

LABOURING UNDER WHITENESS

Final Revised version

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'Some people are born White  
Other achieve Whiteness  
and some have Whiteness thrust upon them  
Discuss.'

A few years ago it would not have been possible to set this exam question, let alone discuss it in the classroom. But Whiteness has, in the last few years, undergone a radical re-invention<sup>1</sup>. The new whiteness is in many respects the obverse of the old. It is self-conscious and critical, not taken for granted or disavowed; it is the visible focus of open conflict and debate not the silent support of an invisible consensus of power; for those to whom it is primarily addressed it is a source of guilt and anxiety rather than comfort or pride; above all it issues from a perspective which privileges a certain black experience of racism and insists that racism is primarily a white not a black problem. In this story, Whiteness is the new white man and woman's burden; their task is to first recognise and then help lift its oppressive yoke, by acknowledging its function as a badge of racial exclusion and privilege.

In some versions of this story Whiteness is reduced to an essentialised biological medium of racial supremacy; it is then conflated with an equally simple minded model of European hegemony which, for example is supposed to have impressed itself in much the same way on the USA, as in the 'third world'. The history of racism becomes the story of white Europeans oppressing black non-Europeans on the basis of skin colour; whites are intrinsically racist and a black European is a contradiction in terms. En route, racisms, and histories which do not fit into this simple binarism become marginalised and 'othered'<sup>2</sup>.

Alternatively skin colour is treated as a purely ideological

construct, in such a way that it becomes virtually a free floating signifier; what it can be made to mean is no longer circumscribed by any corporeal reality outside its representation in language or the social text. At the same time, the European tag takes on a curious almost biological fixity as a historical sediment of colonialism within the archaeology of western reason. This inversion of the nature/culture double act yields a tactical inessentialism in which white Europeans are empowered to shed the burden of representation associated with their skin colour by loosening up their Eurocentric mind sets, and in this way abolish or transcend the racial significance of whiteness<sup>3</sup>.

Both positions offer a certain rhetorical consolation, but there is growing recognition that neither offers much purchase on the complexities of the encounters which are currently taking place either side and across racial/ethnic divides<sup>4</sup>. The meaning of Whiteness is no more exhausted by its biologisation within 'colour racism', than by ethnicising its appeal as an item of 'cultural racism' or Eurocentrism. Indeed the issue is significant precisely because it puts in question the distinction between colour and culture as mutually exclusive terms of discrimination. To think whiteness requires us to rethink racism, and the way racism speaks the body.

### **Race and Representation :From Mimesis to Masquerade**

Let us begin, with Lacan and Levi Strauss, and with the idea of 'race' as an empty category or degree zero of representation<sup>5</sup>; it is an 'x marks the spot' which is not y, a principle of difference magically enclosed inside the human body and hence placed beyond the reach of language which is, nevertheless, the only medium of its articulation. This is a discursive operation which denies itself in order to produce a natural symbolism of

difference, but leaves its trace as an inert principle of repetition . If racist discourse works by reiteration - from the visual stereotype to same old genocidal story- it is because it represents a remainder, and unconsciously, a reminder, of what is not symbolised, or narrated, but threatens to erupt and overwhelm the whole shaky edifice of language, culture and identity in which humans have to make their various homes from home.

There are many different ways of characterising this unrepresentable threat . Freud called it the death drive, the drive for a state of final, perfect stasis which is also, at another level, a source of unmitigated terror<sup>6</sup>. For Lacan it is associated with the Unconscious as a function of the Real , a site where the discourse of the Other articulates an Unknown beyond the boundaries of immediate comprehension and conscious control<sup>7</sup>. According to this view, the repetitions of racist discourse are an attempt to master or contain the diffuse anxiety aroused by this Other Scene ; yet anxiety continually 'leaks out' as a principle of impending catastrophe haunting the quest for final homecomings with the always unforeseen, (but already long anticipated) irruption of the uncanny, the foreign or the alien<sup>8</sup>.

In this script, ghosted by the racist imaginary, immigrants, refugees, visible and invisible minorities of every kind , are made to embody a contaminating otherness; as such they become subject to defensive strategies aimed at both fixing their marginality and eliminating its threat, either by incorporation or expulsion . Once caught within this frame, target populations are treated as so much human waste matter, representing everything that has to be got rid of from the body politic in order to maintain its state of order. The

diffuse sense of dread evoked by the death drive is thereby transmuted into a named object of fear and loathing, whose extermination promises release<sup>9</sup>.

But there is no final solution. There is always a return of the repressed. Whether pinpointed as blemish or beauty spot, the x ray of 'race' traces the movement of somatic traffic beyond the borders of what can be perceived, known or controlled directly through the organs of body politic, a trajectory of lethal desire which in principle escapes even the most ferocious policies of surveillance or purification. How then to deal with this terrifying residuum of meaning which is made to inhere in 'race'?

The most common strategy is to construct a cover story, a kind of collective screen memory transfiguring difference into a myth of origins and destiny, centred on an absolute and congenital self identity. For this purpose somatic and kinesic features such as skin colour, hair, nose, hands, gait, and posture are invested with a special symbolic (ie moral and aesthetic) value and assembled into a second, phantom body, which, unlike the first, can be made to speak and tell its own story. In this anatomy of second nature, each distinctive feature serves as an indelible reminder/ trace of blessing or curse visited upon the generic subject by a fixed inheritance. And whether this body is idealised as the exclusive property of a master race or denigrated as a badge of racial inferiority, it shares a common immortality, a mode of being not touched by history, and eternally the same<sup>10</sup>.

Two simple examples must serve to illustrate some of these points. Consider first the infamous 'one drop' blood rule which is so often evoked in popular genealogies of racial ancestry. According to this mythology one drop of black, or

white, ( or jewish or arab or whatever) blood is sufficient to colour or stain the whole identity. Whether or not this model derives from a prescientific view of heredity , or draws on the language of contemporary genetics, the symbolic significance of the rule lies not so much in the metaphorical conceit of blood but in the metonymic principle of one drop <sup>11</sup> . For what this represents is not the historical individuality of a cultural heritage , but its doubling as second nature , as the singular,irreducible remainder/reminder of what is somehow hidden in the body , and not otherwise named, the phantom x marks the spot of an aboriginal moment of conception which immortalises the racialised body politic, and which it eternally repeats as a curse or blessing visited on each generation as it follows in the mimetic footsteps of its progenitors.

A somewhat similar process can be observed in the mimetic application of skin politics to the racialisation of urban space . Skin as surface covers the whole body ; by extension ,its colour is invested with the same all enveloping quality. One is 'black'. 'white' , 'brown' or 'octoroon' all over. The colour coding of the city is made to follow the same totalising logic; a neighbourhood is constructed as all over black, or white, bangladeshi or jewish, irrespective of the relative density and composition of the different groups living within it. This is a form of 'ethnic cleansing' which can air brush quite large minorities out of the picture . One of the key issues in the local numbers game, in fact, is just how many immigrants it takes to effect a colour change <sup>12</sup>. In some areas, at some times ( but not others) even one black family seems to be one too many and to threaten whiteness with a catastrophic dilution. One defense against this 'anxiety of influence' involves shifting to a strategy of racial masquerade in which elements of black culture are incorporated and

'whitened' in order to permit a restaging of racial identity<sup>13</sup>.

In order to appreciate the function of the body as a natural symbol of racial inequality and division, we therefore have to consider its dual registers of mimesis and masquerade, and their fusion in practices of mimicry<sup>14</sup>. This cultural somatology starts with the immediate givenness of the body, as an anatomy of physico-moral distinctions. But it should not stop there. For there is more to the body politics of race than the regulation of sexuality and the political arithmetic of population control. The disciplining of bodies has to be understood, historically, as part of a wider process of disciplining labour<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Race, Labour and the Roediger Thesis.**

The racial formation of labour power in the metropolitan heartlands of western capitalism is one of the most important chapters of 19th and 20th century history, and one which is only now beginning to be adequately told<sup>16</sup>. It is in the laboratory of emergent working class cultures that the most significant iconographies of whiteness have developed and taken hold of common sense definitions of race, nation and ethnicity. But how are we to understand the interplay of labour and the body in this 'proletarianisation' of whiteness?

