Edited by

Russell Ferguson

Martha Gever

Trinh T. Minh-ha

Cornel West

Foreword by

Marcia Tucker

Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures

Images selected by

Félix González-Torres

The New Museum of Contemporary Art New York, New York

The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England

zer
NX
180
.S6
O97
1990

The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
Documentary Sources in Contemporary Art
Series Editor: Marcia Tucker

Volume 1. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*
Edited by Brian Wallis

Volume 2. *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*
Edited by Brian Wallis

Volume 3. *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture*
Edited by Russell Ferguson, William Olander, Marcia Tucker, and Karen Fiss

Volume 4. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*
Edited by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West

This volume is made possible through a generous grant from The Henry Luce Fund for Scholarship in American Art.

Images selected by Félix González-Torres
Editorial Assistant: Alice Yang
Production Coordinator: Sowon Kwon
Typeset by Strong Silent Type, New York
Designed by Bethany Johns with Georgie Stout

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Out there: marginalization and contemporary cultures /
edited by Russell Ferguson . . . [et al.].
p. cm.
ISBN 0-262-56064-X
1. Arts and society–History–20th century. 2. Ethnic arts.
3. Minorities in Art. 4. Marginality, Social–History–20th
century. I. Ferguson, Russell.
NX 180.S6097 1990
700'.1'0308693–dc20 90-5562
CIP
Sixth printing, 1999

© 1990 The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without written permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

The New Museum of Contemporary Art,
583 Broadway, New York, New York 10012

The MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02142

Contents

7 Director's Foreword — Marcia Tucker
9 Introduction: Invisible Center — Russell Ferguson

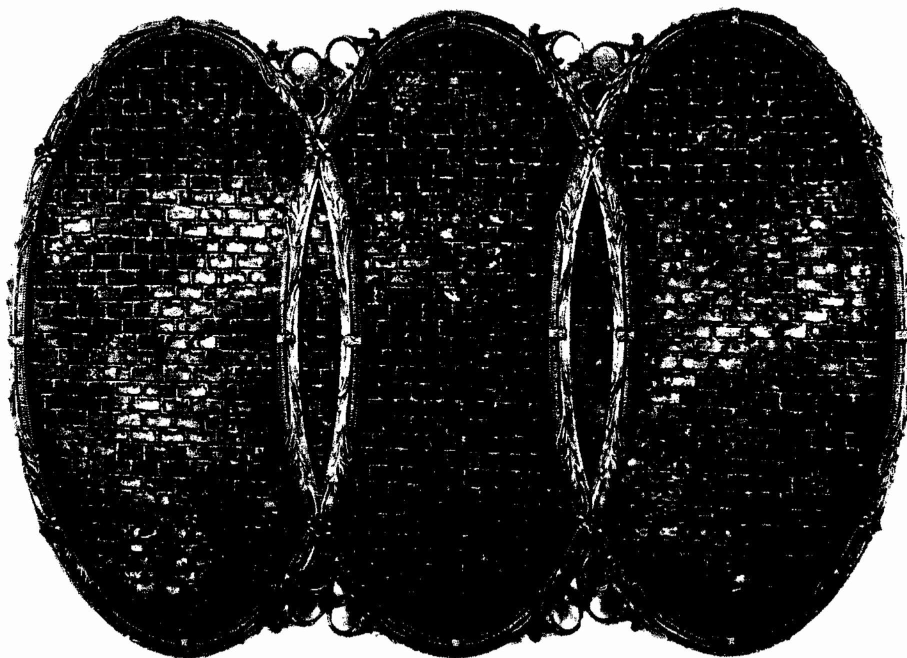
Other Questions: Critical Contexts

19 The New Cultural Politics of Difference — Cornel West
39 Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture — Michele Wallace
51 The Straight Mind — Monique Wittig
59 What is a Minor Literature? — Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari
71 The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism — Homi K. Bhabha
89 Missionary Positions: AIDS, Africa, and Race — Simon Watney
107 Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City — Rosalyn Deutsche
133 Please Wait By the Coatroom — John Yau
141 On Collecting Art and Culture — James Clifford

Wild Tongues: Affirming Identities

191 The Names We Give Ourselves — Martha Gever
203 How to Tame a Wild Tongue — Gloria Anzaldúa
213 Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture — James A. Snead
233 Mourning and Militancy — Douglas Crimp
247 Black Hair/Style Politics — Kobena Mercer
265 Complexion — Richard Rodriguez
281 Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference — Audre Lorde
289 Coming to Terms — Richard Dyer
299 The Site of Memory — Toni Morrison

BOĞAZİÇİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ KÜTÜPHANESİ
432332



Black Hair/Style Politics

Some time ago Michael Jackson's hair caught fire when he was filming a television commercial. Perhaps the incident became newsworthy because it brought together two seemingly opposed news-values: fame and misfortune. But judging by the way it was reported in one black community newspaper, *The Black Voice*, Michael's unhappy accident took on a deeper significance for a cultural politics of beauty, style and fashion. In its feature article, "Are we proud to be black?," beauty pageants, skin-bleaching cosmetics and the curly-perm hair-style epitomized by Jackson's image were interpreted as equivalent signs of a "negative" black aesthetic. All three were roundly condemned for negating the "natural" beauty of blackness and were seen as identical expressions of subjective enslavement to Eurocentric definitions of beauty, thus indicative of an "inferiority complex."[1]

The question of how ideologies of "the beautiful" have been defined by, for and–for most of the time–against black people remains crucially important. But at the same time I want to take issue with the widespread argument that, because it involves straightening, the curly-perm hair-style represents either a wretched imitation of white people's hair or, what amounts to the same thing, a diseased state of black consciousness. I have a feeling that the equation between the curly-perm and skin-bleaching cremes is made to emphasize the potential health risk sometimes associated with the chemical contents of hair-straightening products. By exaggerating this marginal risk, a moral grounding is constructed for judgements which are then extrapolated to assumptions about mental health or illness. This conflation of moral and aesthetic judgement underpins the way the article also mentions, in horror and disgust, Jackson's alleged plastic surgery to make his features "more European-looking."

Reactions to the striking changes in Jackson's image have sparked off a range of everyday critiques on the cultural politics of "race" and "aesthetics." The apparent transformation of his racial features through the glamorous violence of surgery has been read by some as the bizarre expression of a desire to achieve fame by "becoming white"–a deracializing sell-out, the morbid symptom of a psychologically mutilated black consciousness. Hence, on this occasion, Michael's misfortune could be read as "punishment" for the profane artificiality of his image: after all, it was the chemicals that caused his hair to catch afire.

