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Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?

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There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of 'identity', at the same moment as it has been subjected to a searching critique. How is this paradoxical development to be explained? And where does it leave us with respect to the concept? The deconstruction has been conducted within a variety of disciplinary areas, all of them, in one way or another critical of the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity. The critique of the self-sustaining subject at the centre of post-Cartesian western metaphysics has been comprehensively advanced in philosophy. The question of subjectivity and its unconscious processes of formation has been developed within the discourse of a psychoanalytically influenced feminism and cultural criticism. The endlessly performative self has been advanced in celebratory variants of postmodernism. Within the anti-essentialist critique of ethnic, racial and national conceptions of cultural identity and the 'politics of location' some adventurous theoretical conceptions have been sketched in their most grounded forms. What, then, is the need for a further debate about 'identity'? Who needs it?

There are two ways of responding to the question. The first is to observe something distinctive about the deconstructive critique to which many of these essentialist concepts have been subjected. Unlike those forms of critique which aim to supplant inadequate concepts with 'truer' ones, or which aspire to the production of positive knowledge, the deconstructive approach puts key concepts 'under erasure'. This indicates that they are no longer serviceable – 'good to think with' – in their originary and unreconstructed form. But since they have not been superseded dialectically, and there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them – albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed forms, and no longer operating within the paradigm in which they were originally generated (cf. Hall, 1995). The line which cancels them, paradoxically, permits them to go on being read. Derrida has described this approach as thinking at the limit, as thinking in the interval, a sort of double writing. 'By means of this double, and precisely stratified, dislodged and dislodging writing, we must also mark the

interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept', a concept that can no longer be and never could be, included in the previous regime' (Derrida, 1981). Identity is such a concept – operating 'under erasure' in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all.

A second kind of answer requires us to note where, in relation to what set of problems, does the *irreducibility* of the concept, identity, emerge? I think the answer here lies in its centrality to the question of agency and politics. By politics, I mean both the significance in modern forms of political movement of the signifier 'identity', its pivotal relationship to a politics of location – but also the manifest difficulties and instabilities which have characteristically affected all contemporary forms of 'identity politics'. By 'agency' I express no desire whatsoever to return to an unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centred author of social practice, or to restore an approach which 'places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness' (Foucault, 1970, p. xiv). I agree with Foucault that what we require here is 'not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice'. However, I believe that what this decentring requires – as the evolution of Foucault's work clearly shows – is not an abandonment or abolition of 'the subject' but a reconceptualization – thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm. It seems to be in the attempt to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs – or rather, if one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail, the question of *identification*.

Identification turns out to be one of the least well-understood concepts – almost as tricky as, though preferable to, 'identity' itself; and certainly no guarantee against the conceptual difficulties which have beset the latter. It is drawing meanings from both the discursive and the psychoanalytic repertoire, without being limited to either. This semantic field is too complex to unravel here, but it is useful at least to establish its relevance to the task in hand indicatively. In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end

conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total merging it suggests is, in fact, a fantasy of incorporation. (Freud always spoke of it in relation to 'consuming the other' as we shall see in a moment.) Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption. There is always 'too much' or 'too little' – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the 'play', of *différance*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.

From its psychoanalytic usage, the concept of identification inherits a rich semantic legacy. Freud calls it 'the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person' (Freud, 1921/1991) In the context of the Oedipus complex, however, it takes the parental figures as both love-objects and objects of rivalry, thereby inserting ambivalence into the very centre of the process. 'Identification is, in fact, ambivalent from the very start' (1921/1991: 134). In 'Mourning and Melancholia', it is not that which binds one to an object that exists, but that which binds one to an abandoned object-choice. It is, in the first instance, a 'moulding after the other' which compensates for the loss of the libidinal pleasures of primal narcissism. It is grounded in fantasy, in projection and idealization. Its object is as likely to be the one that is hated as the one that is adored; and as often taken back into the unconscious self as 'taking one out of oneself'. It is in relation to identification that Freud elaborated the critical distinction between 'being' and 'having' the other. 'It behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of organization of the libido, in which the object that we long for is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such' (1921/1991: 135). 'Identifications viewed as a whole', Laplanche and Pontalis (1985) note 'are in no way a coherent relational system. Demands coexist within an agency like the super-ego, for instance, which are diverse, conflicting and disorderly. Similarly, the ego-ideal is composed of identifications with cultural ideals that are not necessarily harmonious' (p. 208).

