

Wounded Attachments
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Source: *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Aug., 1993), pp. 390-410
Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/191795
Accessed: 09/05/2014 18:35

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WOUNDED ATTACHMENTS

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

—*Friedrich Nietzsche*
(*from* On the Genealogy of Morals)

MANY HAVE ASKED HOW, given the totalizing regulatory and "othering" characteristics of identity in/as language, identity can avoid reiterating such effects in its ostensibly emancipatory mode.[1] I want to ask a similar question but in a historically specific, cultural and political register not because the linguistic frame is unimportant but because it is insufficient for discerning the character of contemporary politicized identity's problematic investments. There are two levels to this inquiry. First, given the subjectivizing conditions of identity production in a late modern liberal, capitalist, and disciplinary-bureaucratic social order, how can reiteration of these conditions be averted in identity's purportedly emancipatory project? What kind of political recognition can identity-based claims seek—and what kind can they be counted on to want—that will not resubordinate the subject itself historically subjugated through identity categories such as "race" or "sex," especially when these categories operate within discourses of liberal essentialism and disciplinary normalization? Second, given the averred interest of politicized identity in achieving emancipatory political recognition in a posthumanist discourse, what are the *logics of pain* in subject formation within late modernity that might contain or subvert this aim? What are the particular constituents—specific to our time, yet roughly generic for a diverse spectrum of identities—of identity's desire for recognition that seem as often to breed a politics of recrimination and rancor, of culturally dispersed paralysis and suffering, a tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, to disdain freedom rather than practice it? In short, where do elements of politicized identity's investments in itself and especially in its own history

POLITICAL THEORY, Vol. 21 No. 3, August 1993 390-410
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of suffering come into conflict with the need to give up these investments in the pursuit of an emancipatory democratic project?

I approach these questions by sketching, first, the discursive context of identity politics' emergence in the United States, and then elaborating, through reconsideration of Nietzsche's genealogy of the logics of *ressentiment*, the wounded character of politicized identity's desire within this context. What this essay is not is a partisan position in the argument about the virtues and vices of a contemporary political formation called "identity politics," an argument sufficiently stalemated to suggest the limitations of discussing identity either in terms of the (implicitly timeless) metaphysical or linguistic elements of its constitution or in the moral terms of good and evil. It is, rather, an exploration of the ways in which certain troubling aspects of the specific genealogy of politicized identity are carried in its political demands, ways in which certain emancipatory aims of politicized identity are subverted not only by the constraints of the political discourses in which its operations transpire but by its own wounded attachments.

I

The tension between particularistic "I's" and a universal "we" in liberalism is sustainable as long as the constituent terms of the "I" remain unpoliticized indeed, as long as the "I" itself remains unpoliticized on one hand, and the state (as the expression of the ideal of political universality) remains unpoliticized on the other. That is, the latent conflict within liberalism between universal representation and individualism remains latent, remains unpoliticized, as long as differential powers in civil society remain naturalized and as long as the "I" is subordinated to the abstract "we" encoded in the state's guarantee of universal freedom and equality. This subordination is achieved either by the "I" abstracting from *itself* in its political representation, thus trivializing its "difference" so as to remain part of the "we" (as in homosexuals who are "just like everyone else except for whom we sleep with") or by the "I" accepting its construction as a supplement, complement, or partial outsider to the "we" (as in homosexuals who are just "a little different," a bit "queer"). The history of liberalism's management of its inherited and constructed "others" could be read as a history of variations on and vacillations between these two strategies.

The abstract character of liberal political membership and the ideologically naturalized character of liberal individualism together work against politicized identity formation in liberal regimes. A formulation of the political

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state and of citizenship that, as Marx put it in the "Jewish Question," abstracts from the substantive conditions of our lives, works to prevent recognition or articulation of differences *as* political—as effects of power—in their very construction and organization; they are at most the stuff of divergent political or economic *interests*.[2] Equally important, to the extent that political membership in the liberal state involves abstracting from one's social being, it involves abstracting not only from the contingent productions of one's life circumstances but from the *identificatory* processes constitutive of one's social construction and position. Whether read from the frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, in which the many are made one through the unity of the sovereign, or from the formulations of tolerance codified by John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and, more contemporaneously, George Kateb, in which the minimalist liberal state is cast as precisely what enables our politically unfettered individuality, we are invited to seek equal deference—equal blindness from—but not equalizing *recognition* from the state, liberalism's universal moment.[3] As Marx discerned in his critique of Hegel, the universality of the state is ideologically achieved by turning away from and thus depoliticizing, yet at the same time *presupposing* our collective particulars, not by embracing them, let alone emancipating us from them.[4] In short, "the political" in liberalism is precisely not a domain for social identification: expected to recognize our political selves in the state, we are not led to expect deep recognition there. Indeed, in a smooth and legitimate liberal order, the particularistic "I's" must remain unpoliticized, and the universalistic "we" must remain without specific content or aim, without a common good *other than* abstract universal representation or pluralism. The abstractness of the "we" is precisely what insists upon, reiterates, and even enforces the depoliticized nature of the "I." In Ernesto Laclau's formulation, "if democracy *is* possible, it is because the universal does not have any necessary body, any necessary content."[5]