The article did not prescribe hair-styles that would correspond to a "positive" black self-image or a politically "healthy" state of black subjectivity. But by reiterating the 1960s slogan–Black Is Beautiful–it implied that hair-styles which avoid artifice and

look "natural," such as the Afro or Dreadlocks, are the more authentically black hair-styles and thus more ideologically "right-on." But it is too late to simply repeat the slogans of a bygone era. That slogan no longer has the same cultural or political resonance as it once did; just as the Afro, popularized in the United States in the period of Black Power, has been displaced through the 1970s by a new range of black hair-styles, of which the curly-perm is just one of the most popular. Whether you care for the results or not, these changes have been registered by the stylistic mutations of Michael Jackson and surely his fame indicates something of a shift, a sign of the times, in the agendas of black cultural politics. How are we to interpret such changes? And what relation do changes in dress, style and fashion bear to the changed political, economic and social circumstances of black people in the 1980s?

To begin to explore these issues I feel we need to *de-psychologize* the question of hair-straightening and recognize hair-styling itself for what it is, a specifically cultural activity and practice. As such we require a historical perspective on how many different strands–economic, political, psychological–have been woven into the rich and complex texture of our nappy hair, such that issues of style are so highly charged as sensitive questions about our very "identity." As part of our modes of appearance in the everyday world, the ways we shape and style hair may be seen as both individual expressions of the self and as embodiments of society's norms, conventions and expectations. By taking both aspects into account and focusing on their interaction we find there is a question that arises prior to psychological considerations, namely: *why do we pour so much creative energy into our hair?*

In any black neighborhood you cannot escape noticing the presence of so many barber-shops and hairdressing salons; so many hair-care products and so much advertising to help sell them all; and, among young people especially, so much skill and sheer fastidiousness that goes into the styles you can see on the street. Why so much time, money, energy and worry spent shaping our hair?

From a perspective informed by theoretical work on subcultures,[2] the question of style can be seen as a medium for expressing the aspirations of black people excluded from access to "official" social institutions of representation and legitimation in the urban, industrialized societies of the capitalist First World. Here, black peoples of the African diaspora have developed distinct, if not unique, patterns of style across a range of practices from music, speech, dance, dress and even cookery, which are politically intelligible as creative responses to the experience of oppression and dispossession. Black hair-styling may thus be evaluated as a popular *art form* articulating a variety of aesthetic "solutions" to a range of "problems" created by ideologies of race and racism.

Tangled Roots and Split Ends: Hair as Symbolic Material

As organic matter produced by physiological processes human hair seems to be a "natural" aspect of the body. Yet hair is never a straightforward biological "fact" because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally "worked upon" by human hands. Such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of

significant "statements" about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or don't. In this way hair is merely a raw material, constantly processed by cultural practices which thus invest it with "meanings" and "value."

The symbolic value of hair is perhaps clearest in religious practices–shaving the head as a mark of worldly renunciation in Christianity or Buddhism, for example, or growing the hair as a sign of inner spiritual strength for Sikhs. Beliefs about gender are also evident in practices like the Muslim concealment of the woman's face and hair as a token of modesty.[3] Where race structures social relations of power, hair–as visible as skin color, but also the most tangible sign of racial difference–takes on another forcefully symbolic dimension. If racism is conceived as an ideological code in which biological attributes are invested with societal values and meanings, then it is because our hair is perceived within this framework that it is burdened with a range of "negative" connotations. Classical ideologies of race established a classificatory symbolic system of color with "black" and "white" as signifiers of a fundamental polarization of human worth–"superiority/inferiority." Distinctions of aesthetic value, "beautiful/ugly," have always been central to the way racism divides the world into binary oppositions in its adjudication of human worth.

Although dominant ideologies of race (and the way they dominate) have changed, the legacy of this biologizing and totalizing racism is traced as a presence in everyday comments made about our hair. "Good hair," used to describe hair on a black person's head, means hair that looks "European," straight, not too curly, not that kinky. And, more importantly, the given attributes of our hair are often referred to by descriptions such as "woolly," "tough," or, more to the point, just plain old "nigger hair." These terms crop up not only at the hairdresser's but more acutely when a baby is born and everyone is eager to inspect the baby's hair and predict how it will "turn out."[4] The pejorative precision of the salient expression, "nigger hair," neatly spells out how, within racism's bipolar codification of human value, black people's hair has been historically devalued as the most visible stigma of blackness, second only to skin.

In discourses of "scientific racism" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which developed in Europe alongside the slave trade, variations in pigmentation, skull and bone formation and hair texture among the species of "man" were seized upon as signs to be identified, named, classified and ordered into a hierarchy of human worth. The ordering of differences constructed a "regime of truth" that could validate the Enlightenment assumption of European "superiority" and African "inferiority." In this process, racial differences–like the new scientific taxonomies of plants, animals and minerals–were named in Latin: thus was the world appropriated in the language of the "west." But whereas the proper name "Negro" was coined to designate all that the west thought it was not, "Caucasian" was the name chosen by the west's narcissistic delusion of "superiority": "Fredrich Bluembach introduced this word in 1795 to describe white Europeans in general, for he believed that the slopes of the Caucasus [mountains in eastern Europe] were the original home of the most beautiful European species."[5] The very arbitrariness of this originary naming thus reveals how an *aesthetic* dimension, concerning blackness as the absolute negation or annulment of "beauty," has always intertwined with the rationalization of racist sentiment.

The assumption that whiteness was the measure of true beauty, condemning Europe's Other to eternal ugliness, can also be seen in images articulated around race in nineteenth-century culture. In the stereotype of Sambo–and his British counterpart, the golliwog–the "frizzy" hair of the character is an essential aspect of the iconography of "inferiority." In children's books and the minstrel shows of vaudeville, the "woolly" hair is ridiculed, just as aspects of black people's speech were lampooned in both popular music-hall and the nineteenth-century novel as evidence of the "quaint folkways" and "cultural backwardness" of the slaves.

But the stigmatization of black people's hair did not gain its historical intransigence by being a mere idea: once we consider those New World societies created on the basis of the slave trade economy–the United States and the Caribbean especially–we can see that where "race" is a constitutive element of social structure and social division, hair remains charged with symbolic currency. Plantation societies instituted a "pigmentocracy"; that is, a division of labor based on "racial" hierarchy where one's socio-economic position could be signified by one's skin color. Ferdinand Henriques's account of family, class and color in post-colonial Jamaica shows how this color/class nexus continues to structure a plurality of horizontal ethnic categories into a vertical system of class stratification. His study draws attention to the ways in which the residual value-system of "white bias"–the way ethnicities are valorized according to the tilt of whiteness–functions as the ideological basis for status ascription. In the sediment of this value-system, African elements–be they cultural or physical–are devalued as indices of low social status, while European elements are positively valorized as attributes enabling individual upward mobility.[6]

Stuart Hall in turn emphasizes the composite nature of white bias, which he refers to as the "ethnic scale," as both physiological and cultural elements are intermixed in the symbolization of one's social status. Opportunities for social mobility are therefore determined by one's ranking on the ethnic scale and involve the negotiation not only of socio-economic factors such as wealth, income, education and marriage, but also of less easily changeable elements of status symbolism such as the shape of one's nose or the shade of one's blackness.[7] In the complexity of this social code, hair functions as a key "ethnic signifier" because, compared with bodily shape or facial features, it can be changed more easily by cultural practices such as straightening. Caught on the cusp between self and society, nature and culture, the malleability of hair makes it a sensitive area of expression.

