Putting Identity to Work
Post-Fordist Modes of Production and Protest

Alison Kooistra
University of Toronto
Department of Anthropology

Abstract

Over the past thirty years, identity—rather than labour or political party affiliations—has become the rallying point of most social mobilizations. Most discussions of identity politics evaluate its revolutionary potential and condemn its emphasis on image representation as easily co-opted. What is missing from this debate is a nuanced analysis of the ways in which appeals to identity are grounded within a particular historical moment. I argue that this emphasis on identity emerges out of the late capitalist shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist paradigm of production. In North America's "post-industrial" information-based society, image production is as much a part of the economy as factory production, and redefining and essentializing an identity is a way to reclaim control of the relations of production. As the manufacturing base is being outsourced to the developing world and as governments increasingly cut social spending and deregulate industries, identity becomes one of the most effective tools for claiming state resources, capturing public attention, finding jobs, and accessing corporate sponsorships. Why identity? Because it works.

Introduction

Most discussions of identity politics construct a monolithic entity and evaluate it in philosophically abstract terms, usually to condemn it. These critiques argue that identity politics focuses on media representations and ignores the underlying mode of production, and thus lends itself to easy co-optation.[1] What is missing from this debate is not another condemnation or defence of the revolutionary potential of identity politics, but rather a nuanced analysis of the ways in which appeals to identity are grounded within a particular historical moment. "Identity politics" is a term that seems capable of expanding infinitely along a horizontal plane, claiming every new social movement that crops up—from feminists to New Age spiritualists to ethnic separatists to right-wing religious conservatives to anti-globalization protesters to disability activists—but it does not stretch

out infinitely along a vertical plane, encompassing all past and future modes of protest. Identity politics is a relatively new, temporally bounded phenomenon that is linked to changes in the late capitalist mode of production.

Thus, rather than attempting to wrestle these disparate phenomena into one bounded category called "identity politics," I will focus instead on the ways in which identity itself has been operationalized in North America to achieve economic and political goals. What is it that makes identity a powerful tool? Why has identity become the privileged focal point for social mobilization—whether in the form of grassroots alliances or lobbying groups—rather than, for example, unions or political parties (Johnston et al. 1994:9, 26; Flacks 1994:335-337; Hobsbawm 1996:39)?

To answer these questions, I will look at some of the economic and social developments in North America over the last thirty years. I focus on identity-based movements within the United States and Canada for several reasons: first, because a global perspective is beyond the scope of this paper; second, because a focus on "the West" would conflate significantly divergent socio-political trends in Europe and North America; and finally, because I am most familiar with the North American context.[2]

I argue that the focus on "identity" emerges out of the late capitalist shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist paradigm of production. In North America's "post-industrial" information-based economy, claiming and essentializing one's distinctive identity is a way of reclaiming control of the relations of production. As the manufacturing base is progressively outsourced to the developing world and as governments increasingly cut social spending, privatize institutions, and deregulate industries, "identity" becomes one of the most effective tools for claiming dwindling state resources, capturing public attention and support, finding jobs, and accessing corporate sponsorships.

Fordist and Post-Fordist Paradigms

"Fordism" and "post-Fordism" are ideal types which are intended to correspond to the paradigmatic ways—both material and social—that industrial production has been organized. The Fordist paradigm is epitomized by the factory assembly line model that was first made famous by the U.S.-based Ford motor company in the 1920s (Nolan

& O'Donnell 1991:160; Arestis & Paliginis 1995:91-92). Here, workers spend their careers performing the same tasks in order to produce one standardized good in large quantities. This mode of production responds to a homogenous, mass-market demand. The company is regulated by a hierarchically organized bureaucracy, which typically operates within a nationalist economy that is subject to a significant amount of state intervention (Piore & Sabel 1984:49, 60; Smith 1991:139-140; Lancaster 2003:306).

Post-Fordism: "Flexible" and "Specialized"

By contrast, post-Fordist production, or "flexible specialization," operates with far fewer governmental controls.[3] Its corporations are "flexible" because they increasingly rely on temporary workers and move their factories around the world to the cheapest locations, while its workers are described as "flexible" because they have no job stability and must be able to reinvent themselves continually in order to survive (Martin 1994; Peters 1997; Klein 2000).

In the United States, the hiring of "temporary" employees has increased by 400% since the early 1980s (Klein 2000:247). These "disposable" workers may be easily let go if the company needs to improve its bottom line (Martin 1994:146-147; Klein 2000:231-257). Production is made "flexible" through outsourcing—rather than directly hiring workers to produce their goods, corporations contract out these operations to the lowest bidder, often in developing countries (Arestis & Paliginis 1995:101-102; Klein 2000:197-199).

Post-Fordist production is "specialized" because it targets niche markets rather than mass markets. In order to meet diversifying consumer demand, companies are investing heavily in branding the subtle differences between functionally identical commodities (Klein 2000:6). The illusion of variety and endless consumer choice masks the centralized control of a few major corporations. "We live in a double world," according to Naomi Klein: "carnival on the surface, consolidation underneath, where it counts" (2000:130). Companies' real profits now lie, not in what they make, but how they market it. They labour to produce "attribute brands" that become associated with a lifestyle, a political orientation, a set of values—in short, a personal identity—rather than with one particular commodity. For example, Virgin Group has stamped its brand on everything from soft drinks to bridal gowns to music to airlines to financial services

to—most recently—cell phones (Klein 2000:17, 23-24).