We could start from the fact that each mode of production, even the most rationalised, has its own habitus. In other words a set of customary rules, rituals and invented traditions into which subjects are socialised, and from which they derive whatever powers of social combination they possess<sup>17</sup>. Habitus holds the collective worker in certain, largely unconscious, frames of mind and body defining who or what is fitting where within the general framework of the social division of labour.

In this way imagined communities of labour power install themselves in workplace cultures, and shape the way in which different kinds of work and worker are evaluated in society as a whole.

Until the advent of industrial capitalism, the vast majority of people in western societies, acquired skills and competencies of labour through mimetic forms of apprenticeship<sup>18</sup>. In the phase of manufacture, the implements of labour were thought of as a kind of prosthetic extension of body, moulded by the customary usages of handicraft. For the peasant or artisan, rhythms of labour were calibrated to cycles of seasonal production, and bound the functions of nature and the immediate body mimetically to the second nature of the social order. Masquerade was simply an interlude in which social hierarchies and their natural symbolisms were temporarily suspended or turned upside down.<sup>19</sup>

At first then, machines were regarded as simply bigger and better kinds of hand tool. Their functions of implementation are 'naturalised' and compared to those of the body, especially in its sexual or reproductive capacities. But already here the relation is less one of 'natural extension', than metaphor. With the advent of fully fledged machinofacture, and the accelerated trade cycle, the rhythms of employment in manual labouring become increasingly at odds with the tempo of mass production. Handicraft processes are marginalised and increasingly replaced by repetition work. Now, in so far as the body models itself on the 'second nature' of the labour process, mimesis becomes a direct instrument of self alienation. As living labour becomes increasingly disembodied or as Marx put it, dominated by dead labour, so structures of emulation which governed the apprenticeships of the 'old' labouring body



become increasingly redundant ; they are subsumed under rationalised, quasi bureaucratic methods of training which place the emphasis on technical co-ordination between different elements of the production process, of which labour is only one.<sup>20</sup>

But the mimetics of labour do not entirely wither away . Indeed they take on a new lease of life , outside production , as models of vicarious identification with techniques of mastery over nature, and the labour process, in a kind of defiant masquerade which camouflages real absences and lacks. In this way , some of the more hidden injuries inflicted on workers by the new industrial order are neutralised either by parodying their effect on others , or by projecting an immaculate body image 'hardened' by the rigours of labour .Through this process of re-embodiment, the productive capacities of disciplined labour are symbolically reclaimed, by and for the individual worker, albeit in a displaced form. In dance, in sport and especially in the more physically punishing kinds of male athleticism, the element of degradation in manual labour is transformed into a perverse principle of jouissance. Or to put it another way submission to physical self discipline becomes the bodies own labour of love. En route labour learns to mimic capital in its own onward march of productivity<sup>21</sup>.

This reading yields a rather different line of argument from that developed by David Roediger in his influential analysis of the genesis of white working class racism in the USA <sup>22</sup>.

In 'Wages of Whiteness' he sets out to show how American national identity was largely the creation of foreign european immigrants, irish, poles, italians and jews, who through that very device invented themselves as a superior white race staking out the frontiers of civilisation over and against

black slaves and native americans in the West and Deep south.

His central thesis, is taken over largely from George Rawick's 'From Sundown to Sunup':

The englishman and the profit minded settlers in America met the west african as a reformed sinner meets a comrade of his previous debaucheries. The white settler creates a pornography of his former life in order to ensure that he will not slip back into the old ways , so as to increase the distance between his newly refined self and those whom he formerly resembled.

Roediger extends this argument from plantation society to a more general model of the genesis of white immigrant labourism and its role in creating a popular culture of racial supremacism. He suggests that for many immigrants and refugees from old Europe who found themselves in isolated frontier stations of the new country ,the african and native americans who were already there represented the freedoms of a preindustrial world. The laziness, unbridled sexuality, and general social licence attributed to these groups by the white settlers were wistful projections of their own erstwhile ways of life which had been sacrificed to the dictates of the protestant work ethic and the disciplines of primitive capital accumulation.

According to Roediger,those euro-americans who held on most strongly to preindustrial customs and work practices were also those most likely to be discriminated against and to find themselves in competition with freed blacks for the lowest paid unskilled jobs . In this context he looks in particular at the ambiguous position of the Irish, and how their treatment as 'white negroes' created both strong identification with and equally strong dissociation from the cause of black emancipation. Black face minstrelsy is here seen as a privileged cultural form through which the tensions and ambiguities of this

relationship were worked out.

Now it could be objected that the process which Roediger is describing has no parallel in Britain or any other European country. Indeed our story might be considered to be almost the opposite of the USA. Immigrants to Britain, whether they be Jews, Irish, Caribbean, African or Asian, and whether they came as refugees or ex colonial subjects or both have challenged an already established national identity, and have largely been of the receiving end of white Anglo Saxon racism, rather than its chief perpetrators. So that, despite the history of special relationship, from slavery to NATO, and the heavy two way traffic in populations and ideas, the waves of both the white and black Atlantics break quite differently on English and American shores<sup>23</sup>.

But this criticism, however justified, is, I think, largely to miss the point of his work. The central idea, that working class cultures of racism are characterised by a distinctive pattern of ambivalence, deriving from an unconscious denial of the history of labour's transformation under capitalism, and that this ambivalence is focused by whiteness, is certainly suggestive and might be tested against other cases.

The model I have outlined above suggests that we need to approach the issue with a rather more complex model of projective identification than is allowed for in Roediger's rather mechanical application of the Freudian 'return of the repressed'. My suggestion will be that in order to understand the racial ambivalence of the English working class we have to grasp the contradictory way it was positioned within the dominant discourse of the body politic, as at once the backbone of the nation and a race apart. The first position was

associated with an idealised mimetics of manual labour and a process of whitening which stood against denigratory images of toil; the second with rituals of popular protest against conditions of industrialism linked to customary practices of masculinity, masquerade and 'blacking up'. These positions not only became colour coded, but were linked to political arguments about freedom, slavery and the status of wage labour. In order to understand the popular response to immigrants and ethnic minorities we have to understand more about the history of these purely internal negotiations between the two - white and black- faces of English labour. For it was here that the pattern of racial ambivalence directed against labour's others came to be established.

#### **White Labour, Black Masks : A Tale of Two Bodies**

The state of labour's body was a subject of official concern from the earliest period of industrialism. The degrading effects of the early factory system, especially on the vulnerable bodies of women and children, and the impact of overcrowding and insanitary housing conditions in the new slums on public health were prime concerns of the Victorian reformers. Almost inevitably these issues were wrapped up in a moralising discourse about the state of the nation and the degeneration of the race; the promiscuous mixing of the sexes at work or play, the corruption of childhood innocence by the perverse pleasures of city streets, and the threat to ancient customs and liberties posed by the immigration of alien ways of life, these were recurrent refrains in a more general admonition about the evils of urban industrialism addressed as much to labour as to capital <sup>24</sup>.

The moral anatomy of the proletarian body was central to this discourse; it was a body split in two, not just into two

genders, but into two races or nations. The body which figured as the backbone of the nation, the ideal body of manual labour looked backwards to the pre-industrial world of the artisan and forwards to the worker-automaton of fordism. Out of this historical compromise between the ancient custom and modernity came the figure of the yeoman in overalls, a free born englishman possessing both sublime skills of craftsmanship and a fully masculinized physique whose ruder and more mechanical desires had been sublimated in the productivity of work discipline. It was this aristocratic version of labour's body which was made to carry the double burden of representing whiteness as a mirror of proletarian pride, and englishness as badge of patriotic identification<sup>25</sup>.