It is against this historical and sociological background that we must evaluate the personal and political economy of black hair-styles. Dominant ideologies such as white bias do not just dominate by "universalizing" the values of hegemonic social/ethnic groups so that they become everywhere accepted as the "norm." Their hegemony and historical persistence is underwritten at a subjective level by the way ideologies construct positions from which individuals "recognize" such values as a constituent element of their personal identity. Discourses of black nationalism, such as Marcus Garvey's, have always acknowledged that racism "works" by encouraging the devaluation of blackness by black subjects themselves, and that a re-centering sense of pride is a prerequisite for a politics of resistance and reconstruction. But it was Frantz Fanon who first provided a systematic framework for the political analysis of racial hegemonies at the level of black subjectivity.[8] He regarded cultural preferences for all things white as symptomatic of psychic "inferiorization" and thus might have agreed with Henrique's view of straightening as "an active expression of the feeling that it tends to Europeanize a person."

Such arguments gained influence in the 1960s when the Afro hair-style emerged as a symbol of Black Pride and Black Power. However, by regarding one's hair-style as directly "expressive" of one's political awareness this sort of argument tends to prioritize self over society and ignore the mediated and often contradictory dialectic between the two. Cheryl Clarke's poem, "Hair: a narrative," shows that the question of the relationship between self-image and hair-straightening is always shot through with emotional ambiguity. She describes her experience as implicating both pleasure and pain, shame and pride: the "negative" aspects of the hot-lye and steel-comb method are held in counterpoint to the friendship and intimacy between herself and her hairdresser who "against the war of tangles, against the burning metamorphosis . . . taught me art, gave me good advice, gave me language, made me love something about myself."[9] Another problem with prevailing anti-straightening arguments is that they rarely actually listen to what people think and feel about it.

Alternatively, I suggest that when hair-styling is critically evaluated as an aesthetic practice inscribed in everyday life, all black hair-styles are political in that they articulate responses to the panoply of historical forces which have invested this element of the ethnic signifier with both personal and political "meaning" and significance.

With its organizing principles of biological determinism, racism first "politicized" our hair by burdening it with a range of negative social and psychological "meanings." Devalorized as a "problem," each of the many stylizing practices brought to bear on this element of ethnic differentiation articulate ever so many diverse "solutions." Through aesthetic stylization each black hair-style seeks to revalorize the ethnic signifier and the political significance of each rearticulation of value and meaning depends on the historical conditions under which each style emerges.

The historical importance of Afro and Dreadlocks hair-styles cannot be underestimated as marking a "liberating" rupture or break with the dominance of white bias. But were they really that "radical" as solutions to the ideological problematization of black people's hair? Yes: in their historical contexts, they counter-politicized the signifier of ethnic devalorization, redefining blackness as a positive attribute. But, on the other hand, perhaps not, because within a relatively short period both styles became rapidly *de*politicized and, with varying degrees of resistance, both were incorporated into mainstream fashions in the dominant culture. What is at stake, I believe, is the difference between two logics of black stylization–one emphasizing "natural" looks, the other involving straightening to emphasize "artifice."

Nature/Culture: Some Vagaries of Imitation and Domination

Our hair, like our skin, is a highly sensitive surface on which competing definitions of

"the beautiful" are played out in struggle. The racial overdeterminations of this nature/culture ambivalence are inscribed in this description of hair-straightening by a Jamaican hairdresser:

> *Next, apply hot oil, massaging the hair well which prepares it for a shampoo. You dry the hair, leaving a little moisture in it, and then apply grease. When the hair is completely dry you start* cultivating *it with a hot comb . . . Now the hair is all straight. You can use the curling iron on it. Most people like it curled and waved, not just straight, not just dead straight.*[10]

Her metaphor of "cultivation" is telling because it makes sense in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, it recuperates the negative logic of white bias: to cultivate is to transform something found "in the wild" into something of social use and value, like domesticating a forest into a field. It thus implies that in its "natural" given state, black people's hair has no inherent aesthetic value: it must be worked upon before it can be "beautiful." But on the other hand, all human hair is "cultivated" in this way in that it merely provides a raw material for practices, procedures and ritual techniques of cultural writing and social inscription. Moreover, in bringing out other aspects of the styling process which highlight its specificity as cultural practice–the skills of the hairdresser, the choices of the client–the ambiguous metaphor alerts us to the fact that nobody's hair is ever just natural but is always shaped or reshaped by social convention and symbolic intervention.

An appreciation of this delicate "nature/culture" relation is crucial if we are to account both for the emergence of Dreadlocks and Afro as politicized statements of "pride" *and* their eventual disappearance into the mainstream. To reconstruct the semiotic and political economy of these black hair-styles we need to examine their relation to other items of dress and the broader historical context in which ensembles of style emerged. An important clue with regard to the Afro in particular can be found in its names, as the Afro was also referred to as the "natural."

The interchangeability of its two names is important because both signified the embrace of a "natural" aesthetic as an alternative ideological code of symbolic value. The "naturalness" of the Afro consisted in its rejection both of straightened styles and of short haircuts: its distinguishing feature was the *length* of the hair. With the help of a "pick" or Afro comb the hair was encouraged to grow upwards and outwards into its characteristic rounded shape. The three-dimensionality of its shape formed the signifying link with its status as a sign of Black Pride. Its morphology suggested a certain dignified body-posture, for to wear an Afro you have to hold your head up in pride, you cannot bow down in shame and still show off your "natural" at the same time. As Flugel pointed out with regard to ceremonial head-dress and regal crowns, by virtue of their emphatic dimensions such items bestow a sense of presence, dignity and majesty on the wearer by magnifying apparent body-size and by shaping bodily movement accordingly so as to project stature and grace.[11] In a similar way, with the Afro we wore the crown, to the point where it could be assumed that the larger the Afro, the greater the degree of black "content" to one's consciousness.

In its "naturalistic" logic the Afro sought a solution that went to the source of the problem. By emphasizing the length of hair when allowed to grow "natural and free"

the style counter-valorized attributes of curliness and kinkiness to convert stigmata of shame into emblematics of pride. Its name suggested a link between "Africa" and "nature" and this implied an oppositional stance against artificial techniques of any kind, as if any element of artificiality was imitative of Eurocentric, white-identified, aesthetic ideals. The oppositional economy of the Afro also depended on its connections with dress-styles adopted by various political movements of the time.

In contrast to the civil rights demand for racial equality within the given framework of society, the more radical and far-reaching objective of total "liberation" and "freedom" gained its leverage through identification and solidarity with anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles of emergent Third World nations. And at one level, this "other" political orientation of Black Power announced itself in the language of clothes.

The Black Panthers' "urban guerrilla" attire–polo-necks, leather jackets, dark glasses and berets–encoded a uniform for protest and militancy by way of the connotations of the common denominator, the color black. The Panthers' berets invoked solidarity with the often violent means of anti-imperialism, while the dark glasses, by concealing identity from the "enemy," lent a certain political mystique and a romantic aura of dangerousness.