Fordist and Post-Fordist Identity Politics

As the focus of the market shifted "from an industrial/producer economy to a service/consumer economy" (Lancaster 2003:314), the focus of most social reviews, too, "moved from the economic-industrial system to the cultural sphere" (Melucci 1994:109). The paradigm of flexible specialization is said to have emerged in the early 1970s, after the saturation and break-up of mass markets in the late 1960s (Piore & Sabel 1984:184-187; Arestis & Paliginis 1995:92). This is also the period when the "new social movements" based more substantially on identity than on ideology—or, perhaps more accurately, on self-focused ideologies rather than on society-focused ideologies—began to appear (Melucci 1980, 1994; Johnston et al. 1994:10). The connections between these two phenomena are not coincidental: each provided the conditions for the other to emerge.

There are roughly two phases of identity politics. The first grows out of a Fordist paradigm, and precipitates the post-Fordist paradigm; the second grows out of the post-Fordist paradigm. The first phase included the Civil Rights movement and the early women's movement: while both were organized around the identity issues of race and gender, their advocacy was premised on an assumption of ultimate sameness (Heyes 2002:3) and promoted a "modernist universalizing agenda" (Hooks 1990:25). Their demands were advanced for full participation in the state's socio-politico-economic institutions and for more equitable redistribution of wealth.

Such agitations in the United States led, for example, to the Equal Pay Act of 1963 that required all employees be paid equal wages for equal work without discrimination based on gender. They also led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made employer discrimination based on race illegal, and further outlawed racial segregation or exclusion in public places like restaurants, theatres, hotels, and so forth (EPA 1963; CRA 1964). The social movements and legislative victories of the 1960s moved identity out of the periphery and closer to the core of North American politics (Hobsbawm 1996:39).

The second phase of identity politics began in the early 1970s, and is what is generally understood as "identity politics" proper. The term was first articulated by the Combahee River Collective in 1974, and was used to describe the Collective's new approach to the

inextricable oppressions of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism (Ryan 2001:4; Combahee River Collective 1982). This second phase of identity politics emerged from the experiences of people who felt marginalized not only by their society's dominant classes, but also by the dominant voices in the social movements in which they participated. Thus, their primary goal became recognition—a demand for acknowledgement and positive affirmation (Combahee River Collective 1982:16; Taylor 1994:25-26; Fraser 1995:74; Klein 2000:107-109; Ryan 2001:320-321).

These two phases of identity politics correlate roughly to Nancy Fraser's two "modes of collectivity" (1995:74): the first mode is protest against socioeconomic injustice, to be remedied by the state's more equitable redistribution of resources; the second mode is protest against cultural or symbolic injustice, to be remedied by society-wide recognition and respect (Fraser 1995:70-73). I agree with Fraser that these two modes are inextricably intertwined and reinforce each other dialectically: "Cultural norms that are unfairly biased against some are institutionalized in the state and the economy; meanwhile, economic disadvantage impedes equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres and everyday life" (Fraser 1995:72-73).

However, unlike Fraser, I do not see these two poles of activism as part of a kind of historical pendulum swing: I am arguing that one mode predominates (though, of course, never exclusively) over the other mode depending on the specific confluence of economic, social, and political factors at a given moment in time. Thus the redistribution-based social protests in North America during the first half of the century came out of the Fordist paradigm, but prepared the way for the emerging post-Fordist paradigm and a new proliferation of recognition-based identity politics.

The Relationship between the Mode of Production and the Mode of Collectivity

The Fordist model offered job security and high wages only to "breadwinners", who were understood to be White men with wives and children. By virtue of their full productive integration into the economy, such men also held all the privileges of full citizenship (these include not simply voting and running for office, but also the micro practices of community authority and personal safety). Thus

the early political protests against this model were organized by Black people and women seeking acknowledgement as "breadwinners" and thus full citizens in their own right—and not simply as dependants or disposable workers.

Fordist mass-production industries required labour reserves of people—usually non-White, female, young, or otherwise marginalized participants in the economy—who had to accept unstable employment that fluctuated with peaks and lows in consumer demand (Piore & Sabel 1984:167-168; Arestis & Paliginis 1995:91-92; cf. Johnston et al. 1994:26). Though women permeated the labour force during World War II, the government's postwar promise of full employment was directed exclusively to the prewar definition of "breadwinner"—and most female workers were coerced by institutional policies and normative pressures into returning to the domestic sphere (Arestis & Paliginis 1995:92).

Meanwhile, in both pre- and post-War America, the broad divisions of labour between male and female, White and non-White—along with the narrower divisions of labour among particular ethnic groups—meant that unions were being organized according to cultural, racial, and sexual affiliations rather than class solidarity (Flacks 1994:336). Thus identity-based unionizing within a Fordist paradigm laid the groundwork for a post-Fordist identity politics cut loose from its industrial moorings.