Although this *détente* between universal and particular within liberalism is potted with volatile conceits, it is rather thoroughly unraveled by two features of late modernity, spurred by developments in what Marx and Foucault, respectively, reveal as liberalism's companion powers: capitalism and disciplinarity. On one side, the state loses even its guise of universality as it becomes ever more transparently invested in particular economic interests, political ends, and social formations. This occurs as it shifts from a relatively minimalist "night watchman" state to a heavily bureaucratized, managerial, fiscally complex, and highly interventionist welfare-warfare state, a transmogrification occasioned by the combined imperatives of capital and the autoproliferating characteristics of bureaucracy.[6] On the other side, a range of economic and political forces increasingly disinter the liberal

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subject from substantive nation-state identification: deterritorializing demographic flows; disintegration from within and invasion from without of family and community as (relatively) autonomous sites of social production and identification; consumer capitalism's marketing discourse in which individual (and subindividual) desires are produced, commodified, and mobilized as identities; and disciplinary productions of a fantastic array of behavior-based identities ranging from recovering alcoholic professionals to unrepentant crack mothers. These disciplinary productions work to conjure and regulate subjects through classificatory schemes, naming and normalizing social behaviors as social positions. Operating through what Foucault calls "an anatomy of detail," "disciplinary power" produces social identities (available for politicization because they are deployed for purposes of political regulation) that crosscut juridical identities based on abstract right. Thus, for example, the welfare state's production of welfare subjects—themselves subdivided through the socially regulated categories of motherhood, disability, race, age, and so forth—potentially produce political identity through these categories, produce identities *as* these categories.

In this story, the always imminent but increasingly politically manifest failure of liberal universalism to be universal—the transparent fiction of state universality—combines with the increasing individuation of social subjects through capitalist disinternments and disciplinary productions. Together, they breed the emergence of politicized identity rooted in disciplinary productions but oriented by liberal discourse toward protest against exclusion from a discursive formation of universal justice. This production, however, is not linear or even but highly contradictory: although the terms of liberalism are part of the ground of production of a politicized identity that reiterates yet exceeds these terms, liberal discourse itself also continuously recolonizes political identity *as* political interest—a conversion that recasts politicized identity's substantive and often deconstructive cultural claims and critiques as generic claims of particularism endemic to universalist political culture. Similarly, disciplinary power manages liberalism's production of politicized subjectivity by neutralizing (re-depoliticizing) identity through normalizing practices. As liberal discourse converts political identity into essentialized private interest, disciplinary power converts interest into normativized social identity manageable by regulatory regimes. Thus disciplinary power politically neutralizes entitlement claims generated by liberal individuation, whereas liberalism politically neutralizes rights claims generated by disciplinary identities.

In addition to the formations of identity that may be the complex effects of disciplinary and liberal modalities of power, I want to suggest one other historical strand relevant to the production of politicized identity, this one

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hewn more specifically to recent developments in political culture. Although sanguine to varying degrees about the phenomenon they are describing, many on the European and North American Left have argued that identity politics emerges from the demise of class politics consequent to post-Fordism or pursuant to May 1968. Without adjudicating the precise relationship between the breakup of class politics and the proliferation of other sites of political identification, I want to refigure this claim by suggesting that what we have come to call identity politics is partly dependent on the demise of a *critique* of capitalism and of bourgeois cultural and economic values. In a reading that links the new identity claims to a certain relegitimation of capitalism, identity politics concerned with race, sexuality, and gender will appear not as a supplement to class politics, not as an expansion of Left categories of oppression and emancipation, not as an enriching complexification of progressive formulations of power and persons—*all of which they also are*—but as tethered to a formulation of justice which, ironically, reinscribes a bourgeois ideal as its measure. If it is this ideal that signifies educational and vocational opportunity, upward mobility, relative protection against arbitrary violence, and reward in proportion to effort, and if it is this ideal against which many of the exclusions and privations of people of color, gays and lesbians, and women are articulated, then the political purchase of contemporary American identity politics would seem to be achieved in part *through* a certain discursive *renaturalization* of capitalism that can be said to have marked progressive discourse since the 1970s.