The Afro also featured in a range of ex-centric dress-styles associated with cultural nationalism, often influenced by the dress codes of Black Muslim organizations of the late 1950s. Here, elements of "traditional" African dress–tunics or dashikis, head-wraps and skull-caps, elaborate beads and embroidery–all suggested that black people were "contracting out" of westernness and identifying with all things African as a positive alternative. It may seem superficial to re-read these transformative political movements today in terms of style and dress: but we might also remember that as they filtered through mass media, such as television, these styles contributed to the increasing visibility of black people's struggles in the 1960s. As elements of everyday life, these black styles in hair and dress helped to underline massive shifts in popular aspirations and participated in a populist logic of rupture.

As its name suggests, the Afro symbolized a reconstitutive link with Africa, as part of a counter-hegemonic process helping to redefine a diasporean people not as Negro but as Afro-American. A similar upheaval was at work in the emergence of Dreadlocks. As the Afro's creole cousin, Dreadlocks spoke of pride and empowerment through their association with the radical discourse of Rastafari which, like Black Power in the United States, inaugurated a redirection of black consciousness in the Caribbean.[12] Within the strictures of Rastafari as doctrine, Dreadlocks embody an interpretation of a religious, biblical injunction that forbids the cutting of hair (along the lines of its rationale among Sikhs). However, once 'locks were popularized on a mass social scale–via the increasing militancy of reggae especially–their dread logic inscribed a beautification of blackness remarkably similar to the aesthetic logic of the Afro.

Dreadlocks also embrace the "natural" in the way they celebrate the very materiality of black hair texture, for black people's is the only type of hair that can be "matted" into such characteristic configurations. While the Afro's semiotics of pride depended on its rounded shape, 'locks counter-valorized nappy-headed blackness by way of this process of "matting" which is an option not readily available to white people because their hair

does not "naturally" grow into such "organic"-looking shapes and strands. And where the Afro suggested a link with Africa through its name and its association with radical political discourses, Dreadlocks similarly implied a symbolic link between their "naturalistic" appearance and Africa by way of the reinterpretation of biblical narrative which identified Ethiopia as a "Zion" or Promised Land. With varying degrees of emphasis both invoked "nature" to inscribe "Africa" as the symbol of personal and political opposition to the hegemony of the west over "the rest." Both championed an aesthetic of nature that opposed itself to any artifice as the sign of corrupting Eurocentric influence. But nature had nothing to do with it! Both these hair-styles were never just natural, waiting to be found: they were stylistically *cultivated* and politically *constructed* in a particular historical moment as part of a strategic contestation of white dominance and the cultural power of whiteness.

These styles sought to "liberate" the materiality of black hair from the burdens bequeathed by racist ideology. But their respective logics of signification, positing links between the "natural," Africa, and the goal of freedom, depended on what was only a *tactical inversion* of the chain of equivalences that structured the Eurocentric system of white bias. We saw how the biological determinism of classical racist ideology first "politicized" our hair: its logic of devalorization of blackness radically devalued our hair, debarring it from access to dominant regimes of the "truth of beauty." The aesthetic de-negation "logically" depended on prior relations of equivalence which posited the categories of "Africa" and "nature" as equally other to Europe's deluded self-image which sought to monopolize claims to beauty.

The equation between the two categories in Eurocentric thought rested on the assumption that Africans had no culture or civilization worthy of the name. Philosophers like Hume and Hegel validated such assumptions, legitimating the view that Africa was outside history in a savage and rude "state of nature." Yet, while certain Enlightenment reflections on aesthetics saw in the "Negro" only the annulment of their ideas of beauty, Rousseau and later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, romanticism and realism, saw "nature" on the other hand as the source of all that was good, true and beautiful. The Negro was none of these. But by inverting the symbolic order of racial polarity the aesthetic of "nature" underpinning the Afro and Dreadlocks could negate the negation, turn white bias on its head and thus revalorize as positive all that had once been devalued as the annulment of aesthetics. In this way the black subject could accede—and only in the twentieth century, mind you—to that level of aesthetic idealization or self-valorization that had hitherto been denied as unthinkable. The radicality of the 1960s slogan, Black is Beautiful, lay in the function of the logical copula "is," as it marked the ontological affirmation of our nappy nigger hair, breaching the bar of negation signified in that utterance from the Song of Songs that Europe had rewritten (in the King James version of the Bible) as "I am black *but* beautiful."[13]

However radical this counter-move was, its tactical inversion of categories was limited. One reason why may be that the "nature" invoked was not a neutral term but an ideologically loaded *idea* created by binary and dualistic logics from European culture. The "nature" brought into play to signify a desire for "liberation" and "freedom" so effectively was also a western inheritance, sedimented with symbolic references by

traditions of science, philosophy and art. Moreover, this ideological category had been fundamental to the hegemony of the west over "the rest"; the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie sought to legitimate the imperial division of the world by way of mythologies which aimed to universalize, eternalize and hence "naturalize" its power. The counter-hegemonic tactic of inversion appropriated a particularly romanticist version of "nature" as a means of empowering the black subject; but by remaining in a dualistic logic of binary oppositionality (to Europe and artifice) the moment of rupture was delimited by the fact that it was only an imaginary "Africa" that was put into play.

Clearly, this analysis is not to write off the openings and effective "liberations" gained and made possible by inverting the order of aesthetic oppression; only to point out that the counter-hegemonic project inscribed by these hair-styles is not completed or closed and that this story of struggles over the same symbols continues. Nevertheless, the limitations underline the diasporean specificity of the Afro and Dreadlocks and ask us to examine, first, their conditions of commodification and, second, the question of their "imaginary" relationship to Africa and African cultures as such.

Once commercialized in the market-place the Afro lost its specific signification as a "black" cultural-political statement. Cut off from its original political contexts, it became just another fashion: with an Afro wig anyone could wear the style. Now the fact that it could be neutralized and incorporated so quickly suggests that the aesthetic interventions of the Afro operated on terrain already mapped out by the symbolic codes of the dominant white culture. The Afro not only echoed aspects of romanticism, but shared this in common with the "counter-cultural" logic of long hair among white youth in the 1960s. From the Beatles' mop-tops to the hairy hippies of Woodstock, white subcultures of the 1960s expressed the idea that the longer you wore your hair, somehow the more "radical" and "right-on" your life-style or politics. This "far-out" logic of long hair among the hippies may have sought to symbolize disaffection from western norms, but it was rapidly assimilated and dissimulated by commodity fetishism. The incorporation of long hair as the epitome of "protest," via the fashion industry, advertising and other economies of capitalist mediation, culminated at one point in a Broadway musical that ran for years—*Hair*.