As corporations make the shift from a rigid Fordist bureaucracy to a more flexible, subcontractor-dependent paradigm, and governments reduce their centralized control of trade and social welfare to promote privatization and individual economic responsibility, the organization of new social movements is also changing from the "cadre-led and centralized bureaucracies of traditional mass parties" to more "segmented, diffuse, and decentralized" coalitions composed of autonomous satellite groups (Johnston et al. 1994:8-9; cf. Flacks 1994:335).

It is important, however, not to see the relationship between politico-economic changes and forms of social activism as a deterministic cause and effect. Rather, modes of collectivity and modes of production are, in Roger Lancaster's words, "mutually imbricated" and both emerge "by means of a dynamic process of contestation and compromise, played out under very specific conditions" (2003:318). Identity-based social movements were "both

agents of and beneficiaries of" the change from a Fordist to a post-Fordist paradigm (319).

While the Fordist mode of collectivity mobilizes gender and ethnicity to achieve equal access to material and economic resources, the post-Fordist mode of collectivity mobilizes gender and ethnicity to achieve equal recognition—and thus, it is understood implicitly, equal access to material, economic, discursive and cultural resources. Attaining respect and recognition is understood as the key to undoing the nexus of discriminatory policies: you cannot fight city hall, but you can fight the biases of the elite power brokers. The enemy is no longer perceived as a monolithic system, but particular practices and prejudices perpetrated within a cross-secting network of power relations. Thus, where Philip Arestis and Eleni Paliginis define Fordism as the combination of "[m]ass production, mass consumption and monopolistic forms of regulation (Keynesian policies and collective bargaining)" (1995:101), we may define North American post-Fordism as brand/information production, customized consumption, and individual-centred forms of regulation (neoliberal policies and identity politics).

Linking Recognition and Redistribution

While Fraser's heuristic separation of recognition and redistribution provides a useful analytical tool when examining different modes of collective social action, it is important, also, to detail the ways in which these two political goals are inextricably linked in practice in order to understand the economic stakes of identity claims. While the scholarly consensus on identity-based social movements is that they focus to their detriment on representational images and psychological injustices, rather than on institutional realities and economic injustices (Taylor 1994; Turner 1994; Fraser 1995; Johnston et al. 1994; Klein 2000; Kauffman 2001), the demands made by social groups today for recognition have as much to do with redistribution of material resources as they do with discursive acknowledgement and affirmation.

Klein (2000) and other critics are right to note that the insistence on equitable representation should be only one battle in a much larger war (Klein 2000:108; cf. Hennessy 1995 and Kauffman 2001), but they go too far in suggesting identity politics' achievements stop at "raising teenagers' self-esteem and making sure they have positive

role models" in the media and in the literary canon (Klein 2000:114; cf. Taylor 1994). The inclusion of marginalized voices in the canon, for example, does more than raise the self-esteem of minority students: it also directly accrues financial benefits to the author (or the estate of the author) and gives publishers an incentive to publish more work by the same author, or similar works by similar authors. In a marketing-based information society, representation is not just about "mirrors and metaphors" (Klein 2000:108); it is also about money and power.

Studies proliferate on the economic barriers faced by short men, fat women, visible minorities, people with disabilities, queer people, and all others who do not fit into the Caucasian, patriarchal middle class. Despite equal opportunity and affirmative action policies in place in North America, such groups are still marginalized from the centres of power and are still more likely to be living in poverty (Kaw 1994:250-256; Fraser 1995:85; Hennessy 1995:175-176; CHRC 1997; Bishop 2005:7; cf. EPA 1963; CRA 1964; EEA 1995; CCA 2004). The more people physically conform to the "norm", the more likely they are to be financially successful (Kaw 1994:250-256; Fraser 1995:85; Hennessy 1995:175-176; CHRC 1997; Bishop 2005:7). Thus Asian-American women may undergo double-eyelid and nose-bridge surgery—procedures that make facial features look more Caucasian—as a way of increasing chances of employment and socio-economic success (Kaw 1994:254-256).

Cultural and Sub-Cultural Capital

Working to "fit in" to the dominant class is one response to a body-conscious socio-economic structure; consciously rejecting the hegemonic norms and promoting marginalized identity markers is another. Linking the physical markers of ethnicity—for example, skin colour—with cultural markers of ethnicity—for example, musical genre—in an exclusive way may give people marginalized from mainstream success access to a kind of "sub-cultural capital". Where Pierre Bourdieu's "cultural capital" works to facilitate the transmission of hegemonic power from one elite generation to the next (1986:244-246), Sarah Thornton's "sub-cultural capital" consciously defines itself in opposition to the putatively generic mainstream (1996:104, 115). Though Thornton designs the term to apply exclusively to "hipness" in youth culture (1996:11), her term

has a wider applicability that I build on here.