What this suggests is that identity politics may be partly configured by a peculiarly shaped and peculiarly disguised form of resentment—*class* resentment without class consciousness or class analysis. This resentment is displaced onto discourses of injustice other than class but, like all resentments, retains the real or imagined holdings of its reviled subject—in this case, bourgeois male privileges—as objects of desire. From this perspective, it would appear that the articulation of politicized identities through race, gender, and sexuality *require*, rather than incidentally produce, a relatively limited identification through class. They necessarily rather than incidentally abjure a critique of class power and class norms precisely because the injuries suffered by these identities are measured by bourgeois norms of social acceptance, legal protection, relative material comfort, and social independence. The problem is that when not only economic stratification but other injuries to body and psyche enacted by capitalism (alienation, commodification, exploitation, displacement, disintegration of sustaining, albeit contradictory, social forms such as families and neighborhoods) are discursively normalized and thus depoliticized, other markers of social difference may

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come to bear an inordinate weight. Absent an articulation of capitalism in the political discourse of identity, the marked identity bears all the weight of the sufferings produced by capitalism in addition to that bound to the explicitly politicized marking.

If there is one class that is politically articulated in late modern U.S. life, it is that which gives itself the name of the "middle class." This is the "class" that represents the normalization rather than the politicization of capitalism, the denial of capitalism's power effects in ordering social life, the representation of the ideal of capitalism to provide the good life for all. Poised between the rich and the poor, feeling itself to be protected from the encroachments of neither, the phantasmatic middle class signifies the natural and the good between the decadent or the corrupt, on the one side, and the aberrant or the decaying, on the other. Middle class identity is a conservative identity in the sense that it semiotically recurs to a phantasmatic past, an idyllic and uncorrupted historical moment (implicitly located around 1955) when life was good—housing was affordable, men supported families on single incomes, and drugs were confined to urban ghettos. But it is not a reactionary identity in the sense of reacting to an insurgent politicized identity from below. Rather, it embodies the ideal to which nonclass identities refer for proof of their exclusion or injury: homosexuals who lack the protection of marriage, guarantees of child custody or job security, and freedom from harassment; single women who are strained and impoverished by trying to raise children and hold paid jobs simultaneously; people of color disproportionately affected by unemployment, punishing urban housing costs, inadequate health care programs, and disproportionately subjected to unwarranted harassment and violence, figured as criminals, ignored by cab drivers. The point is not that these privations are trivial but that without recourse to a white masculine middle class ideal, politicized identities would forfeit a good deal of their claims to injury and exclusion, their claims to the political significance of their difference. If they thus require this ideal for the potency and poignancy of their political claims, we might ask to what extent a critique of capitalism is foreclosed by the current configuration of oppositional politics and not simply by the "loss of the socialist alternative" or the ostensible "triumph of liberalism" in the global order. To what extent do identity politics require a standard internal to existing society against which to pitch their claims, a standard that not only preserves capitalism from critique but sustains the invisibility and inarticulateness of class, not accidentally, but endemically? Could we have stumbled on one reason why class is invariably named but rarely theorized or developed in the multiculturalist mantra, "race, class, gender, sexuality?"

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II

The story of the emergence of contemporary identity politics could be told in many other ways—as the development of "new social antagonisms" rooted in consumer capitalism's commodification of all spheres of social life; as the relentless denaturalization of all social relations occasioned by the fabrications and border violations of postmodern technologies and cultural productions; as a form of political consciousness precipitated by the black civil rights movement in the United States.[7] I have told the story this way in order to emphasize the *discursive political context* of its emergence, its disciplinary, capitalist, and liberal parentage, and this in order to grasp politicized identity's genealogical structure as composed of and not only opposing these very modalities of political power. Indeed, if the ostensibly oppositional character of identity politics also render them something of the "illegitimate offspring" of liberal, capitalist, disciplinary discourses, their absent fathers are not, as Donna Haraway suggests, "inessential" but, rather, enthroned in the very structure of *desire* fueling identity-based political claims. (The psyche of the bastard child is hardly independent of its family of origin.)[8] And if we are interested in developing the contestatory, subversive, potentially transformative elements of identity-based political claims, we need to know the implications of the particular genealogy and production conditions of identity's desire for recognition. We need to be able to ask: given what produced it, given what shapes and suffuses it, what does politicized identity want?