I am not suggesting that all these connotations should be imported wholesale and without translation into our thinking around 'identity', but they are cited to indicate the novel repertoires of meaning with which the term is now being inflected. The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. That is to say, directly contrary to what appears to be its settled semantic career, this concept of identity does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time. Nor – if we translate this essentializing conception to the stage of cultural identity – is it that 'collective or true

self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves” which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common’ (Hall, 1990) and which can stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging ‘oneness’ or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences. It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. We need to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively ‘settled’ character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the processes of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity (Hall, 1996) and the processes of forced and ‘free’ migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called ‘post-colonial’ world. 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. They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as ‘the changing same’ (Gilroy, 1994): not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes’. They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the ‘suturing into the story’ through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field.

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity – an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation).

Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be

constructed (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; Butler, 1993). Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected. Every identity has at its ‘margin’, an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it ‘lacks’. Laclau (1990) argues powerfully and persuasively that ‘the constitution of a social identity is an act of power’ since,

If . . . an objectivity manages to partially affirm itself it is only by repressing that which threatens it. Derrida has shown how an identity’s constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles – man/woman, etc. What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. It is the same with the black–white relationship, in which white, of course, is equivalent to ‘human being’. ‘Woman’ and ‘black’ are thus ‘marks’ (i.e. marked terms) in contrast to the unmarked terms of ‘man’ and ‘white’. (Laclau, 1990: 33)

So the ‘unities’ which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of the naturalized, overdetermined process of ‘closure’ (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1993).

If ‘identities’ can only be read against the grain – that is to say, specifically *not* as that which fixes the play of difference in a point of origin and stability, but as that which is constructed in or through *différance* and is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out, then how can we understand its meaning and how can we theorize its emergence? Avtar Brah (1992: 143), in her important article on ‘Difference, diversity and differentiation’, raises an important series of questions which these new ways of conceptualizing identity have posed:

Fanon notwithstanding, much work is yet to be undertaken on the subject of how the racialized ‘other’ is constituted in the psychic domain. How is post-colonial gendered and racialized subjectivity to be analyzed? Does the privileging of ‘sexual difference’ and early childhood in psychoanalysis limit its explanatory value in helping us to understand the psychic dimensions of social phenomena such as racism? How do the ‘symbolic order’ and the social order articulate in the formation of the subject? In other words, how is the link between social and psychic reality to be theorized? (1992: 142.)

What follows is an attempt to begin to respond to this critical but troubling set of questions.

In some recent work on this topic, I have made an appropriation of the term identity which is certainly not widely shared and may not be well understood. I use ‘identity’ to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes

which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us (see Hall, 1995). They are the result of a successful articulation or 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of the discourse, what Stephen Heath, in his path-breaking essay on 'Suture' called 'an intersection' (1981:106). 'A theory of ideology must begin not from the subject but as an account of suturing effects, the effecting of the join of the subject in structures of meaning.' Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them. The notion that an effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires, not only that the subject is 'hailed', but that the subject invests in the position, means that suturing has to be thought of as an *articulation*, rather than a one-sided process, and that in turn places *identification*, if not identities, firmly on the theoretical agenda.