In stark contrast, there was the body of the race apart, monstrously deformed by its abject conditions of labour, driven by wild primitive desires, a brute force whose physicality represented a permanent threat to civilised society. Needless to say it was this body which was blackened and associated with immigrant labour, the underclass, and the generic degradations of wage slavery. This body, in all the ferocity of its appetites was also imbued with a certain feminine quality of seductiveness; its very blackness would function as a form of masquerade, both concealing a hidden principle of threat, and inviting its disclosure. Its monstrosity is thus partly linked to its polymorphous perversity.<sup>26</sup>

Between these two poles of identification, between a blackfaced race apart, and the whitened backbone of the nation, there was to prove considerable room for manoeuvre. But in order to understand what is at stake here we have also to grasp the wider frame within which this development took place.

The historic prematurity of the english working class , the fact that it was the first industrial proletariat in the world, meant amongst other things that there were no precedents for describing its origins and growth <sup>27</sup>. It could only be imagined as a kind of aboriginal monster, of fearsomely ill proportion, who had given birth to itself in some perverse mimicry of the reproductive process. It was not surprising that in describing the congenital deformities entailed in this proletarian 'pathogenesis', commentators should have turned to the already long established language of racial teratology <sup>28</sup>.

When Mary Shelley described Dr Frankenstein's creation as a prototype for:

'a race of devils who would be propagated upon the earth , and who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition both precarious and full of terror',

there is evidence to suggest that she had the denizens of england's dark satanic mills exactly in mind.

Subsequently the notion of the english labourer as a race part from the rest of society served as a useful template for similar characterisations of blacks, irish and jews <sup>29</sup>. In the abolition debate the conservative Prime minister Canning argued the case against black emancipation by asserting that :

"to turn the Negro loose in the manhood of his physical passions, but the infancy of his uninstructed mind would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of Mary Shelley's romance, the maker of which finds too late that he has created more than a mortal power of doing mischief and recoils from the monster he has made..

In similar vein, the cartoonist Tenniel portrayed Parnell, the Irish nationalist as overshadowed by the monster of fenianism. The linkage between real and imaginary blacks was thus set very

early in place in english political discourse.

However the history of the term in debates within and about the english working class took a more specific turn . It stuck to particular occupational groups whose conditions of work set them apart from others and who came to represent the insularity or resistance to integration which was variously held to characterise either bloody minded recalcitrance or the revolutionary will of the class as a whole .

Miners were perhaps the most notable example of these special bodies of labour, and were particular suitable for constructing the myth of an aboriginal proletariat<sup>30</sup>. The Quarterly Review wrote at the turn of the century :

"the earth now seems for the first time to have heaved from its entrails another race to astonish and move us to reflection and sympathy".

In the late 18th century cornish tin miners were described as

"a rude bold savage set of beings , apparently cut off from their fellow men in their interests and feelings , but also as a sturdy band apart from the motley mixture of common humanity:

In Newcastle,miners were recorded as:

" speaking an uncouth tongue which none but they could understand - striking terror wherever they went like an eruption of barbarians invading some more civilised country than their own."

A London newspaper in 1776 characterised the Durham pitmen as:

:a very strange kind of being half savage at the best. Many thousands of them live entirely underground where they burrow and breed like rabbits:

Yorkshire miners were similarly described as a distinct race of beings:

"having association only amongst themselves , acquiring habits and ideas peculiar to themselves,and even their amusements are

peculiar - they invariably intermarry and it is not uncommon in the marriage to commingle the blood of the same family."

The theme of incest is here clearly a trope for fears of what the working class might get up to if it was left to its own devices ; the symbolic link between insularity and unregulated sexuality poses a threat to those 'with breeding' and it is no coincidence that much of this comment came from members of the aristocracy who felt their customary forms of personal authority and an extra economic coercion over the lives and labours of the lower orders was going up in factory smoke .

In the 1830 and 40s, against the background of Chartist agitation and the anti slavery campaigns the similarities and differences between the status of english wage labourers and black slaves in the caribbean was much debated , with terms of comparison being banded about from one side of the atlantic to the other<sup>31</sup>. The forging of common symbols of oppression linking the Great Cause with reform of industrial conditions at home undoubtedly heightened public consciousness about both sets of issues. But the terms of comparison were often ambivalent. It was possible for anti abolitionists to use miners as a stick to beat the opposition with:

"The backs and limbs of their own countrywomen are being broken and their moral nature corrupted by a species of slavery in the coal mines more cruel, more degrading and more profligate than any that obtains amongst serfs and slaves in any part of the world that the antislavery zealots of missionary enterprise have yet discovered to claim money and cash.'

Now one interesting thing about this and similar comparisons is their colour blindness . The coal blacked face of english pit men and women did not become an object of public attention until the 1860's and 70's <sup>32</sup>. This was a period in which the reforming english middle classes were beginning to distance themselves from the cause of black emancipation, following



rebellions in the Caribbean and the Governor Eyre controversy<sup>33</sup>.

At the same time they shifted their concern into campaigns against the physically degrading conditions suffered by sections of the English working class whose occupations were mimetically linked to the spread of dirt, disease and depravity. Now for the first time, whiteness is mobilised as a mirror held up to the imperial race, a reflection of what has to be preserved at all costs, and what is tarnished by association with labour in dark satanic mills. The idea that white labour was being forced to wear a black face thus becomes a special kind of public scandal. All the more so since it was so photogenic- the image of white labour in black face was already fixed by the mid Victorian photographers<sup>34</sup>.

At a time when the racial masquerade of American black and white minstrel shows was beginning to find a popular audience in Britain, the mimetic correspondence between conditions of wage labour and those of chattel slavery, which might just be embodied in the figure of miner was no longer found edifying. The campaigns for physical and moral hygiene aimed at the 'great unwashed' spoke to sneaking middle class fears that political attitudes which went along with industrial grime might be so deeply ingrained, so much under the skin, that might not be washed away by purely cosmetic reforms<sup>35</sup>.

The fears and the sympathy which miners evoked in middle class minds bear on their close relation to another blackface group which had much exercised the imagination of reformers - chimney sweeps<sup>36</sup>.

Abolitionists such as Thomas Clarke early on turned their reforming energies to child rescue work in the case of the orphans, runaways, and children of destitute parents forced into this dire work. He wrote :

their lot is as bad as negro slavery and it is not so known. I have myself found a boy as young as 5 years I have known 8 or 9 sweeps lose their lives by sooty cancer. The private parts which it seizes are entirely eaten off caused entirely by sleeping black and breathing the soot in all night.

Here is a lethal form of blackness which gets under the skin and gets so ingrained that it cannot be washed off, and which literally emasculates. It epitomises the pollutant effects of early industrialism and, at the same time promotes the trope of slavery as a description of the new unfreedoms of wage labour. The similarity between the sweep and black slaves was quickly seized upon by campaigners against child labour:

"Oh english gentleman your hearts have bled for the black slave  
you heard his melancholy moan from the Atlantic wave,  
now awake from apathy's cold sleep  
and when you plead for other wrongs forget not the poor sweep."

Many public figures in the late 18th and early 19th century took up their cause, and sweeps appeared regularly in popular novels, in melodramas and music hall acts as well as in reforming tracts. Charles Dickens did a good sweep and of course Charles Lamb wrote a famous essay on the subject.

'In Praise of Chimney Sweepers' is a most curious text, by turns paedophiliac and negrophobic. He is not attracted to old chimney sweeps; in fact he finds them positively repulsive, but he confesses to a 'kindly yearning for these tender novices blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washing not quite effaced from their cheeks'. He writes of his 'yearning for these dim specks, poor blots, innocent blacknesses, these young africans of our own growth, with their dusky suits and shining white teeth', and he fantasises about 'a hint of nobility and good blood, derived from lost ancestry and lapsed pedigree which is lurking under the double disguisement of soot and darkness.'