Where cultural capital exists in embodied states (e.g. as an upper class British accent or as Whiteness), objectified states (e.g. as fine art), and institutionalized states (e.g. as academic qualifications) (Bourdieu: 1986:243-248), sub-cultural capital exists in embodied states (e.g. as slang or as Blackness) and objectified states (e.g. as a limited-edition record collection), but is not institutionalized (Thornton 1996:11-12) because its bearers are alienated from the material means of identity (re)production (e.g. universities, publishing houses, recording studios, and so forth). Both forms of capital reinforce their borders through physical, sartorial, and linguistic codes, which make it difficult for members of elite groups to directly appropriate sub-cultural capital (though they may profit on it through their ownership of the means of production) or for members of marginalized groups to directly appropriate cultural capital.

Identity may be effectively (if not always easily) mobilized along either axis of power—whether by investing one's cultural capital in the academic and corporate institutions of "Brand America" or by venturing one's sub-cultural capital against the mainstream. Both tactics are an indirect consequence of corporate saturation of public (and often private) space: identity is conceptualized as a personal brand, whether one defines oneself within or against the dominant social order. Within the brands-not-products paradigm of the post-Fordist economy, operationalizing identity has proven to be an effective strategy for obtaining corporate sponsorships, achieving commercial success as a branded celebrity, selling oneself on the job circuit, and making claims on scarce state resources.

Corporate Sponsorships

Corporations are increasingly filling the gaps left by government funding cuts over the past thirty years, providing much-needed resources to schools and other public institutions, services, and events (Klein 2000:30; McLeod 2001:6). Corporate sponsorship spending in the U.S. increased 700% between 1985 and 1998, reaching nearly $7 billion (Klein 2000:33). This money always comes with strings attached, however; these usually involve the branding of the recipient with the corporation's identity. For example, in 1998, Coca-Cola promised to reward the school that devised the best marketing

strategy for distributing coupons for the soft drink to its students. One school in Georgia held an "official Coke day" where all students were required to wear matching Coca-Cola t-shirts: one student came to school in a Pepsi shirt and was immediately suspended (Klein 2000:95).

Sponsorship may also take less coercive and more subtle forms. For example, North American corporations participate in nominally philanthropic advertising projects to associate their brand with communities identified as "cool" or "authentic". Thus Nike occasionally gives away free shoes or resurfaces basketball courts in predominantly African-American low-income neighbourhoods because it wants to further entrench its brand's connection within inner-city hip-hop culture (Klein 2000:75).

While exploited workers in both industrialized and developing countries are denied access to fair distribution of economic capital, marginalized people in the first world are courted as consumers and mined as sources of authentic "cool" (Klein 2000:72-77), and they are thus able to operationalize their social and symbolic capital to their benefit. Oppressed and impoverished populations in the industrialized world, and especially Black communities in American urban centres, have become the new source of all things "cool" (Klein 2000:73-77). Corporations have generated an industry of "cool-hunters" who comb ghettoes and schools looking for the latest innovations in style (Klein 2000:72).

Personal Branding

Of course, this coolness generally brings advantages to only very few members of these communities who manage to parlay their identities out of the ghetto and into the mainstream media. Fostering sub-cultural capital is a way of positioning oneself against the mainstream, but in a post-Fordist economy of niche-marketing and specialized consumption, counter-cultural styles are quickly commodified and incorporated into the economy. Subcultures do not necessarily combine their oppositional set of styles and values with a revolutionary critique of the socio-economic system. Identities are cultivated by communities of people, but often only individuals are able to translate sub-cultural capital into financial capital. For example, rappers like 50 Cent are able to rise to fame by promoting their gangster image and boasting about their "street cred". Their

music is judged as much by its "authenticity" as by its sound. 50 Cent derives as much of his star power from the fact that he has been shot nine times and has taken a bullet in the face (Clanton 2005) as he does from his catchy songs.

Many activists have questioned why ghetto life has been construed as authentically Black, as opposed to college life, for example (e.g. Hooks 1990:38). A partial answer is that this latter environment is its own economic reward: as Bourdieu puts it, academic qualifications are the institutionalized form of cultural capital, "a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture" (1986:248). Life on the streets or in rent-controlled housing complexes has no socially recognized prestige or monetary value; thus, commodifying it and limiting those who may (visibly) profit on this identity to people of colour is a way of producing an elitist sub-cultural capital.[4]

Once famous, many musical stars will branch out, turning their identity into a brand that is associated not with one particular product—music—or even one particular individual, but rather with a constellation of values, lifestyle, and image. 50 Cent has created his own record label and clothing line, has tried his hand at acting and directing, and has marketed his own brand of goods from vitamin water to sex toys (Walker 2005). Self-branding—as 50 Cent, Martha Stewart, and Michael Jordan demonstrate—can result in incredible profit empires (Klein 2000:30, 57-59).

Job-Hunting in a Contract Economy

However, branded celebrities are simply the most visible and most profitable version of the widespread personal branding phenomenon, where, as movement guru Tom Peters puts it, "We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc" (1997:83). In an uncertain job market where "employability" is emphasized over "employment" (Klein 2000:271; cf. Piore & Sabel 1984:244; Peters 1997; Arruda 2000), cultivating and promoting one's own unique identity is seen as the key to achieving economic security.