The references to the term which describes the hailing of the subject by discourse – interpellation – remind us that this debate has a significant and uncompleted pre-history in the arguments sparked off by Althusser's 'Ideological state apparatuses' essay (1971). This essay introduced the notion of interpellation, and the specular structure of ideology in an attempt to circumvent the economism and reductionism of the classical Marxist theory of ideology, and to bring together within one explanatory framework both the materialist function of ideology in reproducing the social relations of production (Marxism) and (through its borrowings from Lacan) the symbolic function of ideology in the constitution of subjects. Michele Barrett, in her recent discussion of this debate, has gone a considerable way to demonstrating 'the profoundly divided and contradictory nature of the argument Althusser was beginning to make' (Barrett, 1991:96; see also Hall, 1985:102: 'The two sides of the difficult problem of ideology were fractured in that essay and, ever since, have been assigned to different poles'). Nevertheless, the ISAs essay, as it came to be known, has turned out to be a highly significant, even if not successful, moment in the debate. Jacqueline Rose, for example, has argued in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (1986), that 'the question of identity – how it is constituted and maintained – is therefore the central issue through which psychoanalysis enters the political field'.

This is one reason why Lacanian psychoanalysis came into English intellectual life, via Althusser's concept of ideology, through the two paths of feminism and the analysis of film (a fact often used to discredit all three). Feminism because the issue of how individuals recognize themselves as male or female, the demand that they do so, seems to stand in such fundamental relation to

the forms of inequality and subordination which it is feminism's objective to change. Film because its power as an ideological apparatus rests on the mechanisms of identification and sexual fantasy which we all seem to participate in, but which – outside the cinema – are for the most part only ever admitted on the couch. If ideology is effective, it is because it works at the most rudimentary levels of psychic identity and the drives. (Rose, 1986:5)

However, if we are not to fall directly from an economistic reductionism into a psychoanalytic one, we need to add that, if ideology is effective, it is because it works at *both* 'the rudimentary levels of psychic identity and the drives' *and* at the level of the discursive formation and practices which constitute the social field; and that it is in the articulation of these mutually constitutive but not identical fields that the real conceptual problems lie. The term identity – which arises precisely at the point of intersection between them – is thus the site of the difficulty. It is worth adding that we are unlikely ever to be able to square up these two constituents as equivalents – the unconscious itself acting as the bar or cut between them which makes it 'the site of a perpetual postponement or deferral of equivalence' (Hall, 1995) but which cannot, for that reason, be given up.

Heath's essay (1981) reminds us that it was Michael Pêcheux who tried to develop an account of discourse within the Althusserian perspective, and who in effect, registered the unbridgeable gap between the first and the second halves of Althusser's essay in terms of 'the heavy absence of a conceptual articulation elaborated between *ideology* and the *unconscious*, (quoted in Heath, 1981:106). Pêcheux tried 'to describe with reference to the mechanisms of the setting in position of its subjects' (Heath, 1981:101–2), using the Foucauldian notion of discursive formation as that which 'determines what can and must be said'. As Heath put Pêcheux's argument:

Individuals are constituted as subjects through the discursive formation, a process of subjection in which [drawing on Althusser's loan from Lacan concerning the specular character of the constitution of subjectivity] the individual is identified as subject to the discursive formation in a structure of misrecognition (the subject thus presented as the source of the meanings of which it is an effect). Interpellation names the mechanism of this structure of misrecognition, effectively the term of the subject in the discursive and the ideological, the point of their correspondence (1981:101–2).

Such 'correspondence', however, remained troublingly unresolved. Interpellation, though it continues to be used as a general way of describing the 'summoning into place' of the subject, was subjected to Hirst's famous critique. It depended, Hirst argued, on a recognition which, in effect, the subject would have been required to have the capacity to perform *before* it had been constituted, within discourse, as a subject. 'This something which is not a subject must already have the faculties necessary to support the recognition that will constitute it as a subject' (Hirst, 1979:65). This argument has proved very persuasive to

many of Althusser's subsequent readers, in effect bringing the whole field of investigation to an untimely halt.

