by scapegoating African-Americans. Here the cognitive, which articulates and confirms the pre-existing racist ideology, operates to blind white racists from seeing the structural cause of their oppression and exploitation. As members of the working class, white racists and African-Americans, and other ethnic groups that compose the modern working class, share a similar exploitative relation to capital. This exploitation, through the extraction of surplus value, constitutes an historically objective condition but one erased from intelligibility by postpositivists, who set the cognitive as the limit text of the real. Mohanty suggests that it is "silly" to believe that all emotions are equally justified or rational (38) but this is exactly the logical extension of his theory. If the cognitive is the test of the truth, then on what basis could Mohanty deny cognitive claims of a white racists? The logic of Mohanty's view would

lead to a "cultural specificity," or a "cultural autonomy," which is the direction of Macdonald's essay where she argues for self-segregation for political, epistemic, and ethical reasons (210).

Macdonald's essay highlights a central tension in postpositivist theory between a focus on cultural specificity and the epistemic location of the oppressed and a desire for moral universalism, a tension exacerbated by her nationalism. Macdonald argues that "cultural identities serve an invaluable epistemic function in [. . .] developing ethical developments" (210). Thus Macdonald believes that "the maintenance of racially defined communities is central to the continued presence of culturally specific fields of moral inquiry" (210). Macdonald seems to suggest an "essential" relationship between identity, epistemic function, and ethics. However, she reminds us that she is not asserting "that experience of an oppressed racial identity generates any sort of automatic epistemic privilege or guaranteed objectivity" (212). Yet, she also believes that "the understanding of political power does seem [. . .] partially contingent on the experience of political struggle against oppression" (212) and therefore "an accurate account of social power remains incomplete without the inclusion of analyses of oppressed people" (212).

On one level, Macdonald self-consciously attempts to resist essentializing, but on another level, she silently reinscribes it. She argues that there is not any "epistemic privilege" and yet, for an understanding of social power, it is "essential" to include the analyses of the oppressed, as if the oppressed will "essentially" critique oppressive structures. If the oppressed operate under dominant ideological problematic, then they will not critique oppressive social structures; indeed, they will not even "see" such oppressive structures. Let me clarify my position. Social inequality is an empirical actuality; one can see the enormous wealth of a few and the extreme poverty of others. However, how one makes sense of this actuality depends upon what frames of intelligibility are available to the subject. If the subject only has access to dominant understandings, which is more typically the case in class society, then she will understand social inequality in terms of individual (moral) failing and hence propose the need for personal agency. This subject, inscribed within dominant ideological state apparatuses, will not "see" social oppression. However, if the subject acquires conceptual understanding of the capitalist social totality, via a theorized (i.e. non-cognitive) account of existing social contradictions, then social inequality is seen as an effect of the exploitative system and not a personal inadequacy.

Macdonald, and the other contributors, as well, lose sight of the contested nature of "seeing" because of their repudiation of the concept of ideology. Macdonald offers a one-sided theory, which finds concrete expression in self-segregated racial housing, and yet at the same time, she calls for "humanist alliances" in the interests of racial democracy. Macdonald highlights epistemic specificity of the oppressed, and by implication her position must grant epistemic specificity of the oppressor. Hence, to bridge this gap, one must assume an underlying (cognitive) structure, that would reproduce sameness, but this would directly contradict a key premise of postpositivism: cognitive specificity.

Macdonald adopts the notion of an "inessentialist conception of racial identity" (218) for dealing with racial division; this conception suggests that identity consists of "diverse nationalities, ethnicities, races, religions, and skin colors" (219). Each group is already divided and presumably this inherent diversity provides a basis for (human) community. An inessentialist conception of racial identity amounts to a code word for liberal pluralism. If we are back to liberal pluralism, then what is the point of self-segregation? Is it to show that racial communities are also liberal spaces? And if so then what happens to the question of cognitive specificity? If racial communities merely reproduce liberal pluralism, then are racially defined communities as really necessary as Macdonald suggests? The contradictory logic should not obscure the political operation at work here. Macdonald rehabilitates a notion of the subject as essentially an "inessentialist" (liberal) subject, and thus the possibility "to conceive of racial groups that are at one and the same time ultimately diverse" (219). Hence Macdonald sets up a political project of reform, a project which recurs throughout the volume, and like any reform project, this one would benefit the educated elite of racial communities.

If Macdonald rehabilitates the liberal subject, then Henze's project furthers the reification of the subject. Drawing upon Mohanty's realist notion of the subject, Henze reproduces the aporia found in Mohanty's discourse. Henze acknowledges that a person's interpretation is socially and theoretically informed, and yet he believes that "the actual interpretive act remains in the hands of the person whose experiences are being interpreted" (233). Thus Henze asserts that the "authority to interpret experience remains with the individual" (234). On what analytical basis can Henze make such an assertion? If (transpersonal) social and theoretical narratives inform the interpretive act, then in what sense does interpretive authority still reside with the subject? If anything the interpretive authority resides with the cultural-ideological apparatuses which produce cultural intelligibility. In short, the subject would occupy a range of positionalities, as articulated through economic, political, cultural/ideological apparatuses. Of course, these positions would be open for contestation and transformation through praxis but, even so, this does not free the subject from determinations: the subject remains an historical entity and not the ahistorical instrumentality for asocial agency.