Lamb's sweep is a white negro, a noble savage manque who is caught up in a family romance about kidnap and exotic ancestry and who excites curiosity or patronage but is in no way seen as a threat. This is because blackface is here recognised as a mask, a seductive invitation to penetrate the grimy carapace of labour and discover the innocent whiteness of the child within.

Lamb admits that he is sensitive to what he calls street affronts, but when he accidentally runs into a sweep he is entranced rather than scared. Had he run into a real black, rather than an imaginary one, he leaves us under no illusion that his reaction would have been very different!

Lamb ends the essay by describing an annual feast of sweeps organised by one James White, which is described as a parody of the free born trencherman enjoying his ancient entitlement to roast beef and ale. At the end of the essay he actually bemoans the sweeps passing. How are we to understand this adoption of the sweep as a symbol of old England?.

The public fascination with child sweeps stems not just from sympathy with their appalling lot but because the sweep stands at the crossroads of two quite distinct histories of blackface, one mimetic in mode and linked to the miner which we have briefly looked at; and the other connected to preindustrial traditions of ritual disguising or masking linked with popular resistance to authority<sup>37</sup>.

A popular saying that survived at least into my childhood was that to kiss a sweep brought luck. It was also customary for to leave a piece of coal on the doorstep of newly weds for the same purpose<sup>38</sup>. But luck, in this context, did not mean winning at cards, it meant getting pregnant. The usage links the sweep to

the miner as a symbol of potent magical forces underground . But both in turn are connect to ancient guising traditions of Mummers plays . Mummers blackened their faces so that they would not be recognised by the audience. For a mummer to be recognised was supposed to break the luck - it the dispelled the sexual and other kinds of fertility which it was the purpose of the performance to visit upon the audience's community. To kiss the sweep ( or later to receive piece of coal) thus meant symbolically to identify with the magical procreative power of the Mummer. The Mummer was a kind of blackface trickster whose control over the forces of nature was achieved through mimicry and masquerade.

There was also a close link between Mummers and Morris.Morris was not just a dance but referred to any kind of folk ritual which involved luck and the wearing of disguise. Morris , or Moorish, dancing is a perfect example of an invented tradition.It was not a custom imported from North Africa! Rather performers followed the home grown Mummers custom of wearing black face as disguise. As Chambers says in his classic work on the popular drama in the late medieval period 'the faces were not blackened because the dancers represented Moors , but rather the dancers were thought to be moors because their faces were blackened'.

There were some Morris characters for whom blacking up was mandatory - The Turking knight -often called Beezelbub- was one .And by the late 18th century we see a shift to alternative forms of guising for mummers, with blackface increasingly being reserved for the character playing the black prince of Morocco, whom Saint George (or in some versions King George the 4th) had to slay in order to win the King of Egypt's daughter.

From the mid Victorian period onward, heroes from Imperial history often replace St George and the blackface role is increasingly associated with colonial subjects. This pattern of racialisation is carried over into the Punch and Judy shows which became popular in seaside resorts at this time. Here Sweep at first retains the positive association with luck, but under the influence of imported minstrelsy is increasingly subsumed under the character of Jim Crow. In some versions Mr Sweep and Jim Crow are used interchangeably, or disguise themselves as each other to confuse Punch.

However, this is only one side of the story of English blackface. From the early 18th century the practice also served as a mask of white labour in rituals of popular protest against official encroachments on customary rights and entitlements by the new forces of capital and state<sup>39</sup>. Already in mummers, blacking up had served the latent function of providing a cloak of anonymity which allowed parody and perhaps more overt criticism of local dignitaries to be voiced with relative impunity. As EP Thompson shows in 'Whigs and Hunters' in rural areas, during the early 18th century, especially in the forests of Berkshire and Hampshire the labouring poor took to blacking their faces to go poaching and challenge the royal prerogatives which were encroaching on traditional sources of livelihood. This practice of blacking up went back to Tudor times; but following the enclosure movement, poaching became an increasingly organised affair with pitched battles between gangs of 'blacks' and the law:

"A great number of disorderly and ill designing persons had associated with the name of blacks and took over parks and forests, killed and carried off deer and sent threatening letters to the gentry".

The so called Black Acts not only made poaching but black face itself illegal. However the association of blacking up with

popular struggles against injustice had already taken root in a quite different setting. Along the waterfront of late 18th century London, protesters against the practice of impressment, most of them young men most at risk of being kidnapped for the navy, took to blacking their faces before launching their attacks on the pressing gangs.

Impressment, like forest sequestration was a form of extra economic coercion exercised against the customary rights of labour. As such it was experienced as an affront to the then prevailing sense of popular sovereignty. In the 18th century, when the freeborn Englishman came out in his true colours, the colour not so much red white and blue, as black.

Black face was thus part of two quite distinct strategies of representation - one linked mimetically to slavery, the unfreedoms of wage labour and the abjections of dark satanic mills. And the other to masquerade and the old English guiser, mumming, morris, and the defence of ancient national liberties against foreign yokes. The picture entitled *Punch or Mayday* painted by Benjamin Haydon in 1829 is interesting in that it so clearly articulates these two traditions. It shows a scene in Covent Garden, where children are watching a punch and Judy show. To one side an African boy dressed in gaudy mummers clothes, is waiting to entertain them, his face covered in thick black greasepaint. This young black is shown as an old English guiser, in a prophetic if perverse statement of racial mimicries to come. For masquerade here has produced its own ironic mimetics.

The figure of the sweep brought both orders of representation together, in providing a link at once metaphoric and metonymic, between the experiences of black slavery and white exploitation. But as we have seen this was largely a trope made

by and for the reforming middle classes. What impact did it have on the emergent labour movement ?

The question is immensely important for race and labour history, but the answers, at present, are far from clear<sup>40</sup>. It does seem that there was a brief period in which working class Chartists and abolitionists made common cause and identified certain generic unfreedoms of labour as a focus of popular agitation on both sides of the Atlantic. But following the defeat of Chartism and the advent of formal black emancipation the chains linking the two sets of issues became increasingly those of fanciful association, rather than practical solidarity. The image struck was rhetorical, and derived from a biblical trope of the freeborn English as chosen people, a lost tribe of Israel being delivered out bondage to inherit the New Jerusalem rather than from any more direct reference to shared class and race oppression; the more slavery was appropriated as metaphor of the working class condition by middle class reformers, the more it was assimilated to the image of a dark and primitive continent, the less popular it became with ordinary working class people. And the signs of the times were anyway changing.

By the 1870's child sweeps were a thing of the past ; if kissing people with black faces still brought luck it was more often 'bad luck' associated with fears of racial miscegenation and unwanted pregnancies. Under the protective flag of Empire, real blacks - Africans and Caribbeans - became a new object of public fascination, with the advent of the figures of Sambo, Gollywog and Jim Crow in advertising, pageantry and popular literature . Against this background the indigenous form of blackface fell into disuse; it was replaced by the new idioms of black and white minstrelsy imported from the USA <sup>41</sup> . On the music hall stage

the world could still be safely turned upside down , and the real and imaginary black brought together without detonating their growing contradiction in the real world.

Outside this privileged frame it was a different story. For the late Victorian miner being portrayed 'cross dressed' as a white negro was adding insult to industrial injury . Labourism took up the cause of the freeborn englishman, but divested of its link with blackface. Just as it took up the cause of wage labour, but dissociated from the abjections of slavery and the rougher kinds of toil<sup>42</sup>.

Early forms of racial ambivalence have thus to be seen in relation to the double edged nature of blacking up. Firstly there is the long prehistory in customary practices of guising and protest, bound up with the expression of national/popular sovereignties. There is evidence, for example, that some of the rioters against the presence of Irish labourers were disguised in traditional blackface <sup>43</sup>. In that sense these attacks might be interpreted, in part, as an expression of protest by a residual pre-industrial culture against the incursions of modernity represented by the coming of the railways , built of course by Irish navvies. The Roediger thesis stood on its head so to speak.