Like the Afghan coats and Kashmiri caftans worn by the hippy, the dashiki was reframed by dominant definitions of ethnic otherness as "exotica": its connotations of cultural nationalism were clawed back as just another item of freakish exoticism for mass consumption. Consider also the inherent semiotic instability of militant chic. The black leather jackets and dark glasses of the Panthers were already inscribed as stylized synonyms for "rebelliousness" in white male subcultures from the 1950s. There, via Marlon Brando and the metonymic association with macho and motor bikes, these elements encoded a youthful desire for "freedom," in the image of the American highway and the open road, implying opposition to the domestic norms of their parent culture. Moreover, the color black was not saturated by exclusively "racial" connotations. Dark somber colors (as well as the occasional French beret) featured in the downbeat dress statements of the 1950s boho-beatniks to suggest mystery, "cool," outsider status, anything to "alienate" the normative values of "square society."

The fact that these white subcultures themselves appropriated elements from black

American culture (rock 'n' roll and bebop respectively) is as important as the fact that a portion of the semiotic effectiveness of the Panther's look derived from associations already "embedded" by previous articulations of the same or similar elements of style. The movement back and forth indicates an underlying dynamic of struggle as different discourses compete for the same signs. It shows that for "style" to be socially intelligible as an expression of conflicting values, each cultural nucleus or articulation of signs must share access to a common stock or resource of signifying elements. To make the point from another point of view would amount to saying that the Afro engaged in a critical "dialogue" between black and white Americans, not one between black Americans and Africans. Even more so than Dreadlocks, there was nothing particularly African about the Afro at all. Neither style had a given reference point in existing African cultures, in which hair is rarely left to grow "naturally." Often it is plaited or braided, using "weaving" techniques to produce a rich variety of sometimes highly elaborate styles that are reminiscent of the patternings of African cloth and the decorative designs of African ceramics, architecture and embroidery.[14] Underlying these practices is what might be termed an African aesthetic. In contrast to the separation of the aesthetic sphere in post-Kantian European thought, this is an aesthetic which incorporates practices of beautification in everyday life. Thus artifice is valued in its own right as a mark of both invention and tradition, and aesthetic skills are deployed within a complex economy of symbolic codes in which communal subjects recreate themselves collectively.[15]

Neither the Afro nor Dreadlocks operate within this aesthetic as such. In contemporary African societies, such styles would not signify Africanness ('locks in particular would be regarded as something "alien," precisely the tactical objective of the Mau Mau in Kenya when they adopted such dread appearances in the 1950s); on the contrary, they would imply an identification with First World-ness. They are specifically diasporean. However strongly these styles expressed a desire to "return to the roots" among black peoples in the diaspora, in Africa *as it is* they would speak of a "modern" orientation, a modelling of oneself according to metropolitan images of blackness.

If there was nothing "African" about these styles, this only goes to underline the point that neither style was as "natural" as it claimed to be. Both presupposed quite artificial techniques to attain their characteristic shapes and hence political significance: the use of special combs in the case of the Afro, and the process of matting in the case of 'locks, often given a head-start by initially plaiting long strands of hair. In their rejection of artifice both styles embraced a "naturalism" that owed much more to Europe then it did to Africa. The fate of the Afro in particular might best be understood by an analogy with what happened to the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.

There, complementing Garvey's call for repatriation to Africa, a generation of artists, poets, writers and dancers embraced all things African to renew and refashion a collective sense of black American identity. Yet when rich white patrons descended on Harlem seeking out the salubrious spectacle of the "New Negro" it became clear–to Langston Hughes at least–that the Africa being evoked was not the real one but a mythological, imaginary "Africa" of noble savagery and primitive grace. The creative upsurge in black American culture and politics marked a moment of rupture and a re-

construction of black subjectivity *en masse*, but it was done like the Afro through an inverted reinscription of the romanticist mythology created by Europe's Enlightenment. As Langston realized, "I was only an American Negro–who had loved the surfaces of Africa and the rhythms of Africa–but I was not Africa."[16] However strategically and historically important, such tactics of reversal remain unstable and contradictory because their assertion of difference so often hinges on what is only the inversion of the same.

Style and Fashion: Semiotic Struggles in the Forest of Signs

Having alighted on a range of paradoxes of race and aesthetics via this brief excursion into the archaeology of the Afro, I want now to re-evaluate the political economy of straightening in the light of these contradictory relations between black and white cultures in diasporean societies. Having found no pre-existing referent for either style-statement in "actually existing" African cultures it should be clear that what we are dealing with are New World creations of black people's culture which, in First World societies, bear markedly different relations with the dominant Euro-American culture from those that obtain in the Third World.

By ignoring these differences, arguments that hold straightened styles to be slavish "imitations" of western norms are in fact complicit with an outmoded anthropological argument that once tried to explain diasporean black cultures as bastard products of unilateral "acculturation." By reversing the axes of traditional analysis we can see that in our era of cultural modernity it is white people who have been doing a great deal of the imitating while black people have done much of the innovating.

Refutations of the assumptions underpinning the racist myth of one-sided acculturation have often taken the form of "discoveries," usually proclaimed by anthropologists, of "africanisms" or the survival of African cultural traits across the middle passage to the New World. Melville Herskovits, for instance, made much of the retention of traditional African modes of hairdressing and covering among black Americans.[17] However, in the light of modern contradictions around "inter-culturation," our attention must now be directed not so much to the retention of actual artifacts but to the reworking of what may be seen as a "neo-African" approach to the aesthetic in diasporean cultural formations. The patterns and practices of aesthetic stylization developed by black cultures in First World societies may be seen as modalities of cultural practice *inscribed* in critical engagement with the dominant white culture and at the same time *expressive* of a "neo-African" approach to the pleasures of beauty at the level of everyday life.

Black practices of aesthetic stylization are intelligible at one "functional" level as dialogic responses to the racism of the dominant culture, but at another level involve acts of appropriation from that same "master" culture through which "syncretic" forms of diasporean culture have evolved. Syncretic strategies of black stylization, "creolizing" found or given elements, are writ large in the black codes of modern music like jazz where elements such as scales, harmonies or even instruments like the piano or saxophone from western cultural traditions are radically transformed by this "neo-African,"

improvisational approach to aesthetic and cultural production. In addition there is another "turn of the screw" in these modern relations of inter-culturation when these creolized cultural forms are made use of by other social groups and then, in turn, are all incorporated into mainstream "mass" culture as commodities for consumption. Any analysis of black style, in hair or any other medium, must take this field of relationships into account.

Hair-styles such as the conk of the 1940s or the curly-perm of the 1980s are syncretic products of New World stylization. Refracting elements from both black and white cultures through this framework of exchange and appropriation, imitation and incorporation, such styles are characterized by the ambivalence of their "meaning." It is implausible to attempt a reading of this ambivalence in advance of an appreciation of the historical contexts in which they emerged alongside other stylized surfaces of syncretic inscription in speech, dance, music and dress.