The critique was certainly a formidable one, but the halting of all further inquiry at this point may turn out to have been premature. Hirst's critique was effective in showing that all the mechanisms which constituted the subject in discourse as an interpellation, (through the specular structure of misrecognition modelled on the Lacanian mirror phase), were in danger of presupposing an already constituted subject. However, since no one proposed to renounce the idea of the subject as constituted in discourse as an effect, it still remained to be shown by what mechanism which was not vulnerable to the charge of presupposition this constitution could be achieved. The problem was postponed, not resolved. Some of the difficulties, at least, seemed to arise from accepting too much at face value, and without qualification, Lacan's somewhat sensationalist proposition that *everything* constitutive of the subject not only happens through this mechanism of the resolution of the Oedipal crisis, but happens in the same moment. The 'resolution' of the Oedipal crisis, in the over-condensed language of the Lacanian hot-gospellers, was identical with, and occurred through the equivalent mechanism as, the submission to the Law of the Father, the consolidation of sexual difference, the entry into language, the formation of the unconscious as well – after Althusser – as the recruitment into the patriarchal ideologies of late capitalist western societies! The more complex notion of a subject-in-process is lost in these polemical condensations and hypothetically aligned equivalences. (Is the subject racialized, nationalized and constituted as a late-liberal entrepreneurial subject in this moment too?)

Hirst, too, seems to have assumed what Michele Barrett calls 'Althusser's Lacan'. However, as he puts it, 'the complex and hazardous process of formation of a human adult from "a small animal" does not necessarily correspond to Althusser's mechanism of ideology . . . unless the Child . . . remains in Lacan's mirror phase, or unless we fill the child's cradle with anthropological assumptions' (Hirst, 1979). His response to this is somewhat perfunctory. 'I have no quarrel with Children, and I do not wish to pronounce them blind, deaf or dumb, merely to deny that they possess the capacities of philosophical subjects, that they have the attributes of "knowing" subjects independent of their formation and training as social beings.' What is at issue here is the capacity for self-recognition. But it is an unwarrantable assumption to make, that 'recognition' is a purely cognitive let alone 'philosophical' attribute, and unlikely that it should appear in the child at one fell swoop, in a before/after fashion. The stakes here seem, unaccountably, to have been pitched very high indeed. It hardly requires us to endow the individual 'small animal' with the full philosophical apparatus to account for why it may have the capacity to 'misrecognize' itself in the look from the place of the other which is all we require to set the passage between the Imaginary and the Symbolic in motion in Lacan's terms. After all, following Freud, the basic cathexing of

the zones of bodily activity and the apparatus of sensation, pleasure and pain must be already 'in play' in however embryonic a form in order for any relation of any kind to be established with the external world. There is already a relation to a source of pleasure – the relation to the Mother in the Imaginary – so there must be already something which is capable of 'recognizing' what pleasure is. Lacan himself noted in his essay on 'The Mirror Stage' that 'The child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize his own image in a mirror.' What is more, the critique seems to be pitched in a rather binary, before/after, either/or logical form. The mirror stage is not the *beginning* of something, but the *interruption* – the loss, the lack, the division – which initiates the process that 'founds' the sexually differentiated subject (and the unconscious) and this depends not alone on the instantaneous formation of some internal cognitive capacity, but on the dislocating rupture of the look from the place of the Other. For Lacan, however, this is already a fantasy – the very image which places the child divides its identity into two. Furthermore, that moment only has meaning in relation to the supporting presence and the look of the mother who guarantees its reality for the child. Peter Osborne notes (1995) that in *The Field Of The Other* Lacan (1977) describes the 'parent holding him up before the mirror', with the child looking towards the Mother for confirmation, the child seeing her as a 'reference point . . . not his ego ideal but his ideal ego' (p. 257). This argument, Osborne suggests, 'exploits the indeterminacy inherent in the discrepancy between the temporality of Lacan's description of the child's encounter with its bodily image in the mirror as a "stage" and the punctuality of his depiction of it as a scene, the dramatic point of which is restricted to the relations between two "characters" alone: the child and its bodily image'. However, as Osborne says, either it represents a critical addition to the 'mirror stage' argument – in which case, why is it not developed? Or it introduces a different logic whose implications remain unaddressed in Lacan's subsequent work.

