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Reviews •

Rearticulating Marxism

George Hartley

Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; x + 738 pages, \$18.95.

During this Marxist conference I have frequently had the feeling that I am one of the few Marxists left.

Fredric Jameson

MARXISM IS IN A STATE OF CRISIS. Faced with theoretical challenges which question nearly all of its underlying concepts, Marxist theorists have had to sift through the rubble in order to reconstruct a viable and democratic model for contemporary political practice. But how does one go about rebuilding that edifice when its foundations have been so thoroughly knocked down? That is the question which hovers over all of the essays collected in Cary Nelson's and Lawrence Grossberg's recent book, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*.

As many of the essays in this collection (which grew out of a 1983 summer conference at the University of Illinois) attest, the major theoretical and political challenge facing contemporary Marxist theorists, such as A. Belden Fields, Paul Patton, and Gayatri Chak-

ravorty Spivak, is the figure of Michel Foucault. What I will attempt here is a sketch of the Foucault that emerges in the pages of *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. In general, one could pose that challenge, following Cornel West in his essay "Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Oppression," as an assault on the four following thematics of orthodox Marxism: (1) totalizing frameworks; (2) teleological narratives; (3) homogeneous continuities in history; and (4) recuperative, nostalgic strategies in interpretation. In Derridean terms what is at issue is the "logocentric" economism of Marxism, the tendency to pose the economy as the transcendental signifier for all other cultural practice; that is, the economy figures as the hidden cause and ultimate meaning of all "levels" of society. In short, the post-structuralist challenge denies the validity of any base/superstructure model, even one so sophisticated as Louis Althusser's conception of history as an absent cause, as the determining structural force that appears only in the never-to-be-realized "last instance."

FOR FOUCAULT, THE MARXIST ATTENTION to class would be dependent on an illegitimate totalizing framework. The state itself attempts to justify its existence by a similar totalization that condones the concept of centralized power and its necessary institutions which enforce that power. Totalization thus necessarily leads to totalitarianism, for once the concept of state or society is posed, all of the heterogeneous elements in that "society" must fall in line behind that center or essence. Consequently, when Marxists employ totalizing notions such as state or class they engage in the same totalitarian strategies of closure and domination as the state they oppose. Just so, any concept of ideology depends on the hypostatization of the concept of class and leads to the search for determining class interests which inform all discursive practices.

Marxism employs a macrological approach in its analysis of exploitation; in reaction to this, Foucault chooses instead a micrological analysis of what he sees as the discrete and heterogeneous pockets of power that exist in society. As A. Belden Fields explains in his essay, "In Defense of Political Economy and Systemic Analysis: A Critique of Prevailing Theoretical Approaches to the New Social Movements,"

Foucault directs us to the extremities, to the sites where power is exercised on people in concrete experiences. He seeks to break through the abstraction of the state and to reach down to the concrete level of human interaction where power is really and visibly exerted....

As we will see, Foucault's approach ironically mimics that of the positivists in his insistence on notions such as "concrete experience" of power in its "real" and "visible" manifestations. For him, the abstractions common to Marxist discourse—class, state, ideology—must then be mystification categories with no "real" referent, diversions from the recognition of the daily local exercises of power. Foucault prefers the concrete sites, such as prisons, schools, and mental institutions, where conformity is ingrained—through violence when necessary—into the individual.

Discourse rather than punishment, however, plays the central role in Foucault's mechanics of power. It is this key concept of his that has offered the most to contemporary Marxist theories of ideological struggle—despite Foucault's rejection of ideology. In "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists," Stuart Hall explains:

Discursive formations (or ideological formations that operate through discursive regularities) "formulate" their own objects of knowledge and their own subjects; they operate their own repertoire of concepts, are driven by their own logics, operate their own enunciative modality, constitute their own way of acknowledging what is true and excluding what is false within their own regime of truth. They establish through their regularities a "space of formation" in which certain statements can be enunciated; one constellation constantly interrupts, displaces, and rearranges another.

Power struggles, then, take place through the contestation of discourses which vie for dominance in order to perpetuate their own subject positions and object constructions in the field of knowledge. While this description comes quite close to many contemporary Marxist formulations of ideological struggle within a given social formation, there is no notion here of one discourse being more "ideological" (in the sense of false consciousness) than another. In "Class, Power, and Culture," Jack Aramiglio, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff write that, for Foucault, "actual discursive formations are never purely scientific nor 'ideological' since there is no center of a discursive formation that guarantees a uniform set of effects or imposes a uniform set of constitutive rules." Instead, the above three authors contend, the point for Foucault is that discourses construct "particular modes of objectification (knowledges) through which agents are produced as subjects and inscribed within a network of 'localized' power relations."