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

> Is the relation of forces today still such as to allow these disinterred knowledges some kind of autonomous life? Can they be isolated by these means from every subjugating relationship? What force do they have taken in themselves? . . . Is it not perhaps the case that these fragments of genealogies are no sooner brought to light, that the particular elements of the knowledge one seeks to disinter are no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation? In fact, those unitary discourses which first disqualified and then ignored them when they made their appearance, are it seems, quite ready now to annex them, to take them back within the

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> fold of their own discourse and to invest them with everything this implies in terms of their effects of knowledge and power. And if we want to protect these only lately liberated fragments, are we not in danger of ourselves constructing, with our own hands, that unitary discourse?[9]

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

> I do not think that it is possible to say that one thing is of the order of "liberation" and another is of the order of "oppression." . . . No matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings.
>
> On the other hand, I do not think that there is anything that is functionally . . . absolutely liberating. Liberty is a *practice*. . . . The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. . . . Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because "liberty" is what must be exercised. . . . The guarantee of freedom is freedom.[10]

My quarrel here is not with Foucault's valuable insistence on freedom as a practice but with his distinct lack of attention to what might constitute, negate, or redirect the desire for freedom.[11] Notwithstanding his critique of the repressive hypothesis and postulation of the subject as an effect of power, Foucault seems to tacitly assume the givenness and resilience of the desire for freedom, a givenness that arises consequent to his implicit conflation of the will to power in resistance with a will to freedom. Thus Foucault's confidence about the possibilities of "practicing" or "exercising" liberty

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resides in a quasi-empirical concern with the relative *capacity* or space for action in the context of certain regimes of domination. But whether or not resistance is possible is a different question from what its aim is, what it is for, and especially whether or not it resubjugates the resisting subject. Foucault's rejection of psychoanalysis and his arrested reading of Nietzsche (his utter eclipse of Nietzsche's diagnosis of the culture of modernity as the triumph of "slave morality") combine to locate the problem of freedom for Foucault as one of domain and discourse rather than the problem of "will" that it is for Nietzsche. Indeed, what requires for its answer a profoundly more psychological Nietzsche than the one Foucault embraces is not a question about when or where the practice of freedom is possible but a question about *the direction* of the will to power, a will that potentially, but only potentially, animates a desire for freedom. Especially for the Nietzsche of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the modern subject does not simply cease to desire freedom, as is the case with Foucault's disciplinary subject, but much more problematically *loathes* freedom.[12] Let us now consider why.

III

Contemporary politicized identity contests the terms of liberal discourse insofar as it challenges liberalism's universal "we" as a strategic fiction of historically hegemonic groups and asserts liberalism's "I" as social—both relational and constructed by power—rather than contingent, private, or autarkic. Yet it reiterates the terms of liberal discourse insofar as it posits a sovereign and unified "I" that is disenfranchised by an exclusive "we." Indeed, I have suggested that politicized identity emerges and obtains its unifying coherence through the politicization of *exclusion* from an ostensible universal, as a protest against exclusion, a protest premised on the fiction of an inclusive/universal community, a protest that reinstalls the humanist ideal—and a specific white, middle-class, masculinist expression of this ideal—insofar as it premises itself on exclusion from it. Put the other way around, politicized identities generated out of liberal, disciplinary societies, insofar as they are premised on exclusion from a universal ideal, require that ideal, as well as their exclusion from it, for their own perpetuity as identities.[13]

Politicized identity is also potentially reiterative of regulatory, disciplinary society in its configuration of a disciplinary subject. It is both produced by and potentially accelerates the production of that aspect of disciplinary society that "ceaselessly characterizes, classifies, and specializes," that works through "surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment, and