As a way into this arena of ambiguity listen to this voice, as Malcolm X describes his own experience of hair-straightening. After recounting the physical pain of the hot-lye and steel-comb technology, he tells of pride and pleasure in the new, self-stylized image he has made for himself:

> *My first view in the mirror blotted out the hurting. I'd seen some pretty conks, but when it's the first time, on your own head, the transformation, after a lifetime of kinks, is staggering. The mirror reflected Shorty behind me. We were both grinning and sweating. On top of my head was this thick, smooth sheen of red hair–real red–as straight as any white man's.*[18]

In his autobiographical narrative the voice then shifts immediately from past to present wherein Malcolm sees the conk as "my first really big step towards self-degradation." No attempt is made to address this mixture of feeling: pleasure and pride in the past, shame and self-denigration in the present. The narrative seems to "forget" or exclude the whole life-style of which the conk hair-style was a part. By invoking the idea of "imitation" Malcolm evades the ambiguity, his discourse cancels from the equation what his "style" meant at that moment in front of the mirror.

In its context the conk was but one aspect of a modern style of black American life, forged in the subaltern social bloc of the northern ghettos by people who, like Malcolm Little, had migrated from southern systems of segregation only to find themselves locked into another, more modern, and equally violent, order of oppression. Shut out from access to illusions of "making it," this marginalized urban formation of modern diasporean culture sponsored a sense of style that "answered back" against these conditions of existence.

Between the years of economic depression and the Second World War, big bands like Duke Ellington's, Count Basie's and Lionel Hampton's (he played at the dance-hall where Malcolm worked as a shoeshine boy) accelerated on rhythm, seeking through "speed" to pre-empt the possibility of white appropriations of jazz, as happened in the 1920s. In the "underground" music scene incubated around Kansas City in the 1940s the accent on improvisation, which later flourished as bebop, articulated an "escape"–simultaneously metaphysical and subterranean–from that system of socio-economic bondage, itself in the ruins of war. In the high-energy dance styles that might accompany the beat, the Lindy Hop and Jitter Bug traced another line of flight: through the catharsis of the dance a momentary "release" might be obtained from all the pressures on mind and body accumulated under the ritual discriminations of racism. In speech and language, games like signifyin', playing the dozens and what became known as "jive-talk," verbal style effected a discursive equivalent of jazz improvisation. The performative skills and sheer wit demanded by these speech-acts in black talk defied the idea that Black English was a degraded "version" of the master language. These games refuted America's archetype of Sambo, all tongue-tied and dumb, muttering "Yessa massa" in its miserable abjection. In the semantic play of verbal stylization, hep-cats of the cool world greeted each other as Man, systematically subverting the paternalistic interpellation–boy!–of the white master code, the voice of authority in the social text of the urban plantation.[19]

In this historical moment style was not a substitute for politics. But, in the absence of an organized direction of black political discourse and excluded from official "democratic" channels of representation, the logic of style manifested across cultural surfaces of everyday life reinforced the terms of shared experience–blackness–and thus a sense of solidarity among a subaltern social bloc. Perhaps we can trace a fragile common thread running through these styles of the 1940s: they encoded a refusal of passivity by way of a creolizing accentuation and subtle inflection of given elements, codes and conventions.

The conk involved a violent technology of straightening, but this was only the initial stage in a process of creolizing stylization. The various waves, curls and lengths introduced by practical styling served to differentiate the conk from the conventional white hair-styles which supposedly constituted the "models" from which this black hair-style was derived as imitation or "copy." No, the conk did not copy anything and certainly not any of the prevailing white male hair-styles of the day. Rather, the element of straightening suggested resemblance to white people's hair, but the nuances, inflections and accentuations introduced by artificial means of stylization emphasized difference. In this way the political economy of the conk rested on its ambiguity, the way it "played" with the given outline shapes of convention only to "disturb" the norm and hence invite a "double take" demanding that you look twice.

Consider also the use of dye, red dye: why red? To assume that black men conked up *en masse* because they secretly wanted to become "red-heads" would be way off the mark. In the chromatic scale of white bias, red is seen as a mild deviation from gendered norms which hold blonde hair as the color of "beauty" in women and brown hair among men. Far from an attempted simulation of whiteness I think the dye was used as a stylized means of defying the "natural" color codes of conventionality in order to highlight artificiality and hence exaggerate a sense of difference. Like the purple and green wigs worn by black women, which Malcolm mentions in disgust, the use of red dye seems trivial: but by flouting convention with varying degrees of artifice such techniques of black stylization participated in a defiant "dandyism," fronting-out oppression by the artful manipulation of appearances. Such dandyism is a feature of the economy of style-statements in many subaltern class cultures where "flashy" clothes are used in the art of impression-management to defy the assumption that to be poor one necessar-

ily has to "show" it. The strategic use of artifice in such stylized modes of self-presentation was written into the pleats of the zoot suit which, together with the conk, constituted the *de rigueur* hep-cat look in the black male "hustler" life-style of the 1940s ghettos. With its wide shoulders, tight waist and baggy pants—topped off with a wide-brimmed hat, and worn with slim Italian shoes and lots of gold jewels—the zoot suit projected stature, dignity and presence: it signified that the black man was "important" in his own terrain and on his own terms.

The zoot suit is said to have originated among Latino males on the US west coast—whatever its source, it caused a "race-riot" in Los Angeles in 1943 as the amount of cloth implicated in its cut exceeded wartime rations, provoking ethnic resentment among white males. But perhaps the real historical importance of the zoot suit lies in the irony of its appropriation. By 1948 the American fashion industry had ripped it off and toned it down as the new post-war "bold look" for the mainstream male. By being commodified within such a short period the zoot suit demonstrated a reversal in the flow of fashion-diffusion as now the style of the times emerged from social groups "below," whereas previously regimes of taste had been set by the *haute couture* of the wealthy and then translated back down, via industrial reproduction, to the masses.[20] This is important because, as an aspect of inter-culturation, this story of black innovation/white imitation has been played out again and again in post-war popular culture, most markedly in music and, in so far as music has formed their nucleus, a whole procession of youth subcultures from Teddy boys to B-boys.

Once we re-contextualize the conk in this way we confront a series of "style wars," skirmishes of appropriation and commodification played out around the semiotic economy of the ethnic signifier. The complexity of this force-field of inter-culturation ambushes any attempt to track down fixed meanings or finalized readings and opens out instead on to ambiguous relations of economic and aesthetic systems of valorization. On the one hand, the conk was conceived in a subaltern culture, dominated and hedged in by a capitalist master culture, yet operating in an "underground" manner to subvert given elements by creolizing stylization. Style encoded political "messages" to those in the know which were otherwise unintelligible to white society by virtue of their ambiguous accentuation and intonation. But, on the other hand, that dominant commodity culture appropriated bits and pieces from the otherness of ethnic differentiation in order to reproduce the "new" and so, in turn, to strengthen its dominance and revalorize its own symbolic capital. Assessed in the light of these paradoxical relationships, the conk suggests a "covert" logic of cultural struggle operating "in and against" hegemonic cultural codes, a logic quite different from the overt oppositionality of the naturalistic Afro or Dreadlocks. At one level this only underlines the different historical conditions, but at another the emphasis on artifice and ambiguity rather than an inversion of equivalence strikes me as a particularly modern way in which cultural utterances may take on the force of "political" statements. Syncretic practices of black stylization, such as the conk, zoot suit or jive-talk, recognize themselves self-consciously as products of a New World culture; that is, they incorporate an awareness of the contradictory conditions of inter-culturation. It is this self-consciousness that underscores their ambivalence and in turn marks them off and differentiates them as stylized signs of blackness.

