Modernity, Racism and Subjectivity

Anthony Moran BA (Hons)

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Understanding Racism:

an Introduction

Racism, understood as the form of ideology and the set of social practices based on explicit or implicit notions of biologically determined human 'races', is a modern phenomenon. Other major forms of social cleavage together with the ideologies which contribute to and support them, such as those which relate to class and gender, have had a complex relationship with racism.\(^1\) Nevertheless racism needs to be distinguished analytically from each of these, and given its due as a relatively autonomous system. Viewed from the perspective of the systematic patterning of social life, it has institutional backing and support. In the modern West especially, it has organised, and it continues to help organise, significant areas of the social domain. It has a history, which includes the history of ideas and of representations of the Other, and it is closely tied to economic production and its relations. Though it may be that racism is generated primarily at the social and economic levels, it is experienced psychologically, and psychology plays a role in its reproduction.\(^2\) Racism, then, needs to be examined not only in terms of its social structural features, but at the same time in terms of the involvement of subjectivity in its processes.

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\(^1\) For a compelling account of the way that an early fascist form of racism was tied to the assertion of masculinity and the fear of, and fleeing from femininity, see Klaus Theweleit (1987) *Male Fantasies*, Polity Press, Cambridge. On the relationship between race and class see the work of the authors gathered around the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Of these works, attention should be drawn particularly to CCCS (1982), *The Empire Strikes Back*, Hutchinson, London, Chs. 1, 2, and 8, and Paul Gilroy (1987), *There Ain't No Black In the Union Jack*, Hutchinson, London, Chs. 1 and 2.

Many sociological and political accounts of racism make use of historical material to trace the development of false beliefs about different races, pointing to their sources in scientific and other intellectual productions, and linking both their invention, and their hold over individuals and communities, to purported rational interests. In the cruder forms of such an account, racism becomes little more than a convenient excuse for the pursuit of economic gain. More sophisticated explanations point to the interest that people have in identity issues. Often, however, this latter approach relies ultimately upon a similar economic model. Economic interest is merely replaced by an interest in social prestige, in preserving or enhancing the sense of self and group esteem. There is a hint of a more complex psychology at work in the latter, but it is rarely developed beyond a very rudimentary stage.

For example,

... racial consciousness is still most fruitfully analysed in relation to the organisation of advantage rather than the structure of personality. Thus, racism continues to be a defence of racial privilege, not a psychological abnormality or the product of psychological manipulation. And the racial consciousness of European Americans is still profitably interpreted as culturally acceptable responses to struggles over scarce resources, not ill will or the deviant expressions of intolerant, unsocialized bigots. Put differently, racial consciousness still needs to be located at the sociological intersection between structural and cultural constructions.


Ibid, p. 221. Wellman argues that both economic and status interests can be defended through racism. He argues that we should remove the emphasis upon affects like hate when trying to understand and explain racism. This is related to his claim that we should think of racism in terms of its consequences rather than in terms of the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of racists. He argues that:
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What is usually lacking in approaches which trace the history of ideas, or those which explain racism in terms of the pursuit of economic or status interest, is either a recognition of or an attempt to account for the highly charged nature of racist belief. What gives to racism its psychological intensity? While one should never fail to consider the impact of material gains in understanding the virulence of racism, this is clearly not the whole story. In this thesis I will argue that the question of identity is central to a complete understanding of racism. However, the complex nature of identity formation and transformation, and its connection with racism, requires a model of understanding that goes beyond the economic model of prestige allocation. Moreover, one needs to recognise that the 'lust for identity' is felt differently in different societies and at different times in history. One needs to explain both the social and the psychological underpinnings of racism. In order to do so one needs to give an account of the broad sociocultural conditions that are associated with racism, and address the question of the place of the emotions in racial thinking. One also needs to explain how ideologies of race work to 'fabricate' race and racist subjects.

The recent work of the English sociologist Robert Miles serves as a useful introduction to the sort of framework that I am suggesting here. In his book Racism he makes a considerable attempt to break out of the restrictive economic reductionism that has plagued other, particularly Marxist, theories, and to view racism in its specificity, or, to put it another way, in terms

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of its relative autonomy within a complex social formation. He conceives of racism as a form of ideology which is directly implicated in the ongoing dialectic of Self and Other, which he sees as central to intergroup relations throughout history. He is concerned then with issues of identity as these pertain to racist social relations. He suggests that as an ideology racism has very real material effects. He sees ideology as a form of continuous social production in which subjects are actively involved but at the same time re-constitute themselves as subjects in relations of Self and Other. He defines ideologies as

the accumulated, taken-for-granted, and often contradictory set of assumptions and beliefs that are employed by people to impose an ideological structure upon the social world, within which they can then act (p. 70).

The principle concepts in this understanding of ideology are *representation* and *signification*. Representations are those concepts, images, and associations, which cohere into some sort of symbolic framework which orient subjects' relations with the world, including the world of others, and which orient actions. Signification is

the representational process by which meanings are attributed to particular objects, features and processes, in such a way that the latter are given special significance, and carry or are embodied with a set of additional, second-order features . . . [It is] the process of depicting the social world and social processes, of creating a sense of how things 'really are' (p. 70).

It is therefore a creative, transformative process which involves production, invention, selection and combination. It is also, inevitably, a site of contestation and domination, where certain images and meanings come to capture the hearts and minds of subjects, who are then guided in their actions. These ideologies

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gain institutional effect. They are represented in socioeconomic relations, but they are not merely ad hoc rationalisations for already existing relations of domination. They feed into and shape the very formation of those relations which they legitimise (p. 101). As Miles points out, one must recognise that the images that Europeans had of colonial others were central to the actual transformations of economic and social relations brought about in colonised areas. This sort of approach has the virtue of directing us toward the examination of the intricate relations between the different levels of the social formation and ideologies of race.

Miles argues that representations of the Other are always at the same time representations of the self. They emerge out of whole historical situations—historical events, systems of belief and thought, political processes, class relations, all play their part in the formation of these representations. Paradigms of thought like Christianity and modern science rise and fall; they are like prisms through which the Other is viewed, and give to these representations their own peculiar colouring. For example, in Europe there had been a long history of representation of the ‘wild man’ counterposed to the ‘civilised’ European, but through the prism of Christianity, because of its own ideal of sensual repression, this wild man came to represent aggressive and untamed sexuality and, in female form, the seductress of ordinary men (p. 17). In turn the ‘wild man’ already imbued with wild sexuality and evil, during the process of colonisation of dark skinned people, came to represent the latter in the eyes of Christian colonisers (p. 20). This is understood in terms of preconceived images and ideas brought into a contact that was inherently exploitative, and based around the need to abstract cheap labor from colonised people. In this sense economic need acted as a powerful stimulating agent in the transformation of representations of the other; but it is not strictly determining. In

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Miles’ view the history of the transformation of representations is relatively autonomous (p. 26).

In the latter part of the eighteenth century with the rise of modern science, the secularisation of great swathes of social life, and the subsequent decline of Christian influence, the representations of the Other were taken on and transformed through the prism of science. The famous idea of the Great Chain of Being which under Christianity tended to set all human beings on the same level as creations of God, was transformed under the influence of modern science into a hierarchy of biologically defined and fixed races, providing the ground for the emergence of racism in the nineteenth century (pp. 31–5). Miles thus points to the difference between racism and earlier forms of inter-group conflicts and forms of domination. Racism has a specific view of the Other quite different to earlier conceptions. Where the dominant view of the eighteenth century had been that the differences between peoples were culturally determined and the result of environmental impact, science made ‘race’ a fixed biological entity. Such a view of Others could emerge and become dominant, only when science had largely replaced religion as the dominant belief system, and social life had become increasingly secularised. Importantly, this biological view of race had an impact on the development of new, specifically modern forms of exclusionary and other social practices.

An important feature then, of Miles’ whole approach is his emphasis upon the ideational and representational basis of racism, and of how these ‘representations’ inform and shape images of self and other, which are associated with the formation of group identities. There are, however, limitations to Miles’ approach. Firstly, he has not developed an adequate theory of subjectivity. What is required is a view which recognises that the subject is neither fully rational in its approach to others and to the world, nor unitary. On the contrary human subjects are perpetually under the sway of passions and unconscious fantasies. These are crucial to the way that subjects relate to other subjects. In the case of racism, one
must give some account of the place that fantasies of race have in relations between the ‘races’ and in racist ideologies. Miles refers us to these but has no real way of thinking them through. Related to this one must give an adequate account of the way that the affectual life of subjects is involved in the establishment, maintenance and transformation of race positions. Again Miles can indicate that there are emotional forces involved, but he gives no account of them. In the second place, Miles does not investigate the reasons why a notion like race became such a central and powerful form through which group identities were formulated and views of the Other organised. The paradigm of science emerged, became powerful and reorganised earlier images and discourses of the Other along the lines of fixed race categories, and these fed down into everyday, commonsense understandings. But what was so attractive about the idea of race?

As with all forms of ideology, in racism important relatively unified systems of ideas interweave with potent affects to powerfully shape human action.\(^8\) When studying racism and its history one cannot avoid being impressed by the fact that major systems of thought fed into and significantly shaped this most virulent of ideologies. One cannot deny for example the central importance for racism of the development of the aesthetics of the human form, of phrenology and physiognomy, of anthropology and biology, the idea of the Great Chain of Being, of biblical exegesis, of systems of religious thought, social Darwinism, the emergence of eugenics as a ‘science’ and as an influential social movement, and modern science and the scientific gaze more generally.\(^9\) The ideology of racism made use of these and many other apparently unrelated systems of


thought in the pursuit of its programs. But equally one is impressed by the sheer depth of feeling that motivates racism. One is left wondering to what degree the affectual basis of racism itself contributed to the very development of racist theories and ideas. Though it is never theoretically explained in psychological terms, one gets a sense of the intense emotional need which stood behind the development of racism in the late nineteenth century, through a reading of George Mosse’s *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism.* In this work, Mosse traces the development of racism as an ideological system. He provides us with a history of ideas, but one which perceives a deep underlying reservoir of feeling which fuelled that history, and gave to racism’s chief theoreticians and protagonists a fierce urgency, a do-or-die mentality. He refers to the age of rapid change and anxiety where the search for a foothold, for some kind of permanency, found its temporary answer in the stability of races (p. 32). He reminds us that not only was there a rational science of race, but perhaps more importantly there developed a racial mysticism, especially in nineteenth century Europe. The latter seemed to fulfil a deep longing for national community, for a lasting and genuine unity of people. This had important implications for the development of racism, as the mystics of race in contrast to the scientists of race were in the grip of delusion, where rational structures of thought had no purchase (p. 94).

Mosse understands the history of racism in Europe as an interplay between idea systems and politico-social and economic conditions. He traces the emergence of racial ideas, spurred on in part by long held and intensifying prejudices, and shows them to be more or less potent guides to action and social practices, depending upon the balance of forces or the prevailing climate. In his view racism was a voracious ideological system that managed to swallow other belief systems and refashion them according to its own needs; and therein lay its lasting strength. Thus science was used by racism

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10 Mosse, op.cit. Page numbers in brackets in the text refer to this work.
to support its ends, but racism itself would not be held hostage to the rigours of scientific proofs. If these got in the way, as they often did when coming up against the protagonists of mystical racism, they could be summarily dismissed (p. 86). Similarly, racism was able to use a whole range of other spheres of knowledge, like aesthetics, anthropology, and pseudo-sciences like physiognomy and phrenology, to prove claims of inherent superiority and, later, superior health of particular ‘races’ over others.

The history of ideas helps to characterise racism and traces historically its line of development, but we need to look to other factors in order to explain its ability to catch the hearts and minds of populations. Central to the development of racism, Mosse argues, was the devastating impact of war and revolution, the continuing destabilizations brought about by modernity, and an increasingly important nationalism. It was these that gave to racism its emotional base, and reinvigorated it at a time when it might have faded into the background of European consciousness. It seems ironic at first that communitarianism could provide the basis for a virulent form of racism, but Mosse shows through a discussion of the thought and writings of prominent European socialists, like Proudhon in France, that the quest for a community into which individuals could enter freely and feel committed to—a direct outcome of the shift to modernity—required something more binding and lasting than consciously embraced ‘affinities’ between individuals; it called for an idea of race tied to historical roots usually centred around nationalism (p. 154).

As for war and revolution, the impact of the first world war in particular was felt in terms of transforming a scientific racism, confined to intellectual and high cultural circles, into a far more virulent and dangerous race mysticism (pp. 188–9). The importance of relative political and social stability as protective against rampant racism can be seen, Mosse argues, through the different development of events in France and Germany. Though France had strong traditions of antisemitism and racism
before the war which continued after it, there was no real breakthrough of racism there because:

. . . France never experienced the cycle of defeat, revolution, counter-revolution, and inflation that was instrumental in transforming racial theory into practice in Germany (p. 193).

Despite political turbulence and unstable government, France maintained a basic social stability that Germany never attained (p. 196).

In discussing these two authors I have introduced the central issues within the study of racism that will be addressed in this thesis. I will argue for example that a direct engagement with the debates surrounding the concept and character of modernity is necessary in order to understand racism. The critique of modernity will be examined only insofar as it can help us to understand the emergence and continuing power of racisms of various kinds. The development of this critique is a response to both earlier theories and to historical developments. Modernisation theories, for example, had argued that as modernity spread categories like race or ethnicity would become largely irrelevant. Obviously, as the twentieth century has shown quite dramatically, this has not occurred. In an attempt to come to grips with what had happened, a persistent theme began to emerge: rather than understanding racism as an anti-modernist reaction to modernity, or as a failure of modernity to take hold in some areas of social life, it was argued that something about the processes involved in modernity itself might be largely responsible for phenomena like racism. This was an overturning of the notion of a history that moved progressively forward from barbarism to civilised life. Racism would not be seen as a lapse into barbarism but somehow

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embroiled in the whole civilising process itself. I propose to take up this rather extreme critique in a critical way, highlighting its strengths and its limitations for an explanation of racism.

In chapter one, through a critical analysis of several of Zygmunt Bauman's writings on modernity, I will suggest what I consider to be the most promising lines of inquiry into the relationship between modernity and racism. I will suggest that a concern with the nature of identity formation is central to the explanation of racism's emotional sources and its continual hold over individuals and communities. In order to examine the nature, sources and functioning of racist subjectivity, I will examine, in chapter two, several examples of the attempt to use psychoanalysis to understand the subjective processes involved in racism. These accounts, I will suggest, shed considerable light on the often neglected affective and sexual components of racism. In the course of the discussion I will argue that a theory of ideology must be linked to an understanding of the formation and reproduction of racist subjectivity. Such an approach, I will argue, is necessary in order to understand the central links between modernity, identity and racism.