In foregrounding "individual agency," Henze also outlines the appropriate (liberal) political response for dealing with oppression, and this comes out in his discussion of buying a T-shirt at Gap. Henze's immediate purchasing experience is positive (246), but then he shifts his perspective to consider the view of oppressed, the garment workers, and this makes him more conscious of his contribution to the power structure. As he puts it, "[o]nly by becoming conscious of the experiences of the garment worker can I properly understand my contribution to the power structure that incongruously yields me a T-shirt and yields the laborer a penny on every dollar I spend" (247). By supplementing his perspective with that of the garment worker, Henze suggests the possibility for him to make better-informed choices about his actions (247).

Though helpful in drawing a link between first world consumerism and third world labor practice, Henze's liberalism limits his political project because he theorizes resistance in terms of (individual) choice. Hence, Henze suggests, parenthetically, that

resistance may be facilitated by "no longer choosing to buy Gap T-shirts, or by actively motivating others to take the same step" (247). Here is the ideological lesson Henze teaches: first, he frames the issue in terms of oppression and not exploitation, and then we are supposed to respond to oppression through exercising our choice. By theorizing the issue in terms of oppression and not exploitation, Henze obscures the fundamental exploitative logic of capitalism—a logic which structures the totality and, therefore, boycotting Gap or Nike or, any other multinational corporation, does not alter, in any way, this exploitative logic. In capitalism, is there a garment company that is not engaged in exploitative labor practices? For that matter, is there any industry where workers are not exploited? The best Henze can offer is to provide knowledges that better contextualize the experiences of workers, so they can make better sense of their experiences, but toward what end? Without an understanding of the determinate logic of exploitation, which puts revolutionary social transformation on the agenda, the workers are left to reform individual parts of the capitalist machine.

In the hands of Henze, and similar to the other contributors, postpositivist theory reclaims the subject, and as Henze puts it, "external persuasive forces" affect the subject, but she is "not altogether determined by them" (233). For Henze there remains a surplus, the concrete subject, and it provides the analytical ground for postpositivism. Postpositivists assume that the concrete signifies the real and the true, and hence the necessity to reclaim it; I call this obsession with the concrete a "theory of physicality." However, how concrete is concrete? Does the concrete adequate the real? Furthermore, does the truth reside in the concrete as proposed by the postpositivists? The postpositivists, in the final analysis, reject (social) "determinism," because it restricts agency, but (silently) privilege determination by the senses.

Postpositivists offer an idealist understanding of the social, and the "cognitive" operates, under the guise of objectivity, to displace materialism. In reclaiming the concrete, I find Marx relevant here because he provides a materialist understanding of the concrete in the *Grundrisse*. Marx historicizes the concrete in developing a materialist method for political economy:

It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for the example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. (237)

Marx moves from the "imagined concrete" towards conceptual abstraction which lays bare the simplest determinations and relations. Thus for Marx the "concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse" (237). He continues it "appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of

concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception" (237). The postpositivists fetishize the concrete and mistakenly equate the "point of departure" with the real, rather than see it as the effect of social relations. As Marx shows the concrete, itself, is not essentially the "point of departure" but an abstraction and hence, to treat it as the epistemic foundation mystifies the historicity of subjectivity.

Marx's materialist framework opens a space for reunderstanding the concrete and critiquing the idealism of the postpositivists project. It seems correct to begin with the concrete, or in the language of postpositivists, the cognitive. After all, the cognitive seems so real, so immediate, so physical, and such a direct expression of the rational agent. To the traditional metaphysics of presence, the postpositivists incorporate the possibility for cognitive accuracy, as determined by the subject, and I call this an enlightened metaphysics of presence. However, their notion of the cognitive is similar to Marx's notion of the "concrete" and therefore it is inadequately theorized. The cognitive represents an abstraction if I leave out the economic class structures (of the individual), which in turn provides a base for political/cultural-ideological structures, and these (super)structures, in turn, shape consciousness. This ensemble of social relations provides the (historical) materiality of the cognitive. Although aware of these structures, the postpositivists marginalize any sustained inquiry into these matters because their project revolves around restoring the rational subject, and, in this regard, the postpositivists provide a mode of consciousness that ideologically recuperates and legitimates the exemplary form of capitalist subjectivity: the free and autonomous subject.

The "post" in postpositivism signals not so much a new terrain but a doubling back to recover an older narrative, humanism, and to insert it into the present historical juncture, which effectively neutralizes existing social contradictions. Postpositivism represents a concept of crisis management and, as such, it will certainly find a (hegemonic) place within the mainstream academic and cultural circles, but it will do little to advance its self-proclaimed progressive politics. I believe a progressive politics reclaims not idealist notions of identity, but rather calls for a politics of transformation whereby (social) difference is no longer deployed to justify exploitation.

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The author wishes to thank Greg Meyerson, Nirmala Erevelles, and Sharon O'Dair for constructive critiques of this paper.