In general, however the racialisation of the freeborn englishmen took another route, whitening the body of labour by linking its natal attractions to the imagined geography of an island race. It is no coincidence that white labourism was born along the waterfront, and that its 'avant garde' should be composed of seamen and dockers; here were close knit occupational communities hailed as the backbone of the nation or the salt of the earth and yet so often treated contemptuously as if they were a race apart. Through a complex process of negotiation,



these positions resolved themselves into a distinctive waterfront culture in the mid Victorian period; it was a culture which demanded intense loyalty to ones own kind and an equally fierce independence of spirit, yet projected these particularisms as the true embodiment of generically British traits.

These closures of kith and kinships articulated an inward looking localism which served as a powerful buffer against global movements of people and goods landing directly on their doorsteps. Especially from the 1870's onwards there emerges in these areas a vernacular idiom of white english nativism, claiming a special pride of place by virtue of ancient indigenous ancestry. This in turn yielded a powerful emotional rhetoric for campaigns against the 'cosmopolitan presence' of jews or lascars. The patrimony of labour was thus asserted in the form of specific territorial entitlements and exclusions.

If nationalisms of the neighbourhood were here so easily subsumed under grander narratives of Race and Empire, it was because ports and docks were the gateways where Imperial trade might yet 'strike back' at the metropolitan heartland, in the form of immigration from overseas. From the mid Victorian period onwards, the London waterfront comes to occupy a crucial place in the public imagination of the boundaries of the english state and civil society. Seamen and dockers, living in the backyards of Empire also found themselves placed on its front lines as the standard bearers of an imperial race threatened by invasion from 'alien cultures'. Here dominant and subordinate racisms opportunistically converged<sup>44</sup>.

The growth of white labourism was accompanied by a reconfiguration of blackface as a metaphor for the unacceptable

face of industrial capitalism. This furnished a trope of abjection which foreclosed any possible source of identification with the Irish or the Jews, whose labour, and bodies were being blackened by the newly racialised discourse of labour's immaculate body. Paradoxically the widespread dissociation from traditional english blackface in all its connotations, including those which linked it to 'luck', also made it possible to construct Jewish and Irish immigrants as 'imaginary blacks' in a purely negative sense - as a parasitic antibody of labour enslaving the free born english working man, attacking customary civil liberties, and dragging organised labour back down into abject depths of immiseration<sup>45</sup>.

Nevertheless a line continued to be drawn between these imaginary blacks and the real thing. Under favourable circumstances, Jewish and Irish workers could still be whitened and welcomed into the rank and file as the bearers of invented traditions and trajectories which were consonant with an indigenous labour history. For, after all, were these not these immigrant communities following, at a suitable distance, in the footsteps of the english working class in their struggles to move on from the position of a race part, to become, in their turn, part of the backbone of the nation? And was this not a mimetic of manual labour which real blacks by definition could neither emulate nor claim indirectly by 'passing' as white?

This double standard crystallised in the period from 1880 to the First World War, during the heyday of the popular culture of imperialism in Britain. It was also the period which saw the emergence of labourism as distinctive political culture and ideology. And along with it the beginning of a pervasive whitening of labour's body. But to properly understand this process we have to place it in the context of wider structural

changes<sup>46</sup>.

### **From the Whitening of Labour to the Labouring of Whiteness**

The screen memory of whiteness which we find in the dominant culture of imperialism was derived from an aristocratic aversion to manual labour of any kind. And what it covered over was precisely the recognition that the purest, and most refined forms of nobility were in fact conditional upon the most squalid forms of economic exploitation . That dissociation was maintained by a code which made a rigid distinction between those with breeding and those who merely bred, a class racism in which freedom from selling one's labour power and control over carnal instinct were the joint conditions and marks of a superior moral and mental condition of humanity. Whiteness was both the visible sign and invisible guarantee of this disconnection between desire, labour and the body <sup>47</sup>.

The ideal of refinement through cultivated pursuits was subsequently subsumed under more utilitarian and 'bourgeois' notions of mental and physical fitness as an index of racial or national health ; nevertheless whiteness as a principle of class/race distinction was still anchored to distance or difference from crudities of mind and body associated with manual labouring. The civilising mission was precisely about how to impose a measure of refinement and/or health on those who had the misfortune to engage in it <sup>48</sup>.

The dominant version of this code took a long time dying. As Lord Milner put it when he was watching some of his troops washing in a stream during the battle of the Somme in the First World War, 'I never knew the working classes had such white skins'. But it is a matter of considerable debate as to how much of this whiteness washed off on the working classes.

Certainly Victorian and Edwardian labour aristocrats elaborated their own set of racialised distinctions to set themselves apart, as skilled men with regular family wages, from the world of the casual unskilled and indigent poor, most of whom were women, children and immigrants. And in so doing, they embraced many symbols of difference which were subsequently to become colour coded.<sup>49</sup>

It is unclear what influence this had on those who were still condemned to do the 'dirty jobs', but it certainly did little to lift the burden of representation as a 'race part' from their shoulders. During the inter war period, and against the background of a continued association between the abjections of manual labour and less than whiter than white skins, a new purely cosmetic whiteness was, for the first time, commodified and made available to all<sup>50</sup>. In the new codes of advertising which went along with the early days of popular consumer culture, well scrubbed children, with clean white faces, white lace curtains, and white sheets fluttering in the backyard breeze became powerful symbolic statements, urging identification with a whole new community of aspiration; these images offered access to a world of whiteness which promised to hide or at least offset the squalor and grime which continued to characterise so much of the working class environment, both indoors and out.

There was, for example, a sustained attempt to whiten the miner, not just literally through the introduction of steam baths, but through endless advertisements of miners wives rubbing the black off their husbands backs with flannels and the latest brand of tar soap; and along with this went the transformation of their symbolic location within the body

politic from race apart to backbone of the nation. The alien brute is replaced by the heroic figure of the Big Hewer, half Yeoman, half John Bull, delighting in heroic feats of endurance underground, and no less punishing feats of drinking once back on top. The new model miner is made to mime the gestures of the patriotic englishman, even as the troops are being sent in to break his strikes. The Cockney Coster and the Docker underwent a somewhat similar transformation<sup>51</sup>.

Through the recession of the interwar years, the scope of this whitewashing operation was limited by the real exigencies of social production; a large percentage of the active workforce remained concentrated in heavy industry or dirty jobs. Mass unemployment threw millions back into the most abject conditions of poverty and residual, preindustrial labour. But slowly at first, and then with gathering momentum these conditions were transformed. The cumulative gains of the Labour movement in terms of job security, wage levels, health and safety at work, and social insurance for the unemployed, crystallised in the post war Welfare state<sup>52</sup>.

But to some extent economic recovery was a pyrrhic victory for the labour movement. The post war settlement forced industrial capital to shift to higher ground from which to maintain its rate of profit. In many cases it emigrated to the low wage low skill economies of the third world. In Britain the more labour intensive industries either declined or were transformed through the introduction of automated technologies; the work habitus of manual labourism was increasingly confined to a few skilled trades, and to a residuum of dirty jobs concentrated in a secondary labour market and hidden economy 'reserved' for immigrant labour brought in from the caribbean and the asian subcontinent<sup>53</sup>.

At the same time industrial production was rationalised through the application of informatics and the development of more flexible employment patterns; work based upon bureaucratic, marketing, or personal services increased dramatically, although not sufficiently to absorb the labour displaced from industry.