12See for example Richard L. Rubenstein (1975), The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future, Harper and Row, New York. Rubenstein discusses the connections between rationalisation and disenchantment (in Max Weber's sense), the rise of racism and the process of genocide, drawing parallels between modern American society and the processes involved in the production of the Holocaust. See also Alan Rosenberg "The Philosophical Implications of the Holocaust" in Randolph L. Braham (1983), Perspectives on the Holocaust, Kluwer Nijhoff Publishing, Boston. He argues that science and technology which are central to the processes of modernity, were implicated in the Holocaust. Moreover, he argues that scientific discourse was crucial to the development of racist theories, and to the acceptance of racist ideology by the people, and therefore was a powerful motivating cause for genocide (p. 10). This he argues should lead us to question the whole ethos of the Enlightenment (p. 12).
Chapter One: Racism and the Critique of Modernity

Modernity is mastery; a mode of being shot through with hope, ambition and confidence—a behavioural-attitudinal complex correlated with what Francois Lyotard described as the Cartesian determination ‘to graft finality upon a time-series ordered by subordination and appropriation of ‘nature’.13

—Zygmunt Bauman

Recent studies of racism have reached something of a consensus on the fact that there is an important relationship between racism and modernity, or at the very least between modern ideas and racism. For many commentators racism is a thoroughly modern phenomenon, drawing as it does upon modes of thought and forms of technology characteristic of post-Enlightenment societies. But there are distinctly different ways that the connection between racism and modernity has been viewed. On the one hand there are accounts which attempt to theorise racism as a pathological form developing within modernity, counterposing this with the more emancipatory modes through which modernity can be experienced and lived. Such authors seek to show how modernity can lead to racism but that it does not necessarily have to do so.14 This could be

14Detlev Peukert seems to suggest this view of the connection between racism and modernity. In the concluding remarks to his study of everyday life under Nazism, he writes:

[The view that [National Socialism] was one of the pathological developmental forms of modernity does not imply that barbarism is the inevitable logical outcome of modernisation. The point, rather, is that we should not analyse away the tensions between progressive and aberrant features by making the glib opposition
termed the more optimistic view of modernity, a view which seeks to relate the ideals of the Enlightenment to the ongoing struggles of the present. Peter Gay at the end of his magisterial two volume history of the Enlightenment, after taking stock of the horrors of the twentieth century, the flight into irrationalism, the apparently intractable divisions of race, class and nationalism, and of boredom and despair in the midst of material abundance in the West, states this position eloquently when he seeks to defend the spirit of the Enlightenment and its ideals:

It remains as true today as it was in the eighteenth century: the world needs more light than it has, not less; the cure for the shortcomings of enlightened thought lies not in obscurantism but in further enlightenment. Our recognition of human irrationality, self-centeredness, stupidity beyond the philosophes' most pessimistic appraisals demands not surrender to such forces, but battle against them.\(^{15}\)

At the other extreme there are those authors who seek to normalise racism within the whole movement of modernity, pointing to the intricate links between the thought processes and technologies that have emerged with modernity, and theories of race, the phenomenon of racism, and ultimately the genocidal

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between modernity and tradition: we should call attention to the rifts and danger-zones which result from the modern civilising process itself, so that the opportunities for human emancipation which it simultaneously creates can be more thoroughly charted.

Peukert suggests that modernity is a complex phenomenon which produces its own forms of pathology. We should not claim for example, that racial antagonisms are simply the result of traditional forms reasserting themselves. Nevertheless, we should not demonise modernity itself, but highlight more clearly, as he says, its rifts and danger zones as well as its emancipatory potentiality. See Detlev JK Peukert (1987), *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, BT Batsford, London, p. 249.

project. A good recent example of this perspective is David Theo Goldberg's *Racist Culture*. Through a close reading of key Enlightenment figures he argues that the ideals and claims about equality and reason of the Enlightenment always, and inherently, involved a process of exclusion—some sections of humanity were deemed irrational or less rational than their, usually white European, counterparts, and so not as deserving of equal treatment. From the discourse of equality there emerged a discourse of races. The overconfident universalistic outlook of the Enlightenment was itself crucial to the expansionary aims of the West and therefore for the whole colonial racist project. But in Goldberg's view the relationship is even more deep and direct. Conceiving of both modernity and racism as forms of what Foucault termed discursive formations, Goldberg argues that they share a common set of 'preconceptual elements', which form their shared deep generative structure

... the preconceptual elements or primitives of racialized discourse and of the conditions, implications, and practices that they inform are embedded in social discourses central to and legitimised by practices and relations constitutive of modernity (p. 49).

These include

... classification, order, value, and hierarchy; differentiation and identity, discrimination and identification; exclusion, domination, subjection, and subjugation; as well as entitlement and restriction (p. 49).

The process of the entwinement of modernity and racism has intensified, Goldberg argues, as each has come to influence, define and shape the other:

Racialized discourse... emerged only with the displacement of the premodern discursive order and the

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16 David Theo Goldberg, op.cit. See especially Chs. 2 and 3. Page numbers in brackets in the text refer to this work.
accompanying epistemic transformations. It developed and matured with the social and intellectual formation of modernity. Indeed, it increasingly came to give definition to the sociocultural order of modernity, furnishing in large measure a central strand of the novel means of tying people, power, and history together (p. 45).

Importantly, what stands behind these more optimistic and more pessimistic views of the Enlightenment and of modernity, is a fundamental dispute over what defines the character of modernity. From the viewpoint of the pessimists modernity is signified by domination. From the viewpoint of the optimists, modernity marks a high point in the history of the possibility of human freedom. Involved in this debate are basic philosophical disputes and differing historical analyses.

In this chapter I will focus primarily upon the work of Zygmunt Bauman who, I will argue, has developed a very subtle analysis of modernity and, especially in his book *Modernity and the Holocaust*, of the relationship between modernity and the phenomenon of racism. In a number of works he has built up a powerful account of the period of modernity, and of its partner/successor post-modernity. In characterising the key features of modernity, Bauman makes a vigorous case for seeing racism as a thoroughly modern phenomenon, distinct from earlier forms of heterophobia, contestant enmity or prejudice, and distinguished from each of these by the modernity of its urges and strategies.

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17 Zygmunt Bauman (1987), *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals*, Polity Press, Cambridge. Here, for example, Bauman argues that post-modernity has not necessarily replaced modernity, and that in many instances they exist side-by-side. Moreover he points out that the post-modern tendency already existed in the period of the emergence of modernity itself (p. 3).
On the General Character of Modernity

Bauman sees modernity as a certain attitudinal complex that emerged and became dominant in the Northern part of Europe from about the seventeenth century onward. Modernity is, he argues, not the world itself, but a historically particular perception of the world which, because of its confidence and universalising tendency, cast the rest of the world as relative to it:

It had been the decisive feature of modernity so understood that it relativised its (past and contemporary) adversaries and thereby constituted relativity itself as an adversary; as a spoke in the wheel of progress, a demon to be exorcised, a sickness to be cured.18

The central image which captures for Bauman the essence of the world envisaged by modernity is that of the well-kept, orderly garden. In his view modernity is a process in which all that does not fit into an orderly pattern is constructed as wild and is treated as such. The fences of reason and order were erected, beyond them lay the wilderness. But more than that, any obstacle to modernity's gardening quest within the fences would be considered as wilderness too.19 According to Bauman the movement to modernity was one in which humans came to have increasing faith in their own abilities to consciously order society and nature. If premodern times were presided over by 'gamekeepers' with few gardening ambitions, who had little faith in their ability to transform or modify their environment, but who rather supervised a 'wild culture',20 modern times have been presided over by legislators or gardeners who have an overwhelming faith in their capacity and ability to shape and refashion the social and natural environment—a belief and a

19 Zygmunt Bauman, Legislators and Interpreters, p. 51.
20 Ibid p. 52.
stance, a form of hubris which, in Bauman’s view, has had at the best ambivalent and at the worst disastrous results. To maintain an orderly garden one must control weeds, but weeds themselves are a product of the gardening quest. Extending this metaphor Bauman sees ‘races’ as the product of a gardening culture; they are just like weeds which must be controlled or removed. Thus the modern attitudinal complex expresses itself primarily through that mode of thought called instrumental reason and the modes of action appropriate to it. The same mode of operation is reflected in the control and domination of both nature and society, each treated as a manipulable object to be transformed at will.

Bauman is ambivalent about modernity. A certain scepticism can be detected in his general neglect of its emancipatory potential, and in the apparent relief with which he waves goodbye to its philosophical outlook and aims, and embraces, again with noted ambivalence, the hope entailed by the advent of the postmodern condition. He attempts to capture the Janus faced nature of modernity. He is particularly concerned to pinpoint those elements and tensions within the modern project that have steered humanity along disastrous paths. He points to what might be regarded as modernity’s incorrigible genocidal impulse, tied directly to its aim to

21 Thus in Modernity and the Holocaust Bauman warns us away from claiming that the Holocaust is the ‘truth’ of modernity, or its natural or normal tendency (p. 6), yet he seems to suggest this very normality when he argues that the Holocaust was normal

in the sense of being fully in keeping with everything we know about our civilisation, its guiding spirit, its priorities, its immanent vision of the world—and of the proper ways to pursue human happiness together with a perfect society.


22 See especially Zygmunt Bauman, Intimations of Postmodernity, passim.

23 On the genocidal impulse he writes:
establish the perfect society, and to its shaky embrace of certainty in the face of an uncertainty and ambivalence which it, in part, has brought about, exacerbated, and intensified. From one angle this might lead to a stark pessimism with regard to the liberatory hopes of modernity. From a slightly different angle one might take Bauman’s claim as a warning, and a call for eternal vigilance with regard to certain strains within modernity. I think we can sense in Bauman’s work the attempt to steer a path between the more optimistic and pessimistic views of modernity mentioned at the start of this paper.

Racism, within Bauman’s framework, is viewed not as a pathology of modernity but as one of its possible outcomes, or even in stronger terms, as one of its logical lines of development. His claim is that we can only come to a full understanding of racism if we can understand the whole character, ethos and tendency of modernity. Thus in his recent *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* he argues for a link between the modern form of anxiety about death, the modern obsession with hygiene, and racism. The modern view of death is directly related to the modern effort to master nature and social life through human reason. He argues that premodernity and modernity have different responses to death. Premodernity had a tame view of death, while modernity constructs it as wild, and like everything else wild, modernity seeks to contain or eradicate it. This in turn gives rise to the modern obsession with hygiene, a surrogate, Bauman argues, for the impossible dream of conquering death itself. It follows that racism is a direct outcome of these things.²⁴ Racist discourse is shot through with

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²⁴He writes, in Ibid, p. 155, that

One can understand racial discourse and racist politics of the modern era... as a case of the more general modern
the language of hygiene and pathology, and, according to Bauman, for good reason. This, I would argue, is an important insight. The medical metaphor that infuses this ideology tends to direct action along certain paths, just as the medical conception of disease and the body leads to certain forms of medical intervention. Hygienic thinking seems to be a peculiarly modern obsession, and, when brought into contact with the notion of racial health, can inspire truly horrific reactions. As Bauman points out, racial discourse has itself been an historically integral part of the hygienic thinking and hygiene informed practices so central to modernity. In order to tease out the link between racism and the general ethos and logic of modernity more explicitly, he argues that it is not surprising that race becomes such an important locus for hygienic thinking, given that modernity is so obsessed with control and domination of everything by reason, with the complete elimination of everything contingent, unthinkable and impossible to explain. For, after all,

race invokes ‘supra human’ factors resilient to cultural manipulation akin to, and resonant with, the equally uncontrollable elements of the human condition originally responsible for the paranoid fever. . .

Thus the concept of race, a highly contentious modern invention fuelled by modern biological science and its fallacious applications in pseudo sciences like social Darwinism, brings forth draconian responses since it seems to call into question the efficacy of modernity’s own zealous reshaping of humanity and society.

preoccupation with hygiene, that realistic surrogate for the unrealistic dream of death-avoidance.

26Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies, p. 133.
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On Racism

Bauman makes what I consider to be a necessary shift from the view which sees in racism little more than a reversion to the sway of old passions—a regression in psychoanalytic terms—or the resurgence of tribal animosities. For as he argues it is quite different in character and intention to what went before. In Modernity and the Holocaust, for example, he writes:

... as a conception of the world, and even more importantly as an effective instrument of political practice, racism is unthinkable without the advancement of modern science, modern technology and modern forms of power. As such, racism is strictly a modern product. Modernity made racism possible. It also created a demand for racism; an era that declared achievement to be the only measure of human worth needed a theory of ascription to redeem boundary-drawing and boundary-guarding concerns under new conditions which made boundary-crossing easier than ever before. Racism, in short, is a thoroughly modern weapon used in the conduct of pre-modern, or at least not exclusively modern, struggles (pp. 61–2).

This definition highlights two of Bauman's concerns. Firstly, racism is conceived largely as a set of modern strategies; this gives rise to the concern in his analysis with the elaboration of the mechanisms involved in modern bureaucratic action, and in delineating that form of instrumental thought and action which he deems to be overwhelmingly modern, linked closely to the practice and logic of science. And secondly, he is concerned to analyse the way that group enmities centred around boundary definition, boundary maintenance/protection, and boundary crossing, exacerbated by modernity's upheaval, created the ground for the concept of race to emerge, under the tutelage of science. As I will show, Bauman tends to leave behind the concern with group boundaries and group enmities, beyond the issue of the way that they demanded a concept like race under modern conditions, when explaining the nature and processes
involved in racism. Actions inspired by group enmities themselves are quite sharply distinguished from the form of racist action, in his understanding. This allows him to reserve group prejudices and enmities to premodern forms of the relations between groups, and to make the emotions related to prejudice largely irrelevant to the understanding and practice of racism. Bauman is explicit about this move:

Most commonly (though wrongly), racism is understood as a variety of inter-group resentment or prejudice.28

The argument as I understand it is subtle. Bauman wants to capture what is essentially modern about racism, through counterposing it with other forms of the relation between groups. He makes, for example, an important distinction between traditional antisemitism and racism. He argues that the antisemitism of the masses in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, which derived primarily from contestant enmity and boundary maintenance anxieties stirred up by the upheavals of modernity, combined with long-standing cultural traditions and images of the Jew, did not filter up to the higher intellectual circles where scientific racism was hatched. Though these animosities and traditions formed an important historical background for the emergence of racism, the latter was of a different order entirely, and was not predominantly related to anxieties about modernity, or to direct experiences of intergroup enmity, contest or rivalry. Scientific and mystical racism involved a set of theories about race and civilisation, and a stance toward the racial Other, not primarily inspired by anxieties, but rather tied to the intellectual classes' optimistic embrace of the dream of a perfect societal order.29 This would suggest that racism emerged out of hope rather than hatred or despair. It was this theoretical edifice, created by ambitious intellectuals who had thoroughly imbibed modernity's message of the refashioning of society and nature by Reason, and not the

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28 Modesty and the Holocaust, p. 62.
29 Ibid, p. 80.
diffuse and unsystematic ideas and images of the Other emerging from group contacts and conflicts, which became tied to the engineering practices of the modern state to steer the major forms of racist action of the twentieth century.

Bauman has a very strong case for arguing that modern racist antisemitism represented a considerable break from earlier forms of antisemitism, and called forth unique responses which traditional antisemitism had never called forth. In this regard he makes a well considered and important distinction between premodern forms of antagonism such as heterophobia—the fairly diffuse and unsystematic fear aroused by the Other—and contestant enmity—the more organised and intense fear of the Other who threatens to dissolve group boundaries, bringing forth fear of loss of identity and the reign of chaos—and racism, which differs from each of these in terms of its nature, function, and mode of operation. He proposes the following formulation:

The difference lies neither in the intensity of sentiments nor in the type of argument used to rationalise it. Racism stands apart by a practice of which it is a part and which it rationalises: a practice that combines strategies of architecture and gardening with that of medicine—in the service of the construction of an artificial social order, through cutting out the elements of the present reality that neither fit the visualised perfect reality, nor can be changed so that they do. In a world that boasts the unprecedented ability to improve human conditions by reorganising human affairs on a rational basis, racism manifests the conviction that a certain category of human beings cannot be incorporated into the rational order, whatever the effort.30

The certainty involved in racism, which was given in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century the powerful backing of science, is central to Bauman’s conception, and points to the propensity for racism, given specific conditions, to move into genocidal mode. This certainty

was altogether lacking in those earlier forms of group hostility which, Bauman argues, do not have the same genocidal tendency. This is not to say that these other forms do not stir up and unleash virulent emotions. Rather, Bauman is arguing that these earlier forms do not have the same principle of certainty, nor the totalising vision of the Other, which genocide relies upon. Thus there is a case for saying that racism represents for Bauman a more extreme and dangerous basis for motivation than was present in earlier forms of group conflict.