In jive-talk the very meanings of words are made uncertain and undecidable by self-conscious stylization which sends signifiers slipping and sliding over signifieds: bad means good, superbad means better. Because of the way blackness is recognized in such stratagems of creolizing intonation, inflection and accentuation, these practices of stylization exemplify "modernist" interventions whose economy of political calculation might best be illustrated by the "look" of someone like Malcolm X in the 1960s.

Malcolm always eschewed the ostentatious, overly symbolic dress code of the Muslims and wore "respectable" suits and ties, but unlike the besuited civil rights leaders his appearance was always inflected by a certain "sharpness," an accentuation of the hegemonic dress code of the corporate business suit. This intonation in his attire spelt out that he would talk to the polity on his terms, not theirs. This nuance in his public image echoed the "intellectual" look adopted by jazz musicians in the 1950s, but then again, from another frame, Malcolm looked like a mod! And in the case of this particular 1960s subculture, white English youth had taken many of the "found objects" of their stylistic bricolage from the diasporean cultural expression of black America and the Caribbean. Taking these relations of appropriation and counter-appropriation into account, it would be impossible to argue for any one "authoritative" reading of either the conk in the past or the curly-perm today. Rather, the complexity of these violent relations of valorization, which loom so large over the popular experience of cultural modernity, demands that we ask instead: are there any laws that govern this "semiotic guerrilla warfare" in the concrete jungle of the modern metropolis?

If, in the British context, "we can watch, played out on the loaded surfaces of . . . working-class youth cultures, a phantom history of race relations since the war,"[21] then any analysis of black hair-style in this territory of the diaspora must reckon with the contradictory terms of this accelerated inter-culturation around the ethnic signifier. Somewhere around 1967 or 1968 something very strange happened in the ethnic imaginary of Englishness as former mods assembled a new image out of their parents' work-clothes, creating a working-class youth culture that derived its name from their cropped hair-styles. Yet the skinhead hair-style was an imitation of the mid-1960s soulboy look where closely shaven haircuts provided one of the most "classic" solutions to the problem of kinks and curls. Every black person (at least) recognizes the "skinhead" as a political statement in its own right—but then how are we to understand the social or psychological bases for this post-imperial mode of mimicry, this ghost dance of white ethnicity? Like a photographic negative, the skinhead crop symbolized white power and white pride sure enough, but then *how* (like their love of ska and bluebeat) did this relate to their appropriation of Afro-Caribbean culture?

Similarly, we would have to confront the paradox whereby white appropriations seem to act both as a spur to further experimentation and as modified models to which black people themselves may conform. Once the Afro had been ingested, black Americans brought traditional braiding and plaiting styles out from under their wraps, introducing novel elements such as beads and feathers into cane-row patterns. No sooner said than done, by the mid-1970s the beaded cane-row style was appropriated by one-hit wonder Bo Derek. It also seemed that her success validated the style and encouraged more black people to cane-row their hair.

Moreover, if contemporary culture functions on the threshold of what has been called "postmodernism," an analysis of this force-field of inter-culturation must surely figure in the forefront of any reconstructive rejoinder to debates which have so far marginalized popular culture and aesthetic practices in everyday life. If, as Fredric Jameson argues, postmodernity merely refers to the dominant cultural logic of late capitalism which "now assigns an increasingly essential structural function to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" as a condition of commodity fetishism and higher rates of turn-over in mass consumption, then any attempt to account for the gradual dissolution of boundaries between "high" and "low" culture, "taste" and "style," must reckon with the dialogic interventions of diasporean, creolizing cultures.

As Angela McRobbie has noted, various postmodern stratagems of aesthetic critique have already been prefigured as dialogic, politicized interventions in popular culture. Scratching and rap in black music would be a good example of "radical collage" engaged in popular culture or everyday life; like the bricoleur, the DJ appropriates and juxtaposes fragments from the arche-text of popular music history in a critical engagement or "dialogue" with issues thrown up by the present.[22]

It is in the context of such critical bricolage that the question of the curly-perm today must be re-posed. One initial reading of this hair-style in the late 1970s, as a symbol of black "embourgeoisement," is undermined by the way that many wet-look styles retain the overall rounded shape of the Afro. Indeed, a point to notice about the present is that the curly-perm is not the "one" uniformly popular black hair-style, but only one among many diverse configurations of "post-liberated" black hair-styles that seem to revel in their allusions to an ever wider range of stylistic references. Relaxing cremes, gels, dyes and other new technologies have enabled a width of experimentation that suggests that hair-straightening does not "mean" the same thing after as before the era of the Afro and Dreadlocks. Black practices of stylization today seem to exude confidence in their enthusiasm for combining elements from any source–black or white, past or present–into new configurations of cultural expression. Post-liberated black hair-styling emphasizes a "pick 'n' mix" approach to aesthetic production, suggesting a different attitude to the past in its reckoning with modernity. The philly-cut on the hip-hop/go-go scene etches diagonalized lines across the head, refashioning a style from the 1940s where a parting would be shaved into the hair. Combinations of cane-row and curly-perm echo "Egyptian" imagery; she looks like Nefertiti, but this is Neasden, nowhere near the Nile.

One particular style that fascinates me is a variant of the flat-top (popularized by Grace Jones, but also perhaps a long-distance echo of the wedge-cut of the 1960s) where, underneath a crest of miniaturized dreadlocks, the hair is cut really close at the back and the sides: naturalism is invented to accentuate artifice. The differential logics of ambivalence and equivalence are shown to be not necessarily exclusive as they interweave across each other: long 'locks are tied up in pony-tails, very practical, of course, but often done as aesthetic stylization (itself in subtle counterpoint to various "new man" hair-styles that also involve the romanticist male dandyism of long hair). And perhaps the intertextual dimension of creolizing stylization is not so "new"; after all, in the

1970s black people sometimes wore wild Afro wigs in bold pink and day-glo colors, prefiguring post-punk experimentation with anti-naturalistic, "off" colors.

On top of all this, one cannot ignore how, alongside the commodification of hip-hop/electro, breakdancing and sportwear chic, some contemporary hair-styles among white youth maintain an ambiguous relationship with the stylizing practices of their black counterparts. Many use gels to effect sculptural forms and in some inner-city areas white kids us the relaxer creme technology marketed to black kids to simulate the "wet-look." So who, in this postmodern mêlée of semiotic appropriation and counter-creolization, is imitating whom?

Any attempt to make sense of these circuits of hyper-investment and overexpenditure around the symbolic economy of the ethnic signifier encounters issues that raise questions about race, power and modernity that go beyond those allowed by a static moral psychology of "self-image." I began with a polemic against one type of argument and have ended up in another: namely one that demands a critical analysis of the multi-faceted economy of black hair as a condition for appropriate aesthetic judgements. "Only a fool does not judge by appearances," Oscar Wilde said, and by the same token it would be foolish to assume that because somebody wears 'locks they are dealing in "peace, love and unity"; Dennis Brown also reminded us to take the "wolf in sheep's clothing" syndrome into account. There are no just black hair-styles, just black hair-styles. This article has prioritized the semiotic dimension in its readings to open up analyses of this polyvocal economy but there are other facets to be examined: such as the exploitative priorities of the black hairdressing industry as it affects consumers, or workers under precarious market conditions, or the question of gendered differentiations (and similarities).