Although the new 'post fordist' labour forms entail their own kinds of stress, they do not engage the body in the same process of physical degradation. The system of oppression is rather more subtle and contradictory than that <sup>54</sup>. In a world where the employee is supposed to model the corporate image, (including nowadays its equal opportunity policies) and where impression management is the name of the game (and even often of the job) then the 'right' physical appearance and social skills are part of the necessary vocational credentials. Certainly in the dream jobs to which so many young people in the West aspire - air hostess, dancer, lifeguard, rock musician, sportsperson etc- what is being sold in addition to physical prowess is a certain public body image, an ability to stage manage the job as a dramatic performance, rather than the capacity to collaborate in the process of production as such. <sup>55</sup> As a result, at the level of recruitment and promotion within internal labour markets, faces are now made to fit (or not) as coded signs of 'life style', linked to social identity.

Raced and gendered bodies have thus in a sense become much more strategic in determining access and status within the immediate work habitus. But at the same time the process of social production has become increasingly dematerialised; in the movements of global capital, the essential inputs are entirely disembodied and abstracted from living labour. In the faceless

interfaces of the information super highway , identities are literally immaterial. Race and gender are entirely irrelevant to productivity and access. Yet precisely at the point at which globalisation makes racism and sexism finally redundant in principle, in practice it strengthens their hold over local labour markets and histories<sup>56</sup>.

So the contradictions proliferate. Those who have the credentials to win the 'clean' white collar jobs consign the dirty jobs and those who do them to the dustbins of history; yet the new 'white' jobs also become destabilised by pressures of corporate downsizing. Meanwhile, amongst the rank and file who cannot gain entry to the new work habitus, certain types of traditionally 'white' manual work take on a hyper-inflationary value , not just because of skill or wage level, but because they require or permit the public performance of masculinities which have otherwise become redundant and dysfunctional<sup>57</sup>.

Certain types - the building worker, the trucker, the rigger, the cowboy, the steel erector, the garage mechanic, - stake out the new frontiers of white labourism and sometimes push beyond them. In Country and Western music, in buddy movies, in soft porn magazines and comics, in corporate advertising, in TV serials, their praises are sung, often with strongly homoerotic overtones. This new ideal body-of-labour seems at one level to evoke a sense of nostalgia for a 'world we have lost', where certain types of manual work entailed a special pedigree, a principle of consanguinity, which was often transmuted into an almost mystical sense of ownership and control over the labour process . Coal is in your blood. Herring in your bones. You were born to the mills or shipyards . An east ender born and bred. You have a seafarers legs, a seamstresses fingers . Today, these quasi racial tropes can conjure up a romance of lost

labour patrimonies , in a world where children no longer follow parents into the same occupation, or learn the skills of their various trades by watching and emulating other members of their family.

But in fact these men are models in an altogether different sense; as we watch them posing and strutting their way through adventure stories of male bonding, we are not being invited to admire any professional competence they may have in driving trucks, roping steers, or plastering walls! Rather they are there to make fashion statements about what it takes to belong to a rough trade in a world where neither masculinity or manual labour is quite what it was. What is held up to our gaze is their narcissistic pride in performing certain old fashioned virtues of rugged individualism associated with a deep sense of physical fraternity rooted in specific types of manual work. The covert message is that these figures are the backbone of the nation precisely because they are nowadays a race apart.

But this race apart wears a white face, not a black one . It is a race of white superworkers riding the waves of technological change, keeping abreast of the times in the era of globalisation , whilst still retaining the local ethnicities associated with specific trades. At once modern and post modern, and enjoying the best of both worlds , they are indeed the standard bearer of a new white labourism<sup>58</sup>.

Meanwhile in the real world , the occupational cultures of residual manual labourism have frequently become the preserve of blacks and other ethnic minorities. This means that the same jobs frequently appear under a dual sign - for example hard, dirty or dangerous jobs are both valorised as a sign of white proletarian ethnicity or macho sexuality and despised by



association with blacks.

This system of attribution lies at the heart of contemporary working class racism and what might be called its system of double indemnity. It endorses the familiar complaint that blacks are taking 'our' jobs, or cheapening 'our' labour, and hence threatening individual or family livelihood; but at the same time, at a more unconscious level, it underwrites a pervasive disavowal of the ambivalence associated with the performance of manual labour. If blacks are being attacked, it is not for being insufficiently sublimated in the disciplines of work or domesticity (as Roediger suggests) but, on the contrary, because the very emergence of black struggles to widen opportunity structures in employment, achieve higher occupational status etc exposes the historical limitations of white labourism. Not only do these struggles often demonstrate a practical transcendence of forms of exploitation dissimulated under the masquerade of whiteness; they point to communities of aspiration and belonging which have become an object of envy and sometimes of secret sabotage. As one ex dockers leader put it to me:

"the blacks have their heroes, their role models, the living ideas and ideals they can follow. They have Nelson Mandela. But all we have been left with is the memory of illusions, hollow promises, ancient prejudices, plans that didn't work and dreams that turned into nightmares".<sup>59</sup>

### **White Skins and the Re-Imagining of Labour**

It is little wonder then that many young white people have abandoned the 'ideal types' of manual labour as sites of identification because they no longer correspond to any realisable ambition. The growth of youth unemployment as a structural feature of western economies throughout the 1980's cut large numbers of young people off from any kind of work

apart from what was offered by the hidden economy . The mimetics of apprenticeship were subsumed once and for all in the mimicry of youth culture.<sup>60</sup>

The emergence of a 'skinhead youth international' closely allied to movements of the Far Right and with transatlantic links is one symptomatic response to these changes. Yet it still seems remarkable that what started as a local and somewhat sardonic meta-statement about a white english ethnicity associated with a dying culture of manual labourism belonging to costers, dockers and cockneys in the east end of london should develop into an international badge of popular white supremacism <sup>61</sup>.

At least one of the things which made this possible was the ease with which the skinhead 'uniform' - shaved head, Doc Martin's boots, T shirt, jeans and braces, could be abstracted from any specific reference or content in local social history and projected as a generic transnational image of white labour. It was easy precisely because this 'labour' had been emptied of any content apart from its 'colour'. What it worked on and reconfigured with new value and meaning was precisely whiteness. And by the same token what this whiteness now signified was its transcendence of any determinate work habitus. Which is perhaps one reason why it was so popular amongst unemployed youth.

Yet once whiteness floats free of any mimetic framework ,and becomes pure masquerade, its inner emptiness stands revealed. One defensive move against this happening consists in re-inscribing colour within an alternative but no less imaginary community - that of the nation, modelled no longer on the state but around local analogues of labour's body. Nationalisms of the neighbourhood, the football team, even the family can serve

as supports for unofficial forms of immigration control directed against those whose faces do not fit the habitus of white male territorialism. This device is one way in which the most powerless and disadvantaged groups can imagine themselves to be some kind of local ruling class. For at least 'we rule round here' (not them). And yet because the nation has become such a fluid and unstable construct, this is a tactical essentialism which often raises more contradictions than it resolves<sup>62</sup>.

Another strategy consists in elaborating a politics of masquerade around skin and the body, playing with elements of the colour code whilst conserving the significance of whiteness as a natural symbolism of race. It is no longer the grime of work which blackens white faces but consumer choice. The early skins used facial cosmetics to give themselves a 'black look' as a way of demonstrating their identification with reggae and afrocaribbean culture, but underwent a process of whitening as they moved closer to the National Front.

Today dark sun tans are de rigueur amongst many white unemployed youth, if only because they are supposed to speak volumes about a hedonistic life style as far removed from the workaday world and degradations of slumcity as possible. If you have nothing to do all Summer but hang out in the street or park, then 'sunbathing' on the invisible tropical beach beneath the broken paving stones and withered grass means that at least you have something to show off for it for it .

Yet exhibitionistic darkening, whether achieved by artificial or 'natural' means is almost always ambiguous. At one level it may describe a more or less envious identification with the pleasure principles associated with black music and street

culture; but at another, far from repudiating the privileges of whiteness, it is a means of reasserting their validity on the part of those who in real terms are largely deprived of them. Here is a paradoxically post modern form of skin politics which enables young people who are born of the wrong side of the race and class tracks to imagine they have the best of white and black worlds, whilst in reality having the worst of both .