At this point it is necessary to think through the place that Bauman assigns to the emotions in terms of racism and racist action. He is saying some complex things here. In terms of racist projects, the curious thing about racism when it is fused with modern bureaucratic processes is that the emotions become largely irrelevant, except perhaps in the case of the small elite truly enamoured of the racist vision. For the rest of the population involved in modern bureaucracy there is little need for them to even be guided by racist ideology, or by emotions like hatred of the Other. The sort of hatreds involved in traditional forms of antisemitism, for example, still played a role in the Holocaust, but these were qualitatively different to the sort of motivation needed to guide the exterminatory enterprise. Even those more directly involved in the exterminating project, Bauman argues, did not need to be, and in most cases were not, racists. Locked into bureaucratic actions which served to distance them morally from those to be exterminated, and which interrupted the sense of personal responsibility for actions, people involved in mass racist actions, steered by a racially visionary state, were just doing their jobs. But what of those true visionaries themselves? Weren’t they at least guided by irrational hatreds? Here Bauman says something quite unusual. It seems that in his view it is not emotions like hate or psychological complexes like sadism which stand behind, invigorate, or help to generate, racism. Rather it is an epochal changing idea—that of the humanly perfectible environment—coupled with a blinding hope of truly mesmerising proportions, that stand behind the whole racist enterprise. If this is the case,
then perhaps a whole school of analysis focussed upon the impact of intense fears and hatreds seen as standing behind racism, has been mistaken in its emphasis. If anything, Bauman argues, emotions such as hate or resentment are brought into play because of the grip of this modern idea drenched with hope. Peculiar historical circumstances including the particular shifting position of the Jews within the social structures of European societies were the contingent conditions which singled them out for extermination. But it was the dream of the one thousand year Reich rather than antisemitism that drove the Nazis on. The argument that he makes for the fate of the Jews in the Holocaust can be generalised to include other racial conquests:

From the point of view of those who designed and commanded the mass murder of the Jews, Jews were to die not because they were resented (or at least not primarily for this reason); they were seen as deserving death (and resented for that reason) because they stood between this one imperfect and tension-ridden reality and the hoped for world of tranquil happiness (p. 76).

One problem with Bauman’s formulation here, I believe, is that the sort of separation of hope from fear, rage or resentment, and the rearrangement of these emotions into an historical sequence, cannot be sustained. The emotion of hope cannot be seen as separated from or historically antecedent to the hate and resentment of the ‘races’ who stood in the way of these hopes. Rather, we need to see this phenomena in terms of idea-affect clusters, or ideologies, which inspire and direct actions. Thus we need to see how hope and hatreds, bound up with ideas, fuel one another in the racist enterprise. This means that one still needs to account for those processes which define and relegate the Other as race subject. This involves the work of both thought and emotion.31 Nevertheless, Bauman’s emphasis upon the hope

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31 Another example of Bauman’s tendency to make these separations is evident in his claim that one of the important lessons that the Holocaust has
that stands behind racist projects, in the context of accounts which point only to the desperation and fear of personal and group disintegration as standing behind and fuelling racism, restores a necessary balance to our understanding. For as Robert Lifton has pointed out, a great deal of the power of Nazi ideology centred around its life-affirming and culturally regenerative promise, which contained images of wholeness, national harmony and health. But, as he adds, this was inextricably bound up with the ‘death atmosphere’ in Germany just after World War I, and the perceived threat of potential collective calamity, as its other pole.\textsuperscript{32}

Racism, Identity and Modernity

We need to keep in the foreground, in the analysis of racism, a concern with the general issue of identity, and with the forms of racist subjectivity. Because of the way that Bauman uses the unique example of the Holocaust to shed light on both the nature of modernity and the nature of racism, he tends to play down the issues of the role of ideological motivation for racist practices, the relationship between racism and concerns with identity, and the importance of racist subjectivity. But what might have been true in this extreme example of the attempt to create a racially pure society is not necessarily true of other forms of racism. In other words, in these other forms the formation and reproduction of racist identities is important, since racist bureaucratic processes are not in place to the degree that they were in Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{33}

He argues quite convincingly, using the backing of recent historical evidence, that the planners and designers of the racial

\textsuperscript{32}Robert Jay Lifton, op.cit, pp. 470–81.

\textsuperscript{33}See also Goldberg, op.cit, p. 96, where he makes a similar critique of Bauman.
genocide of the Holocaust did not require the generation of mass racial consciousness in the populace, but could rely, firstly, on the less modern form of antisemitism to create an atmosphere of general indifference to the plight of the Jews among the rest of the German people, and secondly upon a combination of rational bureaucratic processes, and the general removal of the Jewish population from the ‘moral universe’ of other Germans, in order to carry through their terrible plans.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus, according to his argument, the true racists were a small elite operating in exceptional wartime conditions, and in the context of the concentration of power, violence and other techniques of coercion in the modern state, which tends to operate autonomously in relation to the rest of society. Racism was therefore not a mass psychological phenomenon, while at the same time being a form of mass practice. In the context of such a formulation, Bauman has little need to analyse the formation and operation of racist subjectivity.

In the case of the Holocaust his explanation of a form of bureaucratic racism which is instrumentally rational to the extent that it does not require the ideological commitment of most of its participants, and rather than utilising emotions like hatred and resentment for the racialized Other to fuel and invigorate its processes, acts to keep that emotion away and make it irrelevant to the whole enterprise, is compelling if not wholly convincing. Most particularly, the analysis of the myriad ways that rationality is put into the service of and utilised by those orchestrating the exterminating process, is a powerful rejoinder to those who have sought to emphasise the irrationality of racism. But there is too much analysis of bureaucratic action at the expense of the neglect of the ideological processes which support the racist vision. At times bureaucracy itself seems to take on an overdetermining role in his argument. How are we to understand the ideological processes which drive at least those subjects who Bauman does admit had to be ideologically committed to the Nazi enterprise?

\textsuperscript{34}See Modernity and the Holocaust, Ch. 3.
Even in relation to them Bauman tends to play down the existence of racist subjectivity, or even ideological commitment. As Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann have recently pointed out, the devotion to an image of dry emotionless bureaucratic action can in fact act as a camouflage for visceral hatreds. They argue that there is a danger that one will overlook or underestimate the way that deeply irrational hatreds are cloaked in coolly detached bureaucratic language. As they point out:

Dark fantasies and paranoia are not inconsistent with the most routinised and efficient managerial practice.\(^{35}\)

Bauman's argument is ranged against the sort of analyses which read social phenomena from the perspective of individual psychology. Instead he aims to produce an account which explores the impact of sociological structures or factors on human action. He is concerned to explain how and why seemingly good men and women who in other areas of their lives were apparently capable of warm human association, could carry through inhuman and cruel acts upon Jews and other Nazi victims, and perhaps most horrifying, that they could do so free from emotions like hate or guilt. In this respect he repeats Hannah Arendt's\(^ {36} \) claim that known or suspected sadists were removed from the direct extermination activities of the SS:

The SS leaders counted (rightly, it would appear) on organisational routine, not on individual zeal; on discipline, not ideological dedication. Loyalty to the gory task was to be—and was indeed—a derivative of loyalty to the organisation.\(^ {37}\)

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\(^{37}\) *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 20.
Modernity, Racism and Subjectivity

This is in some respects a necessary theoretical move. However, the convincing critique of the individual psychology approach as psychologically reductionist, should not lead one to the conclusion that subjectivity itself does not need to be theorised in order to understand the workings of racism. Bauman is making the radical claim that the system itself motivates action for reasons quite separate to racist ideas or emotions. Emotions are a problem for the pursuit of rational action, therefore rationalisation processes aim at removing the influence of emotion from human actions. For Bauman, racism is part of broad rationalisation processes of this kind. While he can tell us much about the processes of moral distancing involved in the distantiations processes of bureaucracy, and how these contribute to the carrying out of forms of cruelty, including those involved in mass racist actions, this does not relieve him of the need to give a thorough account of how racism and the subjectivities of racists, contribute to the perpetuation and reproduction of those bureaucratic processes. Even if it is true that racist ideology was only an important motivating force for a small section of the population under Nazism, and that the genocide could rely on the mass indifference to the plight of the Jews among the rest of the population not swept up in the racist ideology, Bauman needs to theorise the racist subjectivity of this important former group.

An analysis which is in part supportive of Bauman’s account of the bureaucratic processes of racism, but which also recognises the centrality of ideology and the formation of racist subjectivity can be found in Robert Lifton’s *The Nazi Doctors*. While accepting that bureaucratic processes were important features of the genocide, he argues that these were not enough in themselves to explain what went on in the death camps. We must see these processes in combination with visionary motivations associated with Nazi ideology, enshrined in the Nazi medical notion of ‘killing as healing’. We must also

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38 Robert Jay Lifton, op. cit. Page numbers in brackets in the text refer to this work.
examine closely the individual psychological processes which allowed people to kill (pp.14-15). In his view the question of ideology is central. Crucial to the capacity to perform selections of Jews for the gas chambers, he argues, was a doctor’s relationship to Nazi ideology. Important here was the basic early attraction on the part of most of these doctors to the Nazi promise of German resurgence—a tie that could sustain them through reservations and discomfort (p. 204). And these ties were not merely intellectual but, as with all ideology, deeply affectual, group ties which gave the participants a sense of communal purpose. Lifton tries to capture the way that ideologies transform the self and guide action. He refers to ideological currents which influence ‘self-process’, a term he uses to capture that sense of shift and change in representation and symbolisation of what we call the ‘self’. Through involvement with ideologies, and in collective activities, the self is shaped and transformed. The propensity for self process to slip over into genocidal self-process is stimulated, in part, by modern conditions. Seeing genocide as a form of purification ritual, and comparing ancient forms of human sacrifice to the Nazi genocide, he considers the latter to be more unstoppable because Nazis

were much less at home in their skins than were primitive peoples: as a modern movement seeking by their purification procedures to restore a past of perfect harmony that never was, the Nazis’ actions inevitably were compensatory and more desperate. Starting from modern forms of collective dislocation and of fragmentation of the self, their purification was bound to fail. It is simply not possible to create, from the modern psychic vantage point, a ‘primitive, undifferentiated universe’ within which a Führer principle becomes the source of all judgements about life, death, and killing. Indeed, one suspects that the very impossibility of the project takes it from mere victimisation to genocide (p. 484).
Modernity, Racism and Subjectivity

Lifton brings back into view the subjective dimensions involved in racism. He points to that battle against the death atmosphere, and ultimately against the disintegration of the self, that stands behind the image of the self and communal 'cure' coming through the destruction of the Other, which gives such added and vicious momentum to the racist enterprise, and brings back into focus the sense of rage, conscious or unconscious, that the racist is guided by:

... the genocidal self is impelled by its own struggle with disintegration: indeed, rage directed at victims can derive partially from a displacement of this death equivalent, from rage at one's own fear of disintegration. Rage can also distance the killer from the act of killing (p. 499).

The question of identity, and the way that Others come into relation with forms of communal identity must, therefore, remain central to our understanding of racism.

Many writers have pointed to the relative fluidity of modern identities compared to the relatively fixed and traditionally guaranteed nature of identity in premodern societies. Jean Paul Sartre in his seminal essay on the psychology of the antisemite,39 had pointed to this factor as being crucial to the lust for fixed identity that the antisemite exhibited:

The Jew only serves him as a pretext; elsewhere his counterpart will make use of the Negro or the man of yellow skin. The existence of the Jew merely permits the anti-Semite to stifle his anxieties, at their inception by persuading himself that his place in the world has been marked out in advance, that it awaits him, and that tradition gives him the right to occupy it. Anti-Semitism, in short, is fear of the human condition. The anti-Semite is a man who wishes to be pitiless stone, a furious torrent, a devastating thunderbolt—anything except a man (p. 54).

Sartre argued that antisemitism was "the expression of a certain ferocious and mystical sense of real property" (p. 148). This related specifically to the belief of the French antisemite in an innate, earthy union with a mystical entity named 'France'. This belief had become for the antisemite an unshakeable conviction because of the plight of the individual in the face of the powerful dislocations of modernity. In other words racial identity can be seen as a last ditch effort to assign to oneself and, fundamentally, to the collective of others gathered around the self, a fixed sense of identity in the face of the flux of all identities in modern life. It is thus at the same time a form of virulent hatred directed at the threatening Other, and a powerful love of self and group:

Anti-Semitism is not merely the joy of hating; it brings positive pleasures too. By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite. This elite, in contrast to modern times which are based on merit or labor, closely resembles an aristocracy of birth. There is nothing I have to do to merit my superiority, and neither can I lose it. It is given once and for all. It is a thing (pp. 26-7).

Racism is always closely attached to a longing for group membership, and of a very particular kind. The group identity sought after, and one which tends to fill out individual identity, is one which cannot be questioned. It is like a force of nature. But the very fact that it is humanly created and sustained means that it is invariably open to a questioning of its status. The doubt that this entails is defended against constantly and violently in the racist response. Boundaries must be vigilantly guarded. The images of the racial Other are in part a product of this need. Because of the involvement of the racial Other in the boundary maintaining processes of a group, this Other is actively sought out and focussed upon, to be hated, to be punished, to be expelled. As we have seen, while Bauman recognised the instability of modernity he did not see that the impact of this at the level of individual or even group life was central to the
character and impetus of racism. I am arguing that the opposite is the case, and that a theory of racism must account for this. Stephen Frosh, for example, has argued that personal anxieties and instability brought about by modernity are a powerful impetus for the formation of racist subjectivity. He sees a psychoanalytical understanding of the formation of subjectivities, and the ways that these interact unconsciously and consciously with a cultural environment, as essential to an understanding of the psychological reproduction of racism in modernity:

What is present in the racist psyche, psychoanalysis suggests, is a repudiation of multiplicity and heterogeneity, the most challenging aspect of modernity.\(^{40}\)

Bauman has himself emphasised the perilous nature of group identities in modernity and postmodernity, and done so in a highly evocative way. Because of its obsession with control and order, he argues, modernity is characterised by what he terms ambivalence or contingency. This results in an intensification of anxiety, and can serve as a powerful instigator of a frantic search for solid ground, a tendency which has been exacerbated by the emergence of post-modern trends:

No wonder that post-modernity, the age of contingency \emph{für sich,} of self-conscious contingency, is also the age of community: of the lust for community, search for community, invention of community, imagining community.\(^{41}\)

The lust for community expresses itself in what Bauman terms neo-tribalism which he distinguishes from the more fixed, fated communities of the old tribal (pre-modern) world. In neo-tribalism there is an attempt to forge communal relations through the avenue of multiple acts of self-identification. In contrast to the old tribalism, these tribes

\(^{40}\)Stephen Frosh, \emph{Psychoanalysis and Psychology: Minding the Gap}, p. 229.
\(^{41}\)Zygmunt Bauman, \emph{Modernity and Ambivalence}, p. 246.
'exist' solely by individual decisions to sport the symbolic traits of tribal allegiance. They vanish once the decisions are revoked or their determination fades out. They persevere thanks only to their continuing seductive capacity. They cannot outlive their power of attraction.42

These fragile, highly volatile communities are lusted after all the more because of their propensity to fragment and break down, threatening to throw the individual back on him/herself. At the same time, one might argue, as Stephen Frosh does,43 that these social conditions do not tend to promote stable individual identities; one has little that is secure to fall back on, which can result in a spiral of anxiety for the individual. In such a situation one can readily see how the temptation to identify and punish out-groups becomes intensified, in direct relation to the level of instability and doubt of the viability of one’s own group.44 The sense of personal disintegration inherent in the experience of modernity is mirrored by the terrible spectacle of group disintegration.

