Transforming Race Matters:
Towards a Critique-al Cultural Studies1

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"...critique represents a class..."

-- Marx

One

Since the post-war reconfiguration of the international division of labor and the subsequent "crisis" of "difference" brought about through recognition of traditional liberal humanism's erasure of difference within its analysis of culture (other than in the Eurocentric terms of "natural inequalities"), a new space opened up for thinking "difference" in the Western academy. The emergence of postmodern cultural studies, which takes as its fundamental point of departure from traditionalist knowledges a focus on difference not only as a core analytical category in cultural theory but as a fundamental basis for advancing a "politics of difference" which could work to further the interests of those subjects subordinated by the dominant social relations, has been integral to this development. However, for the most part, this new focus has been drastically limited by the dominant models for understanding difference. Specifically, the dominant modes for understanding questions of difference have been developed within the framework of a postmodern politics which, under the alibi of "post-history" or commitment to radicalizing "democracy," works to grant a *political* and *cultural* acknowledgment of difference (in a suitably "radical" rhetoric) while excluding, or, at best, relegating to the margins, the *economics* of difference. The consequences of this exclusion or marginalization of the economic as the basis for understanding issues of difference are nowhere more evident than in the current constitution of postmodern

theories of "race". In both its main "experiential" and "ludic"[2] forms contemporary race theory has worked to promulgate an account of difference in exclusively "superstructuralist" terms. Therefore its politics have remained limited to a cultural politics aimed primarily at intervening in the sphere of cultural representations as an end in itself. Moreover, such an "intervention" has primarily been conceived within the terms of an "appreciation" of cultural difference undertaken through a valorization of previously excluded or ignored cultural practices and experiences or through positing an "excess"-ive difference as a "subversion" of the hegemonic processes of signification at the site of representation.

My argument here is that such an "appreciative" politics of cultural difference[3] has emerged, ultimately, as part of a much wider development in (left)liberal knowledges to contain the *critique* of cultural difference as an alibi of capitalist social relations deployed to ensure the unavailability of any systematic knowledge of the *material* (economic) difference between exploiter and exploited informing all cultural practices and relations. In short, the primary ideological work undertaken by the appreciative position of the dominant tendencies in race theory is that of separating out (by way of an epistemological segregation) questions of cultural difference from the material difference of class. It is only on the basis of this (reifying) separation that the dominant knowledges have been able to set the limit text of a politics of difference in terms of a "cultural politics" concerned almost exclusively with issues of representation (semiotic access and other discursive and civic "rights")-- and thus displace any understanding of politics as the struggle of the exploited and oppressed for systemic social*emancipation*. As such, such a liberal cultural politics takes its place as part of the broader current "democracy promotion" campaign of the North-Atlantic ruling class (Robinson 1-72) which is being globally deployed so as to mitigate the increasingly sharp social and political tensions of the so called "new world order" (by covering over and containing its unresolvable contradictions) and manufacture politicodiscursive "consensus" for Northern capital's world-wide "free market" policies. In other words, what is at stake in contestations over difference is (as I shall show) not simply a question of epistemology understood in abstraction from the contestations over the organization of social relations (ultimately, over the limits of the ratio of exploitation)[4] in contemporary global capitalism. Rather, what is at stake in the consolidation of current notions of a cultural politics of difference is the concerted erasure from the scene of theory of an emancipatory politics of difference: politics *not* simply as the struggle for equal access to the cultural resources of society (i.e. the struggle for superstructural reforms within the limits of the existing system of exploitation) but as the determinate struggle of an international collectivity to transform by overthrowing the present system of socio-economic relations so as to ensure equal access of all people--regardless of differences of race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, age . . .--to its "base" of material resources: to the means of production and accumulated social wealth of the world which has been (and continues to be) derived from the systematic exploitation of the working majority by a tiny minority who own and control these resources for purposes of maintaining their own rule (class difference).

In this essay, in order to advance a materialist understanding of cultural difference which could contribute to such an emancipatory politics, I interrogate and contest the

enabling assumptions and presuppositions of both experientialist and ludic strands within the postmodern engagement with race. Yet, before turning to these issues it is necessary to locate such a contestation within its broader conditions of possibility in terms of the more general configuration of cultural studies on the postmodern academic scene. Specifically, it is necessary to situate it within the horizon of the sharp political conflict between the (largely suppressed) knowledges of a "critique-al cultural studies"--which takes Marxist historical materialist (ideology) critique as its mode of theoretical and political engagement with questions of culture--and the social and (the dominant) bourgeois knowledges of "appreciative cultural studies", which are founded on a rejection of critique as an "impossible" or simply "unethical" theoretical practice. Such a situating is above all necessary because, as I have already indicated, at stake in the question of critique as an intellectual practice is at root the question of both the "feasibility" of and "desirability" of an emancipatory politics capable of inaugurating a new society free from exploitation.

In order to foreground the larger political issues at stake in the opposition to critique in appreciative cultural studies it will be useful to briefly distinguish what I understand as "materialist critique" from other available modes of "critique". It is necessary, in short, to distinguish materialist critique both from traditional humanist "criticism" and from the currently predominant practice of "immanent critique". Thus critique differs from "criticism" insofar as it breaks from the notion that the task of criticism is that of appealing to transcendental (aesthetic or other) "values" and "norms" in order to produce an "evaluation" of specific social or cultural phenomena. From the position of materialist critique any such appeal to transhistorical criterion for the purpose of "judging" particular practices or discourses is essentially a moral (as opposed to political) exercise designed so to protect the interests of the dominant classes by rendering certain historically produced categories (which correspond to these interests) as unassailably valid ("good for all time") and thus beyond any political interrogation (which could indicate the constructedness, and thus radical historicity, of these categories). "Criticism", in short, is inherently a conservative mode of knowing which is aimed at inculcating in subjects a moral approach to political issues (for example, "family values" as a response to the crisis of the bourgeois institution of the family), and like all moralism is, in the last analysis, an apparatus of the state deployed to explain away and manage social crises.

Also opposed to criticism is the practice of immanent critique. As Barbara Johnson explains, differentiating immanent critique from criticism: immanent critique

> . . . is an analysis that focuses on the grounds of [a] system's possibility. The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point in not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself (xv).

In short, for the practice of immanent critique as well the goal of critique is *not* the production of moral judgments but an interrogation of the terms and categories of any

system in order to show their constructedness and thus to denaturalize them by removing them from the terrain of the "self-evident". As such, immanent critique joins with materialist critique in calling for an analysis capable of "reading backwards" as a "mapping" of the internal relations of the terms of the system, in order to mark its contradictions, its limits, and its cultural situationality (the cultural situatedness of its categories). Here, however, is where the similarity between the two modes of cultural practice ends. Basically, from the materialist position, while immanent critique is a "necessary" moment in the development of analysis it is not sufficient in terms of producing a *radical* interrogation of the system and this is so precisely because of its "immanence". That is, insofar as immanent critique remains limited to an internal investigation of the system and does not connect up this investigation to the wider social, historical and economic series it remains limited to merely a "formal", or "logical" mode of analysis which *cuts off* the immanent workings of the system or text from the global structures of domination within which it is embedded. As such, it works primarily to "protect" the local system from being implicated in these global structures. It works, ultimately, then as a strategy of *neo-conservatism* which while problematizing the "naturalness" of any system does not relate this to its "outside" (structures of exploitation) and thus works as a strategy of conservation of the "inside".