I have suggested that this process of 'post modernisation' either fetishises certain 'ideal types' of manual labour or abstracts them into forms which mimic labours official body politic. It is no coincidence that this is occurring at a time when Labourism and working class politics generally are in retreat throughout the Western world. Through the medium of its racialised and sexualized bodies, Labour comes to re-occupy a central place in public imaginations of the nation, a place from which it has been decisively evicted in the actual field of political strategy<sup>63</sup>.

We are facing a curious paradox. The manual working classes are out of job in the sense of featuring as an active subject of political engagement . Except that courtesy of these new agendas of gender and race , they have made a comeback bid albeit in a purely negative sense - as bad news; they star in a new kind of narrative, no longer as heroes of socialist folk tales or revolutionary fairy stories but as villains of feminist and antiracist critiques- part of the cautionary tale of what happened when the dream of labour's onward march turned into the nightmare of Thatcherism, and a whole lot of nastiness came out of the political closet <sup>64</sup>.

According to this scenario , a new generation of angry white

young men, for whom the links between growing up , working and class are no longer available, find themselves stranded in a kind of permanent adolescence, unable to find wages, wives, or the wherewithal to establish the kind of individual autonomies which are demanded by the enterprise culture. Masculinities hitherto disciplined by the apprenticeships of manual labourism run riot - leading to increasing domestic violence, drug abuse, street crime, and last but not least racial antagonism. The whole laddish ethos , with its clinging to rigid muscle bound definitions of self, and refusal to engage in the kinds of identity work required for multicultural competence , provides a ready recruiting ground for the New Right. It is from the ranks of these young men that the fascisms of the future, as of the past, will be recruited<sup>65</sup>.

In this chapter I have tried to argue for a way of understanding the racial ambivalence engendered by labour's two bodies which militates against such one sided and pessimistic conclusions. The very fact that whiteness now has to be worked at so strenuously in order to maintain its fiction as second nature, means that the same old cover story is wearing thin . As repetition fails to master the anxiety of racial influence we must expect that this 'blank screen' will feature ever more florid movies in which the civil war between idealised and denigrated bodies will be staged in terms ever more displaced from the matrix of labour power.

Yet it is also possible to detect in and across these engagements another project. Not the facile mirroring of 'black and white unite and fight'; not the envious emulation instilled by role modelling; nor the immortalisation of shared grievance; and least of all a return to oceanic feelings of identification with ' the human race'. But rather the persistent search for

ways of building bridges between labour, desire and the body through elementary structures of collaboration at the level of everyday life: the setting up of a nursery, the organisation of a street festival, a campaign to keep open a library or close a road to traffic, these popular initiatives often yield tactical alliances between communities which in other contexts are at each others throats. At the same time they offer models of political action which can be adopted and customised by groups living on the other side of class and race tracks. In both cases they provide a forum for working through differences, which in however small a way, may begin to ease the burden of representation which is still carried by whiteness. In an age of overblown rhetorics it is time these small victories, clutched out of the midst of the racial inferno, were properly celebrated. Italo Calvino put it like this :

"The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is already here, the inferno we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. the first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognise who and what in the midst of inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space"<sup>66</sup>.

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1. The work of Frankenberg (1994), Roediger (1994) Ware (1993) and Almaguer (1994) has been central to this re-appraisal and in what follows I am much indebted to their work. See also the introduction to this book for an account of this whole development. On the role of whiteness as a blind spot in the literary imagination of America see Morrisson (1994) and for a general overview of recent debates Erikson (1995).

2. For recent examples of this kind of argument see Feagin and Vera (1995) and Barthelemy (1995) . For a general critique of essentialist models of race see the contributions to Donald and Rattansi (1991) . For a discussion of racial binarism in Britain see the contributions to the special issue of Patterns of Prejudice (1996).

3. For a critique of the constructivist position, for ignoring the persistent reality principles of 'race' , especially as these are articulated in 'scientific racism' see Kohn (1995). Roediger's suggestions for 'abolishing' whiteness are criticised by Erickson (op cit).

4. Recent substantive analyses of such as those of Back (1995) have pointed to the inadequacy of both the essentialist and constructivist positions . This argument is developed across a range of ethnographic case studies in Cohen (1997).

5. On the function of the zero phoneme in linguistics see Levi Strauss (1986) and in literature Barthes (1984). Rustin (1993) has elaborated the notion of race as an empty category from a perspective which integrates Kleinian theories of object

relation with Durkheimian theories of classification. Lacan's(1986) theory of desire takes another tack linking difference with repetition in reworking Freud's notion of the death instinct. Sibony ( 1991 and 94) has developed a lacanian theory of racist desire, and Zizek(1989) has applied a somewhat similar perspective to analysing the psychic foundations of nationalism's other scenes. From a post Kleinian standpoint David (1994) has stressed the importance of racist constructs as a defence against anxiety. These approaches, which have influenced much of the present argument, develop a more sophisticated model of repression and unconscious representation than is found in the classic Freudian accounts of Kovel (1970) and Theweleit(1989).

6. For a discussion of Freud's theory of anxiety and the death drive see . Melanie Klein's work is largely devoted to an analysis of the psychic defences - splitting , projection and denial, which are mobilised by the infant to deal with these early destructive feelings. Post Kleinians have looked at how these infantile structures are conserved and reproduced in various kind of social ideology and cultural practice.

7.On the relation between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic orders see Lacan(op cit).On the psychoanalytic theory of the Unknown see the pioneering studies by Rosolato (1978)

8. On the relation of the uncanny to the construction of the foreign see Kristeva (1991).

9. On the function of naming, and classification systems in objectifying the anxiety of the Other see Cassirer 1979)

10.The two bodies theory draws on the Lacanian psychoanalytic perspectives of Dolto (1982) Ali (1981). The historical origins of this dual image in the divine/mortal body of the feudal king is discussed in Kantorowicz (1986) ; its transposition into aristocratic models of racial genealogy is analysed by Devyer(1984) . Zizek (1994) shows how this principle of dualism is sublimated in positions of power and subjection within the modern nation state. The cultural linkage to notion of purity and impurity is suggested by the anthropological work of Mary Douglas (1970,1972) .

11. For a discussion of popular beliefs about blood and inheritance seen Jacob (1974) and more recently Jones (1996).

12. For a discussion of urban space and its racialisation see the contributions to Keith( 1993) and Hesse (1993)

13. For an analysis of these processes within urban youth cultures see Hewitt (1989) and Back (op cit)

14. Girard (1991) has developed a theory of mimesis and the double which links it to narratives of sacrifice and the scapegoat but in a transhistorical vein. For a discussion of the interplay of mimesis and masquerade in concrete contexts of the post/colonial encounter see Taussig (1993) and Richards (1994). Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry (Bhabha 1994) implicitly defines it as a systemic conflation of these two orders, but fails to distinguish conceptually between them. As a result the precise terms of their articulation in particular instances is never clarified. For a further discussion of this point see Cohen (1997 op cit).

On disciplinary regimes and the body see Foucault(1989), For a discussion of Foucault's model of bio-politics and the absence of any developed problematics of 'race' see Solers (1996). A close up focus on the discursive formation of body to the neglect of its embeddedness in the details of labour history is a characteristic failing of post structuralist approaches. There have however been some recent studies on the body politics of slavery (Sanchez-Eppler 1995), the post colonial encounter (Lingis 1994). The pioneering study of the culture of imperialism by Anne McClintock (McClintock 1994) attempts , for the first time , to bring the two side of the story together in a convincing way .