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classification," through a social machinery "that is both immense and minute."[14] A recent example from the world of local politics makes clear politicized identity's imbrication in disciplinary power, as well as the way in which, as Foucault reminds us, disciplinary power "infiltrates" rather than replaces liberal juridical modalities.[15] Last year, the city council of my town reviewed an ordinance, devised and promulgated by a broad coalition of identity-based political groups, which aimed to ban discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of "sexual orientation, transsexuality, age, height, weight, personal appearance, physical characteristics, race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sex or gender."[16] Here is a perfect instance of the universal juridical idea of liberalism and the normalizing principle of disciplinary regimes conjoined and taken up within the discourse of politicized identity. This ordinance—variously called the "purple hair ordinance" or the "ugly ordinance" by national news media—aims to count every difference as no difference, as part of a seamless whole, but also to count every potentially subversive rejection of culturally enforced norms as themselves normal, as normalizable, and as normativizable through law. Indeed, through the definitional, procedural, and remedies section of this ordinance (e.g., "sexual orientation shall mean known or assumed homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality"), persons are reduced to observable social attributes and practices; these are defined empirically, positivistically, as if their existence were intrinsic and factual, rather than effects of discursive and institutional power; and these positivist definitions of persons as their attributes and practices are written into law, ensuring that persons describable according to them will now become regulated through them. Bentham couldn't have done it better. Indeed, here is a perfect instance of how the language of unfreedom, how articulation in language, in the context of liberal and disciplinary discourse, becomes a vehicle of subordination through individualization, normalization, and regulation, even as it strives to produce visibility and acceptance. Here, also, is a perfect instance of the way in which differences that are the effects of social power are neutralized through their articulation as attributes and their circulation through liberal administrative discourse: what do we make of a document that renders as juridical equivalents the denial of employment to an African American, an obese man, and a white middle-class youth festooned with tattoos and fuschia hair?

Want I want to consider, though, is why this strikingly unemancipatory political project emerges from a potentially more radical critique of liberal juridicial and disciplinary modalities of power. For this ordinance, I want to suggest, is not simply misguided in its complicity with the rationalizing and disciplinary elements of late modern culture nor simply naive with regard to

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the regulatory apparatus within which it operates. Rather, it is symptomatic of a feature of politicized identity's *desire* within liberal-bureaucratic regimes, its foreclosure of its own freedom, its impulse to inscribe in the law and in other political registers its historical and present pain rather than conjure an imagined future of power to make itself. To see what this symptom is a symptom of, we need to return once more to a schematic consideration of liberalism, this time in order to read it through Nietzsche's account of the complex logics of *ressentiment*.

IV

Liberalism contains from its inception a generalized incitement to what Nietzsche terms *ressentiment*, the moralizing revenge of the powerless, "the triumph of the weak as weak."[17] This incitement to ressentiment inheres in two related constitutive paradoxes of liberalism. There is a paradox between individual liberty and social egalitarianism, which produces failure turned to recrimination by the subordinated and guilt turned to resentment by the "successful." There is one between the individualism that legitimates liberalism and the cultural homogeneity required by its commitment to political universality. This latter paradox stimulates the articulation of politically significant differences, on the one hand, and the suppression of them, on the other, and offers a form of articulation that presses against the limits of universalist discourse even while that which is being articulated seeks to be harbored within—included—in the terms of universalism.

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

However, it is not only the tension between freedom and equality but the prior presumption of the self-reliant and self-made capacities of liberal

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

> For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly, an agent; still more specifically a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering—in short, some living thing upon which he can on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy. . . . This . . . constitutes the actual physiological cause of *ressentiment*, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to deaden pain by means of affects . . . to deaden, by means of a more violent emotion of any kind, a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unendurable, and to drive it out of consciousness at least for the moment: for that one requires an affect, as savage an affect as possible, and, in order to excite that, any pretext at all.[18]

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

Now, what I want to suggest is that in a culture already streaked with the pathos of ressentiment for these reasons, there are several characteristics of late modern postindustrial societies that accelerate and expand the conditions of its production. My listing is necessarily highly schematic. First, the phenomenon that William Connolly names "increased global contingency" combines with the expanding pervasiveness and complexity of domination by capital and bureaucratic state and social networks to create an unparalleled individual powerlessness over the fate and direction of one's own life, intensifying the experiences of impotence, dependence, and gratitude inherent in liberal capitalist orders and consitutive of ressentiment.[19] Second, the steady desacralization of all regions of life—what Weber called disenchantment, what Nietzsche called the death of God—would appear to add yet another reversal to Nietzsche's genealogy of ressentiment as perpetually available to "alternation of direction." In Nietzsche's account, the ascetic

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priest deployed notions of "guilt, sin, sinfulness, depravity and damnation" to "direct the ressentiment of the less severely afflicted sternly back upon themselves . . . and in this way [exploited] the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming."[20] However, the desacralizing tendencies of late modernity undermine the efficacy of this deployment and turn suffering's need for exculpation back toward a site of external agency. Third, the increased fragmentation, if not disintegration, of all forms of association until recently not organized by the commodities market—communities, churches, families—and the ubiquitousness of the classificatory, individuating schemes of disciplinary society combine to produce an utterly *unrelieved* individual, one without insulation from the inevitable failure entailed in liberalism's individualistic construction. In short, the characteristics of late modern secular society, in which individuals are buffeted and controlled by global configurations of disciplinary and capitalist power of extraordinary proportions, and are at the same time nakedly individuated, stripped of reprieve from relentless exposure and accountability for themselves, together add up to an incitement to ressentiment that might have stunned even the finest philosopher of its occasions and logics. Starkly accountable, yet dramatically impotent, the late modern liberal subject quite literally seethes with ressentiment.