In the post-Fordist organization of labour, the company absolves itself of its commitment to its workers and jobs are characterized by transience more than stability. The economy increasingly relies on "temps", contract workers, part-timers, and interns who may be easily

let go if the company needs to improve its bottom line (Martin 1994:146-147; Klein 2000:231-257). Michael Piore and Charles Sabel argue that employees are no longer paid for what they do, but for what they know (1984:244). Thus the focus returns to identity—individuals must work on their own self-improvement, on upgrading their skills and finding hidden talents, in order to make themselves attractive to employers as they move from job to job.

The conceptual Fordist division between public and private life is eliminated: not only are people increasingly working from home (Klein 2000:254-255), but, as some "personal branding" gurus claim, treating your down time as professionally as you do your company time is the key to security in an uncertain job market (Peters 1997, 1999; Arruda 2000; Frost 2003). As Tom Peters, one of the most vocal advocates of the new "free agent" economy, notes that since the large corporations "aren't in charge of our careers—and by extension our *lives*—anymore" it is therefore "up to *us* to fashion *ourselves*" (1999:12, emphases in original; cf. Peters 1997; Klein 2000:252-255; Frost 2003). There are self-help books, seminars, websites, and even branding coaches available to help you micromanage every aspect of your personal life: from the friends you choose, to the clothing you wear, to the way you talk (Frost 2003).

State Resources

Identity can also be mobilized to access state resources. American affirmative action programs and Canadian employment equity policies consciously work to overcome systemic racism by removing "the barriers to make sure that real merit is recognized and rewarded" and by specifying hiring quotas, or setting aside particular resources, for identified minority groups (CHRC 1997; cf. EPA 1963; CRA 1964; EEA 1995; CCA 2004).

For example, the Canada Council for the Arts has identified members of "the culturally diverse community as a strategic funding priority, along with the youth community and the Aboriginal community" (CCA 2004). A 2005 report commissioned by the Council announced that while the arts labour force in Canada grew at almost three times the rate of the overall labour force between 1991 and 2001, artists earned 26% less than other members of the work force.[5] During the same ten-year span, the number of visible

minority artists grew an astonishing 74%, while their average yearly earnings in 2001 amounted 11% less than artists as a whole (Hill Strategies Research 2005:3, 6-7). In an attempt to correct this disparity, the Canada Council for the Arts boosted their direct and indirect funding of "culturally diverse" artists by over 50% (from $7.2 million to $10.9 million) between 2001 and 2003 (CCA 2004). Thus there is a quickly expanding pool of artists competing for scarce resources, and identity is an increasingly influential bargaining tool.

Therefore, while distinctions between paradigms of recognition and redistribution are useful as ideal types, in practice they are inextricably linked. For members of marginalized groups, cultivating a certain kind of identity can garner a corporate sponsorship or a career in the entertainment industry. Increasing awareness of minority presence and disproportionately low representation in positions of power in the public and private sectors can lead to government policies designed to correct these inequalities. Yet seeking recognition is not reducible to seeking redistribution; claiming a public identity is also an effort to reappropriate control of the relations of identity in an information economy.

Essentialism and the Relations of Identity Production

As Alberto Melucci recognized in 1980, production in late capitalism can no longer be exclusively understood as the processing of natural resources into technological products: "It is also becoming the production of social relations and social systems; indeed, it is even becoming the production of the individual's biological and interpersonal identity" (1980:218). In an information economy, power lies not in the messages themselves, which proliferate in astonishing numbers and become obsolete with astonishing speed, but rather, power lies in controlling the codes that shape the interpretation and organization of message contents (Melucci 1994:112).

Identity politics critiques the "everyman" code, the "mythical norm" which, as Audre Lorde puts it, "is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian [sic], and financially secure" (2001:116). Exclusion from this norm is exclusion from the stronghold of power and authority (115-116). Many social movements have focused on challenging the codes that frame the concepts of physical attractiveness and personal self-worth. The

Black Power movement insisted that "Black Is Beautiful" (Walker 2001:1), while second-wave feminists critiqued the fashion industry for propagating unrealistic images of female bodies that fostered low self-esteem and eating disorders (Klein 2000:124).

The body is a critical site of struggle in many new social movements for several reasons: first, physical traits have not only become (racialized and gendered) indicators of class and status (Turner 1994:28), but they also play a role in determining socioeconomic success (Bishop 2005:7; Kaw 1994:254-256); second, the body is the focus of the disciplinary surveillance of the hegemonic system (Melucci 1980:221); and third, the body is, according to Terence Turner, "the material infrastructure" of identity production (1994:28). According to Turner, the struggle for control of the body is a struggle for "control of the relations of personal production, meaning both the production of personal identity and the material conditions of personal bodily existence" (45).

Susan Bordo traces the shift from a Fordist understanding of the body as a mechanized instrument, like a watch wound up by God, and repaired to smooth functioning as needed by medical science, to the post-modern paradigm of the self as omnipotent sculptor and the body as "cultural plastic," amenable to limitless reshaping on its way toward the goal of perfection (1997:335-337; cf. Martin 1994). Yet the body is another example of the surface "carnival" of consumer choice and the underlying "consolidation" of standardized production: a vast and varied array of beauty products exists, but it exists to create (or at least approximate) one basic look. While the post-modern rhetoric of creative self-determination and playful self-expression dominates the discourse of physical appearance, norms for attractiveness are narrowly standardized as slim, toned, young bodies with symmetrical, Caucasian-type facial features (Kaw 1994:243, 258-261; Bordo 1997:339).