On the political horizon of postmodern popular culture I think the *diversity* of contemporary black hair-styles is something to be proud of. Because this variousness testifies to an inventive, improvisational aesthetic that should be valued as an aspect of Africa's "gift" to modernity. And because, if there is the possibility of a "unity in diversity" somewhere in this field of relations, then it challenges us to cherish plurality politically.[23]

Versions of this article have been critically "dialogized" by numerous conversations. I would like to thank all the seminar participants at the Center for Caribbean Studies, Goldsmiths' College in London, April 30, 1986, and, in thinking diasporean aesthetics, thanks also to Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Clyde Taylor.

1. *The Black Voice*, no. 15 (June 1983): 3 (paper of the Black Unity and Freedom Party, London SE15).
2. See Tony Jefferson, and Stuart Hall, eds., *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1975); and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1979).
3. See C.R. Hallpike, "Social Hair," in *Social Aspects of the Human Body*, ed. Ted Polhemus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978); on the veil see Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," in *A Dying Colonialism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).
4. Such anxieties, I know, are intensified around the mixed-race subject: "I still have to deal with people who go to touch my 'soft' or 'loose' or 'wavy' hair as if in the touching something . . . will be confirmed. Back then to the 60s it seems to me that my options . . . were to keep it short and thereby less visible, or to have the living curl dragged out of it: *maybe then you'd look Italian . . .*

or something." Derrick McClintock, "Color," *Ten.8*, no. 22 (1986).
5. George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (London: Dent, 1978), p. 44.
6. Ferdinand Henriques, *Family and Color in Jamaica* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1953), pp. 54-55.
7. Stuart Hall, "Pluralism, Race and Class in Caribbean Society," in *Race and Class in Post-Colonial Society* (New York: UNESCO, 1977), pp. 150-182.
8. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).
9. Cheryl Clark, *Narratives: Poems in the Tradition of Black Women* (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1982); see also *Hairpiece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People*, dir. Ayoka Chinzera, 1982.
10. Henriques, *Family and Color in Jamaica*, p. 55.
11. See John C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930).
12. On connections between Black Power and Rastafari, see Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with my Brothers* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1968), pp. 32-33.
13. On Africa as the "annulment" of Eurocentric concepts of beauty see Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). On systems of equivalence and difference in hegemonic struggles see Ernesto Laclau, "Populist Rupture and Discourse," *Screen Education*, no. 34 (Spring 1980) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).
14. Esi Sagay, *African Hairstyles* (London: Heinemann, 1983).
15. See John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Victoria Ebin, *The Body Decorated* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979) and Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).
16. Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* (London: Pluto Press, 1986); and see also Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964).
17. Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1959). During the 1950s anthropologists influenced by the "culture and personality" paradigm approached the ghetto as a domain of social pathology. Abrahams (mis)read the process rag hairdo, kept under a handkerchief until Saturday night, as "an effeminate trait . . . reminiscent of the handkerchief tying of Southern 'mammies'," a symptom of sex-role socialization gone wrong, cited in Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 26-27. Alterative concepts of "inter-culturation" and "creolization" are developed by Edward K. Braithwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, JA: Savacou Publications, 1974); see also Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture* (London: Faber, 1953).
18. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 134-139.
19. On Afro-American stylization see Ben Sidran, *Black Talk* (London: De Capo Press, 1973); Thomas Kochman, *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey," in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Gates (London and New York: Methuen, 1984).
20. Steve Chibnall, "Whistle and Zoot: the Changing Meaning of a Suit of Clothes," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 20 (1985) and Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 18 (1984). See also J. Schwartz. "Men's Clothing and the Negro," in *Dress Adornment and the Social Order*, eds. M. E. Roach and J. B. Eicher (New York: Wiley, 1965).
21. Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 45.
22. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July/August 1984): 56; and Angela McRobbie, "Postmodernism and popular culture," *ICA Documents no. 4/5* (London: ICA, 1986).
23. *Sister Carol wears locks and wants a Black revolution*
She tours with African dancers around the country
Sister Jenny has relaxed hair and wants a Black revolution
She paints scenes of oppression for an art gallery
Sister Sandra has an Afro and wants a Black revolution
She works at a women's collective in Brixton
Sister Angela wears braids and wants a Black revolution
She spreads love and harmony with her reggae song
All my sisters who want a Black revolution don't care
How they wear their hair. And they're all Beautiful.
Christabelle Peters, "The Politics of Hair," Poets Corner, *The Voice* (March 15, 1986).

Complexion

Visiting the East Coast or the gray capitals of Europe during the long months of winter, I often meet people at deluxe hotels who comment on my complexion. (In such hotels it appears nowadays a mark of leisure and wealth to have a complexion like mine.) Have I been skiing? In the Swiss Alps? Have I just returned from a Caribbean vacation? No. I say no softly but in a firm voice that intends to explain: My complexion is dark. (My skin is brown. More exactly, terra-cotta in sunlight, tawny in shade. I do not redden in sunlight. Instead, my skin becomes progressively dark; the sun singes the flesh.)

When I was a boy the white summer sun of Sacramento would darken me so, my T-shirt would seem bleached against my slender dark arms. My mother would see me come up the front steps. She'd wait for the screen door to slam at my back. "You look like a *negrito*," she'd say, angry, sorry to be angry, frustrated almost to laughing, scorn. "You know how important looks are in this country. With *los gringos* looks are all that they judge on. But you! Look at you! You're so careless!" Then she'd start in all over again. "You won't be satisfied till you end up looking like *los pobres* who work in the fields, *los braceros*."

(*Los braceros:* Those men who work with their *brazos*, their arms; Mexican nationals who were licenced to work for American farmers in the 1950s. They worked very hard for very little money, my father would tell me. And what money they earned they sent back to Mexico to support their families, my mother would add. *Los pobres*—the poor, the pitiful, the powerless ones. But paradoxically also powerful men. They were the men with brown-muscled arms I stared at in awe on Saturday mornings when they showed up downtown like gypsies to shop at Woolworth's or Penney's. On Monday nights they would gather hours early on the steps of the Memorial Auditorium for the wrestling matches. Passing by on my bicycle in summer, I would spy them there, clustered in small groups, talking—frightening and fascinating men—some wearing Texas *sombreros* and T-shirts which shone fluorescent in the twilight. I would sit forward in the back seat of our family's '48 Chevy to see them, working alongside Valley highways: dark men on an even horizon, loading a truck amid rows of straight green. Powerful, powerless men. Their fascinating darkness—like mine—to be feared.)

"You'll end up looking just like them."

1

Regarding my family, I see faces that do not closely resemble my own. Like some other