16. In the USA much recent labour history has taken race as its primary focus of concern. In addition to the work of David Roediger, discussed below see the major studies by Rawick (1972 ) Saxton (1991) and Allen(1994). Race has been very much a blind spot of labour historians moulded in the EP Thompson tradition (Rattansi 1996, Watts and Boal 1996) . There have been numerous empirical case studies of specific instances of racialised confrontation between 'immigrants or 'ethnic minorities' and 'indigenous' white working class communities. See for example the contributions to Lunn (1982, 1991) Holmes (1978) and Frost(1995) . These incidents are usually explained in purely conjunctural and economic terms, or else as the function of deeply ingrained traditions of intolerance. See for example Husbans(1982 ) . These micro-politics of race and class are not at all integrated into macrohistorical explanations of the 'british' social formation, and hence appear as a side show

to the main conflicts engendered by the social structure. Ron Ramdin's study of the 'making of the black working class' (Ramdin 1987) establishes a line of separate historical development for this subject-in-struggle against racism, colonialism and imperialism, in which the enviroing structures of civil society all but disappear. Miles (1984, 1989) does attempt to link historical events with wider structural explanations albeit through a rather mechanical type of Marxist functionalism. For a discussion of this whole field see Cohen (1997 op cit)

17. The concept is developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991).

18. On the history and rituals of apprenticeship in the long transition from artisanal or petty commodity production, through the stage of cottage industry to fully fledged factory production see Rule (1986) and Berg (1984, 1991). On the transformation of the wider culture of labour during this period see the classical studies of Thompson (1984) and Hobsbawm (1979).

19. For a discussion of masquerade and rituals which turned the world upside down in early modern european culture see Davis (1975)

20. See Doray (1988)

21. The recent upsurge of interest amongst historians and sociologists in changing cultures of the body have not on the whole but seen it as simple process of transition from the sphere of production to that of consumption. See for example the studies by Turner (1989), Falk (1994) and Brooks (1993). A notable exception is the study by Dabakis (1996).

22. See Roediger (1991, 1994)

23. For an attempt to reformulate and save the atlantocentric position see Gilroy (1994). The main critique of this position in Britain has come from Tariq Modood. See the discussion of his work in Patterns of Prejudice (1996).

24. For a good introduction to this literature see Stedman Jones (1991) and the contributions of Keating and Epstein to Dyos (1976). For a discussion of the moral topography of the victorian city see Stalleybrass and Allon, and for its sexual politics Walkovitz (1994).

25. On the rhetorical link between patriotism and the popular will see Cunningham (1990) Rule (1992) Colley (1992) and Finn (1993).

26. The image of particular sections of the working class as constituting a race apart, inhabiting an 'unknown' or 'dark continent' is a recurrent theme in much public commentary during the Victorian period, and one which for obvious reasons was much used by the urban social explorers. See for example the discussion of Mayhew's use of the term by Epstein (op cit). The frequency of this term is noted by Linebaugh (1990) and Rule (1991 op cit). Chevalier (1976) notes the function of the term in characterising the 'dangerous classes'. The term continued to be applied to dockers, miners and up until the 1960s, and still characterises many local narratives. For a further discussion see Cohen (1996).

27. On the prematurity of the English working class I have broadly followed the line of argument first developed by Tom Nairn (1976).

28. On Frankenstein's monster as an image of the proletariat see Baldick (1985). On the iconography of the monstrous races see Friedman (1976). For a general discussion of the sexual see Huet ( ). A further discussion is to be found in Cohen (1989).

29. See for example Engels' infamous characterisation of the Irish in *The Condition of the English Working Class* (Engels) and Robert Blatchford's view of Jews in *Merrie England* (Blatchford).

30. In what follows I have drawn extensively on the work of John Rule ( ) and Anne Mc Clintock (1994).

31. For a general discussion of the freedom/unfreedom debate as it relates to the status of wage labour see Hill (1991). On the relation between slavery and ideologies of freedom under capitalism see Holt ( ), Patterson ( ) and Brion Davis ( ). On the specific terms of transatlantic comparison between chattel slavery and wage labour see Blackett ( ) Fladland ( ) , Cunliffe ( ) and the contributions to Lovejoy and Rogers ( ).

32. The point is well made by Benson ( )

33. On the shift in middle class interest from slavery and the condition of blacks, to domestic reform focused on the English

working class during the mid victorian period see Lorimer ( ) and Hall ( )

34. See the discussion in Tagg ( ).

35. On this point see Haley ( )

36. For the victorian literature on sweeps and climbing boys see Phillips ( ) and Strange ( )

37. On popular traditions of disguise see Garner ( ), and on Morris and Mummers Chandler ( ), Nirdlinger ( ) and Chambers ( ). For a detailed study of the symbolism of blacking up related to sweeps and coal see Pythian Adams ( ). The rituals of masquerade which characterises this pre-industrial culture are analysed in depth by Judge ( ).

38. See Pickering ( )

39. For a general discussion of the persistence of pre-industrial cultures in forms of resistance to new forms of capitalist work discipline, modernity and law see Thompson and Hays ( ) and Linebaugh (op cit) . For a discussion of resistance against impressment see Rediker ( ) .

40. Although recognising the influence of antislavery on some working class leaders Fladeland ( ) is generally sceptical of the impact made on the mass of labourers rank and file. Drehscher ( ) in contrast argues that the symbolisms of freedom associated with abolition permeated the popular rhetorics of working class agitation during the Chartist period,

41. For a discussion of popular representations of black people in Britain at this time see Lorimer (op cit) . On the development of blackface in the USA see the brilliant study by Eric Lott ( ). Mayhew notes the presence of American blackface minstrelsy on the streets of mid victorian London , but Lorimer suggests that the popularity of these acts came much later on the boards of the music hall . The extent to which english responses to imported blackface were overdetermined by the persistence of the home grown version in popular memory, if not custom, is, at present a matter of speculation awaiting further research.

42. On the early culture of labourism see the Hobsbawm ( ) , and the case study by Marriott ( ). On the relationship between the discourse of labourism and race see Knowles ( )



43. On the Murphy Riots and their rationale see the discussion by Miles ( )

44. This topography of white labourism is explored further in Cohen (1996b)

45. On anti Irish racism see Lebow ( ) and on antisemitism in working class culture and politics Cohen (1990) and Lee (1984)

46. On these changes see Stedman Jones ( )

47. For a discussion of the code of breeding and its transformations see Cohen (1989)

48. See Haley ( ) on the general movement for moral and physical hygiene aimed at the working classes. On self improvement and rational recreation see Bailey ( ). The impact on young people through education and youth organisations is assessed by Springhall ( ) and the contributions to Mangan ( ).

49. See the discussion in Bourke ( )

50. On the growth of consumerism and its impact on the working class see Bourke ( op cit) and Falk ( ) op cit

51. For a discussion of the transformation of the Costermonger into a patriotic cockney see Stedman Jones ( ). On the changing image of dockers see Worpole ( ). This development is also discussed in Cohen (1996a).

52. On the interwar period see Branson . On the post war welfare state settlement

53. On the position of black immigrant labour see Miles and Phizaclea ( ). For a succinct analysis of the development of 'race relations' during this period see Schwarz ( )

54. On the habitus of post fordism see Jessop (1991)

55. On impression management in the new work habitus see the study by Hochschild ( ). On its relation to new forms of education and training see Cohen (1996)

56. On globalisation and the reproduction of local inequalities see Appadurai ( ) and the contribution to King ( ). On the new cyberculture see Stallabrass ( ).

57. On the reconstruction of masculinities see

58. On the post modern imagery of manual labour see Bettie ( )
59. quotation from resident on the Isle of Dogs quoted in Cohen (1996)
60. For a detailed discussion of this point see the work of Hebdige ( ). On the re-formation of youth identities see Holland ( ) and Cohen (1996).
61. On the original formation of skinheads see CCCS( ). On their later development see Moore ( 1993)
62. On the ambiguities of white male territorialism see Cohen (1994)
63. On the long term decline of working class politics and trade union power see Gorz ( ) and Hindess( )
64. For a discussion of the onward march and what went wrong see Seabrook ( ) and the contributions to Hobsbawm ( ).
65. This scenario is painted most luridly by Campbell( )
- 66.