In contrast, radical materialist critique is above all a mode of knowing concerned with the relation of the "inside" (that is, the immanent workings of any locality) to its "outside": that is, to the material and historical structures of exploitation within which any local text, site, system, or practice is located. As such it is a mode of cultural practice which enables a knowledge not only of the "locality" but of the global social totality, a practice which is thus capable of *explaining* conflicts manifested at the site of "culture" (the production and circulation of social meanings, practices, and significations) in terms of the historical and material conditions under which they are produced and which are necessary to transform in order to allow for the production of *radically new* and different meanings, practices and significations. It is, then, precisely this understanding of critique: as a mode of materialist praxis working for such a global transformation that is called into question by appreciative cultural studies. As I shall indicate, it is only by means of such rejection that the latter is enabled to advance a re-formist social agenda, which, while attentive to the existing relations of unequal distribution of "power", is aimed eventually at keeping intact the structures which produce these unequal relations--with minor changes (capitalism with a "human face").

We can see the reactionary consequences of such a reformist trajectory clearly established in both the two primary lines of variously, "populist" and "pan-insidist", opposition to materialist critique within the frame of appreciative cultural studies.5 Exemplarily marking the terms of the populist strand of opposition is of course the work of John Fiske (whose writings are symptomatic of the [re]constitution of Anglo-American cultural studies in the 1990s, particularly the work of Constance Penley and Andrew Ross in the U.S. [e.g. Penley and Ross, "Introduction" to *Technoculture,* and Ross *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*] and of Stuart Hall and other "New Times" writers in the UK [for e.g. the collection of essays in the volume *New Times*, which are for the most part reprinted from the now defunct revisionist journal *Marxism*

Today]),6 and is in turn integrally informed by the neo-populist bourgeois writings of Michel de Certeau [*The Practice of Everyday Life*] and Pierre Bourdieu [*Distinction*]7 which now form the underlying analytical matrix for contemporary social and cultural theory across a variety of disciplines, from sociology to English.8

In his *Understanding Popular Culture*9 Fiske establishes the basic line of populist argument against critique-al cultural studies by way of his distinction between "structural" and "practical" perspectives (62) in contemporary cultural analysis. Central to the first perspective is its tendency to "concentrate almost exclusively on the power of dominant groups to maintain the system that advantages them" (18) at the expense of a focus on "the complexity and creativity by which the subordinate cope with the system" (19) (the "practical" view that he ardently defends). For Fiske the weakness of the former is that it fails to "connect" with the "everyday" lives and modes of struggle of "the people" and thus cannot articulate with and support ("appreciate") these struggles. Ostensibly, then, what is at stake in Fiske's defense of the "practical" is a "pragmatic" question: a choice between political perspectives which "appeal" to "the people", and which can thus "participate" in on-going local struggles against the "power bloc" and those perspectives which do not "appeal" and thus basically lock themselves into dis-participation.

And yet, the political economy of what Fiske presents at the level of pragmatic "choice" is in fact not at all a pragmatic question but is articulated at the level of a principled opposition between two *fundamentally* opposed modes of understanding social change and two *fundamentally* different understandings of the workings of power in contemporary societies. Underlying Fiske's appeal to the "practical" (as he himself acknowledges) is a non-"instrumental" view of power which, following Foucault, argues that "power cannot be adequately explained by class relations, that power is discursive and is to be understood in the specific contexts of its exercise, not in generalized social structures" (179). While this theory presents itself as more capable of accounting for the "complexity" of "power" in current societies, it is, ultimately, a ruling class theory of power which disconnects power from any relation to questions of production and ownership.

In class societies power is *not* distributed equally, nor is it an effect primarily of "discourse". Rather, power is always constituted at the level of production: at the level of the separation between those who own the means of production (as a class) and those who do not own these means and thus are forced to sell their labor power in order to survive. Power, in short, is a *structural* relation deployed (particularly through the mediation of the State) for purposes of exploitation and not a free-floating abstraction to which all people, regardless of their position in the social division of labor, have access. To posit otherwise (as in Foucauldian social theory), a move which is purportedly made on philosophical grounds (e.g. anti-instrumental-ism/anti-binaries; Foucault *Politics* 94, *Power/Knowledge* 78-108), is ultimately a (class) *political* strategy to dehierarchize power as a "reversible" construct in which the lines of opposition between the "powerful" and the "powerless" are blurred. Yet to blur these lines, or posit them as discursively "negotiable" (without a change in the position of the subject in the structure of social

relations), is to neutralize power as a "struggle-concept" (Mies 36) through which the powerless are enabled to wage a concerted struggle against the powerful. This neutralization of power as a struggle-concept is of course well underway in such "high theoretical" Foucauldian accounts of "resistance" as Judith Butler's which advance the claim that resistance ("agency") is "immanent to power" (*Bodies* 15),10 and finds perhaps its most developed and reactionary form in the writings of such archconservative post-materialist theorists as Scott Wilson who proposes "revising" Foucault by way of the libidinal economy of Bataille in order ultimately to argue that every act of power is in fact only ever a staging of/for the "enjoyment" of the powerlessand hence far from being a demonstration of the power-full ness of the powerful is nothing other than a mark of the 'constitutive failure' of power (138, 139).11 Yet these various neutralizations of the functional effectivity of power, as committed social theorists such as Nancy Hartsock have noted ("Foucault" 165-169), are highly questionable moves, particularly on the part of intellectuals who claim to advance the interests of the "powerless". Moreover, while (post)Foucauldian social theory may (on its own terms) lead to a greater "appreciation" of the workings of power in the "specific contexts of its exercise" (i.e. it may attain a higher descriptive resolution), it *cannot* in any case--in all its various modalities--explain *why* power is deployed in the first place. But to be unable to explain the "why" of power is, ultimately, by way of a reverse strategy, to dehistoricize power and to make of it a "transcendental" category: the effect of a transhistorical "will to power" which eternally subsists in the social.

Under the alibi of "specificity" appreciative cultural studies shifts attention away from the global workings of power. It thereby shields the system of domination from any global (i.e. non-local) interrogation and critique of its operation. At the core of this shift, as Fiske's text clearly shows, is the attempt to keep the struggle for social change within "allowable" (local) limits: that is, within the existing limits of the present organization of relations of production. In the "practical" perspective, the limit text of struggle as set by the allowable is manifested in the rejection (again on "immediate" "pragmatic" grounds) of "radical" struggle (i.e. struggle for the purpose of a revolutionary overthrowing of existing structures) in favor of "popular" struggle. As Fiske explains, whereas radical struggle calls for a "break" with the system, popular struggle

> is an on-going process, aimed at maintaining or increasing the bottom-up power of the people within the system. It results in the softening of the harsh extremities of power, it produces small gains for the weak, it maintains their esteem and identity (188).