Flexible and Inflexible Identities

Insisting on the inflexibility of certain bodies and identities—by asserting that some women will never look like Twiggy or that sexual orientation is not a choice, for example—unsettles the post-Fordist paradigm of equal-rights consumerism. While it does not present a revolutionary challenge to the economic structure itself, it does reassert (however incompletely) some measure of control over the

relations of identity production. It gives particular communities a kind of organic, informal intellectual property rights over the cultural forms that they have generated, and it gives them the authority to police their own borders, by restricting who may consume and display certain goods through the informal means of public disapproval, gossip, moralizing, ridicule, and so forth.[6] For example, the pejorative label "wigger" is applied to White people who are seen as "trying to become Black" by wearing ghetto-coded clothing, speaking African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), and listening to rap music.

This policing of identity works both ways. African-American rock musicians like Lenny Kravitz must continually justify the fact that they play an ostensibly "White" form of music as opposed to a "Black" form of music like hip-hop. These accusations are most often countered, not by the argument that artistic expression should not have a colour bar, but rather by the claim that rock was invented by African-Americans and is thus authentically "Black" music (Decurtis 1996; Louie 2004).[7]

Authority over the relations of identity production is asserted by linking the inflexibility of a particular phenotype to more flexible aspects of identity that could potentially be available to any interested consumer. For example, AAVE is, in theory, a language that may be learned like any other form of speech, yet is conventionally restricted to people of colour. Clothing styles, musical forms, rituals, and other cultural symbols are also linked to particular ethnic groups.

Yet the ties between inflexible and flexible identities are not always produced by ethnic communities: recent discussions of homosexual identity have also built on the concept of an inflexible (if not inborn) sexual orientation to argue that "butch" and "femme" lesbian identities are also not easily cast on and off with simple wardrobe changes (Walker 2001:10; cf. Hennessy 1995:151-152).

Citizenship or Citizenshop?

By arguing that this kind of essentialism may be a way of reasserting control over the relations of identity production and thus a way of posing a challenge to the paradigm of post-Fordist plasticity, I do not mean to ignore the ways it can be re-commodified by the marketing industry and co-opted by the post-Fordist cornucopia of customized products and consumer choice (Hennessy 1995:161;

Klein 2000:111; Lancaster 2003:314-315). As Klein illustrates, countercultural movements are eagerly mined for their cutting-edge cool by corporate advertisers: the proclamation of ever more distinctive "sexual and racial identities ma[kes] for great brand-content and niche-marketing strategies" (2000:111).

An assessment of the positive results of this co-optation—minorities achieving greater recognition and validation by the wider cultural system—and the negative results—the perpetuation of oppression as society may appear to be correcting inequalities without changing any fundamental structural or material systems of distribution—is contrary to the theoretical orientation of this paper. The point of this paper is not to evaluate identity politics for its radical potential, but rather to show how and why it has been an effective mode of mobilization in North America. Here, its ease of co-optation is a measure of its inextricability from the post-Fordist capitalist economy.

The post-Fordist mode of collectivity focuses on discourse, consumer choices, and identity because, as Rosemary Hennessy points out, "the proliferation of information technologies, media images, [and] codes ... in post-industrial cultures has helped to reconfigure bourgeois modes of perception in First World populations, producing subjects who are more differentiated and less likely to experience capitalism collectively through production relations and more likely to experience it through relations of consumption" (1995:174).

The brands-over-products, marketing-over-making paradigm was made possible by the decimation of the American manufacturing base and the outsourcing of stable jobs to temp agencies. This weakened (though, of course, not eliminated) the labour-based platform for social action, making other modes of organizing more salient and practicable. Thus even Judith Butler acknowledges, at the end of her defence of postmodernist deconstructions of the subject, in North America, "lobbying efforts are virtually impossible without recourse to identity politics" (1992:15), and even Eric Hobsbawm, in his much-cited denunciation of identity politics, notes that "constituting oneself into an identity group" can be very effective, "especially in countries where parties compete for votes" (1996:39).

Conclusion

Identity-based social movements in North America both developed from and contributed to the post-Fordist paradigm shift. As marginalized groups began to protest their exclusion from the centres of power and production, the market capitalized on the diversifying consumer demands. As the manufacturing base was increasingly outsourced to the developing world and as North America became an information and retail economy, identity became a more and more effective tool to access scarce resources. As branding began to infiltrate all aspects of public and private identity, the mobilization of sub-cultural capital became a way to reassert control over the relations of production. As this new proliferation of distinctive identities is repackaged and sold back to its producers, new forms of identity-based anti-corporate resistance are emerging.