Bauman argues that it is in fact the intensity of the effort to self-consciously construct communal relations—a legacy of modernity—that imperils their survival, since it leads, through intensity of the gaze upon foundations and group character, to constant bifurcations and dissent:

42Ibid, p. 249.
44See for example Rae Sherwood (1980), The Psychodynamics of Race, The Harvester Press, Sussex, Ch. 10. While Sherwood tends to refer here to the sense of frail individual identity which leads to envy of groups picked out for their perceived cohesiveness of identity, one can see individual identity as being at least in part dependant upon a sense of collective identity. See especially her discussion of 'John', and his response to Pakistani immigrants. Part of his identity problems reflect the sense of communal breakdown assailing his English working class milieu. See pp. 421-2.
Modernity, Racism and Subjectivity

The search for community turns into a major obstacle to its formation. The only consensus likely to stand a chance of success is the acceptance of the heterogeneity of dissensions.45

The Modern State and Racism

The final important component of Bauman’s notion of racist practice, is his understanding of its connection with the rise of the modern nation state. For Bauman racism, and especially racial genocide, is essentially a state controlled process, making use of the modern bureaucratic and scientific techniques at its disposal and largely under its control. This he points out is one of the essential dangers of modern life; the autonomy of the state in relation to the rest of society, and the concentration of the means of violence and other methods of social control in its hands. The modern state has played the central role in the formation of racist projects and in carrying out, through the wholesale implementation of bureaucratic processes, mass racist actions. It was that small fanatical elite who gained control of the state, and not the people themselves who represented the exterminating version of racism:

... the true role of the sophisticated, theoretical forms of antisemitism lay not so much in its capacity to foment the antagonistic practices of the masses, as in its unique link with the social-engineering designs and ambitions of the modern state.46

For Bauman the modern state acting in such a way is only putting into practice in an extreme form, and in exceptional circumstances, the whole ethos of the civilising mission of modernity, which is composed of the dream of order, the belief that its actions are a form of progress, and a lack of concern for those who stand in the way:

45 Modernity and Ambivalence, p. 251.
46 Modernity and the Holocaust, p. 80.
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The modern dream of a uniform, harmonious order of society, and the equally modern conviction that the imposition of such an order upon recalcitrant reality is a progressive move, a promotion of the common interests and, by the same token, legitimate whatever the 'transitional costs' can be found behind every case of modern genocide. 47

Bauman's argument points to a promising line of inquiry: one might suggest that any examination of racism needs to include in its discussion the role of the modern state in creating and policing national identity. 48 Bauman, following Weber sees the growing centralisation and separation of the modern state from everyday life as one of modernity's key features. As such this process, in certain circumstances, has been closely related to racist urges and racist practices. Race and racial consciousness is in part a by-product of the state process of attempted homogenisation of identities to create a singular and unified national identity. The nation-state, in order to continually legitimise its hold over people within a certain geographical area, is compelled, Bauman argues, to smother differences in the pursuit of national identity and a community of ideal citizens. 49

47 In a footnote in Zygmunt Bauman Modernity and Ambivalence, p. 29.
48 Alastair Davidson has argued this case in his study of the formation of the Australian state. He argues that the reforming State sought to create disciplined citizens, who based their identities around notions like possessive individualism, and that the State's reforming aims were related to the development of racism towards Australia's aboriginal population:

Ultimately, the destruction of Aboriginal society was essential to the reforming process as the presence of difference would have threatened the otherwise homogeneous produced people. The Aborigines were doubly dangerous since not only were they different but also their way of life was the direct opposite of that which the reforming State sought to achieve.

49 Modernity and Ambivalence, p. 105.
Bauman singles out modern intellectuals acting as confident social engineering legislators as prime culprits involved in this whole enterprise. The attempted homogenisation of identities involves strategies as diverse as carefully planned immigration programs, expulsions of peoples or their forced assimilation, ghettoization or genocide. And what better criteria for separation and categorisation of people was there than the certainty implied in the biological notion of race, a certainty given moral force by the support of the already formidable ideological and moral force of modern science? For Bauman this form of state action is spurred on by the ethos of modernity. Yet these forms of state action can be viewed from another angle, suggested in the writings of Jürgen Habermas.

One might suggest, following Habermas, the alternative view that the actions of the state do not represent the spirit of modernity, but a response to the important dilemmas that the course of its historical development has thrown up. I am thinking in particular of the set of concerns which Habermas has addressed in his attempt to defend the emancipatory and progressive side of modernity as a project: his attempt to develop a theory of communicative action, which highlights another feature of the rationalisation of society which does not proceed along the lines of the spread of instrumental reason. Within that whole movement of modernity, Habermas assigns an important place to the way that individual and group identities go through a process of rationalisation that can be viewed as a form of emancipation.

Consider the example of the development of normative structures which guide interaction. Habermas has argued that

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50 Ibid. p. 69. For a discussion of the creative role of the state in fashioning of national identity see p. 105.

51 Habermas has pursued these issues in a number of works over several decades. The question of the rationalisation of society from the perspective of communicative rationality is dealt with extensively in his lengthy analysis of the work of Max Weber. See Jürgen Habermas (1984), The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1, Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 143–273.
we can trace a line of development from premodern to modern forms of consciousness, analogous to the way that Piaget has theorised cognitive development, and Kohlberg has theorised moral development. World views, legal and moral representations, and individual and collective identities are seen as sharing lines of development which are conceived as the movement from lower to higher stages. These developments, broadly, exhibit a tendency to express more abstract and universalising principles which guide action. Thus identities become tied less and less to designated roles and the rule of tradition—tendencies exhibited in the conventional stage of development for Piaget and Kohlberg—and become: a) more and more universalistic in tone, taking in the whole of humanity as reference group rather than, for example, groups arranged along kinship lines; and b) more fluid/less fixed as the areas of identity formation become open to discourse, and thus increasingly self-reflexive—attributes of Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s post-conventional stage. These developments, Habermas argues, have a potentially and actually liberating effect. The point is then, that the project of modernity inaugurates a pressure for identities to become less parochial and more universalistic in aspect. This would suggest that there is an historical shift away from tribal identifications, and to use the language of Piaget and Kohlberg, a movement toward the establishment of post-conventional identities. This implies the potential development of views of and orientations toward the Other that are opposed to the whole ethos of racism, and to its practices of domination. How then would one come to explain the emergence in modernity of a form of racial identity which is defined precisely by its ascriptive, non-universalistic nature, the characteristics that suggest that it is a conventional mode of identity?

Part of Habermas’s answer to this, though unfortunately he does not explain it at any length, relates to the development of the modern state under the pressure of capitalism. Habermas

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52 See Jürgen Habermas (1979), Communication and the Evolution of Society, Beacon Press, Boston, p. 98.
Modernity, Racism and Subjectivity

argues that the modern emancipatory push toward universalisation of collective identity had been historically checked and diverted by the formation of nation states. Nation states arranged in an interlocking and competitive international order required as their justification and motivational core the development of national as opposed to world identity. He argues that the collective identity required by the nation state was in contradiction to the collective identity at least implied by the abstract formulations of bourgeois law and ethics existent within those very same nation states. These abstract formulations of the identity, rights and obligations of the individual in relation to the collective, concerned with abstract notions of legality, morality and sovereignty, were according to Habermas "best suited to the identity of world citizens, not to that of citizens of a particular state that has to maintain itself against other states."53 The contradiction between these two forms of identity—particularistic and universalistic—was "temporarily silenced through membership in nations." This form of collective national consciousness was necessary in order to motivate members of nation states arranged in a military order to be willing to lay down their lives if necessary when conflicts between states arose. Habermas suggests that there are indications that this historical compromise of national identity which

defused and made bearable the contradiction between the intrastate universalism of bourgeois law and morality, on the one side, and the particularism of individual states on the other

is breaking down, but that there is no force to generate the shift to world identity, given that an earlier attempt, represented by the socialist working class movement had foundered in the twentieth century. As a result or symptom of the breakdown of the compromise:

53Jürgen Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p. 114.
Conflicts that are ignited below the threshold of national identity are breaking out everywhere, in connection with questions of race, creed, language, regional differences, and other subcultures.\(^{54}\)

Thus one might situate racism within that set of identity deformations resulting from the interrelations between nation-states coupled with the need of the latter to develop forms of national consciousness which, at least in times of conflict, require the demonising of enemy states; but also in the deformations arising out of the breakdown of unified national consciousness—a scramble for identity in a vacuum. In reference to the racist movements that emerge in this context, one could view them as assertions of identity which combine a nostalgic longing for a reinterpreted and idealized premodern form of identity with an instrumentalist view of social life, and which, under the influence of the latter, make use of the techniques of instrumental reason in processes of identity formation and socialisation, and in dealing with socially constructed ‘race’ others.\(^{55}\) In doing so racist movements do not operate by removing affect from social action through bureaucratic measures; rather they redeploy that affect in various ways. One way is through the libidinization of the bureaucratic process itself.\(^{56}\) The distantiation processes themselves can be viewed as

\(^{54}\)Ibid, p. 115.

\(^{55}\)Nazism serves as a preeminent example here.

\(^{56}\)This notion of the libidinization of bureaucratic processes is inspired by Theodor Adorno’s account of the manipulative psychological type, which we can take as an example of the bureaucratic individual. The manipulative type infuses bureaucratic processes with psychological meaning, and with the love one would usually expect to be reserved for other people. Such a type is schizophrenic in character. He or she resolves extreme inner tension emerging from a particular failed resolution of the Oedipus Complex, by in effect imposing his or her own compartmentalised inner world onto the external world. This external world is then divided up in manageable compartments—hence the schizophrenic quality—which can then be
temporarily successful human attempts to displace or ward off guilt. But one needs to be wary of claims that they are able to do so permanently.\footnote{Despite distartion processes guilt waits in the wings. See for example the analyses of defence against, and straight out denial of, guilt present in Germany after the defeat in the Second World War, in Alexander and Margaret Mitscherlich (1975), \textit{The Inability To Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour}, Grove Press, New York. National Socialism was in their view a violent affective period in German history, which continued to have long range effects in the German populace. See p. 43.}

In his explanation of racism, Bauman is more concerned with the nature of modernity than he is with the character and function of the racist subject. He produces therefore an oversocialised account of racism, and leaves a gap at the level of subjectivity that needs to be filled. Moreover, and perhaps because of this gap, Bauman can be seen at times to be advocating a position which lays the blame for racism and genocide at the feet of the modern project itself, rather than at the feet of certain ideologies and related subjectivities that emerge, and are in part stimulated by, tendencies within the conditions of modernity:

The two most notorious and extreme cases of modern genocide did not betray the spirit of modernity. They did not deviously depart from the main track of the civilising process. They were the most consistent, uninhibited

\footnote{Human objects are not, in general, cathected. Instead technical processes, the tools of precise management, are loved, are fraught with libido. The \textit{doing} gets libinized:

\ldots rigid notions become ends rather than means, and the whole world is divided into empty, schematic administrative fields.

There is an almost complete lack of object cathexis and of emotional ties.}

expressions of that spirit. They attempted to reach the most ambitious aims of the civilising process most other processes stop short of, not necessarily for the lack of good will. They showed what the rationalising, designing, controlling dreams and efforts of modern civilisation are able to accomplish if not mitigated, curbed or counteracted.\textsuperscript{58}

One can see at this point that his critique of certain elements of modernity spills over into a more wholesale critique of what he takes to be the \textit{spirit} of modernity. It is this spilling over that needs to be avoided, for it seems to suggest a too close fit between the racist enterprise, genocide in general, and the form of modernity. The more subtle elaboration of \textit{trends} gives way to a more all embracing and demonic image. It is modernity itself, rather than the symptom that is racism, that needs to be restrained. It is the whole civilising mission which is at fault, not a pathological form of this mission called 'racism'. One could ask of Bauman where the mitigating and curbing tendencies might come from, if not from that same spirit of modernity, enshrined in the notions of liberty, equality and fraternity. This would call for a more thorough examination of that other face of modernity which is not dominating and controlling, but emancipatory.

Moreover, stemming from the analysis in this chapter it can be seen that there is a need to fill out the explanation of the specific impact of the dislocations of modernity on subjective experience and identity formation. In the next chapter I will be arguing that psychoanalysis wedded to a theory of ideology, can provide us with the conceptual tools to understand how certain forms of subjectivity and psychological processes feed into racism, under the conditions, the tensions and crises of modernity.

\textsuperscript{58}Modernity and the Holocaust, p. 93.
Chapter Two: 
Racism and Subjectivity

My concern in this chapter is to produce a better understanding of racism by examining the notion of racist subjectivity. In order to understand how racism works, how it is reproduced as a system, we must develop an account of the desires, fantasies, and affects which form part of its complex. In the course of the discussion I will argue that a racist system reproduces itself, in part, by situating dominating and dominated subjects within an ideological field. Ideological forms are central to the general shaping, indeed to the very formation of subjectivity. But we need to develop a dynamic view of the relationship between subjectivity, agency, ideology and racism.

In the first section of this chapter I will map out the understanding of subjectivity and ideology that informs my whole approach. In order to understand subjective involvement in racism more deeply I will, in the later sections of the chapter, examine three psychoanalytically informed explanations of racism. Erich Fromm’s important early work *Fear of Freedom,*\(^5\) provides us with an initial, though I will argue ultimately inadequate, account of prejudiced subjectivity. Next I will examine two related works on white racism by Franz Fanon and Joel Kovel. One must exercise caution when making use of psychoanalysis within social and political theory in general, and in relation to racism in particular. One needs to be fully conscious of the place that one assigns to psychoanalytic concepts in one’s arguments, paying particularly close attention when developing causal explanations.\(^6\) Any theory which relies

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6. For an excellent discussion of these issues see Eugene Victor Wolfenstein’s “On the Uses and Abuses of Psychoanalysis in Social Theory” in *Free Associations,* (1991), Volume 2, Part 4 (No.24). For an earlier stimulating essay on the relationship between the psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity
exclusively upon universal structures of conscious and unconscious life in explaining something as specific as racism will fail.\textsuperscript{61} One must always understand the dynamic relationship between psychological processes and specific social situations. Nevertheless, psychoanalytic theory, with its complex understanding of psychic life—as both unconscious and conscious, as deeply divided—is potentially the most powerful psychological understanding which can be married to a social theory that explains racism. Psychoanalysis provides the best currently available understanding of the complexity of subjectivity—in terms of its formation, maintenance, and ongoing transformation. I defend two main theses in these exploratory discussions. Firstly, racism has a fundamental sexual component which cannot be understood from a purely sociological perspective. Psychoanalysis can help explain the peculiar energy, in many cases the ferocity, of racist emotion and action. The central contribution of psychoanalysis to the understanding of subjectivity has been in its elaboration of unconscious processes. At the level of subjectivity, we must be able to give some account of the engagement of racism with these unconscious processes. My second thesis is closely related to the first: the subjects of racism must be understood not in terms of unified character structures, but as radically transformative within the field of ideology.

Subjectivity, Ideology and Racism

Eugene Victor Wolfenstein has recently suggested that psychoanalysis views subjectivity as involving the following: a notion of agency along with the idea of impeded or inhibited

agency; some notion of interiority, of an individual’s or a group’s inner world; not only thoughts and beliefs but also feelings, passions and desires; and finally, very importantly, the idea that subjectivity is always intersubjectivity. Wolfenstein argues that there is an emancipatory potential at the heart of subjectivity. To make this claim he draws upon the early work of Jürgen Habermas, who had argued that in the psychoanalytic analysis, through the intersubjective communication free from constraint experienced by analyst and analysand, the self could reflect upon its own conditions of existence and free itself of the forms of distorted communication and domination that it had been subject to. In fact, Habermas took the analytic situation to be a preeminent example of that form of emancipatory communicative action that was already implicit within language, and which the form of social life that emerged within modernity had the potential to instantiate at the base of its conditions of existence. Wolfenstein explains this emancipatory analytic situation as follows:

The self turns back upon the conditions of its own formation, conditions which were originally experienced as external or alien. Against resistance and through self-reflection, it makes these external conditions into self-determinations. Alienated dimensions of selfhood, which operated upon it like forces of nature, become constituents of a free will.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that such processes are always only partial and are always subject to radical undermining. The decentering of the subject, the understanding that consciousness is always infused with unconscious desires, wishes and processes, has, arguably, been one of the chief

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63 See Jürgen Habermas (1968), *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Beacon Press, Boston, Chs. 10–11.
64 Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, op.cit., p. 516
insights of psychoanalysis since Freud and is, as I will argue, essential to an understanding of the way that racism is experienced and reproduced by individuals and groups.

In a recent attempt to capture the way that the subject is decentred in relation to unconscious processes and in relation to ideologies, John Cash has come up with the following formulation:

Each of us, unless we go 'mad', finds a dynamic accommodation between the 'it' and the 'I', an accommodation which, though it tends to persevere, is constantly reworked within the moving field of rules, reasons and emotions which we can denote as culture or ideology. In other words, as subjects we are doubly decentred. The shifting, though persevering, 'I' which we each take ourself to be is always subject to re-organisation according to the rules of the 'It', or, more precisely, the dynamic unconscious. This is its first decentering. At the same time this same shifting, though persevering, 'I' is subject to re-organisation according to the rules of the field of ideology. This is the second moment of its decentering. These two moments of decentering are, of course, each implicated in the other.