Of course, as Fiske establishes, advocates of the "practical" do not completely reject the necessity for breaking with capitalist social relations (or at least those who not wish to completely relinquish their credentials as "left"), maintaining, rather, an understanding in which the "incremental" micro-moves made at the level of popular struggle form the pre-requisite for "radical" struggle. And yet, what this occludes is the fact that far from being merely a question of linear progression--first, micro (i.e. "concrete") changes and then macro (i.e. structural) change--the modes of struggle entailed under the concepts of the "radical" and the "popular" (to use his terms) are in irreconcilable conflict. For radical

politics, far from ensuring a smooth progress to a revolutionary crisis, the "gains" attained at the level of "popular" struggle are themselves effects of a global strategy of power deployed under capitalism: a strategy aimed at allowing for the accomplishment of temporary, local gains so to *defer* the arrival of any structural confrontation. The call for a popular "pragmatic" politics of the "concrete" and the "immediately realizable", in other words, is nothing other than a call to set the horizon of politics at a bourgeois politics of reform, a reformist politics which is periodically presented by the latest bourgeois theories, in Lenin's words, "as if it were something entirely new" (62) rather than "only a variation of the old song about adding a kopek to a ruble" (72). The effect of this "everyday" politics, as Lenin explains, writing from within the revolutionary tradition of Marxist materialist critique, is precisely to achieve the "softening of the harsh extremities of power" (capitalism with a human face) so better to preserve the larger system of exploitation. As such it is mode of ideological capitulation to the dominant by way of which "the people" are inculcated *not* into "the revolutionary struggle for freedom and for socialism" but merely towards "better terms" "*in the sale of their labour power* " (61-62), i.e. towards "better terms" under which to continue be exploited!

On these (materialist) terms, the current intellectual rejection of critique as an intervention into the (spontaneous) consciousness of the people (from the "outside") is in the end nothing more than a redeployment of the time-worn bourgeois tactic of "subservience to spontaneity" (Lenin 102), a subservience which, while ostensibly undertaken in the name of "empowering" the people, is nothing other than an attempt to constrain their struggles *within* the (ideological) limits of their daily experience (the "inside") by withholding from them any systematic knowledge of the structures *producing* this experience. Thus, on another level, far from being seen as a "compassionate" act undertaken in solidarity with the oppressed, such a tactic must be seen ultimately for what it is: an opportunistic narrative on the part of a few privileged intellectuals to legitimate their complicity with the system of exploitation, and to avoid coming into any political conflict with the powers that be. What this shows, in other words, is that what is deemed "practical", is, in the last analysis, only what is "appealing" and "useful" to the ruling class and its petit bourgeois allies and far from contesting is an integral part of the hegemonic workings of domination in capitalist societies.

If critique-al knowledge--as knowledge of the "outside"--is rejected, on the one hand, under the terms of the populist resort to what is "appealing" (as the hallmark of "effective" politics), it finds its "philosophical" legitimation in the effacement of the very notion of a determinate "outside" from which critique could be waged. Along these lines, we can see the philosophical impetus for this effacement most clearly established in the highly influential "post-marxist" writings of Ernesto Laclau (in collaboration with Chantal Mouffe) through his notion of the "constitutive outside."

As Laclau elaborates, from the post-marxist position materialist critique is undermined not so much on "pragmatic" grounds but rather as a "consequence of the crisis of the assumptions on which [it] is grounded" ("Impossibility" 89), a "crisis" at the core of which is the "untenability" of the concept of "totality" "as an underlying principle of intelligibility of the social order" (90). This "untenability", as Laclau argues (following

Derrida), is due not to the "vastness" of the field of totality, but rather is the result of what he calls an "*infinitude of the social. . . .* the fact that any structural system is limited, that it is always surrounded by an 'excess of meaning' which it is unable to master" (90). In short, "identified with the infinite play of differences" (90) the social exists not as a "determinate" totality but instead, as in a state of perpetual indeterminacy, marked by a "surplus" of meaning which establishes the "impossibility" of any ultimate "fixation" of meaning. And yet, as Laclau goes on, the very principle of "intelligibility" of any discourse unless it is to collapse into the discourse of the psychotic is precisely such a "closural" "fixation". That is, any discourse, in order to make an intelligible claim about the world, must "attempt to bring about such an ultimately impossible fixation" (91) but, insofar as "no discursive totality is absolutely self-contained . . . there will always be an outside which distorts it and prevents it from fully constituting itself" ("Post-Marxism" 109).

My focus here is not on the internal contradictions of this argument. For example, on how an epistemological argument (the radical unfixity of all meaning) is deployed to "unfound" the very possibility of epistemological argument.[12] Rather, my focus is on the political economy of this argument which establishes the "outside" *not* as the space of a determinate knowledge of the "inside" but rather as the space of a semantic indeterminacy which eradicates the possibility of any reliable (objective) foundation from which a critique of the "inside" could be made. In short, my focus here is on what such a notion of "constitutive outside" *politically* legitimates and what it delegitimates.

What is politically *de*legitimated under the terms of this argument is (as I have already said) the possibility of establishing the outside as a zone of decided opposition to the (ideological) practices of the inside, since if every outside is established necessarily as "constitutive" then it is not in fact an "objective" (decided) outside but merely an ideological extension of the economies of the inside. It is, in short, only a "contingent" (i.e. non-objective) outside which can always be reinscribed and thus "deconstructed" (away) and made "undecidable". But this is to say that no conclusive critique of the inside can ever be made as every such critique would remain constitutively subject to the "play" of *différance* (undecidability) and thus "open" to "interpretation" (reinscription). The aim of "constitutive outside", in other terms, is to ensure that no *definite* conclusions about existing social arrangements can ever be reached. For appreciative cultural studies-ists the reaching of any definite conclusions (other than of course the "definite conclusion" that "definite conclusions" are impossible!) are, as Laclau makes clear, merely a means of effecting a "totalitarian" closure on the infinite "openness" of the discursive and are a limitation of the "playful" possibilities of the signifier.

Yet, from the standpoint of a politics of emancipation such a claim is highly problematic. Far from being totalitarian impositions on the "inherent" play of signification, "conclusions" are the basic condition for a decided politics: the beginning, in short, of a revolutionary--as opposed to reformist--praxis of social change. This is because without such definite conclusions--which require a *certain* knowledge of social relations--we can only advance politics as an *ad hoc*, and tentative micropolitics of incremental change; we cannot have an emancipatory social politics of systemic change

(Ebert 3-44). From the position of critique-al cultural studies, in short, what is deployed through such a post-al notion of politics as "radically inconclusive" is not (as Laclau, Mouffe, and Judith Butler among other post-Marxists, believe) a new "non-dogmatic" mode of political engagement but, in actuality, a new liberal pluralist discourse of legitimation of the current exploitative social relations, relations which rely on the idea that "politics" should be constituted *not* as the terrain of conclusive (class) contestation over the existence of a system of exploitation of the many by the few, but as the space, rather, of what Richard Rorty calls (non-conclusive) "conversation": which is the zone of blurring of the antagonistic interests of the two opposed classes.

To recapitulate, what is at stake under the guise of a "democratic" post-epistemological conversationalism, is, in fact, the limits of politics and the role of intellectual practices in establishing these limits. What is at stake in a position which dispenses with the politics of "totality" as "epistemologically" unviable, is the dispersing of social phenomena into an indeterminate series of differences without any necessary "underlying" basis which could *explain* these differences as part of a global common structure of exploitation ("There is no single underlying principle fixing--and hence constituting--the whole field of differences" [*Hegemony* 111]), and which thus "fixes" politics as a local and localizing politics. In the absence of such an objective explanatory principle (which can grasp the cause of social phenomena) what are elided are the determinate connections between disparate phenomena-- connections which materialist critique establishes--in order to isolate these off and prevent them from being related to the system of exploitation. It is only on these terms that appreciative cultural studies is enabled to advance politics not as a transformative collective praxis to abolish exploitation, but, rather, as a series of local, cosmetic changes whose ultimate effect is to (re)secure the exploitative practices of the inside.