Throughout this tangled intertwining, one thing has remained constant: personal identity and its vast shadow, the corporate brand, have the potential both to reap financial capital and to mobilize human capital. Identity capital is ventured in everything from business gambles to social protests, from making claims on the state to hooking corporate sponsors. To dismiss identity politics, or to insist on the need to transcend it, therefore, is to ignore the integral role that identity plays in a post-Fordist economy characterized by employment instability and a brands-over-products paradigm.

Acknowledgements

This paper is an abridged and revised version of the introduction and first chapter of my MA dissertation, *Essentialism in Text and Context: Identity Production and Protest in Late Capitalist North America* (Kooistra 2005). I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Bonnie McElhinny, and my second reader, Dr. Ivan Kalmar, for their comments on my dissertation; I am also grateful to the two anonymous Nexus reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

Notes

[1] See for example: Taylor 1994; Hennessy 1995; Hobsbawm 1996; Klein 2000; Kauffman 2001 [1990]. These authors are not intended to be a representative sample; I single these individuals out here because I draw on their work elsewhere in this paper.

[2] For a discussion of the divergent trends in Europe and North America, see Michael Piore and Charles Sabel (1984:133-167), Chris Smith (1991:152-153), Peter Nolan and Kathy O'Donnell (1991:173), and Hank Johnston, Enrique Laraña, and Joseph R. Gusfield (1994:26-27).

[3] The new production paradigm of "neo-Fordism" (Sabel 1982) or "flexible specialization" (Piore & Sabel 1984) was heralded by Charles Sabel and Michael Piore in the early 1980s. Their initial definition (and optimistic prognostication) has been substantially critiqued and reworked (Smith 1991; Nolan & O'Donnell 1991; Arestis & Paliginis 1995; Klein 2000; Martin 1994). In this paper I use the definition of "post-Fordism" that is now commonly employed (for a detailed discussion of the conceptual evolution of the term "post-Fordism," see Kooistra 2005).

[4] 50 Cent is an interesting case here, as well, since his popularity is in part due to Eminem's efforts to finance and promote him during the early part of his career. Eminem, as a hugely successful White rapper, is the exception that proves the rule—it is difficult to think of any other famous White rappers, aside from the Beastie Boys and the perennial objects of ridicule, Vanilla Ice and Snow. White rappers must fight to be perceived as "authentic" hip-hop artists and not just "wiggers" who pretend they are Black; many of Eminem's lyrics focus on identifying himself with Black rappers (e.g. Dr. Dre) and distinguishing himself from other White hip-hop and pop artists (e.g. N'Sync, Snow, Everlast, Vanilla Ice, and Milkbone) through insulting battle rhymes.

[5] The report defines "artists" according to nine occupational categories: (1) actors; (2) artisans and craftspersons; (3) conductors, composers and arrangers; (4) dancers; (5) musicians and singers;

(6) other performers; (7) painters, sculptors and other visual artists; (8) producers, directors, choreographers, and related occupations; and (9) writers (Hill Strategies Research 2005:2).

[6] Kembrew McLeod (2001) argues that only celebrities are able to gain control over the (re)production of their images, styles, and identities through the American "right of publicity" law and through their substantial personal wealth (224-225). I agree that this is true on a formal, institutional level, but propose that subcultural capital may provide communities with an informal set of intellectual property rights.

[7] See Mary Bucholtz's (1995) work on ethnic passing for further discussion and illustration of how the borders of ethnic and gender identities are policed.

References

Arestis, Philip, and Eleni Palignis
1995. Fordism, Post-Fordism, and Gender. *Économie Appliquée*. XLVIII(1):89-108.

Arruda, William
2000. 1-2-3 Success! Three Steps to a Winning Personal Brand. Electronic document, ww.reachcc.com/reachdotcom.nsf/bdf8f1dec3dadac0c1256aa700820c2c/9c04bd175d15e94ac1256c4a007adf0b!OpenDocument, accessed June 20, 2005.

Bishop, Ceiran
2005. *Fat women getting left behind*. Dose, May 27:7.

Bordo, Susan
1997. Material Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture. In *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*. Roger Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo, eds. Pp. 335-358. New York: Routledge.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1986 [1983]. The Forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. J.G. Richardson, ed. Richard Nice, trans. Pp. 241-258. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bucholtz, Mary
1995. From Mulatta to Mestiza: Passing and the Linguistic Reshaping of Ethnic Identity. In *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*. Kira Hall and Mary Bucholtz, eds. Pp. 351-373. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith
1992. Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism". In *Feminists Theorize the Political*. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds. Pp. 3-21. New York: Routledge.

Canada Council for the Arts (CCA)
2004. Cultural diversity – the cornerstone of Canadian society and a strategic priority for the Canada Council. Electronic document, http://www.canadacouncil.ca/aboutus/advocacy/dk1273067159357812 50.htm, last updated May 26, 2004; accessed June 6, 2005.

Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC)
1997. *Visible Minorities and the Public Service of Canada.* Submitted to the CHRC by John Samuel & Associates Inc., Ottawa. Electronic document, http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/publications/chap3-en.asp, accessed May 1, 2005.

Civil Rights Act (CRA)
1964. Pub. L. 88-352, July 2, United States. Electronic document, http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/laws/majorlaw/civilr19.htm, accessed June 22, 2005.