Foucault's micrological study of power and knowledges has affected the theorists in this volume in a variety of ways. Among those who

incorporate Foucault's position almost in its entirety into their own positions is Paul Patton. In his "Marxism and Beyond: Strategies of Reterritorialization," he comes closer than perhaps anyone else represented in these pages to denying Marxism any validity whatsoever in light of the advances of Foucaultian (and Deleuzian) theorizing, as his title suggests. In his battle with "orthodox" Marxists, such as Alex Callinicos, who supposedly refuse to politicize their own methods of theorizing, Patton forwards the goal of non- (or even anti-) totalizing thought. According to Patton:

Callinicos defends a classical conception of classical Marxist theory: it is no different from any other "scientific research program" and may be defined by a method and a set of core doctrines such as materialism, the determining role of the relations of production, the centrality of class struggle, and so on. His predominant attitude toward non-Marxist theory is essentially reactive: the superiority of Marxism must be asserted, along with the priority of the problems Marxism addresses.

As we shall see, Patton's sensitivity to the questions that Callinicos seems to sweep under the rug must be seen as a positive initial step in rethinking the validity and scope of Marxism today. But a second question must then arise concerning the validity of Patton's own valorization of theoretical "lines of flight" and "nomadism"*: are we accomplishing any socially constructive goals by such complete, and in their own way reactive, refusals to totalize? Perhaps Patton's plural oppositions of state and nomadism, totalization and de-territorialization, simply produce their own essentialist form of "theoretical capture" by so thoroughly equating totalization with totalitarianism. Patton writes: "It is never easy to predict where the fault-lines of a given conjuncture lie, or from where might come the lines of flight that destabilize an entire social system." But where does he get the theoretical authority to discuss "an entire social system" when his devotion to localism—which I should add here is a necessary correction but not entire reproof of some Marxist totalizations—denies the possibility of theorizing the totality, or even of positing the structural existence of any totality whatsoever? I shall return to this point.

At first reading, Ernesto Laclau appears to take a similar position in his essay, "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms." When he claims, for example, that "society is ultimately impossible" and that "everything becomes discourse," we have to wonder how any theorizing predicated

on these positions could in any way resemble what we know as Marxism. But I wish to argue that Laclau's position, while deliberately challenging the received vocabulary of Marxism, provides us with the necessary groundwork for constructing a viable Marxist (or neo-Marxist) approach to politics.

Laclau begins his essay with a summary of the challenge to the Second International posed by Rosa Luxemburg. The importance of her challenge for Laclau was her claim that the particular strike in 1917 which led the people of Russia to rise up against the state was not proof of the inexorable laws of capitalist development, but instead the symbolic conflation of a particular political event and a general ideological atmosphere. The view of the strike as a result of the necessary movement of history was a lucky coincidence of two relatively unrelated phenomena which then took on a symbolic unity of its own. "It is not a unity that is given by any structure determinable a priori," Laclau claims, "but is constructed in this process of what today we would call the overdetermination of the meaning of a social event." The unity of the working class at this point is the result of a symbolic condensation of otherwise separate signifiers, from which Laclau concludes: "If the unity of the class is created through this process of symbolic representation, the unity of the class itself is a symbolic event and belongs consequently to the order of the metaphor."

THE QUESTION THEN ARISES: if this unity is symbolic rather than necessary, then why is it specifically a class unity? "In the countries of the third world," Laclau continues, "this process of overdetermination of popular struggles creates social identities that are not essentially class identities.... These developments introduce some gaps into the argument concerning the necessary laws of capitalist development as presented by the Second International." Here we come to Laclau's celebrated concern with the articulation of non-class struggles and identities as a necessary correction of traditional Marxism's essentialization of class identity. But how do we explain the mechanics of this identity-construction if the symbolic bridging of this gap between the event and the general context follows no necessary development? This is ultimately a political question: how can we bridge that gap in a way that serves the interests of the exploited when we see it arise in the future?

*Nomadism can be defined as a pluralistic force which opens up the movement of a given social formation, as opposed to the captive movement of the state.

Laclau's answer is to develop Gramsci's notion of hegemony. But in order to do that we must abandon the notion of society, for such a notion serves as a determinant and ultimate limit to the possibilities of constructing more egalitarian symbolic unities. Are we again faced with a refusal to totalize on the order of Foucault? Not really, for Laclau's alternative is much more sophisticated: instead of positing the objectification of social relations into something called "society," Laclau prefers focusing on what more accurately should be referred to as "the social."

If we are to be true to the anti-essentialist gesture of much recent theorizing, such as Althusser's, then we can neither posit the objectivity of the elements (Foucault's "concrete instances of power") nor of the relations (the Second International's "necessary laws of capitalist development"). Neither absorbs nor exhausts the other, for each exists within a system of differences, each drawing its identity from the existence of the other. It is in this sense that "society is ultimately impossible."