Cash marks out his own perspective against those early attempts by the Frankfurt School to link up the individual with the social by way of a socialisation theory inspired by the work of Freud. Instead he wants to posit a view of identities as radically shifting, as radically decentred, in order to restore the dynamic relationship between individuals and culture. He has argued that such a theory should not begin with a notion of

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unified trait filled subjects or personalities, but should see subjectivity as a dynamic meeting point for historical, cultural, conscious and unconscious processes. This seems to me an important theoretical move in general, but also specifically in terms of understanding racist subjectivity. We must break free of the notion that racism is produced at the level of individuals ‘socialised’ in childhood, and shift towards a position which can adequately conceptualise the way that racist ideologies, in specific situations, work, through the agency of moral and political leaders in group situations, to organise social life in race terms, and effect the taking up of racist subject positions.67

I have been emphasising the point that we need to keep in view the agency of subjects involved in social processes. This is a general social theoretical issue which goes beyond issues raised in the study of racism, but which is equally important for the latter. Subjects are active, cogitating, feeling, meaning-making individuals, no doubt caught up in and between competing ideological codes and influenced by unconscious processes, but never solely determined by them. Subjects are situated by social processes, including discursive practices, into subject positions, but at the same moment, given that they exist and operate within intersubjective contexts, and because of the very nature of the communicative act, they are able to reflect back upon their conditions of subjection, thus rendering real and possible their active interventions in social life. It is not that these subjects do not draw on ideological and other symbolic forms available to them in a social world, but that they do draw on, and are not simply constructed by, these forms.68

67Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, making use of Freud’s classic study of group life, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, has emphasised the role of leaders in articulating racist ideologies and in shaping the emotional conflicts, wishes and urges of white racist subjects, within group situations. See Eugene Victor Wolfenstein (1981), The Victims of Democracy, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 70-85.

68In a number of papers John Cash has elaborated this position on the nature of the subject. See for example “Ideology as Process: The Rules of the Game.”
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Though I am not able to explain it at any length here, the approach of Jürgen Habermas to the understanding of subjectivity emerging through communication processes, has been, in my view, an important contribution. He argues that as a result of the positions taken up as speaker and listener in speech acts, and because of the validity claims implicitly raised within communication—

to the comprehensibility of the symbolic expression, the truth of the propositional content, the truthfulness of the intentional expression, and the rightness of the speech act with respect to existing norms and values—

—the subject is impelled towards the attempt to reach mutual, intersubjective understanding. Understandings which are reached through communication are mutual, self and other, rather than individual understandings. The individual is only possible or thinkable within the social, within communication with others. That is to say, reason is intersubjective and the subject is formed intersubjectively. Habermas proposes that the notion of communicative reason should replace the discredited notion of subject-centred reason—the notion that reason emerges from the isolated individual consciousness. The subject of reason is by definition not a monad, and presupposes certain

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For a recent reformulation see his "Chasing the Decentered Subject: Ideology Since Freud."

69Jürgen Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, p. 97.


71Chapter 11 of The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity provides a sustained critique of the philosophy of consciousness and of subject-centered reason but rather than calling for a complete dismissal of the subject as constitutive of social process and the dismantling of the 'pretensions' of Reason—what he regards to be the typical, though mistaken moves of the post-structuralists—Habermas calls for a reformulation of these as communicative reason and as consciousness emerging through, but always remaining tied to, the intersubjective contexts of communicative practice.
capacities for reaching understanding as constitutive of the human species as language using and language producing, though these capacities only form the basis upon which learning processes achieved historically through acts of communication take hold, and propel human beings and human society toward self-understanding and, potentially, to forms of emancipation. Habermas' argument is that human subjects through communication can reach understanding of their own conditions of existence. Because human subjects can become aware, they can institute forms of social life that are most suitable to the needs and desires of the species as self-producing and self-preserving, as revealed through communication. Subjects can endeavour to set up the conditions of life necessary for the level of freedom and autonomy possible within the historical limits of their own time. But the processes involved in racism act as a distorting mechanism which undermines communicative understanding between subjects. Forms of racist domination, including ideological domination, through the avenue of creating and sustaining forms of race identity, prevent the communication aimed at establishing intersubjective understanding from being achieved.

The subject for Habermas is not simply the 'bearer' of discursive formations. Rather, the subject through language is creative and created in the one movement, in relation to an inner and an outer world inextricably bound up together. The subject as subject has access to this inner and outer world and is able to constitute knowledges of both worlds. Habermas raises the possibility that through the realm of intersubjective communication subjects might come to understand areas of distorted communication, such as racism, as distorted communication, recognise these as constricitive of the potentialities of social life as revealed to them through

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72 On this see Habermas dicussion of psychoanalysis in his Knowledge and Human Interests, chs.10-12. See also John Cash's discussion of this theme in Habermas' work in his paper "Chasing the Decentered Subject: Ideology Since Freud," pp.40-49.
communication, and so seek to alter them. Communicative possibilities, according to Habermas, have been advanced by the period of modernity. Modernity, in his view, instigates an important emancipatory push. But emancipation is only a possibility, and one that can only be brought to fruition by acting subjects, as the long history of racist oppression clearly shows.

I want to illustrate the link between ideology, subjectivity and racism by examining an approach recently elaborated by David Theo Goldberg, whose work I discussed briefly in the last chapter.\textsuperscript{73} He attempts to explain subjective involvement in racist culture through combining Foucault's understanding of the operation of discursive formations with Althusser's notion of the 'interpellation' of subjects by ideology.\textsuperscript{74} I will emphasise firstly the virtues of this approach, before going on to discuss some of its problems.

In Goldberg's account there is an interweaving of the level of consciousness or ideology, and the level of material relations, each contributing to and reconstituting the other in an ongoing dialectical process. Subjects are 'called' to subject positions which shape conceptions of, and relations with, others, by circulating discourses which have themselves been produced by ongoing social praxis:

By converging with related discourses and interiorised by the individual, the discourse underlying racism comes to codefine not only subjectivity but otherness also. It molds subjects' relations with others. Subjects' actions are rendered meaningful to themselves and others in light of the values that this discourse, among others, makes available or articulates to the parties involved. In this way, racialized discourse—reproduced, redefined perhaps, and acted

\textsuperscript{73}Page numbers in brackets in the text refer to Goldberg's \textit{Racist Culture}.

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upon—reconstitutes the relations of power that produced them (p. 57).

Though the concept of interpellation has certain theoretical problems,75 I would suggest that it does at least capture the sense of positioning in ideologies that subjects experience, and the way that individuals can move between these subject positions in response to the power of prevailing or emergent ideologies. It also emphasises the fundamental and inextricable relationship between subjective involvement in social life, and engagement with those chains of meaning and structured emotion defined as ideologies or discourses. If one gives full recognition to the place that Althusser gave to Lacan’s notion of the mirror phase in understanding how subjects in order to act as subjects must enter into positions of ideological misrecognition, one can see that discourses or ideologies are central to individual functioning in social life. Subjects within ideology or discourses are ‘hailed’ to various positions which direct thought, emotion and action, and the involvement of these in relation to others co-defined in the discourse, along certain lines, and can forestall, for example the extension of human solidarity to certain groups of people defined as out-groups. Goldberg’s notion of the discursive field in which subjects interact is helpful:

... racialized discourse does not consist simply in descriptive representations of others. It includes a set of hypothetical premises about human kinds... and about the differences between them (both mental and physical). It involves a class of ethical choices (e.g., domination and subjugation, entitlement and restriction, disrespect and

75 A very good account of these can be found in Anthony Elliott, op.cit., Ch. 5. On the notion of interpellation, Elliott points out that subjectivity itself cannot be fully formed through this process, since as a process it assumes certain capacities for self recognition to be already present. In other words the individual must already have some sense of subjecthood prior to interpellation. See pp. 173–75.
Thus racist ideologies can shape relations in such a way that 'race' others can only enter into designated spheres of social life under certain conditions and in a certain manner—i.e. via forms of deference—or may be excluded completely and kept at a distance. Or in extreme cases such as those described in the last chapter, these ideologies may configure relations in such a way that 'race' others find no place in one's universe of moral obligation. Bauman, as I have shown, analysed this form of moral distancing largely in terms of the operation of the distantiating processes involved in bureaucratic action. I have suggested that ideology played a more important role in the operation of these bureaucratic relations than Bauman seems to suggest. Robert Lifton, as I showed also in the last chapter, argued that 'self-process' was affected by prevailing ideological currents. The metaphor of currents is a useful one. It suggests that subjective involvement at a certain level of a particular ideology might seem only partial or piecemeal, but that these involvements generally have broader implications because of the directedness of the ideological currents, the way that subjects get swept up into more unified and purposeful forms of action. One needs to capture both the cohesiveness of racist ideologies and their dispersion; i.e. the way that involvement in some aspects of an ideology may mean that one takes up a position which infers or leads to other positions.

Goldberg's attempt to explain the deep structure of racist discourse, to show how it tends to hold together, and to result in forms of relatively unified social actions, and yet goes through a series of historical transformations, has a much needed dynamism lacking in other accounts of racist ideology. However, while he points out that socioeconomic, political or sociological interpretations cannot help us understand "the persuasiveness of racist expression, its compelling character for subjects" (p. 57), Goldberg cannot either. He has no way of thinking through the motivations and desires that tye subjects to
racist discourses. The concept of interpellation, as he uses it, cannot adequately explain this connection. A major reason for this lack is that he can give no account of the interiority of subjects, which as I indicated above, Wolfenstein had cited as an important feature of subjectivity as understood by psychoanalysis. Most importantly, Goldberg can give no account of the intermeshing of ideological and unconscious processes. The individual self, with its motivations and desires, becomes largely irrelevant, replaced by a notion of social self-definition mediated by social discourses (p. 58) which are simply interiorized by subjects. Goldberg's race subjects are peculiarly passionless, which extends to their involvement in race ideologies.

Though he provides a convincing critique of the irrationality thesis, by pointing to the many rational and logical processes involved in racist practices and racist thinking, his concern to combat this view and related views of racism as psychological aberration, leads him away from any attempt to theorise the powerful affects which invigorate racism. Psychoanalysis, as I have suggested, can help here. Goldberg tends to caricature it on the one hand and to dismiss it outright on the other, in terms of its value in understanding racism or prejudice. In the first instance he refers to reductionist accounts which see racism as the direct outcome of men's rationalisation of their fear of losing sexual partners—which Goldberg is able to dismiss very easily. In the second case, in a fleeting reference to Joel Kovel's White Racism, he argues that a similar untenable reductionism is involved in attempts to understand racism in terms of the psychoanalytics of "unconscious symbolic mysterious fantasies."76 In this over hasty and ill-considered dismissal of the value of psychoanalysis, Goldberg has refused to raise and respond to the possibility of a psychoanalytically informed social theory of racism which is not simply reductive in individual psychological terms. Ironically enough, Goldberg himself signals the need to develop a complex understanding of

76Goldberg, op.cit., p. 104. I discuss Kovel's White Racism extensively below.
the affective bases of subjectivity and how they weave through racism, when in a general statement towards the end of his book he writes:

Race extends a tremulous identity in a social context marked by uncertainty of a future beyond this life, the uncertainty of situatedness, or at least of its lack, and the uncertainties of self-assertion and assertiveness in a world of constant flux, power shifts, neighbors and nations next door one day and gone the next. Identities like race, especially of race, offer a semblance of order, an empowerment, or at minimum an affectation of power.77

As I have pointed out, from Goldberg’s perspective on discourse and subjects he has no way of thinking this proposition through. In the remainder of this chapter I will critically examine three psychoanalytic attempts to explain the interiority of racist subjectivity.

**Freedom and the Individual in Modernity: Erich Fromm**

In *Fear of Freedom*78 Erich Fromm traced the shift from feudal to modern times through the transformations of the individual in relation to social structure, and in relation to freedom, and argued that these changes stood behind three mechanisms of escape: destructiveness, authoritarianism, and automaton conformity. It is at the level of this insight about the loosening up of identities in modernity giving rise to intense fear, and the subsequent formation of pathological forms of identity—viewed from the vantage point of a notion of potentially healthy, free individuality—that Fromm made his real contribution to the understanding of the relationship between modernity, as experienced under capitalism, and racist movements. As I will show, he sought to link these mechanisms of escape with character structures which supported contemporary phenomena like fascism, and the general intolerance for outgroups.

78Erich Fromm, op.cit. Page numbers in brackets in the text refer to this book.
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Potentially, then, Fromm might offer an account of a racist subjectivity which supports the production and reproduction of a racist society.

Fromm argues that in feudal times the round of life of the individual was far more circumscribed, and individual action and identity were dictated much more by the position of the individual in the social structure, than was the case in the emerging period of modernity. Freedom was fairly limited, but this was compensated for by the relative security the individual felt, in terms of identity, rightful action, duty and sense of place. With the rise of modernity—which Fromm largely equates with the changes wrought by capitalism in the west—the individual's position had been loosened up, and the tempo of social change had radically increased. By the time we had reached the stage of advanced modernity people were faced with a level of freedom they had never experienced before, and before which they were, in general, terrified. Capitalism, with its separation of people into competitive classes, and with its inherent political and economic crises, made the embracing of freedom offered by modernity an uncommon thing. Most people fled from it through the mechanisms of escape. These Fromm argued were analytically distinguishable, but were related in terms of their overall psychological aim. Through the mechanisms of escape the individual sought to overcome experiences of fear and aloneness by embracing a position which denied separateness. This aim he termed 'symbiosis', and it was compulsive:

This course of escape . . . is characterised by its compulsive character, like every escape from threatening panic; it is also characterised by the more or less complete surrender of individuality and the integrity of the self. Thus it is not a solution which leads to happiness and positive freedom; it is in principle, a solution which is to be found in all neurotic phenomena (p. 121).

The central and defining feature of the authoritarian personality or character structure was its sadomasochism. Sadistic attitudes and actions were directed at certain explicitly
or implicitly socially sanctioned outgroups. Masochism was exhibited toward accepted authorities. The authoritarian character thus craved to inflict suffering upon designated victims, but also to succumb to powerful authority. This double-sided response exhibited the desire for symbiosis. Sadism was an attempt to incorporate the object through domination, and thus to annihilate separateness. Masochism meant that one gave over one's individuality and individual responsibility to powerful figures, thus again succeeding in the aim of denying separateness. Destructiveness pursues the same aim in a slightly different manner. Separateness and distinctiveness are overcome by annihilating the object, and thus totally removing it from view:

The destruction of the world is the last, almost desperate attempt to save myself from being crushed by it. Sadism aims at incorporation of the object; destructiveness at its removal. Sadism tends to strengthen the atomised individual by the domination over others; destructiveness by the absence of any threat from the outside (p. 154).

It is important to note, as Fromm does, that though we can make an analytical distinction between destructiveness and sadomasochism, in reality destructiveness is always to some extent blended with sadomasochism (p. 137). It is also important to note Fromm's departure from the classical Freudian understanding of sexuality and the drives. Fromm distinguishes his position from that of Freud's earlier writings on sadomasochism, which saw sadomasochistic tendencies as sexually derived, and from Freud's late views on human destructiveness being rooted in the death instinct. Fromm argues that each of these tendencies has a social rather than instinctual source. In relation to authoritarianism he writes:

... instead of the masochistic character traits being thought of as rooted in the sexual perversion, the latter is understood to be the sexual expression of the psychic tendencies that are
anchored in a particular kind of character structure (pp. 129–30).

They became anchored there because of the individual response to the pressures of capitalist modernity, as mediated through the structures of class and family, which was a whole character response, not just a sexual one. In other words, it was a total individual response to social conditions, making use of psychological processes that were mostly unconscious. Similarly, he argues that destructiveness is much more closely related to the ways that societies, and especially class position, thwart individual expansiveness, spontaneity, and expressiveness, than it is to human instinct. One implication of this is that Fromm tends to downplay or even annihilate what was arguably the truly revolutionary view of the subject inaugurated by Freud, i.e. that the subject was inherently split and conflictual, and would be forever caught up in the attempt to reconcile opposites within the self.