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

> Identity . . . does not consist of an active component, but is a reaction to something outside; action in itself, with its inevitable self-assertive qualities, must then become something evil, since it is identified with that against which one is reacting. The will to power of slave morality must constantly reassert that which gives definition to the slave: the pain he suffers by being in the world. Hence any attempt to escape that pain will merely result in the reaffirmation of painful structures.[21]

If ressentiment's "cause" is suffering, its "creative deed" is the reworking of this pain into a negative form of action, the "imaginary revenge" of what Nietzsche terms "natures denied the true reaction, that of deeds."[22] This revenge is achieved through the imposition of suffering "on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as he does"[23] (accomplished especially through

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the production of guilt), through the establishment of suffering as the measure of social virtue, and through casting strength and good fortune ("privilege" as we say today) as self-recriminating, as its own indictment in a culture of suffering: "it is disgraceful to be fortunate, there is too much misery."[24]

But in its attempt to displace its suffering, identity structured by ressentiment at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection. This investment lies not only in its discovery of a site of blame for its hurt will, not only in its acquisition of recognition through its history of subjection (a recognition predicated on injury, now righteously revalued), but also in the satisfactions of revenge that ceaselessly reenact even as they redistribute the injuries of marginalization and subordination in a liberal discursive order that alternately denies the very possibility of these things or blames those who experience them for their own condition. Identity politics structured by ressentiment reverses without subverting this blaming structure: it does not subject to critique the sovereign subject of accountability that liberal individualism presupposes nor the economy of inclusion and exclusion that liberal universalism establishes. Thus politicized identity that presents itself as a self-affirmation now appears as the opposite, as predicated on and requiring its sustained rejection by a "hostile external world."[25]

Insofar as what Nietzsche calls slave morality produces identity in reaction to power, insofar as identity rooted in this reaction achieves its moral superiority by reproaching power and action themselves as evil, identity structured by this ethos becomes deeply invested in its own impotence, even while it seeks to assuage the pain of its powerlessness through its vengeful moralizing, through its wide distribution of suffering, through its reproach of power as such. Politicized identity, premised on exclusion and fueled by the humiliation and suffering imposed by its historically structured impotence in the context of a discourse of sovereign individuals, is as likely to seek generalized political paralysis, to feast on generalized political impotence, as it is to seek its own or collective liberation. Indeed it is more likely to punish and reproach—"punishment is what revenge calls itself; with a hypocritical lie it creates a good conscience for itself"—than to find venues of self-affirming action.[26]

But contemporary politicized identity's desire is not only shaped by the extent to which the sovereign will of the liberal subject, articulated ever more nakedly by disciplinary individuation and capitalist disinternments, is dominated by late twentieth-century configurations of political and economic powers. It is shaped as well by the contemporary problematic of history itself, by the late modern rupture of history as a narrative, history as ended because it has lost its end, a rupture that paradoxically produces an immeasurable heaviness to history. As the grim experience of reading *Discipline and Punish*

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makes clear, there is a sense in which the gravitational force of history is multiplied at precisely the moment that history's narrative coherence and objectivist foundation is refuted. As the problematic of power in history is resituated from subject positioning to subject formation, power is seen to operate spatially, infiltrationally, "microphysically" rather than only temporally; it is also seen to permeate and construct every heretofore designated "interior" space in social orders and in subjects. As the erosion of historical metanarratives takes with them both laws of history and the futurity such laws purported to assure, the presumed continuity of history is replaced with a sense of its violent, contingent, and ubiquitous *force*. History becomes that which has weight but no trajectory, mass but no coherence, force but no direction; it is war without ends or end. Thus the extent to which "dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living" is today unparalleled even as history itself disintegrates as coherent category or practice. We know ourselves to be saturated by history, we feel the extraordinary force of its determinations; we are also steeped in a discourse of its insignificance, and above all, we know that history will no longer (always already did not) act as our redeemer.