In contrast, for critique-al cultural studies there *is* an "underlying principle" which explains the disparate historical series. There *is* a historical basis for materialist critique as a practice of knowledge of the social totality. Contrary to the bankrupt "pan-insidism" of constitutive outsidists, in short, there *is* a non-constitutive "outside" which delimits the exploitative practices of the inside (totality) and constitutes an "unsurpassable objectivity" as the "foundation of revolutionary praxis and of critique as part of such a praxis" (Zavarzadeh, 98). As the Marxist theorist Mas'ud Zavarzadeh explains, this

> unsurpassable objectivity which is not open to rhetorical interpretation and constitutes the decided foundation of critique is the "outside" that Marx calls the "Working Day" (*Capital* 1: 340-416). . . . The "working day" is the site of the unfolding of [the] fundamental contradiction [between capital and labor]: it is a divided day, divided into "necessary labor"--the part in which the worker produces value equivalent to his wages--and the "other", the part of "surplus labor"--a part in which the worker works for free and produces "surplus value". The second part of the working day is the source of profit and accumulation of capital. "Surplus labor" is the OBJECTIVE FACT of capitalist relations of production: without "surplus labor" there will be no profit, and without profit there will be no

> accumulation of capital, and without accumulation of capital there will be no capitalism . . . "surplus labor" is that objective, unsurpassable "outside" that cannot be made part of the economies of the "inside" without capitalism itself being transformed into socialism (98).

For critique-al cultural studies it is just this "unsurpassable objectivity"--the "working day" as that objective zone marking the "outside" as the space of a "determinate" and ineradicable opposition between exploiter and exploited (and which is *neither* open to the "play" of the "constitutive outside", *nor* analogically subsumable under the terms of Slavoj Zizek's 'objective idealist' colonization of the "outside" as *sinthome-al*)13--which is the condition of possibility for the praxis of critique. The aim of such a praxis is to go beyond both the bourgeois sentimentality and the "democratic" neo-liberalism of the dominant knowledges in order to *explain* the cause of oppressive social practices in the objective and historically produced system of exploitation. In thus showing how these practices have come about it also indicates how they are historically transformable through the determinate action of a revolutionary collectivity for self-emancipation from a global system of oppression and exploitation of the many by the few.

Two

In abandoning materialist critique and its revolutionary theorization of the social as "unviable" in the contemporary moment, appreciative cultural studies has worked to consolidate a theoretico-political climate in which theorizations of "culture" and "difference" can be advanced in abstraction from class. The reactionary consequences of this can clearly be seen in the dominant postmodern notions of race. Through two different approaches to the issues, Anglo-American thinking on race has worked to maintain the focus on questions of racial difference in terms of the cultural and discursive while cutting these off from the structural causes and material relations underlying the cultural and the discursive (and thus reifying them). In short, at the core of the issue of "race" is the question of the *production* of racial difference and its relation to wider global structures, processes and relations. In materialist critique-al theory racial difference (like all other differences) is not "separate from" or "autonomous from" this wider global series. In contrast, in the dominant understandings it is precisely this notion of "autonomous" differences which is established. The political effect of such an "autonomist" reification of difference (as I show below) far from enabling those subjects most marginalized by racial difference is both to reduce such difference to a question of knowledge/power relations which can be "dealt with" (negotiated) on a discursive level without a fundamental change in the relations of production, and to disenable the modes of knowing (collectivity) required to bring about such a fundamental change. While current theorizations of racial difference see themselves as engaged in a progressive political project, in actuality they are "progressive" only for those who are already relatively well off within the terms of the current relations of production.

We can see one framework for advancing such a "progressive" political project within the "experiential" trend in race theory in the theory of "minority discourse" put forward by Abdul Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd in their programmatic introductory essay to the

anthology *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse.* As the contradictions and consequences of the theory of difference outlined in this essay are symptomatic of those traversing the experiential trend in general, it will be useful to use this text as a tutor text in framing the central issues at stake.

Basic to the project of minority discourse as a contestation of relations of marginalization of cultural/racial "minorities" is its understanding of minority cultures as a product of "damage"--"damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture" (4). In order to sustain such a claim then Jan Mohamed and Lloyd put forth a seemingly "materialist" understanding of the production of cultural difference as an effect of a "deeper" historical process. As they explain:

> The destruction involved [in colonialism] is manifold, bearing down on variant modes of social formation, dismantling previously functional economic systems, and deracinating whole populations at best or decimating them at worst. In time, with this material destruction, the cultural formations, languages, and diverse modes of identity of the "minoritized peoples" are irreversibly affected, if not eradicated, by the effects of their material deracination from the historically developed social and economic structures in terms of which alone they "made sense." With a certain savage consistency, this very truncation of development becomes both the mark and the legitimation of marginalization" (4).

Ostensibly, then, on these lines, what Jan Mohamed and Lloyd are saying is that cultural difference cannot be understood on its own terms: rather, it must be understood as an *effect* of the historical and material process of exploitation, a process which entailed/entails as part of its logic the production of "other" cultures as "different" and thus "legitimately" subject to marginalization. The "cultural" marking off of "minorities" in other words, is a strategy of "marking" some subjects within the capitalist system in order to better facilitate their "marginalization". On this logic, then, cultural difference as manifested through, for example, minority cultural forms and texts (and equally, of course the cultural forms and texts of the dominant culture) which maintain the "origin"ality of cultural difference, must be understood as enabling of this process of marking. That is, rather than being understood as "automatically" contestatory of the dominant, they must be *critiqued* as ultimately a part of the hegemonic logic of exploitation and its segregational cultural strategies to facilitate this exploitation.

Contrarily, however, Jan Mohamed and Lloyd maintain that what is necessary to address such a process of production of hierarchical cultural difference is not a critique of it as a naturalization of historically produced differences, but, rather, a project of affirmation of these differences. A project which would work toward a "recovery of excluded or marginalized practices. . . and articulation of alternative practices and values that are embedded in the often-damaged, -fragmentary, -hampered, or -occluded works of minorities" (8) as a means to contest the assignation of any but "a negative value to minority cultures" (2). In short, minority discourse as a project of affirmative "recovery"

of the previously excluded or marginalized would be directed toward a process of "reevaluation" of cultural representations which could work to produce the "positive" out of the "negated".

And yet, even taken on its own terms, such a project is highly contradictory. If indeed the pre-capitalist cultural formations (of which "minority cultures" are purportedly only an extension) had indeed been "irreversibly affected, if not eradicated, by the effects of their material deracination from the historically developed social and economic structures in terms of which alone they "made sense" (4), then the aim of "recovery" of these cultural practices and values, would itself be an impossible as well as a "nonsensical" task. Underlying the claim of "recovery" through a strategy of production of "affirmative" readings, in short, is an identitarian cultural claim which denies cultural difference as "produced", thus projecting such difference back into a pre-historical and "ideal" (undifferentiated) past of "pure" identities unrelated to any wider structure of economic and social practices. As Madhava Prasad argues in his philosophical elaboration of this issue, central to such a claim is a highly problematic historical proposition: namely,

> that the pre- or non-capitalist economic systems are supposed to have already been marked by a clear separation of the (politico-)economic sphere from the cultural sphere of identity. Thus the differentiation of spheres and their autonomous development (art, literature, science, humanities with their various subdivisions) which has been understood as a feature of capitalist societies. . . is here read back into pre-capitalist historical and geographical sites" (78).