The third mechanism of escape is automaton conformity, and is of central cultural importance because it is the predominant form of escape for the majority of individuals in modern society. Here one loses the integrity of a self and simply becomes a cipher for the outside world. The overcoming of separateness is achieved by becoming just like everyone else, conforming to cultural patterns to such a degree that the individual self disappears entirely. Fromm makes two very suggestive analogies. The first is of an animal taking on the colours of its environment in response to an external threat. The second analogy is the hypnotist's subject who is convinced that the thoughts and feelings put into the self by the hypnotist are actually thoughts and feelings originated by the self (p. 163). Here all is pseudo thought and pseudo feeling. The individual is neither original nor creative. The predominance of this form of escape suggested the danger that ideologies formed outside the individual would be simply and unreflectively internalised. Conformity on such a grand scale meant that the individual presented no line of defence against ideologies including fascist
and other forms of racist ideology—a theme taken up by members of the Frankfurt school in studies like *The Authoritarian Personality*, and in the critique of mass society.

In *Fear of Freedom* Fromm was specifically concerned with explaining the rise of fascism in Europe, but his cultural critique can be extended, and the mechanisms of escape themselves can be related to broader forms of racism. Adorno and others,79 for example, have argued that the libidinal structure of authoritarianism is linked to the psychological propensity to make use of processes of stereotypy, and projection and displacement of intense aggression, and to both the production of prejudice and to the receptiveness to ideologies of prejudice. Most particularly, they have pointed to the same mechanisms being involved in the psychological economy of the authoritarian personality, and in racism—compulsive attachment to the leader, to the in-group, and the intensified need to pinpoint enemies and out groups as repositories for displaced destructiveness.

Fromm understood racism as one by-product of modernity, and sought to explain the phenomenon of racism (as exhibited through fascism for example) primarily through individual psychological terms. He provided a sociological explanation for the factors which helped to produce a preponderance of psychological types, a cultural pattern. This was understood mainly as a socialisation theory of the following kind: the shift to modernity ushers in broad social/economic conditions which produce certain patterns of family life, mediated by class position, which in turn produce children with authoritarian, destructive or automaton personalities, which provide the psychological conditions for the rise of fascism and other racist movements. The impact of class is felt psychologically: certain

79T.W. Adorno et. al, *The Authoritarian Personality*. For a more recent attempt to relate the idea of the authoritarian character to incipient fascism see Ashis Nandy’s essay “Psychology of Fascism in India”, in Ashis Nandy (1980) *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
character types predominate in specific class locations. For example, Fromm argues that most of the support for Nazi ideology derived from the petit-bourgeoisie, who because of their peculiar class location developed a preponderance of authoritarian and destructive character types. The isolation of the individual and suppression of human expansiveness were much greater with them than with either the working class—which had community solidarity, and belief in a common cause where the petit-bourgeoisie had extreme individualistic capitalist competition—or the upper classes which had the compensations of power and wealth, plus less need for excessive repression of individual spontaneity and expansiveness (p. 158).

I want now to make the suggestion that while Fromm's analysis particularly of the sadomasochistic structure of the authoritarian personality is useful in depicting an important mechanism involved in racism, the relationship between subjectivity, social situations and action is inadequately theorised in his account. For it has been argued convincingly that you do not need a preponderance of authoritarian personalities, conceived of as relatively fixed sets of traits sedimented in individual personalities and transmitted through authoritarian families, for racism to become, and to continue to be produced as, a cogent social phenomenon. Moreover, it seems that people who do not have measurable authoritarian personalities may resort to positions of an authoritarian nature if submitted to enough social pressure. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, has recently discussed the experiments of Milgram as providing strong support for this claim, and directs attention to the sociological factors—especially the processes involved in bureaucratisation, and relationships to authority—as being the most important factors in explaining mass racist action.\(^80\)

Though I have criticised this perspective to some extent, Bauman must be given some ground when he points to the centrality of social situations. Alternatively, from a psychoanalytic perspective, authors influenced by the work of

\(^{80}\)See Modernity and the Holocaust, Ch. 6.
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Melanie Klein on depressive and paranoid-schizoid modes of psychological functioning, have pointed to the role of regression when explaining racism, and racist cultures. From this perspective, defence against the racist impulse will not necessarily be served by the development of strong, resistant, autonomous egos in the mass of the population, as Fromm’s argument would suggest, and which the authors of The Authoritarian Personality, and other authors associated with the Frankfurt school have, at times, claimed; for it is conceivable that these modes of psychological operation are available to all people given sufficient social pressures.  

I suggest therefore, that together with an understanding of the perpetual crises of identity that modernity threatens, we must develop a complex understanding of the notion of crisis itself and of its impact upon social, political and subjective processes. Along these lines John Cash, for example, has sought to show, in an examination of Unionist sectarian ideology in Northern Ireland, that in situations of crisis, people can regress to what Klein and others have termed the paranoid-schizoid position, and that ideologies and institutional arrangements which express and instantiate these modes of thought and feeling, can be in such moments powerfully persuasive to most people caught up in the tumult of events. This form of operating involves an extreme splitting of good and bad objects, and a massive projection of the bad onto designated outgroups. One can readily see that processes of this kind are involved in racism, and thus an understanding of them might help to explain the structure of thought and emotion that underlies racist movements. Cash has argued, along with Klein, that all human subjects in the normal course of development pass through the paranoid-schizoid position, to take up what Klein terms the depressive position. The latter involves a recognition that all whole objects, including the self and the most loved

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81 See for example the argument that is made for the strengthening of ego functions as a way to combat prejudiced thinking, in Alexander and Margaret Mitscherlich, The Inability To Mourn, pp. 78–82.
objects, including individuals and groups, contain good and bad elements, and elicit feelings of anger, hate, envy, guilt, and love. In the depressive position individuals still have recourse to the processes of splitting and projection, but these are far less pervasive than they are in the paranoid-schizoid position. Moreover, within the depressive position, with its recognition of guilt, envy, aggression etc., as present within both the self and the object, an ongoing process of reparation toward the object is put in place. Cash points out that we need to have a far more developed view of crisis than that involving economic and political crises. We need to include ideological crises which threaten cathected identities and attachment to objects such as group and nation, and chart the impact of these in terms of the psychological structure of the response to them. All subjects have access to the processes involved in the paranoid-schizoid position, and a regression to this position can powerfully shape social and political responses and outcomes.  

There is also a very suggestive account of what might be involved psychologically in racism, in Stephen Frosh’s discussion of the Kleinian notion of projective identification. When there is an excessive death drive, leading to an excess of what Klein terms constitutional envy, the normal process of splitting gets transformed from the splitting of the object into good and bad, to an object split into idealized and persecutory parts. This seems to be exactly what happens in racist environments, where one’s own self and social group—the latter conceived of as a race—are idealized, and the opposing group, also defined as a race, is seen as persecutory. Quoting Rosenfeld, Frosh provides this explanation of the process:

Projective identification relates first of all to a splitting process of the early ego, where either good or bad parts of the self are split off from the ego and are as a further step projected in love or hatred into external objects which leads

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to fusion and identification of the paranoid parts of the self with the external objects. There are important paranoid anxieties related to these processes as the objects filled with aggressive parts of the self become persecuting and are experienced by the patient as threatening to retaliate by forcing themselves and the bad parts of the self which they contain back again into the ego. 83

The point can be made that modernity itself intensifies and exacerbates this already present tendency in the individual, and with a not only available but culturally prevalent discourse of racism, and socially, even politically condoned forms of racist practice, projective identification can take a racist form. What I am suggesting is that an understanding of these psychological processes themselves can only go part of the way in explaining what is involved in racism. For these processes need to gain expression through the production and use of racist ideologies. That is to say, while there is a psychological regression, the form that this regression takes is different in different historical periods, and the forms of ideology through which the regression works, will powerfully shape the forms of action that the regression gives rise to. We must see how these psychological processes weave their way through those modern ideologies of racial hygiene and health, and hoped for unity of national/race purpose, 84 in a world marked by uncertainty and constant change.

A second problem evident in Fromm’s explanation is that the relationship between the individual and society cannot be adequately explained on the basis of his character structure approach. Each stands against the other. Fromm cannot provide us with an understanding of the way that each productively feeds into and continues to reshape the other. If the individual is stamped by society, through the process of socialisation, with a particular character structure, and then this character structure

83 Rosenfeld quoted by Stephen Frosh in *Identity Crisis*, p. 168.
84 As discussed in Chapter One.
is seen as largely determining action, thought and emotional expression, what will be the driving force that might bring about change? In other words, Fromm’s account lapses into a form of societal determinism. This points to the need to see the involvement of subjectivity in racism in a more dynamic way. As I have argued, subjectivity needs to be conceived, not as a static depository for psychological traits fixed from childhood through socialisation in the family, but as far more dynamic and subject to reorganisation through ideologies which subjects, as agents, have themselves a creative involvement in shaping.

**White Racism**

In the final sections of this chapter I will critically examine the work of Franz Fanon and Joel Kovel on white racism. I have brought these two authors together as exemplary examples of the attempt to understand racism through the analysis of the form of the white self that they argue emerged in the modern west. This brings together the themes that have been highlighted in this thesis: views of subjectivity; the role of ideology in racism; the understanding of the relationship between modernity and racism; and the place of the emotions, sexuality, and unconscious processes in racism. Here, however, the emphasis of the argument is less upon the dislocations of modernity, than it is upon a more positive, directional connection between the character and ethos of the modern west, the way that this is revealed through western subjectivity, and racism. These positive connections need to be theorised and thought through. In the view of each of these authors, black people have generally suffered as a result of becoming caught up in the *self-system* of dominant white people, through the interweaving of unconscious processes with the social structures of colonisation, imperialism and slavery.

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85 See John D. Cash “Chasing the Decentered Subject: Ideology Since Freud.”
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Fanon: Racism, Sexuality and the Black Body

One of the major claims that Fanon makes in his seminal study *Black Skin, White Masks*, is a psychological one. He argues that within a racist system the black person becomes a phobic object for the white. The black person arouses anxiety, fear and revulsion in the white person, because he or she “is endowed with evil intentions and with all the attributes of a malefic power” (p. 155). The fear, anxiety and revulsion forms a complex of feeling which conceals potent sexual desires. This dialectic of fear and desire will become important for the understanding of the eroticisation of black bodies discussed below. The phobic nature of racist thinking is also of special importance for racism because, Fanon tells us, it is heavily laden with affect, and is largely unconscious:

... the phobic is a person who is governed by laws of rational prelogic and affective prelogic: methods of thinking and feeling that go back to the age at which he experienced the event that impaired his security (p. 155).

This means that it is imbued with extraordinary, hallucinatory power and is resistant, at a very primal level, to reasoned argument. Fanon argues that psychology can only help us to understand the peculiar power of racism as a system of belief in terms of its ties to identity; we need to examine culture and history in order to understand, for example, how the Negro became for the white person such a potent phobic object. Historical, economic and cultural factors have led to the

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86Franz Fanon (1968), *Black Skin, White Masks*, MacGibbon and Kee, London, p. 151. Pages in brackets in the text refer to this work, unless otherwise indicated.

87This regression is also sexual:

Is there not a concurrent regression to and fixation at pregenital levels of sexual development? Self-castration? (The Negro is taken as a terrifying penis.) Passivity justifying itself by the recognition of the superiority of the black man in terms of sexual capacity?

Ibid, p. 177.
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formation of racism, and a racist social structure sustains and reproduces this situation. We need to look at the whole long history of the concept of blackness, and how it came, for European civilisation, to represent all that was evil and dangerous in the world. Nevertheless, the focus on identity formation is revealing of just how deeply layered racism is: it goes right to the heart of the formation of subjectivity. At the level of the individual growing up in a racist culture an unconscious dynamic is at work:

This phobia is to be found on an instinctual, biological level. At the extreme, I should say that the Negro, because of his body, impedes the closing of the postural schema of the white man—at the point, naturally, at which the black man makes his entry into the phenomenal world of the white man (p. 160).

This 'entry' occurs at a very early stage in life through story telling and through the products of popular culture within a racist society. To explain the nature of the relationship between black and white in identity formation, Fanon makes use of Lacan's notion of the Mirror Stage, through which the emergent subject misrecognizes him or herself as a unitary 'I'. Using this as his theoretical starting point, Fanon argues that, stemming from the history of colonial relations, the image of the black body has interrupted the image that the white has of his/her own body, in some profound way. In an interesting footnote Fanon asks what impact the white's recognition of the Negro has upon the white's image of the Other, and reaches this conclusion:

When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable (p. 161).
There are two points which need emphasising here. Firstly, black and white people are seen as being locked into a dialectic of self and other, but one which does not allow a true recognition of the Other. This is a form of communication distorted by ideology. In racism the Other becomes, not a person with which a self can reach understanding in a process of mutual recognition, but instead a strange and hallucinatory object that is both desired, hated and feared. Secondly, the black Other is conceived by the white self almost totally at the bodily level. It is one of the strengths of Fanon’s argument that he begins to show how cultural development has a direct impact upon the formation and shaping of psychological relations between self and other, in-group and out-group. He shows how certain features of white European development, most particularly the history of the separation of nature/biology from reason/intellect, and the denigration of the former and idealisation of the latter, have resulted, through a complex social and psychological process, in both a white fascination with and repulsion from, a black body construct. Fanon takes this to be central to the whole structure of white racism:

To suffer from a phobia of Negroes is to be afraid of the biological. The Negroes are animals. They go about naked. And God alone knows (p. 165).

This ‘imago’ in Fanon’s view is central to the reproduction of racist relations, and guides the white in all his or her relations with the black (p. 169). Thus in psychological terms racism operates primarily at an unconscious level. The cultural system produces this set of relations as an ongoing pattern.

The black person, who is clearly different in appearance to the white person, presents a problem for the latter. Fanon argues that the white person must defend the white self against an

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88 A different process is involved in antisemitism according to Fanon. Jews are not primarily focussed upon and hated/desired at the bodily level. Rather, images of distasteful ethnic otherness and acquisitiveness seem to predominate as stimulus to hatred of Jews, ibid, pp. 160-5.
Other whose difference has been largely constructed out of white Western culture's fantasy projections. There is a peculiar intensity in this personification of the Other, which becomes "the mainstay of his [the white person's] preoccupations and desires" (p. 170). This points to a particular neurosis exhibited by white people which Fanon posits as emerging through the development of white European culture:

In the remotest depth of the European unconscious an inordinately black hollow has been made in which the most immoral impulses, the most shameful desires lie dormant. And as every man climbs up toward whiteness and light, the European has tried to repudiate this uncivilised self, which has attempted to defend itself. When European civilisation came into contact with the black world, with those savage peoples, everyone agreed: Those Negroes were the principle of evil (p. 190).

The relations here are complex. In positing the extreme sexuality of the black person the white person makes of the black a sexual being who is desired but must be defended against. Making the black person hyper-sexual threatens the white's sense of sexual potency since his secret ideal "is an infinite virility" (p. 159). Moreover, because the Other (as black) becomes such a repository of vice and desire for the white, whites cannot keep their hands off blacks—they must endlessly scrutinise and refer to, pit themselves against, be repulsed by and attracted to the black person. There is a direct link between this set of relations and the development of modernity, especially in relation to the modern process of separating the human/cultural realm off from the realm of nature, which at its extreme, results in the domination and denigration of the 'natural'. The price to be paid for this achievement of the modern West, according to Fanon, has been a sort of one-

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89 Which makes more comprehensible the often sexual nature of racial violence. i.e. rape, emasculation, lynching.
sidedness of development in which the intellectual life has been enlarged while the emotional/sexual life withered away.