Clanton, Brett
2005. 50 Cent request buys Charger street cred. The Detroit News, January 18. Autos Insider section. Electronic document, http://www.detnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0501/18/B01-62252.htm, accessed June 6, 2005.

Combahee River Collective
1982 [1977]. A Black Feminist Statement. In *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies.* Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. Pp. 13-22. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press.

Decurtis, Anthony
1996. Is rock 'n' roll a white man's game? *Time Magazine*, April 29.

Employment Equity Act (EEA)
1995. Canada. Electronic document, http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/E-5.401, accessed June 26, 2005.

Equal Pay Act (EPA)
1963. Pub. L. 88-38, June 10, United States. Electronic document, http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/epa.html, accessed June 22, 2005.

Flacks, Richard
1994. The Party's Over—So What Is to Be Done? In *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, eds. Pp. 330-351. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Fraser, Nancy
1995. From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist" Age. *New Left Review* 212:68-93.

Frost, Randall
2003. Me Incorporated: Your Own Magnetic Brand. Electronic document, http://www.brandchannel.com, posted August 4, 2003, accessed June 20, 2005.

Hennessy, Rosemary
1995. Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture. In *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. Linda Nicholson and Steve Seidman, eds. Pp. 142-183. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heyes, Cressida
2002. Identity Politics. In *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta, ed. Electronic document, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2002/entries/identity=politics/, last updated July 18, 2002; accessed January 16, 2005.

Hill Strategies Research
2005. Diversity in Canada's Arts Labour Force: An Analysis of 2001 Census Data. *Statistical Insights on the Arts* 3(3). Report funded by the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Ontario Arts Council (OAC). Electronic document, http://

www.canadacouncil.ca/NR/rdonlyres/42D9F55E-4BCF-4E6B-9AFB3E83B63E0F13/0/Diversity_arts.pdf, accessed August 14, 2005.

Hobsbawm, Eric
1996. Identity Politics and the Left. *New Left Review* 217:38-47.

Hooks, Bell
1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Johnston, Hank, Enrique Laraña, and Joseph R. Gusfield
1994. Identities, Grievances, and New Social Movements. In *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, eds. Pp. 3-35. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kauffman, L.A.
2001 [1990]. The Anti-Politics of Identity. In *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement*. Barbara Ryan, ed. Pp. 23-34. New York: New York University Press.

Kaw, Eugenia
1994. "Opening" Faces: The Politics of Cosmetic Surgery and Asian American Women. In *Many Mirrors: Body Image and Social Relations*. Nicole Sault, ed. Pp. 241-265. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Klein, Naomi
2000. *No Logo: Taking Aim At The Brand Bullies*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.

Kooistra, Alison
2005. *Essentialism in Text and Context: Identity Production and Protest in Late Capitalist North America*. M.A. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto.

Lancaster, Roger N.
2003. *The Trouble with Nature: Sex in Science and Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lorde, Audre
2001 [1984]. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

Louie, Rebecca
2004. Kravitz: Black enough for ya? *Arizona Daily Star*, May 24. Electronic document, http://www.dailystar.com/dailystar/relatedarticles/23244.php, accessed June 26, 2005.

Martin, Emily
1994. *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture—From the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDs*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

McLeod, Kembrew
2001. *Owning Culture: Authorship, Ownership, and Intellectual Property Law*. New York: Peter Lang.

Melucci, Alberto
1994. A Strange Kind of Newness: What's "New" in New Social Movements? In *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, eds. Pp. 101-130. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

1980. The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach. *Social Science Information* 19(2):199-226.

Nolan, Peter, and Kathy O'Donnell
1991. Restructuring and the Politics of Industrial Renewal: The Limits of Flexible Specialization. In *Farewell to Flexibility*. Anna Pollert, ed. Pp. 158-175. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Peters, Tom

1997. The Brand Called You. *Fast Company* 10, August/ September: 83.

Piore, Michael J., and Charles F. Sabel
1984. *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*. New York: Basic Books.

Ryan, Barbara, ed.
2001. Identity Politics: The Past, the Present, and the Future; and Having It All: The Search for Identity and Community. In *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement*. Barbara Ryan, ed. Pp. 1-16 and 320-333. New York: New York University Press.

Sabel, Charles F.
1982. *Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Chris
1991. From 1960s' Automation to Flexible Specialization: A *déjà vu* of Technological Panaceas. In *Farewell to Flexibility*. Anna Pollert, ed. Pp. 138-157. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Taylor, Charles
1994. The Politics of Recognition. In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Amy Gutmann, ed. Pp. 25-73. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thornton, Sarah
1996. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Sub-cultural Capital*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.

Turner, Terence
1994. Bodies and anti-bodies: flesh and fetish in contemporary social theory. In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. T.J. Csordas, ed. Pp. 27-47. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Walker, Lisa

2001. *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity*. New York: New York University Press.

Walker, Verbal
2005. 50 Cent's business mentality. *Hip Hop DX*, May 30. Electronic document, http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/news/id.3288, accessed June 6, 2005.