In short, as Prasad 's argument establishes, underpinning the claim to "recovery" is a theory of cultural difference which relies on a reified understanding of "culture" as a sphere "ontologically" distinct from and thus autonomous from the politico-economic. Yet, as Prasad makes clear, such an understanding, far from providing a "new" or "effective" view of the historical process is itself part and parcel of a capitalist narrative of "history" as the history of "interaction" between distinct and irreducible cultures (not class and modes of production) and as such is part of the legitimating narrative of capitalist (class) exploitation.

Ultimately, by working to consolidate an identitarian understanding of cultural difference (as repressed), experiential race studies advances an understanding of race and racism as a question merely of cultural hegemony by dominant systems of meaning to which the "answer" thus becomes the clearing of greater cultural space for the excluded experiences ("voices") of the cultural margin which have been prevented from being "heard" (represented). But race and racism cannot be reduced to a question merely of cultural hegemony and the struggle against racism cannot be reduced to an "affirmative" politics of reevaluation of existing representations which is "sensitive" to the experiences and cultural practices of the marginalized. As Sue Clegg writes, a simple affirmation of the experience of those oppressed along racial lines is never enough because racism, under "capitalism. . . operates as part of the ideological underpinnings of exploitation" (94), and for this reason what is necessary is "an analysis that goes beneath [the]

experience [of oppression]" to show how oppression is "connected to the central dynamics of capitalist exploitation" (112).[14] To abandon such analysis in favor of an "affirmative" approach, in short, is ultimately to limit the struggle against racism to its "local" effects (in representation) while leaving the "central dynamics" producing racism as a *systematic* practice facilitating exploitation (not only oppression), untouched.

Of course, experientialists would undoubtedly argue that to advance such a position would be tantamount to repeating the "denial" of the experience of the oppressed and thus would merely reproduce the hegemony of Western culture (see e.g. bell hooks' argument in her *Black looks*), or, on the other hand, would fall into the "extreme" of "relegat[ing] intellectual work to perpetual adventism, an idealistic waiting for some historically inevitable precipitation of a class formation powerful enough to 'smash the system'"(Jan Mohamed and Lloyd 14). But, from a materialist perspective, both these claims are deeply problematic. As the Marxist cultural critic Donald Morton has argued, drawing on the work of Herbert Marcuse, to set the limit text of a politics of difference at a simplistic affirmation of experience is ultimately to succumb to "the utopian gesture. . . the ideological aim" of which "is to distract attention from the 'factual world of the daily struggle for existence'" (Morton 123, Marcuse 95, cited in Morton). The main purpose of such a "distraction" which substitutes the experience of exploitation for the analysis of exploitation as a global structure of material relations is, as Morton further clarifies, to *reduce* exploitation to the experience of exploitation (i.e. cultural oppression) in order to propose a cultural solution to a class contradiction. In short, at the core of such a strategy is the attempt to channel the political energies of the exploited *away* from the conditions of their exploitation and into cultural spaces where they can be more easily managed and contained. Underlying such a "non-extremist" strategy (which legitimates itself under the alibi of producing "immediate effects") is, in other words, exactly the deferral of, and diversion away from, a class agency "powerful enough to 'smash the system'".

By privileging an understanding of cultural difference in terms of "autonomous" and "primordial" cultural identities, experientialist race theory naturalizes historically produced differences and moves toward an instantiation of existing ideological divisions among the global working class, divisions which capitalism has itself produced and which are necessary to maintaining its material hegemony over this very class. But to advance such a claim is emphatically *not* to argue, as Lawrence Grossberg does in a recent essay summarizing the current state of race theory, for a cultural studies which "move[s] beyond models of oppression" and towards a model of identity in terms of a "singular becoming" which deconstructs the difference between the oppressor and oppressed as "inappropriate to contemporary relations of power [and]. . .incapable of creating alliances [between]. . .various fractions of the population in different relations to power" (88). Contrary to Grossberg, the goal of a materialist critique of experientialist race theory is *not* to provide a model of identity which is more "inclusive" of the positions on both the oppressor and the oppressed side of relations of power. Such a model, which gains currency under the alibi of creating "alliances" across material divisions (i.e. between the rulers and the ruled), is, in the end, only a tactic to produce a politicocultural arena where the materiality of these divisions is dissolved and is a strategy to dilute a radical, transformative politics (of determinate opposition) with a

bourgeois popular frontism which capitulates to the interests of the already empowered. Rather, what is at stake in the materialist position is to critique the notion that the condition of possibility for a radical politics of difference is, as Benita Parry asserts, a "conception of cultural identity in terms of one shared culture" (175), a position which (despite her protestations to the contrary) is symptomatic of a reactionary post-al indigenism which privileges cultural identity over and above the identity derived from the positioning of the subject in the relations of production, and which thus deploys a cultural and experiential commonality to erase the *class* commonality necessary for a united struggle against racist, imperialist capitalism.15

Purportedly offering a more "materialist" and "historical" theory of cultural identity is the ludic poststructuralist account of racial difference not as a pre-given "essence" but as a cultural "invention" (Hall, 'Cultural Identity..." 222). On the terms of such an account, as R. Radhakrishnan argues, while the "short-term affirmation of ethnicity" proposed by experientialist race theory might lead to "a substitution of the 'contents' of history" its ultimate effect is to "leav[e] untouched the very forms and structures in and through which historical and empirical contents are legitimated" (50). It is in opposition to such a "content"-based perspective, then, that what becomes necessary is "a critical tactic that will call into question both the economy of identity and the axiology of binarity that underwrites the nomology of identity" (63). In short, a tactic aimed at an investigation of, and problematization of, the very undergirding structures which constitute the conditions of possibility of the binary logic of identity/difference to begin with.

It is under this imperative then, that ludic race theory argues for an account of identity which would focus on identities as constituted within representation. As Stuart Hall further clarifies the basis for this shift:

> Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they
> continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the
> resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming
> rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from," so much as
> what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears
> on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted
> within, not outside, representation" ("Introduction" 4).

In other words, on the terms of this understanding, while the dominant logic of identity frames itself in terms of "history" understood in terms of a "past"ness with which identities exist in a relation of continuity and to which representations of identity exist in a relation of simple "correspondence", in actuality identities do *not* exist "prior" to their representation, but are in fact constituted within it, are in fact, *effects* rather than *causes* of the process of representation as a historical becoming: Identities, in other words, do not exist in some "ideal" realm "outside" discourse, but rather are "materially" produced by way of discursive practices. We need here, however, to look more closely at what theory of the "material" and "historical" process of "production" of cultural identities/differences underlies such a claim.

At the core of this ludic notion of cultural production (as "invention") is a Foucauldian theory of "material" production in terms of the "productivity" of discourse as an "autonomous" potential. The philosophical grounds of this theory then can be found in Foucault's claim that

> the object [of discourse] does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity: it does not preexist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations (*Archeology* 45).

And yet does not such a theory of the discursive production of objects lapse back into a very classical form of idealism which would deny the very "objectivity" of the object, by subsuming it into discursivity? In short, does not such a theory (despite its own claims) entail a transcendental recourse to a (in Judith Butler's words) "divine performative" which "not only causes but composes everything which is its object" (6); a "discursive monism whereby language effectively brings into being that which it names" (Butler 192)? And if so, does it not, far from "materializing" the logic of production of identity/difference, in fact *dematerialize* it, relegating it to an idealist problematic of discursive autonomy?