As I have already mentioned, Fanon provides a cultural explanation for racism. He posits that a racist European culture exists, tied to economic exploitation, but developing a certain life of its own. His explanation combines an economic with a psychoanalytic perspective. For example, he argues against the claims of another author in the following way:

M. Mannoni believes that the contempt of the poor whites of South Africa for the Negro has nothing to do with economic factors. . . we could point out to M. Mannoni that the displacement of the white proletariat’s aggression on to the black proletariat is fundamentally a result of the economic structure of South Africa (pp. 86-7).

The ‘economic’ might be determinant in the last instance, but in order to understand how the black proletariat has become a fit object for that displaced aggression we must also look at racist social structure and racist cultural production. To at least some extent this has a line of development reaching away from the purely economic. Fanon depicts this very evocatively, picking over a range of literary and artistic forms which surround people within a racist culture, and referring us back to the historical association between blackness, death, the devil and all things evil. The culture of racism has deep unconscious springs; “the myth of the bad nigger is part of the collective unconscious” (p. 92).90

But Fanon’s analysis also sheds an important light on the other side of the equation—upon the deformations of black

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90It is important to note that Fanon means something quite different to Jung here. This collective unconscious is culturally, not genetically transmitted. It is:

purely and simply the sum of the prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group . . . the collective unconscious is cultural, which means acquired (p. 188).
subjectivity within a racist culture, and particularly in the context of imperialism. The black bodies caught up in the self system of whites are not merely there to mold at will. The black person had the potential to resist, and thus a racist system depended in part for its sustenance upon constructing black subjectivities in ways which supported its own processes. Fanon argues that racist systems were in fact so powerful and all-pervasive as to make black resistance almost impossible.\textsuperscript{91} To a large extent the black person in relations of domination came to take up the position allocated to him or her within the ideologies of race. Black people were actively involved in the sensuous life of a racial culture, fleeing from blackness and pursuing a whiteness they could never hope to attain. The white body for the black person became a highly desirable object. Blackness was given similar associations with dirt and evil among the colonised people, became a term of abuse etc. Similar nightmares of blackness haunted the dream life of the colonised people, and similar fantasies of race invaded waking life.

Fanon begins with the question of language. For language he argues is central to the relationship between self and other: "For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (p. 17). In entering the language of white civilisation, the black person immediately became a support for a whole civilisation and history which indicted and dehumanised him or her:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation (pp. 17–18).

To take on the colonisers' language meant subjugation and the burial of blackness, and a movement toward the colonisers' own preferred whiteness. Whiteness became the measure for black identity. Black people in colonised situations perceived each

\textsuperscript{91}Almost, but never totally: Fanon's own life and work were a form of resistance to the place accorded him by white culture.
other in white terms and expected to be perceived by their others in this way (p. 163).

Through the flight from blackness, through the formation of black subjectivity as negativity in relation to whites, oppression was given a powerful psychological support, and resistance undermined. It is not that the brute facts of direct military and economic domination were not central to racial domination. It is the case, however, that such systems maintained the compliance of their subject populations, in part, by fomenting the inferiority complex which authors like Mannoni, wrongly as Fanon argues (p. 84), saw as inherent and dormant in primitive cultures:

The feeling of inferiority of the colonised is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior (p. 93).

Negritude itself was the result of the contact between white colonisers and the black colonised. It was a form of subjectivity that emerged out of the relation. Through degradation the black person came to feel inferior, to believe that his or her cultural life was impoverished and in no way a source of pride. In explaining the source of the native inferiority complex Fanon links the economic and cultural domination of black people with the societal breakdown of native society and its psychological mechanisms, and the imposition of a racist culture which informed them at every point of their inferiority:

In other words, I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonised native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world, 'that I am a brute beast, that my people and I are like a walking dung-heap that disgustingly fertilises sweet sugarcane and silky cotton, that I have no use in the world' (p. 98).
In his vivid self-reflections on involvement with white culture, Fanon manages to capture the pervasive power of the ideology of whiteness, but at the same time the sense of subjective partial penetration of ideological processes\(^2\) which is an inherent feature of subjectivity as I have conceived of it here. The latter needs to be emphasised. Subjects are agents involved in intersubjective processes which create the ground for their agency, for their capacity to respond to a set of ideological processes, and to create new forms of ideology and discourse. Nevertheless ideologies work as powerful forms of subjective domination. Fanon depicts the way that his own self-perception, including his bodily perception, under the all pervasive eyes of white people, came to be dominated by white images of the black man. He had been narrated by white culture and this shaped his sense of identity. His bodily self-image changed as he entered a white world and felt white people looking at him. He knew what they were thinking and he was swept up in their view of his body's negativity (pp. 110–11):

I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in the white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro (p. 116).

Fanon’s analysis provides a good example of the way that ideologies shape subjective experience within a racist culture. He works with a similar understanding of ideology to that developed by Louis Althusser.\(^3\) In one of his theses on ideology, which I have already referred to, Althusser had

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\(^2\)See especially the famous “The Fact of Blackness” chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

\(^3\)See especially Louis Althusser’s essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”.

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argued that ideology was central to the reproduction of the relations of production in a capitalist society, by ‘interpelling’ individuals as subjects who then supported that system of relations, by taking up the necessary positions within it. One gets the same sense of the way that ideologies ‘call’ individuals to certain positions which then support a racist system, in Fanon’s account of his own placement within the fabric of ideas, myths, images, attitudes, and passions of a surrounding white culture. Caught within that ideological fabric, while a powerful sense of alienation and dehumanisation is felt by the person of black color, resistance is made difficult by the vacuum into which one would plunge if one rejected white culture and its ideologies. For through colonisation, through the opening up of the closed circle of native culture, that past to which one might have had recourse has been destroyed forever:

However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the blackman there is only one destiny. And it is white (p. 12).

And yet something in Fanon resists the place set out for him by white culture. Even where he illustrates the way that white culture shows the black man at every turn his inferiority, Fanon’s own sense of inherent equality rages against the imposition. This suggests that the self or subjectivity as an agency formed intersubjectively is not only a site of domination by ideology, but at the same time a site of deep resistance. Stephen Frosh seeking to counteract what he sees as a dangerous tendency of postmodernist and poststructuralist thought to conceive of the self as merely the reflex of social processes, or worse still as a dominative ideological form which needs to be broken, has referred to this sense of the agency of the self:

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94Ibid.
95Fanon, op.cit., p. 97.
Individuals... are not fully constituted by the social processes that surround them. They share in the social, they experience modernity in all its fullness of promise and terror, but they are not identical with it. In each person there is something that can resist, something that can create, something that can appropriate the public sphere and make it home. Psychoanalytically, there is an ego which can become infused with loving values and with the ability to form constructive and reparative object relationships, in even the most dismal of circumstances.  

Fanon’s own struggle for recognition as a man beyond the distortions of race ideologies, evident throughout Black Skin, White Masks, provides a striking example of this notion of the self.

Kovel: The White Self and Race Fantasies

Fanon’s account of racist subjectivity is provocative and suggests important lines for further investigation. But it is often impressionistic in terms of its use of psychoanalysis and phenomenology to think through the issues that it raises. A more systematic approach to the explanation of the relationship between psychology, modernity and racism can be found in the work of Joel Kovel. In an early work titled White Racism Kovel dealt extensively with the psychosexual underpinnings of racist thought, fantasy and action. What is of abiding interest in this account of racism is the attempt to trace the sources of particular fantasies about race to the fantasies which emerge unconsciously at a bodily level, centred around the gradual formation of identity or subjectivity. His attempt to trace the linkages between these early fantasies and specific cultural productions of the West, and to explain how the early fantasies become transformed through cultural developments into race

96 Stephen Frosh, Identity Crisis, p. 19.
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fantasies, is challenging and fruitful. I will argue below that I do not believe that he has been completely successful in this endeavour, but that the effort is not misplaced. In fact his analysis does capture quite successfully, at various points, what is going on psychologically in white racism, and makes the important implicit claim that the study of ideologies of racism must give an account of the way that ideologies or representations of race engage and reverberate with other powerful fantasies. It is only through an understanding of this process that we can come to an understanding of the forces which contribute to the powerful hold of racism.

Kovel argues that historically racism had served an important unifying purpose in North American life, and remained deeply embedded in the whole of its culture. He argues that the period of slavery had a massive impact on cultural and economic life not just in the Southern states where it was primarily situated, but in the Northern states as well. These broad institutional arrangements had played a fundamental role in the inculcation, elaboration and proliferation of racist fantasies till they became definitive of the psychological conditions of the whole of white North America. This broad historical understanding is necessary as an underpinning for his analysis of the psychological structure of racism:

For we can see that racism (as well as any other aspect of culture) needs to be approached from the interaction of several lines of inquiry. Put simply, we must derive the symbolism and fantasies underlying racism and study their historical emergence and transformations, simultaneously. The inner nature of a cultural phenomenon becomes understandable only when its historical substructure has been grasped (p. 6).

In terms of his particular use of psychoanalysis, his basic strategy is to show how certain universal fantasies about dirt and domination, produced at the level of the individual unconscious, have gained a specific cultural expression in the
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West which has resulted in widespread racism. Kovel treads a dangerous path here as his theoretical edifice threatens to account for a specific historical production through universal unconscious fantasies, and so lose sight of racism's specificity. At its very worst extreme, this leads Kovel to argue that at base racism is really only an historico-cultural expression in the West of the universal fantasies surrounding defecation. However, at its best, what Kovel can do is provide insight into the sexual and aggressive sources of the powerful affect that is generated within racist cultures, and explain why racism so often incorporates sexual forms of domination and sexual representations of 'race' others.

Kovel makes a broad distinction between two forms of racism, which he terms dominative and aversive racism. As ideal types these derive their impetus and character from different fantasy bases. Behind dominative racism stand Oedipal fantasies, while behind aversive racism stand defecation fantasies. The different fantasy bases lead to variations in orientation to the Other. Oedipal fantasies, centred around guilt, domination and mastery, tend to result in more direct and vicious forms of racist violence and suppression. But they also lead to a closer involvement of dominating whites with black people, infused with desire, disgust, hatred and guilt. The anal fantasies, which as I will show are more central to his overall explanation of western white racism, centre around images of dirt and purity, forms of separation which have their own violence, but tend to result in more passive relationships such as avoidance of black people. Racism as it is actually experienced usually combines elements of these fantasies, though Kovel does argue for seeing an historical movement from dominative to aversive racism, and a tendency for personality types to develop around the different fantasy bases.

Each of these modes develops out of what Kovel terms the primary process. The primary process refers to representational activity that centres directly around the drives. Because the drives are biological urges, in order for them to be interpreted they must achieve symbolic form. The complex explanations for
how this process works cannot detain us here. Suffice to say that the primary representations are responses to desires and wishes. The primary drives, in Kovel's view, are sexual and aggressive but these are fairly open and can achieve satisfaction in a variety of ways. Symbolic systems, such as racism, are so powerful because they relate directly to the primary processes and to the primal fantasies that emerge from that source. Of racism in America he says: “it pervades the history of our culture at that deepest of levels at which the primary fantasies are generated” (p. 95). Related to this is the distinction that he makes between primary and secondary symbols. Primary symbols emerge directly out of the work of the ego in interpreting and negotiating primary fantasies. This involves repression of the unconscious wish, but at the same time the creation by the ego of symbolic outlets which allow some satisfaction of the drive tension attached to the wish. A primary symbol is any symbol that “refers to feeling, thought, action, value etc. and which is, correspondingly, free of reference to an external object” (p.101). Secondary symbols are ‘in the world symbols’ through which the inner primary symbols find expression outside the self. For example, in Kovel’s schema ‘blackness’ is a primary symbol which relates to the fantasies which centre around defecation, which he posits as a central process through which the self emerges and is defined in opposition/relatin to others. A process of secondary symbolisation, tied to the realm of culture, accounts for the way that this primary symbol attaches itself to, in the example of American racism, the symbol ‘Negro’. The secondary symbols which are fed by a number of primary sources will be those which are held onto most tenaciously by a culture. The Negro, for the white person, is an example of this:

Black people, for example, become symbols of blackness, of dirt, of being dominated [the fantasy of mastery is primary].

98 For a good account of the primary process and representational activity, see Anthony Elliott, op.cit., Ch. 1.
etc., and so become a basic part of the symbol system of Western culture (p. 102).

The work of the ego is central to this, and therefore central to the development of culture as an historical process:

Insofar as the ego can act upon the world, it has to affix to it a primary symbol, deriving from the inner strivings of the mind. In its action the ego creates secondary symbols, and if such symbols prove particularly fruitful for the representation of primary symbols, they will become enduring parts of culture (p. 102).

Humanity has a gift for symbol making. A whole network of related symbols can refer to a given fantasy and its ego expression, with each symbol expressing part of the original wish. Most importantly, according to Kovel, the symbolic apparatus of a culture contains certain representations by which individuals within the culture sustain the inner balance of their personalities (p. 100). Race representations, centred around the symbols of blackness and whiteness, serve this purpose for the white self of Western culture. This, Kovel argues, goes part of the way towards explaining the tenacious hold that white racism and race fantasies in general have over white people; they go right to the centre of personality.

When examining the dominative racism that was so typical of the Southern American states, Kovel attempts to use the Oedipus Complex "enlarged into a cultural apparatus that defines and binds real roles even as it apportions fantasies amongst the players of these roles" (p. 71) to describe the complex relations, at the levels both of fantasy and material life, between black and white men and women. This phenomenology of race relations in the south has a certain convincing power: it seems to capture what is going on psychologically. It also suggests that racism taps into strong feelings. Freud's account of the ambivalence of the child's relations with authority figures, as illustrated in his case studies in particular, depict affective states that lurch from the extremes of love and idealisation to
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fear, guilt, envy and murderous hatred. Kovel's account suggests that adult racists tap into these affective states which gives to racism a powerful impetus and sway over action. Racism offers violent pleasures in the release from strictures that have been put in place through the development of the superego. The set of conflicts and the ways in which aggressive and sexual impulses are repressed and sublimated as the child passes through the Oedipal stage continue to exert their influence in later adult life. Importantly, Oedipal conflicts and attempts at resolution are perpetually restaged in relations with others. Racial domination has supplied a set of conditions that Kovel argues is especially conducive to such restaging of the Oedipal phase. In this set of racially structured hierarchical relations the positions of white and black males and females are designated according to a peculiar working out of the Oedipus Complex. Through this conceptual apparatus, Kovel can account for the eroticisation of black men and women, the idealisation and purification/sterilisation of white women, and the need of white men to have black women to brutalise sexually, and black men to dominate and infantilise. It is clear, at this point, that psychoanalysis has an important role in explaining racism. Sociology remains silent about the forms through which racism expresses itself, whereas psychoanalysis begins to account for them. Kovel explores the complicated flow of potent sexual desire through these relations, intensified by fantasy, fear and guilt. A rape fantasy stands at the centre: the belief that black men want to possess through rape the white women who, because they are idealised and made into pure sexless beings, their white male counterparts cannot themselves fully possess.

In summing up the general nature of these relations, Kovel writes:

By making the rape fantasy the cornerstone of his culture, the white male only repeats in adulthood the central incest taboo of his childhood. And here the Southern culture makes its unique contribution to an ageless human problem: the Southern white male simultaneously resolves both sides
of the conflict by keeping the black man submissive, and by castrating him when submission fails. In both these situations—the one symbolically, in the other directly—he is castrating the father, as he once wished to do, and also identifying with the father by castrating the son, as he once feared for himself. All that he has to do to maintain this delectable situation is to structure his society so that he directly dominates black men (pp. 71-2).

In this scenario the black man oscillates between the position of father and son in accordance with the needs of the fantasy of the white male. And indeed in one form of the fantasy the idea that ‘blackness is bad’ is transposed to read black man represents both father and son in destructive mode, and Kovel argues that there is support for this fantasy in the black man’s social role:

... he is the bad father who possesses the black mammy (who is herself impure), and he has the genital power which forever excites the child’s envy; he is also the bad child who lusts after the pure and utterly forbidden white mother (made sexless, in reality) (p. 71).