The notion that nothing of the subject is there until the Oedipal drama is an exaggerated reading of Lacan. The assertion that subjectivity is not fully constituted until the Oedipal crisis has been 'resolved' does not require a blank screen, *tabula rasa*, or a before/after conception of the subject, initiated by a sort of *coup de théâtre*, even if – as Hirst rightly noted – it leaves unsettled the problematic relationship between 'the individual' and the subject. (What is the individual 'small animal' that is not yet a subject?)

One could add that Lacan's is only one of the many accounts of the formation of subjectivity which takes account of unconscious psychic processes and the relation to the other, and the debate may look different now that the 'Lacanian deluge' is somewhat receding and in the absence of the early powerful impulsion in that direction which we were given by Althusser's text. In his thoughtful recent discussion of the Hegelian

origins of this concept of 'recognition' referred to above, Peter Osborne has criticized Lacan for 'the way in which the child's relation to the image is absolutized by being abstracted from the context of its relations to others (particularly, the mother)', while being made ontologically constitutive of 'the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form . . .' and considers several other variants (Kristeva, Jessica Benjamin, Laplanche) which are not so confined within the alienated mis-recognition of the Lacanian scenario. These are useful pointers beyond the impasse in which this discussion, in the wake of 'Althusser's Lacan', has left us, with the threads of the psychic and the discursive spinning loose in our hands.

Foucault, I would argue, also approaches the impasse with which Hirst's critique of Althusser leaves us, but so to speak from the opposite direction. Ruthlessly attacking 'the great myth of interiority', and driven both by his critique of humanism and the philosophy of consciousness, and by his negative reading of psychoanalysis, Foucault also undertakes a radical historicization of the category of the subject. The subject is produced 'as an effect' through and within discourse, within specific discursive formations, and has no existence, and certainly no transcendental continuity or identity from one subject position to another. In his 'archaeological' work (*Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic, The Order of Things, The Archaeology of Knowledge*), discourses construct subject positions through their rules of formation and 'modalities of enunciation'. Powerfully compelling and original as these works are, the criticism levelled against them in this respect at least seems justified. They offer a formal account of the construction of subject positions within discourse while revealing little about why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others. By neglecting to analyse how the social positions of individuals interact with the construction of certain 'empty' discursive subject positions, Foucault reinscribes an antinomy between subject positions and the individuals who occupy them. Thus his archaeology provides a critical, but one-dimensional, formal account of the subject of discourse. Discursive subject positions become *a priori* categories which individuals seem to occupy in an unproblematic fashion. (McNay, 1994: 76–7). McNay cites Brown and Cousins's key observation that Foucault tends here to elide 'subject positions of a statement with individual capacities to fill them' (Brown and Cousins, 1980: 272) – thus coming up against the very difficulty which Althusser failed to resolve, by a different route.

The critical shift in Foucault's work from an archaeological to a genealogical method does many things to render more concrete the somewhat 'empty formalism' of the earlier work, especially in the powerful ways in which power, which was missing from the more formal account of discourse, is now centrally reintroduced and the exciting possibilities opened up by Foucault's discussion of the double-sided character of subjection/subjectification (*assujettissement*). Moreover, the

centring of questions of power, and the notion that discourse itself is a regulative and regulated formation, entry into which is 'determined by and constitutive of the power relations that permeate the social realm' (McNay, 1994: 87), brings Foucault's conception of the discursive formation closer to some of the classical questions which Althusser tried to address through the concept of 'ideology' – shorn, of course, of its class reductionism, economic and truth-claiming overtones.