But what of Laclau's claim that "everything becomes discourse"?

Such a situation [the necessary dependence of objects in a system of differences], in which there is a constant movement from the elements to the system but no ultimate systems or elements—these are finally metaphoric expressions—a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed, is what I call "discourse."

It is from this notion of structure as constantly negotiated and constructed that Laclau's conception of discourse gets its political clout:

And the fact that we cannot speak of society in such a way [as an objectified unit] is why we have to have a concept of hegemonic relations. Hegemonic relations depend upon the fact that the meaning of each element in a social system is not definitely fixed. If it were fixed, it would be impossible to rearticulate it in a different way, and thus rearticulation could only be thought under such categories as false consciousness.

Discourse—which is not to be reduced to language, but instead to be thought of as the differential structure of all social practices—is thus the space of hegemonic struggle.

Following Laclau's de-essentializing of the concept of society by referring to "the social," we can perhaps approach the question of totalization which haunts the discussions in Nelson's and Grossberg's anthology. Rather than speaking in essentialist terms of the totality—which seems to call up the ghosts of Stalin and Lenin—perhaps we

can deflect that question by speaking instead of "the totalizable" or, in a more Althusserian construction, "totality-effects." Such a terminology would allow us to speak of the mediated effects of elements and structures on one another without tossing either into the trash can of history. This is necessary as a political gesture for, whether we like it or not, "the social" is always being totalized in other discourses which compete with our own for hegemony. While Patton's Deleuzian motion of de-territorialization is a necessary deconstructive first movement, the resulting fragments will be rearticulated by someone. The question must always be: whose interests are to be served in that rearticulation?

This is precisely the question behind Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's admirable essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak lauds Foucault (as well as Gilles Deleuze) for two crucial recognitions:

First, that the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counter-productive—a persistent critique is needed; and second, that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other. Yet the two systematically ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history.

In a curious way Foucault and Deleuze resurrect that which they had hoped to banish: their emphasis on heterogeneity leads them to deny the existence of a transcendental subject, the self-sufficient monad; instead they point to the multiple trajectories of desire as the producer of subject-effects. But in the process they end up essentializing desire as the new Subject of Europe and reducing Europe's "Other"—the third world—to the status of Object, the object of European Desire. The notions of ideology and interests get absorbed into this "parasubjective matrix" called desire. Consequently, argues Spivak:

The critique of ideological subject-constitution within state formations and systems of political economy can now be effaced, as can the active theoretical practice of "transformations of consciousness." The banality of leftist intellectuals' lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent.

But, Spivak continues, this transparency of the intellectual subject and the effacement of the concept of ideological interests has dangerous consequences:

However reductionistic an economic analysis might seem, the French intellectuals forget at their peril that this entire overdetermined enterprise was in the interest of a dynamic economic situation requiring that interests, motives (desires), and power (of knowledge) be ruthlessly dislocated. To invoke that dislocation now as a radical discovery that should make us diagnose the economic (conditions of existence that separate out "classes" descriptively) as a piece of dated analytic machinery may well be to continue the work of that dislocation and unwittingly to help in securing "a new balance of hegemonic relations."

Foucault and Deleuze end up complementing the very effort of capitalism to render the processes of imperialism transparent.

HOW DOES SPIVAK SPEAK to the totality/totalitarianism equation? Foucault's mistake here, she suggests, is his conflation of the disjunction between two separate concepts, which she discusses with the example of the conflation of the two senses of the word "representation." For Marx the problem was much simpler, since in German the two senses have two separate words. On the one hand, Marx uses the word *Vertretung* to discuss the political sense of representation—representation by proxy, by a representative who stands in for her constituents. On the other hand, *Darstellung* refers to representation in the semiotic sense, as the conceptual representation of the economy, for example. Politics is the mode of manifesting representation as *Vertretung*, whereas the objectification of labor as value is an example of the mode for *Darstellung*. We should note here that Foucault attends solely to the side of *Vertretung*, the micrological texture of power, while Marx supplements that with *Darstellung*, the macrological networks of exploitation and geopolitical domination. Spivak argues that ideology appears in the gap between the two:

[We] must note how the staging of the world of representation—its scene of writing, its *Darstellung*—dissimulates the choice of and need for "heroes," paternal proxies, agents of power—*Vertretung*.

The complicity [of the two], their identity-in-difference as the place of practice—since this complicity is precisely what Marxists must expose, as Marx does in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*—can only be appreciated if they are not conflated by a slight of word.