In sum, standing behind Kovel’s argument about dominative racism is the claim that the fantasies which emerge with and surround the Oedipus Complex continue to organise the life of the individual, at least in some respects, and become imprinted upon cultural forms. Certain social arrangements promote conditions under which Oedipal fantasies hold greater or lesser sway over individuals, and will have an impact upon the particular forms in which those fantasies are played out. Periods of intense anxiety, including those which arise from racial tensions, can result in forms of regression which involve the pervasive influence of Oedipal fantasies and associated projections.99 Kovel points to the way that institutional

99 Ibid, p. 73.
arrangements stimulate the production of racist subjects. He has argued that the institutional basis for white racism in the United States was undoubtedly the peculiar form that slavery took there. It was, he argued, especially dehumanising, in part due to the interaction between an already existing slave economy and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which led to the consignment of black slaves to subhuman status, which was given official recognition in the constitution, where it was stated that for purposes of representation, blacks were only three-fifths of a person. This compromise, he argues, was caused less by persecutory hatred than by the contradiction between economic dehumanisation under capitalism, and liberalising ideals. And yet once this dehumanising structure was firmly set in place and officially legitimised it provided a powerful force "generating and channelling persecutory hatred to a prodigious degree." In other words the institution of slavery was a dehumanising structure of white racist capitalist exploitation of labor, which stimulated a peculiar playing out of intensified Oedipal fantasies, making use of prevailing racial forms of social life.

Kovel’s general explanation of white racism, however, stands or falls on the merit of his argument about the links between western culture, anal fantasies and white racism. The cluster of defecation fantasies form the nucleus, according to Kovel, of the dominant form of white racism that developed out of the West. He must explain then why defecation fantasies play such an inordinate role in the life of the West. As I will show Kovel does make a considerable attempt to explain how the character of western culture stimulates the widespread utilisation of defecation fantasies, and that this propensity has been closely associated with the development of white racism. I will argue, however, that this characterisation of the West is too

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101 Ibid, p. 216.
simplistic, and that ultimately it forms an inadequate basis from which to establish a theory of racism.

Kovel is surely right to assert that images of dirt and despised races are closely associated. This observation provides the impetus for a systematic analysis of the causes of individual and cultural reactions to dirt and smell. Dirt is central to Kovel’s understanding of aversive racism: to the way that white people are phobic about touching or coming into contact with black people. This has deep historical roots, especially in terms of the association between ‘blackness’ and dirt, and developmental roots, in terms of the relationship between faeces, dirt, the problem of inside/outside, and the developing self. The fantasies of dirt though related in development to Oedipal issues, go beyond these. Kovel claims that there is a universal aversion to dirt and ‘bad’ odours,\textsuperscript{102} though of course it takes very different forms in different cultures. He is concerned to show how in white Western culture images of bad smell and dirt came to be associated with black people, and what implications this has had for race relations. To some extent these associations had an accidental character:

Of all prejudiced-against people, none have suffered the appellation of filthiness so much as Negroes, and this peculiar fate has had something to do with the natural melanotic pigmentation of their skin (p. 82).

The symbolic apparatus of white people seized upon the external—blackness of skin—and related this to dirt, smell, and ultimately, the source for both of these, faeces. Aversion to black people is, according to Kovel, the cardinal manifestation of modern American racism:

The nuclear experience of the aversive racist is a sense of disgust about the body of the black person based upon a

\textsuperscript{102}In this claim he gets considerable support from anthropologists. See for example Mary Douglas (1966), \textit{Purity and Danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo}, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
very primitive fantasy: that it contains an essence—dirt—that smells and may rub off onto the body of the racist. Hence the need for distance and the prohibition against touching (p. 84).

In an appendix to *White Racism*, setting out his understanding of the relationship between psychoanalysis and the interpretation of culture, Kovel argues that

... culture contains, traced upon its realistic and rational structure, potent remnants of infantile and bodily experience (p. 250).

Kovel argues that there is a relationship between the fantasy life of the infant, the formation of the individual self, the urges to dominate and to exercise power in the world, and the development of racism (pp. 250-1). The process of individuation is depicted as a splitting of the self into good and bad in response to the growing frustrations the child feels in relation to the world, after a state in which the child had felt merged with the world. The child rebels against separation by segregating aspects of the self that can be loved or hated; from the outset the formation of a self is experienced in terms of a split (p. 264). The anal region and defecation become the most important early focal point for self-symbolism: "the crucial body region chosen to represent the conflicts about the formation of a self" (p. 265). Through a symbolic process, which combines symbols emerging directly out of the primary process with secondary cultural symbols, blackness in the West became so closely associated with faeces that it came to represent the latter in the cultural realm (p. 87), and these accumulated associations were then offloaded onto black people. The connections are basically hidden at the conscious level:

By and large, connections between faeces and the various symbolic organisations with which it is associated remain deeply repressed. The substance itself is abhorred, although a word, shit, is used freely enough; but for the rest the
connection is mediated through the more remote, and hence less threatening, symbols of dirt (p. 88).\textsuperscript{103}

The association between blackness and dirt, evil, the night, etc., which Fanon had argued were so important for the reception of black people by European culture, is given an additional dimension by Kovel, through a reworking of Freud's topology of mind. Particularly in the West, because of the historical development which resulted in the stripping down of the polycentric self to a duality of good and evil parts, to which Puritanism added its own peculiar hatred of the flesh and its own recasting of the split as devil and god,\textsuperscript{104} the id, the site of instinctual energies, became the reference for blackness, for all that was dark and in need of being suppressed, and this broadly cultural determination became available to all white people:

\ldots we may understand that, spurred by the superego, the ego designates the id, which is unseen, as having the quality that comes from darkness; as being black. The id, then, is the referent of blackness within the personality; and the various partial trends within the id, all repressed, make themselves symbolically realised in the world as the forms of blackness embodied in the fantasies of race (p. 66).

\textsuperscript{103} The raw manifestations of anal fantasies which may surface when racial tensions are ignited, provide some support for Kovel's argument about this connection. One example is that of the common act of smearing of faeces on the property of black people as a form of protest and threat. A less direct form is given in Kovel's example of what happened in Ann Arbor, Michigan in reaction to an open-housing movement:

Immediately following the civil rights drive, the white citizens became intensely interested in the cleaning up of their town: a crackdown was ordered on homosexuals, and an anti-litter ordinance was frantically passed. The threat had been met with an outburst of moralism and reaction formation: purer and cleaner, the community was able to settle down to business as usual.

See \textit{White Racism}, p.89.

\textsuperscript{104} See "On Racism and Psychoanalysis".
The id became the representative for everything dark, evil, and ultimately threatening for the unity of the self, and in the context of imperialism and slavery, the black person became the representative for the denied id.\textsuperscript{105}

Kovel claims that the West as a whole is a culture based around, and responding to, anal fantasies. The West has taken these anal fantasies and constructed over the top of them a whole way of life, a whole way of responding to the world. From this perspective it can be seen that:

\ldots control, stubbornness, defiance, orderliness, cleanliness, punctuality and thrift—all these complicated traits which have characterised the West more than any other civilisation—devolve onto anal fantasies and the resolution of their logical incompatibility is achieved through an unconscious symbolic root in infantile fantasies about excretion. \ldots in the modern West, reality has been restructured according to the symbolism of the excremental vision of infancy (pp. 131–2).

This involves the fear of and fleeing from faeces, but also the transformation of faeces, the sterilisation, the making something else of faeces in order that it becomes freed of its dangerous quality, its evil. This is the process of abstraction, which is the very life blood of the Western cultural process. Western culture is, above all else, an abstracting culture. The commodity form, the central defining element of capitalism, itself a product of the West, is a form of abstraction. The concept of race, an essence, is also an abstraction.\textsuperscript{106} In the course of the historical development of the west, and especially of North America, black people were deemed subhuman—'thingified'—in a process through which blackness/faeces was expelled from

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, pp. 212, 218.

\textsuperscript{106} Kovel draws a very close link between the abstraction of labor, its transformation into a commodity and the view of individuals as profitable things to be manipulated according to the needs and exigencies of the market economy, and 'race' seen as an essence, in Ibid, pp. 215–16.
the white self, neutralised by becoming a nothingness, and yet endlessly played with and toyed with, through slavery, domination, and sexual exploitation. Through slavery white civilisation was able at the same time to keep the excremental body, which it had expelled from a purified self, at a distance, but in view, where it could both play with it in a fantasy which related to symbiosis, an undifferentiated self, and also mock, punish, destroy, and distance it from the self (p. 193). Through the process of abstraction, in Kovel’s view, the West has endeavoured to create itself as a ‘pure culture’, free from dirt:

One overriding quality determines what is good and bad within the analized world: purity. And within the entire spectrum of reality, one aspect of knowledge fulfils this quality: abstraction (p. 133).

This is to say, in effect, that the rationalisation of life brought to fruition in modernity is fundamentally based on excremental fantasies, and on little more than these. In turn racism must be understood as one important outcome of the whole historical process of the West, and emerges from that deepest of levels—the primary process.

One of the main virtues of Kovel’s interpretation is in his recognition, through the discussion of fantasy, that the subject is never unitary, but is on the contrary radically decentred. Unconscious fantasy plays a central role in adult life, and is central to the understanding of racist subjectivity and action. This emphasis on race fantasies, and the explanation for the institutional arrangements and crisis situations which stimulate their flooding of subjective consciousness, gives to Kovel’s explanation a power that is lacking in more sociological explanations of racism. Moreover, what is most promising in Kovel’s general line of argument lies in his attempt to explain how unconscious fantasies and representations, produced at the very outset of the formation of subjectivity, in the infant’s separation from the mother and gradual forging of an individuated self, are reproduced and transformed through the subject’s involvement within culture, and find an outlet in
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historically produced cultural fantasies about race. Nevertheless, I see two major critical points that need to be raised in response to Kovel's argument.

In the first place he overplays the role of anal fantasy in the formation and development of western culture. The complexity of modernity, and the particular nature of its achievements, are therefore overlooked, in a onesided critique of the development of industrial society and its 'abstracting' culture. Despite certain disclaimers, a sort of nostalgia for and romanticising of the premodern world pervades Kovel's critique of modernity and racism. The world of the 'primitive' for example is seen as more spiritual and rich, than the world of modernity. The 'primitive' world is seen as having an openness towards the world of experience and to otherness that the modern world and its people has lost. 107 There is no room in such imagery for an assessment of the communicative possibilities only unleashed within modernity, and the opportunities these might provide for the formation of a common world beyond the racial divide. 108

Thus Kovel operates with a too simplistic view of modernity, which results in his drawing of too direct a link between the character of modernity and the character of racism. Related to this is his rather monolithic view of the form of the white self which emerged from the cultural process of the West under the tutelage of Christianity, modern science and capitalism, and the seemingly inevitable racism inherent in this form of self. For example, he has recently argued 109 that racism must be situated as the current end point of the long historical

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107 See especially "On Racism and Psychoanalysis."

108 This perspective which follows the theory of communicative action developed by Jürgen Habermas, is not an idealist and utopian view. There are no guarantees that the more destructive forces unleashed within modernity can be held in check, or that the communicative communities which modernity has unleashed as a possibility will in fact be achieved historically. There are no guarantees that the link between racism and modernity will be dissolved.

109 Joel Kovel, "On Racism and Psychoanalysis."
process of the West, which has resulted in the formation of a rigid unitary ego in place of polycentric identity, seen as a kind of stripping down of the psyche and the reduction of its own intensity and ambivalence. Through this process the Western mentality started to regard itself as homogeneous and purified—the reflection of ‘mind’ or ‘cogito’—and it was led to assign ambivalence and negativity to other non-Western peoples, and so to enmesh them in the system of racism. He argues that there remains, despite all repressive efforts, a radical ambivalence at the centre of human nature. The modernising state, at its own peril, has sought to drive away, repress, or deny this ambivalence through its rationalisation processes. As other authors have argued, this attitude and effort stands behind modernity’s apparent and peculiar intolerance for all forms of difference.\(^{110}\) Racism, therefore, is very closely related, for Kovel, to the Enlightenment ideal of the fully rational individual, and to the Enlightenment’s attitude of self-confidence and certainty about its civilising project. He argues that the sort of homogenised psyche that emerged out of the developmental process of the West not only occurred alongside the debasement of other cultures; the latter was crucial to the development of the West’s inflated sense of itself—ultimately a sense of its own ‘pure whiteness’—and to the West’s peculiar cultural and technological achievements. The other races came to embody different segregated mental essences. White civilisation, together with the peculiar form of subjectivity that it has supported, needed to create a vision of debased instinct and degradation in order to construct itself:

Without the spectacle of lost nature to hate and be fascinated by, it is doubtful whether the reduction of the psyche to a homogeneous personality could be sustained.\(^{111}\)

\(^{110}\) A version of this argument can be found in Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Julia Kristeva (1991) has argued this point extensively in her *Strangers To Ourselves*, Columbia University Press, Oxford/New York.

Racism conceived of as the other side of the 'regime of the ego,' will not be broken down until that regime is broken. But if modernity as a process requires the 'regime of the ego' as its central support, what social forces might contribute to the replacement of the 'rigid' white self, and thus how could racism be conceivably overcome? Because he gives no real account of the emancipatory impulses of modernity this question can find no real answer within Kovel's theory of racism.

Secondly, through placing so much emphasis upon the symbolic relationship between blackness, the 'dark regions of the psyche' (the id) and dirt, his explanation for racism can find no real common ground with other forms of racism. Given the central place that he accords defecation fantasies in the cultural life of the West, and as standing behind and fuelling racism, how then would he explain the link between dirt fantasies and non colour forms of racism? If he argues that white racism is the exemplary form of racism involved in Western imperialism, that the white self is the central form of Western consciousness, and that modernity is closely associated with certain splits which refer back to defecation fantasies, what fantasies stand behind the links between modernity and other forms of racism? Are the ethnic conflicts between peoples of colour not to be included under the question of modernity's stimulation of racism? A return to the the issue of the impact of the dislocations of modernity upon individual and group identities might, especially when trying to account for related but different forms of racism, provide a better explanation.

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112 Kovel has argued that he does not make the claim that his explanation of white racism can be transposed wholesale to the explanation of other forms of racism, such as racist anti-semitism. Ibid, p. 214.
Conclusion

Racism is a complex, modern phenomenon. In this thesis I have argued for an explanatory framework which can account for the links between the period of modernity and racism. Broad socioeconomic and political processes, and historical transformations constitutive of modernity, stand behind and have fuelled the production of racist ideology and other forms of practice through which racist domination has been achieved. I have suggested that the more pessimistic view of modernity that stands behind several accounts of its links with racism needs to be tempered by an understanding of modernity’s emancipatory potential. This is an area which I have not been able to elaborate upon in any detail within the confines of this thesis. I have indicated, however, that the project of modernity unleashes certain potentials which lead, paradoxically, in two different directions: towards solidarity and identity formation beyond the racial divide, and towards forms of violent and defensive assertions of racial identity in the face of modernity’s inherent uncertainties and dislocations.

Within the period of modernity racism has made use of, and has been shaped by, modern forms of discourse and practice, and modern forms of articulated knowledge including the natural and social sciences. I have argued that an adequate framework for explaining racism must be able to move down from this more macro level of analysis, to show how racism is experienced as a 'lived relation' by subjects. I have argued that such a framework must at the same time attend to the impact of modern conditions on individual and group identities. A theory of ideology, which can incorporate an understanding of the formation and transformation of subjectivity, in the context of a complex understanding of the impact of social situations, has the potential to provide the mediating link between these macro and micro understandings of racism. In this thesis I have only been able to give an indication of what such an approach might involve. Further work in this area could present fruitful results.
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Most particularly, as I have sought to illustrate through my discussions of psychoanalytic explanations for racism, an important line of inquiry centres around the linkages between racist ideologies and unconscious processes, affects, sexuality, and fantasies. Only through the exploration of these linkages will one achieve an understanding of the peculiar compulsion involved in racist ideology, the tendency for racist categories to persist despite their intellectual dismantling, and their continuing power to organise and reorganise social relations. I have pointed to certain problems involved in the character structure approach to the linkages between the individual and society, and have suggested the need to develop a more dynamic view of subjectivity, which can capture the shift and change of subjectivities in response to ideology.
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