In the area of the theorization of the subject and identity, however, certain problems remain. One implication of the new conceptions of power elaborated in this body of work is the radical 'deconstruction' of the body, the last residue or hiding place of 'Man', and its 'reconstruction' in terms of its historical, genealogical and discursive formations. The body is constructed by, shaped and reshaped by the intersection of a series of disciplinary discursive practices. Genealogy's task, Foucault proclaims, 'is to expose the body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body' (1984: 63). While we can accept this, with its radically 'constructivist' implications (the body becomes infinitely malleable and contingent) I am not sure we can or ought to go as far as his proposition that 'Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.' This is not because the body *is* such a stable and true referent for self-understanding, but because, though this may be a 'misrecognition', it is precisely how the body has served to function as the signifier of the condensation of subjectivities in the individual and this function cannot simply be dismissed because, as Foucault effectively shows, it is not true.

Further, my own feeling is that, despite Foucault's disclaimers, his invocation of *the body* as the point of application of a variety of disciplinary practices tends to lend this theory of disciplinary regulation a sort of 'displaced or misplaced concreteness' – a residual materiality – and in this way operates discursively to 'resolve' or appear to resolve the unspecified relationship between the subject, the individual and the body. To put it crudely, it pins back together or 'sutures' those things which the theory of the discursive production of subjects, if taken to its limits, would irretrievably fracture and disperse. I think 'the body' has acquired a totemic value in post-Foucauldian work precisely because of this talismanic status. It is almost the only trace we have left in Foucault's work of a 'transcendental signifier'.

The more well-established critique, however, has to do with the problem which Foucault encounters with theorizing resistance within the theory of power he deploys in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*; the entirely self-policing conception of the subject which emerges from the disciplinary, confessional and pastoral modalities of power discussed there, and the absence of any attention to what might in any way interrupt, prevent or disturb the smooth insertion of individuals into the subject positions constructed by these discourses. The submission of the body through 'the soul' to the normalizing regimes of truth

constitutes a powerful way of rethinking the body's so-called 'materiality' (which has been productively taken up by Nikolas Rose, and the 'governmentality' school, as well as, in a different mode, by Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, 1993). But it is hard not to take Foucault's own formulation seriously, with all the difficulties it brings in its train: namely, that the subjects which are constructed in this way are 'docile bodies'. There is no theorized account of how or why bodies should not always-for-ever turn up, in place, at the right time (exactly the point from which the classical Marxist theory of ideology started to unravel, and the very difficulty which Althusser reinscribed when he normatively defined the function of ideology as 'to reproduce the social relations of production'). Furthermore, there is no theorization of the psychic mechanism or interior processes by which these automatic 'interpellations' might be produced, or – more significantly – fail or be resisted or negotiated. Powerful and productive as this work undoubtedly is, then, it remains the case that here 'Foucault steps too easily from describing disciplinary power as a *tendency* within modern forms of social control, to positing disciplinary power as a fully installed monolithic force which saturates all social relations. This leads to an overestimation of the efficacy of disciplinary power and to an impoverished understanding of the individual which cannot account for experiences that fall outside the realm of the "docile" body' (McNay, 1994: 104.)

That this became obvious to Foucault, even if it is still refused as a critique by many of his followers, is apparent from the further and distinctive shift in his work marked by the later (and incomplete) volumes of his so-called 'History of Sexuality' (*The Use of Pleasure*, 1987; *The Care of the Self*, 1988, and as far as we can gather, the unpublished – and from the point of view of the critique just passed, the critical – volume on 'The Perversions'). For here, without moving very far from his insightful work on the productive character of normative regulation (no subjects outside the Law, as Judith Butler puts it), he tacitly recognizes that it is not enough for the Law to summon, discipline, produce and regulate, but there must also be the corresponding production of a response (and thus the capacity and apparatus of subjectivity) from the side of the subject. In the critical Introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault lists what by now we would expect of his work – 'the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity in particular cultures' – but now critically adds

the practices by which individuals were led to focus attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. In short, with this genealogy, the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of desire. (1987: 5)