All the central presuppositions of the attempt to answer these questions in the negative can be found in Laclau and Mouffe's post-marxist defense of discursive productionism as constitutive of the very essence of an "authentically" materialist perspective on the social. As they argue in their polemic with Norman Geras, the claim that the "affirmation of the discursive character of every object...incu[rs] one of the most typical forms of idealism" ("Post-Marxism" 103) is itself based on an "elementary confusion" which establishes an "arbitrary identification" (103) between what they differentiate as the "being" of objects and their "existence" (100-112), an identification which, for them, is in fact what lies at the core of idealism. As Laclau and Mouffe explain, the thesis of discursive production of objects does not deny the pre-discursive *existence* of objects as a substratum independent of and prior to any construction: rather, what such a thesis entails is the recognition that objects are never given to us except "within discursive articulations"; that "things only have *being* within a certain discursive configuration, or 'language game,' as Wittgenstein would call it" (104). In other words, what is called for under the terms of this theory of the object is the notion that while the object may have existence "outside" of thought, it only has "meaning", is only constituted *as* object (for us), within the terms of discourse. Thus opposed to its mere existence, the "being" of the object is its "historical and changing" (102) dimension and it is this discursive dimension, moreover, which is thus at stake in the struggles over "meaning" which is the terrain of the "political."

And yet, contrary to what Laclau, Mouffe and other post-marxist discursive productionists believe, the distinction between the "being" and "existence" of the object does *not* ultimately evade the charge of idealism. Rather, it is merely a (solipsistic) move to reconstitute idealism at a higher level of abstraction, and part of the routine mystifications by way of which idealist theory wages its struggle against (Marxist)

materialism. It is part, in short, of the same tendency critiqued by Marx and Engels as constituting "[n]ot only in its answers [but] even in its questions" (*German* 34) a mystification. In contrast to what Laclau and Mouffe assert, the question of idealism versus materialism cannot be reduced to the question of the mere acknowledgment of the "pre-discursive" existence of the object and the conflation (or not), of this "existence" with its (discursive) "being". Rather, as the Marxist theorist Teresa Ebert writes, what is at stake in any theory of materialism is not merely the recognition that there *is* an extra-discursive sphere of existence of the object, but rather the question of the relation *between* the extra-discursive and the discursive (24-44). In short, the question at stake in materialism is the issue of determination between the two "levels" of reality of the object.

Thus, as Laclau and Mouffe show, whereas the notion of discursive production may distance itself from the "divine performativity" of language--insofar as it accepts the existence of the object outside of language--it nevertheless grants all "determining" power to the discursive: it acknowledges the object only insofar as it exists in discursive relations. But how then does it account for the existence of the object in the first place? By way of a conceptual detour what is eventually resorted to in this theory is a notion of the object as transcendentally "given". But if the object is a "transcendentally" given object, then we cannot account for the "material" production of the object; we can only account for the object as it is "produced" within discourse. While discursivists would of course claim here that discourse *is* material, this is really a conflation of discourse with materiality in order to avoid having to account for the material production of the object.16 In other words, what is elided in the ludic theory of production is that *before* being situated in discursive relations, the object is located in material relations of production, relations which are both historical--that is, produced by the praxis of labor-- and material--that is, conflictually structured according to the material difference between the exploited (producers) and exploiters (appropriators). The (extra-discursive) object, in short, is not a static, ahistorical and "essential" substratum which eternally exists; it is not a Feurbachian "thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same" (*German* 62). Rather, it is a historically changing site of material conflicts which determines (causes) the discursive.

By privileging the object as it exists in discursive relations and thus cutting off the question of the material production of the object(ive world), ludic discursivist theory is an attempt to foreclose upon the relations under which it is produced. By limiting "historical change" to the discursive "being" of the object, discursivism curtails historicity to the formalism of a pan-historical, abstract "temporality" of process ("becoming") which displaces the historical praxis of labor and its world-historical formative activity in producing the world for us. Discursive productionism, in short, is a (ruling)*class* theory of production which *reduces* "reality" to discourse in order to cover over and conceal the underlying (economic) relations producing the discursive. While this theory is purportedly advanced so to evade a "reductionist" view of the real in fact it is itself a discursive reductionism which excludes any possibility of understanding the causes of social phenomena, thus relegating these phenomena to the status of autonomous "effects" whose causes cannot be known.

It is only under such terms, then, that ludic race theory is enabled to theorize identities/differences not historically and materially--as effects of the global process of exploitation based on the appropriation of surplus labor (economic difference)--but as the "fortuitous" (i.e. chance) effects of the discursive and processes of signification severed from the economic. It is on this logic that ludic theorists have been able to understand "race" not in terms of a historical necessity stemming from the fundamentally exploitative relations of production but rather, as in terms of a "contingent" textuality: a ("dangerous") "trope" (Gates 5) or a linguistic "fiction" (Appiah 35), without any material basis. Understood thus, "race" is not a structure of appropriation of surplus labor but a "language game". Of course, ludic race theorists would argue that this is precisely the point. Understood in terms of language games and an account of the "matter" of subjectivity as a process of (ahistorical) self-"becoming", racial identities/differences can be rearticulated, and "reinvented", that is, can be "said" differently in ways that would contest dominant meanings of race, as Kobena Mercer, for instance, argues when he writes race as a signifier open to "the making and remaking of meanings" (430). But this is ultimately to limit race struggles to a semiotic politics of resignification of differences which does *not* fundamentally alter a system in which race is used to justify the global expropriation of the surplus labor of people of color. In short, while it may alter the meanings we can subsequently assign to race it does not work to change the structures producing racialized identities in the first place. In doing so, what it does, above all, is to render these structures--which deploy racial differences as a means to legitimate unequal access to and control over the resources of society--as reified, static, permanently fixed and beyond the reach of a transformative politics of change.

In theorizing cultural difference in terms of, variously, a primordial identitarianism (however disavowed and mediated) or a discursive inventionism, contemporary race theory works toward consolidating a (superstructuralist) understanding of race in abstraction from the historical-material difference of class. But on the terms of such an abstraction it becomes impossible to understand *why* racial hierarchies exist to begin with. Of course, race theory claims to be able to explain such hierarchy. For example, in what is ultimately a defense of the experientialist perspective E. San Juan Jr. argues, in his critique of Marxist theories of race, that the "problematic of racism transcends historical boundaries and seems to demand a prior ontological diagnosis and subsequent ethical resolution" (67). But this is merely to refer racism back onto the terms of a sociology of domination which substitutes an "ontological" will to power to explain relations of domination for a historical account of these relations; which argues, in short, that "domination" is explained by domination itself! Similarly, on the terms of the ludic account of race it is ostensibly the "axiology of binarity" as embedded in representation itself which supposedly explains hierarchical differences. But such a view eventually cannot account for the existence of the logic of binarity itself except by referring such a logic back onto the "pan-historical" operations of language: a logic which "fixes" linguistic binarity as outside of history.