I raise the question of history because in thinking about late modern politicized identity's structuring by ressentiment, I have thus far focused on its foundation in the sufferings of a subordinated sovereign subject. But Nietzsche's account of the logic of ressentiment is also tethered to that feature of the will that is stricken by history, that rails against time itself, that cannot "will backwards," that cannot exert its power over the past—either as a specific set of events or as time itself:

> Willing liberates but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? 'It was'—that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. . . . He cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy.[27]

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

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sensibility, from crushing disappointment in the liberatory promise of his will:

> The now and the past on earth—alas, my friends, that is what *I* find most unendurable; and I should not know how to live if I were not also a seer of that which much come. A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future—and alas, also as it were, a cripple at this bridge: all this is Zarathustra.[28]

Nietzsche here discerns both the necessity and the near impossibility—the extraordinary and fragile achievement—of formulating oneself as a creator of the future and a bridge to the future in order to appease the otherwise inevitable rancor of the will against time, in order to redeem the past by lifting the weight of it, by reducing the scope of its determinations. "And how could I bear to be a man if man were not also a creator and guesser of riddles and redeemer of accidents?"[29]

Of course, Zarathustra's exceptionality in what he is willing to confront and bear, in his capacities to overcome in order to create, is Nietzsche's device for revealing us to ourselves. The ordinary will, steeped in the economy of slave morality, devises means "to get rid of his melancholy and to mock his dungeon" that reiterate the cause of the melancholy, that continually reinfect the narcissistic wound to its capaciousness inflicted by the past. "Alas," says Nietzsche, "every prisoner becomes a fool; and the imprisoned will redeems himself foolishly."[30] From this foolish redemption—foolish because it does not resolve the will's rancor but only makes a world in its image—is born the wrath of revenge:

> 'that which was' is the name of the stone [the will] cannot move. And so he moves stones out of wrath and displeasure, and he wreaks revenge on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as he does. Thus the will, the liberator, took to hurting; and on all who can suffer he wreaks revenge for his inability to go backwards. This . . . is what *revenge* is: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was.'[31]

Revenge as a "reaction," a substitute for the capacity to act, produces identity as both bound to the history that produced it and as a reproach to the present that embodies that history. The will that "took to hurting" in its own impotence against its past becomes (in the form of an identity whose very existence is due to heightened consciousness of the immovability of its "it was," its history of subordination) a will that makes not only a psychological but a political practice of revenge, a practice that reiterates the existence of an identity whose present past is one of insistently unredeemable injury. This past cannot be redeemed *unless* the identity ceases to be invested in it, and it

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cannot cease to be invested in it without giving up its identity as such, thus giving up its economy of avenging and at the same time perpetuating its hurt—"when he then stills the pain of the wound, he at the same time reinfects the wound."[32]

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

What might be entailed in transforming these investments in an effort to fashion a more radically democratic and emancipatory political culture? One avenue of exploration may lie in Nietzsche's counsel on the virtues of "forgetting," for if identity structured in part by ressentiment resubjugates itself through its investment in its own pain, through its refusal to make itself in the present, memory is the house of this activity and this refusal. Yet erased histories and historical invisibility are themselves such integral elements of the pain inscribed in most subjugated identities that the counsel of forgetting, at least in its unreconstructed Nietzschean form, seems inappropriate, if not cruel.[33] Indeed, it is also possible that we have reached a pass where we ought to part with Nietzsche, whose skills as diagnostician usually reach the limits of their political efficacy in his privileging of individual character and capacity over the transformative possibilities of collective political invention, in his remove from the refigurative possibilities of political conversation or transformative cultural practices. For if I am right about the problematic

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of pain installed at the heart of many contemporary contradictory demands for political recognition, all that such pain may long for more than revenge is the chance to be heard into a certain reprieve, recognized into self-overcoming, incited into possibilities for triumphing over, and hence losing, itself. Our challenge, then, would be to configure a radically democratic political culture that can sustain such a project in its midst without being overtaken by it, a challenge that includes guarding against abetting the steady slide of political into therapeutic discourse, even as we acknowledge the elements of suffering and healing we might be negotiating.

What if it were possible to incite a slight shift in the character of political expression and political claims common to much politicized identity? What if we sought to supplant the language of "I am"—with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, and its equation of social with moral positioning—with the language of reflexive "wanting"? What if it were possible to rehabilitate the memory of desire within identificatory processes, the moment in desire—either "to have" or "to be"—prior to its wounding and thus prior to the formation of identity at the site of the wound? What if "wanting to be" or "wanting to have" were taken up as modes of political speech that could destabilize the formulation of identity as fixed position, as entrenchment by history, and as having necessary moral entailments, even as they affirm "position" and "history" as that which makes the speaking subject intelligible and locatable, as that which contributes to a hermeneutics for adjudicating desires? If every "I am" is something of a resolution of desire into fixed and sovereign identity, then this project might involve not only learning to speak but to *read* "I am" this way, as in motion, as temporal, as not-I, as deconstructable according to a genealogy of want rather than as fixed interests or experiences. The subject understood as an effect of a (ongoing) genealogy of desire, including the social processes constitutive of, fulfilling, or frustrating desire, is in this way revealed as neither sovereign nor conclusive even as it is affirmed as an "I." In short, this partial dissolution of sovereignty into desire could be that which reopens a desire for futurity where Nietzsche saw it sealed shut by festering wounds expressed as rancor and ressentiment. "This instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed . . . incarcerated within."[34]