Foucault describes this – correctly, in our view – as 'a third shift, in order to analyze what is termed "the subject". It seemed appropriate to

look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject.' Foucault, of course, would not commit anything so vulgar as actually to deploy the term 'identity', but I think, with 'the relation to self' and the constitution and recognition of 'himself' (*sic*) *qua* subject we are approaching something of the territory which, in the terms established earlier, belongs to the problematic of 'identity'.

This is not the place to trace through the many productive insights which flow from Foucault's analysis of the truth-games, the elaboration of ethical work, of the regimes of self-regulation and self-fashioning, of the 'technologies of the self' involved in the constitution of the desiring subject. There is certainly no single switch to 'agency', to intention and volition, here (though there are, very centrally, the practices of freedom which prevent this subject from ever being simply a docile sexualized body).

But there is the *production* of self as an object in the world, the practices of self-constitution, recognition and reflection, the relation to the rule, alongside the scrupulous attention to normative regulation, and the constraints of the rules without which no 'subjectification' is produced. This is a significant advance, since it addresses for the first time in Foucault's major work the existence of some interior landscape of the subject, some interior mechanisms of assent to the rule, as well as its objectively disciplining force, which saves the account from the 'behaviourism' and objectivism which threatens certain parts of *Discipline and Punish*. Often, in this work, the ethics and practices of the self are most fully described by Foucault as an 'aesthetics of existence', a deliberate stylization of daily life; and its technologies are most effectively demonstrated in the practices of self-production, in specific modes of conduct, in what we have come from later work to recognize as a kind of *performativity*.

What I think we can see here, then, is Foucault being pushed, by the scrupulous rigour of his own thinking, through a series of conceptual shifts at different stages in his work, towards a recognition that, since the decentring of the subject is not the destruction of the subject, and since the 'centring' of discursive practice cannot work without the constitution of subjects, the theoretical work cannot be fully accomplished without complementing the account of discursive and disciplinary regulation with an account of the practices of subjective self-constitution. It has never been enough – in Marx, in Althusser, in Foucault – to elaborate a theory of how individuals are summoned into place in the discursive structures. It has always, also, required an account of how subjects are constituted; and in this work, Foucault has gone a considerable way in showing this, in reference to historically-specific discursive practices, normative self-regulation and technologies of the self. The question which remains is whether we also require to, as it were, close the gap between the two: that is to say, a theory of what the mechanisms are by

which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. In short, what remains is the requirement to think this relation of subject to discursive formations as an articulation (all articulations are properly relations of 'no necessary correspondence', i.e. founded on that contingency which 'reactivates the historical' cf. Laclau, 1990: 35).

It is therefore all the more fascinating that, when finally Foucault *does* make the move in this direction (in work which was then tragically cut short), he was prevented, of course, from going to one of the principal sources of thinking about this neglected aspect – namely, psychoanalysis; prevented from moving in that direction by his own critique of it as simply another network of disciplinary power relations. What he produces instead is a discursive *phenomenology* of the subject (drawing perhaps on earlier sources and influences whose importance for him have been somewhat underplayed) and a genealogy of the *technologies of the self*. But it is a phenomenology which is in danger of being overwhelmed by an overemphasis on intentionality – precisely because it cannot engage with the *unconscious*. For good or ill, that door was already foreclosed.