It is, moreover, within these terms--the increasingly evident radical ahistoricity and anti-materialism of contemporary theories of race17--that more recent attempts to "critique from within"--and thus salvage the dominant idealist notions of racial difference

while jettisoning some of its more overtly idealist theoretical aspects--must be seen. Thus in his *Colonial Desire* Robert J.C. Young noting the critique of a "certain textualism and idealism" (165) in (post)colonial discourse analysis, proposes to materialize ludic discursivism (after of course appropriate homage to the "Holy Trinity" [163] of postcolonial studies--Said, Bhabha, and Spivak) by considering colonialism "not just as a form of fantasy but also as a form of ambivalent desire" (167). Desire-al accounts of colonialism and race have of course not been absent in (post)colonial theory, most notably in Homi Bhabha's psychoanalytic revision of Edward Said's original distinction between the "manifest" and "latent" (fantasmatic) dimensions of colonial discourse, to foreground the displacement of the "historical enunciations of colonial discourse" by "the *unconscious* scene of latent Orientalism" (*Location* 72).18 As Young is aware, however, Bhabha's foregrounding of the psychic economy of colonial discourse presupposes a psychic-social distinction which locks his account of desire into the ahistorical idealism of a representationalist/fantasy model which constitutively excludes (from view) the *social* dimensions of colonialism (the violence of capitalist exploitation as well as physicalnot only psychic and epistemicviolence). It is with this in mind that he proposes a new direction for (post)colonial race theory which would "redirec[t] our attention towards two obvious but important points that tend to get lost in today's emphasis on discursive constructionsthe role of capitalism as the determining motor of colonialism, and the material violence involved in the process of colonization" (167)by providing an ostensibly more "materialist" "social theory of desire which cuts through the problematic psychic-social opposition of orthodox psychoanalysis" (168) (and which thus evades the charge of discursive idealism).

Again, it is necessary to look more closely at Young's attempt to give idealist race theory a more "material" basis. In fact, far from doing so, Young merely enacts a local shift from the idealism of discursive materialism to the idealism of Deleuze and Guattari's desire materialism, which, as Lenin noted long ago, like all idealisms proposes to have "risen above" and "transcended [the] obsolete antithesis" of idealism/materialism while all the while "continually sliding into idealism and . . . conducting a steady and incessant struggle against materialism" (*Materialism* 354). Thus, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's "break[ing] down [of] the conventional epistemological distinction between materiality and consciousness" (168) in*Anti-Oedipus*,19 Young puts forward his theory of "colonial desire" as a material force, the "desiring-machine" producing (post)colonial reality. However, while this move is made in order purportedly to provide a social theory of desire, it does, in fact, the reverse: providing instead (despite its own claims) a *desire-al theory of the social*. In Young, as in Deleuze, what is advanced is not a "new" synthesis and trancendence of the social/psychic (or, in classical Marxist terms, base/superstructure) binary (through recourse to a monism of desire), but a theoretical *reversal* in terms of which *desire becomes the base of the social*: "the social field . . . is the historically *determined product* of desire" (*Anti-Oedipus* 29, my emphasis). On this model what ultimately "explains" colonialism, racism, colonial discourse, capitalism as well as anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, anti-racism, (post)coloniality. . . is not the historically produced and differentiated determinate material struggles over labor, but desire as an autonomous libidinal force and "agency" producing the social: in short, an ahistorical (and finally, theological) determinism of the disclosure of a *self-invented* and

hence naturalized desire which displaces labor, and, in doing so, provides a neo-Hegelian version of history not as *material* history but as "an agonistic narrative of [colonial] desire" (174) which "produces" the material.[20] Moreover, as Xiaoying Wang notes in a materialist critique of desire theory in general, the focus on desire in contemporary theory (from ludic feminism to cybertheory) is hardly incidental but is in fact "a necessary ideology for the consumer society of late capitalism" (123) which posits desire (as allegory of consumption) as the beginning and end of the social and, in doing so, underwrites a market-driven system based on the ruthless exploitation of the direct producers. In the world-historical context of the imperialist exploitation of the world working class the focus on a "productive" desire which Young, among others, advocates, is not a "progressive" "answer" to the "impasse with regard to the theoretical questions raised in the study of colonial discourse" (Young 164), so much as it is--in effect--a mode of *cyberracism* and a "new" justification for a fascist imperialism.[21]

In order to have an effective politics of difference it is necessary to account for and explain differences historically. In order to move beyond a politics which calls for an "ethical" resolution of racial differences (i.e. a change in consciousness), or which posits the "subversion" of existing meanings of race through the immanent play of signification as in and of itself "sufficient", it is necessary to advance a theory of race which can get at the root of racial differences as given by a structure of appropriation of material resources. The basis of such a theory lies not in the dominant notions of "irreducible" cultural differences which reify these as "autonomous" effects of "nature", "language," "desire," or an ahistorical matter-ism of "skin color", but in the critique of difference as an effect of historical-material divisions of labor under capitalism (the historicity of "invention") and their subsequent naturalization in culture (see Callinicos *Race and Class*). Difference, in short, is not explainable on its own terms, but "only by the system that deploys such difference" (Ebert 170). In contrast to contemporary idealist understandings of racial (as cultural) difference which aim merely to "reevaluate" or "resignify" cultural difference *as it exists*--or worse a cyberracism which underwrites capitalism--an emancipatory politics of difference works to *abolish* existing differences (which are the effects of exploitation), through transforming the capitalist system which produces them in the first place. It is only in such a transformed world-historical socialist society, which no longer organizes social life according to the reified divisions of exploitation, that a historically viable difference becomes possible: a difference based not on the unequal distribution of material and cultural resources along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, . . . (for purposes of profit), but on a system of equality of all people at all levels of social existence. Critique-al cultural studies is part of the revolutionary struggle for the emergence of this historically viable difference.

Notes

1This essay is one in a new series entitled: **TEXTS FOR TRANSFORMATION: Introductions to Critique-al Cultural Studies,** sponsored by the **RED COLLECTIVE**. The purpose of this series is to bring back into contemporary social and cultural theory fundamental concepts in historical materialist ideology critique. Moreover, this series will argue for the necessity of "the conceptual" at a historical moment when the mainstream liberal-left, in both its academic and activist modalities, has abandoned "theory" in a reactionary stance against "the rational." We argue against the irrational in all its forms-- from the "body-ism" of the libidinal-left to the "spontaneity-ism" of the popul(ar)ist-left-- which put forward (at best) a historically bankrupt act-ionism geared towards a pragmatic politics of local re-form and thus displace the need for theory as an on-going critique of ideology and hence an integral part of an international praxis of revolutionary social transformation. Our purpose is to intervene in this ruling class anti-rational ideology, which, far from opposing late global capitalism, is one of the most "new and improved" means for mystifying the structural determinants (opaque to experience) which are increasingly and systematically privatizing and commodifying the production of knowledge, culture, and basic human needs.

For more information on the **RED COLLECTIVE** see: http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2072/.

2 I draw my understanding of the concept "ludic" as referencing the "play" of the signifier, from Teresa Ebert's original theorization.

3 I partially draw my understanding of "appreciative" cultural studies from Adam Katz's theorization. See "Postmodern Cultural Studies: A Critique."

4 At any given historical moment the ratio of exploitation refers to the division of the workday into the parts of necessary and surplus labor (and is equivalent to the rate of surplus value appropriated from the worker by the capitalist, determined as s/v). See Marx, *Capital* vol. 1, 320-426. See also *Value, Price and Profit*, esp. p.50-62.