Such a slight shift in the character of the political discourse of identity eschews the kinds of ahistorical or utopian turns against identity politics made by a nostalgic and broken humanist Left as well as the reactionary and disingenuous assaults on politicized identity tendered by the Right. Rather than opposing or seeking to transcend identity investments, the replacement—even the complex admixture—of the language of "being" with "wanting" would seek to exploit politically a recovery of the more expansive moments

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in the genealogy of identity formation. It would seek to reopen the moment prior to its own foreclosure against its want, prior to the point at which its sovereign subjectivity is established through such foreclosure and through eternal repetition of its pain. How might democratic discourse itself be invigorated by such a shift from ontological claims to these kinds of more expressly political ones, claims which, rather than dispensing blame for an unlivable present, inhabited the necessarily agonistic theater of discursively forging an alternative future?

NOTES

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

I cite from Connolly rather than from the more obvious Derrida because Connolly is exemplary of the effort *within* political theory to think about the political problem of identity working heuristically with its linguistic operation. I cite from Connolly as well because the present essay extends a conversation began at a 1991 APSA roundtable discussion of his book. In that discussion, noting that Connolly identifies late modernity as producing certain problems for identity but does not historicize politicized identity as such, I called for such a historicization. To the degree that the present essay is my own partial response to that call, it—as the notes make clear—is indebted to Connolly's book and that public occasion of its discussion.

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

2. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., edited by R. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1974), 34.

3. John Locke, *Letter on Toleration*; John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," George Kateb, "Democratic Individuality and the Claims of Politics," *Political Theory*, August 1984.

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

5. Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity," *October* 61 (Summer 1992), 90. Laclau is here concerned not with the state but the possibility of retaining a "universal" in social movement politics where a critique of bourgeois humanist universalism has become quite central. Interestingly, Laclau's effort to preserve a universalist political ideal from this challenge entails making this ideal even more abstract, pulling it further away from any specific configuration or purpose than the distance ordinarily managed by liberal discourse.

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Interestingly, Laclau's aim in voiding the universal completely of body and content is only partly to permit it to be more completely embracing of all the particulars; it is also intended to recognize the *strategic* value of the discourse of universality, the extent to which "different groups compete to give their particular aims a temporary function of universal representation" (p. 90). But how, if universal discourse may always be revealed to have this strategic function, can it also be taken seriously as a substantive value of democracy?

6. Jürgen Habermas's *Legitimation Crisis*, translated by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1975), and James O'Connor's *Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973) remain two of the most compelling narratives of this development. Also informing this claim are Max Weber's discussion of bureaucracy and rationalization in *Economy and Society*, Sheldon Wolin's discussion of the "mega-state" in *The Presence of the Past*, as well as the researches of Claus Offe, Bob Jessop, and Fred Block.

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

8. In "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited by L. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), Donna Haraway writes that "cyborgs are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" (p. 193).

9. "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 86.

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

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

12. "This instinct for freedom forcibly made latent—this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself." *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by W. Kaufmann and P. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1969), 87.

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

14. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, translated by A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 209, 212.

15. Ibid., 206.

16. From an early draft of "An Ordinance of the City of Santa Cruz Adding Chapter 9.83 to the Santa Cruz Municipal Code Pertaining to the Prohibition of Discrimination."

17. *Identity\Difference*, 21-27.

18. *Genealogy of Morals*, 127.

19. *Identity\Difference*, 24-26.

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20. Ibid., 128.

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

22. *Genealogy of Morals*, 36.

23. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited by W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1954), 252.

24. *Genealogy of Morals*, 123, 124.

25. Ibid., 34.

26. *Zarathustra*, 252.

27. Ibid., 251.

28. Ibid., 250-51.

29. Ibid., 251.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 252.

32. *Genealogy of Morals*, 126. Nietzsche's elaboration of this moment in an economy of suffering could easily characterize the rancorous tenor of many contemporary institutions and events in which politicized identity is strongly and permissibly at play:

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

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

34. *Genealogy of Morals*, 87.

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