Fortunately it has not remained so. In *Gender Trouble* (1990) and more especially in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler has taken up, through her concern with 'the discursive limits of "sex"' and with the politics of feminism, the complex transactions between the subject, the body and identity, through the drawing together in one analytic framework insights drawn from a Foucauldian and a psychoanalytic perspective. Adopting the position that the subject is discursively constructed and that there is no subject before or outside the Law, Butler develops a rigorously argued case that

sex is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a 'regulatory ideal'. In this sense, then, sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces (through the repetition or iteration of a norm which is without origin) the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls . . . 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. (Butler, 1993: 1)

Materialization here is rethought as an effect of power. The view that the subject is produced in the course of its materialization is strongly grounded in a performative theory of language and the subject, but performativity is shorn of its associations with volition, choice and intentionality and (against some of the misreadings of *Gender Trouble*) re-read 'not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names

but rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler, 1993: 2).

The decisive shift, from the viewpoint of the argument being developed here, however, is 'a linking of this process of "assuming" a sex with the question of *identification*, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications' (Butler, 1993: 5). This centring of the question of identification, together with the problematic of the subject which 'assumes a sex', opens up a critical and reflexive dialogue in Butler's work between Foucault and psychoanalysis which is enormously productive. It is true that Butler does not provide an elaborate theoretical meta-argument for the way the two perspectives, or the relation between the discursive and the psychic, are 'thought' together in her text beyond a suggestive indication: 'There may be a way to subject psychoanalysis to a Foucauldian re-description even as Foucault himself refused that possibility.' At any rate

this text accepts as a point of departure Foucault's notion that regulatory power produces the subjects it controls, that power is not only imposed externally but works as the regulatory and normative means by which subjects are formed. The return to psychoanalysis, then, is guided by the question of how certain regulatory norms form a 'sexed' subject in terms that establish the indistinguishability of psychic and bodily formation. (1993: 23)

However, Butler's relevance to the argument is made all the more pertinent because it is developed in the context of the discussion of gender and sexuality, framed by feminism, and so is directly recurrent both to the questions of identity and identity politics, and to the questions which Avtar Brah's work posed earlier about the paradigmatic function of sexual difference in relation to other axes of exclusion. Here Butler makes a powerful case that all identities operate through exclusion, through the discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalized subjects, apparently outside the field of the symbolic, the representable – 'the production of an "outside", a domain of intelligible effects' (1993: 22) – which then returns to trouble and unsettle the foreclosures which we prematurely call 'identities'. She deploys this argument with effect in relation to the sexualizing and the racializing of the subject – an argument which requires to be developed if the constitution of subjects in and through the normalizing regulatory effects of racial discourse is to acquire the theoretical development hitherto reserved for gender and sexuality (though, of course, her most well-worked example is in relation to the production of these forms of sexual abjection and lived unintelligibility usually 'normalized' as pathological or perverse).

As James Souter (1995) has pointed out, 'Butler's internal critique of feminist identity politics and its foundationalist premises questions the adequacy of a representational politics whose basis is the presumed universality and unity of its subject – a seamless category of women.'

Paradoxically, as in all other identities treated politically in a foundational manner, this identity 'is based on excluding "different" women . . . and by normatively prioritizing heterosexual relations as the basis for feminist politics'. This 'unity', Souter argues, is a 'fictive unity', 'produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought'. Significantly, however, as Souter also argues, this does *not* lead Butler to argue that all notions of identity should therefore be abandoned because they are theoretically flawed. Indeed, she takes the specular structure of identification as a critical part of her argument. But she acknowledges that such an argument *does* suggest 'the necessary limits of identity politics'.

In this sense, identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are the sedimentation of the 'we' in the constitution of any I, the structuring present of alterity in the very formulation of the I. Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshalled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give way. (1993: 105)

The effort, now, to think the question of the distinctiveness of the logic within which the racialized and ethnicized body is constituted discursively, through the regulatory normative ideal of a 'compulsive Eurocentrism' (for want of a different word), cannot be simply grafted on to the arguments briefly sketched above. But they have received an enormous and original impetus from this tangled and unconcluded argument, which demonstrates beyond the shadow of a doubt that the question, and the theorization, of identity is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the 'impossibility' of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged.

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