5 My distinction between these two strategies of opposition to materialist critique is made in order to highlight two emphases in contemporary social and cultural analysis, rather than to mark any ultimate disjunction between these strategies. In other words, not only do both these strategies work in the end toward identical political ends and interests but also both eventually subscribe, through different ideological routes, to an identical political populism and pan-insidist cultural descriptivism. Here is the place also to add that these issues are of course closely connected to what I have not here focused on: namely, appreciative cultural studies' foregrounding of consumption as the primary arena of "resistance" to capitalism and privileged frame of reference for understanding the social, a move which has by now almost entirely displaced issues of production from the scene of theory. For materialist discussion of the contemporary politics of consumption see Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, "Post-ality" (in *Transformation* 1, 1995: 1-75); Teresa Ebert,

"After Transnationalism and Localism: Toward a Red Feminism" (in *Against the Current*, Sept-Oct 1996, 27-31); Scott Forsyth, "Marxism, Film and Theory: From the Barricades to Postmodernism" (in *Socialist Register* 1997. Ed. Leo Panitch. London and New Jersey: Merlin Press and Humanities Press, 1997); Donald Morton, "Queerity and Ludic Sado-Masochism: Compulsory Consumption and the Emerging Post-al Queer" in *Transformation* 1; Brian Ganter, "Class Politics/Identity Politics" (forthcoming); Xiaoying Wang, "The Body That Puts the Mind on Trial".

6 Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. (New York: Routledge 1989) and Ross and Constance Penley (eds.), *Technoculture*. Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. Stuart Hall and Jacques Martin (eds.), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London and New York: Verso, 1990).

7 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: U of Californai Press, 1984) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1984).

8 For example, see respectively the anthologies *Cultural Reproduction*, edited by Chris Jenks (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) and *Cultural Studies*, edited by Grossberg et al. (Cultural Studies. New York and Routledge, 1992). Among many others, see also, Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London, Sage Publications: 1991); George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads* (London and New York: Verso, 1994).

9 See also his *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) and more recent *Media Matters* (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1994).

10 Butler's is of course the most influential (new)constructivist account of "creative" resistance as "immanent" to the workings of power. For a critique of performative "resistance" see my "`Cybermaterialism and the Invention of the Cybercultural Everyday" (in *New Literary History* 1997, 28: 543-567).

11 Wilson's work is particularly reactionary in terms of the struggle for an emancipatory materialist cultural studies insofar as it not only claims the constitutive failure of power, but, moreover, posits that every theoretical critique of the "positive" operations of power is merely an extension of its "powerfullness" insofar as it denies its propensity for expenditure and "self-destruct[ion]" (44-52). As is evident, such a view takes the category of `bourgeois theory' to new levels in its underlying move to completely invalidate power as a theoretico-political category mobilized in the interests of social change.

12 Another influential argument which launches contemporary cultural studies into a post-epistemological space from which we cannot critique but only appreciate or "cognitively map" the existing is of course Frederic Jameson's claim that any "critical distance" from which to critique capitalism has "been abolished in the new space of

postmodernism" (*Postmodernism* 48). For a recent restatement of this position see Jameson's "Culture and Finance Capital" (p.265), where Jameson's hostility to ideology critique is doubly inscribed in the claim that capitalism has now arrived at a "post-ideological" moment: thus not only is ideology critique "impossible" but now it is also not "necessary".

13 In Zizek the sinthome refers not to "the symptom" as "the coded message to be deciphered by interpretation" but to "the meaningless letter that immediately produces jouis-sense", a "stupid, material presence that escapes 'historical mediation'" (*Looking*129) and thus constitutes, according to Zizek, an "outside" to ideology/the symbolic. For an extended critique of the inscription of 'the material' as that which "resists" signification, a move which lapses back into the ahistorical matterism of 'objective idealism' see Ebert's *Ludic Feminism and After*. On objective idealism see Lenin's critique of Berkeley in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

14 For a materialist account of the emergence and changing shape of racism in the course of development of capitalism specifically as "the racism of slavery, the racism of empire, and anti-immigrant racism" (p.6) see Peter Alexander's *Racism, Resistance and Revolution*.

15 For ideologically "updated" experiential notions of racial difference--which formally claim to take into account the critique of identity--but which recuperate nevertheless an "affirmative" perspective on issues of race, see Linda Alcoff, "Philosophy and Racial Identity" (in *Radical Philosophy* No. 75, 1996. 5-13) and *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. David Lloyd and Lisa Lowe, especially the introduction (Durham and London: Duke Up, 1997).

16 Judith Butler's writings are again most relevant here for providing the most sophisticated contemporary articulation of discursive materialism, especially her *Bodies That Matter*. For a Marxist-feminist critique of Butler's "materialism" see Jennifer Cotter's review in *College Literature*, 21:3 (1994). For an extensive critique of Butler's ostensible self-distancing from the idealism of "radical linguistic constructivism" see Ebert, *Ludic Feminism and After*.

17 For cultural materialist critiques of discursivist race theory see as representative Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" (in *Critical Inquiry* 29, Winter 1994); Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World" (in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, Jan. 1992); Neil Lazarus, "Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, Nationalism, and the Problematic of Representation in Current Theories of Postcolonial Discourse" (in *Research in African Literatures*. 24:4, Winter 1993); Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992). As symptomatic of the cultural materialist turn to a "situated" identity politics which conflates "materiality" with "situationality" in order to consolidate a 'new social movement' localism, see the essays collected in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, eds. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham and London: Duke Up, 1996).

18 For a Marxist critique of Bhabha's withinist notion of the "self-deconstruction" of the colonial see my review of his *The Location of Culture* (in *College Literature* 23.1, Feb. 1996). For a discussion from the experientialist perspective on race see Benita Parry, "Signs of Our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*" (in *Third Text*, no. 28-29, Autumn/Winter, 1994). For a left-postmodern discussion see Pheng Cheah "Given Culture: Rethinking Cosmopolitical Freedom in Transnationalism" (in *boundary 2*, 24:2, 1997). Desire-alist accounts of race at the level of the "everyday" (via the importation of the psychoanalytic notion of "identification" as the "agency" of a continual desiring "self-invention" by the subject of "performance") are of course increasingly popular even on the part of cultural theorists who attempt to more explicitly distance themselves from poststructuralism, and thus maintain a semblance of credibility as " radical" and "left". See e.g. Ella Shohat' s "The Struggle Over Representation: Casting, Coalitions, and the Politics of Identification"; for a more narrativist account of performing subjectivity see May Joseph's "Performing in the Postcolony: The Plays of Mustapha Matura" both in *Late Imperial Culture*, ed. Roman de la Campa, Michael Sprinker, and Ann Kaplan (London and New York: Verso 1995).

19 Young is of course referencing here Deleuze and Guattari's critique of "the traditional logic of desire" (and particularly the representational economy of classical psychoanalysis) which posits desire as lack (*Anti-Oedipus* 25). It is against this view that they claim: "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object" and thus "If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality" (26).

20 Indeed, for all his opposition to the so-called "historicism" of Marxism in his earlier *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), Young's book resembles nothing so much as a historicism which finds an essentialized "colonial desire" "everywhere", thus naturalizing the material conflicts which actually produce the history to which he refers.

21 The "newest" of the new justifications for imperialism is of course the discourse of the "new cosmopolitanism" which begins a fresh chapter in the political diversions of the left-wing defense of imperialist capitalism. For a critique see my "Dreaming the World 'In Some Other Way': Cosmopolitanism as the New False Consciousness of Imperialism" (forthcoming).

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