With these distinctions in mind we can now return to the totality/totalitarianism couplet. The project of totalizing thought in and of itself carries no necessary political result. It should be considered simply as the attempt to graph the mechanics of *Darstellung*, a project which Fredric Jameson calls "Cognitive Mapping." This need not be

an essentializing process, however. As Spivak points out, "Marx's contention here is that the descriptive definition of a class can be a differential one—its cutting off and difference from all other classes." The concept of class in this instance is thought of as a result of what Laclau refers to as discursivity. (That this notion of discourse relies heavily on Foucaultian theory only magnifies the irony here.) In the same way, the totality can be posited as a differential conception, as the effect of structure in the Althusserian sense.

WHAT SHOULD BE CLEAR by this point is that few of the writers in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* accept the either/or position assumed in Foucault's devotion to microphysics. The question is not between totalization or localization but of a way of conceiving and representing the articulation of the two. Darko Suvin offers a suggestive though problematic approach:

Respecting the intimately sociohistorical character of all semiotics means acknowledging that in language any meaning of a term is a matter of semantics and pragmatics, and in nonverbal communication it is another variant of, as [Umberto] Eco put it, a "cultural unit."

Suvin insists on going beyond the traditional structural couplet of syntagmatic and paradigmatic, or syntactics and semantics, by positing a third "level" ("axis" does not seem quite fitting for Suvin). That third level, pragmatics, can be defined as "the domain of relationships between the signs and their interpreters, which clarifies the conditions under which something is taken as a sign." Syntactics ("the domain of relationships between signs and their formally possible combinations") and semantics ("the domain of relations between the signs and the entities they designate") must be complemented by pragmatics if the social nature of the sign is to be registered. But what relationship does pragmatics have to the other two domains? How would we schematize this relationship to the usual paradigmatic/syntagmatic axis? Suvin suggests that "pragmatics is a constitutive and indeed enveloping complement" of the two.

We thus pass from the vertical/horizontal axis to a concentric envelope of spheres with semantics at the center, syntactics as the sphere enveloping semantics (for the multiple possibilities of reference of the sign are limited by syntax), and pragmatics as the outer sphere and outer limit of the sign. This conception postulates, claims Suvin,

a reality organized not only around signs but also around subjects, in the double sense of a psychological personality and a socialized, collectively representative subject. The entry of potentially acting subjects reintroduces acceptance and choice, temporal genesis and mutation, and a possibility of dialectical negation into the frozen constraints of syntax.

UNFORTUNATELY, WHILE SUVIN seems to reinsert the historical process into semiotics, he does so in an essentializing way. Such a notion of concentric spheres reinserts not only a genetic conception of history (with teleology trailing not far behind), but also a certain expressive causality, with history once again figuring as the transcendental signifier for the "signifying situation" itself, practice as the constitutive and englobing context of signification. Now we once again have subjects who in practice recognize the intended semantic goal of the signifying subject. What has been lost is the gain of posing signifying practices as processes engaged in differential (rather than essential) structures. What has been lost is the recognition that, as Michel Pecheux puts it:

Discourse, by its very existence, marks the possibility of a deconstructing-restructuring of [memory] networks and [social] trajectories. Any given discourse is a sign of a movement within the sociohistorical filiations of identification, inasmuch as it constitutes, at the same time, a result of these filiations and the work (more or less conscious, deliberate, and constructed or not, but all the same traversed by unconscious determination) of displacement within their space: there is no completely "successful" identification; that is, there is no sociohistorical link that is not affected in some way by an "infelicity" in the performative sense of the term....

In any case, the positions marked in this review around the question of totalizing thought and political practice have hardly exhausted the complex issues at stake. What they have done, however, is to problematize the notion, which Jameson seems to fall back on in the quotation with which I open this review, that there is such a thing as "true" Marxism. The ultimate beauty of a collection such as Nelson and Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* is its revitalization of the debate around questions which challenge—and I believe with positive results for "Marxism"—the very nature of Marxist thought today. Such a collection will help us for some time in our attempts to rearticulate Marxism.

Pygmalion as Black and Female

Missy Dehn Kubitschek

Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; 223 pages; \$19.95.

MATERIALIST ANALYSIS WITHOUT JARGON? Comprehensive literary criticism making major new claims? For Christmas in July, read Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood*. Carby presents an informative materialist corrective to what she sees as established dogma in three areas: white political feminism that obscures the historical interactions of American black and white women to claim a non-existent unity; sexist history that declares W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington the spokesmen of African-Americans 1880-1910 without reference to the several prominent African-American women writers; and current conventions of literary interpretation, including the most influential academic constructions of black literary traditions.

The book is thus a polemic, but instead of indulging in the rancor so characteristic of academic discourse, it rigorously evaluates others' positions with a real generosity. Carby identifies flaws in the critical stances of two landmarks (Barbara Smith's 1977 "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" and Deborah McDowell's 1980 "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism"), while at the same time saluting them for confronting academia with pressing issues about black women's identities and literature. Noting that Smith claimed recognition for a marginalized lesbian perspective, Carby affirms McDowell's critique

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