

# THE OTHER QUESTION . . .

## HOMI K BHABHA RECONSIDERS THE STEREOTYPE AND COLONIAL DISCOURSE

<sup>1</sup> There are two major problems with this account which emphasise the tentative and introductory nature of the essay. First, despite the subject's problematic accession to sexual difference which is crucial to my argument, the body in this text is male. Realising that the question of woman's relation to castration and access to the symbolic requires a very specific form of attention and articulation, I chose to be cautious till I had worked out its implications for colonial discourse. Secondly, the representation of class difference in the construction of the colonial subject is not specified adequately. Wanting to avoid any form of class determinism 'in the last instance' it becomes difficult, if crucial, to calculate its effectivity. I hope

*To concern oneself with the founding concepts of the entire history of philosophy, to deconstitute them, is not to undertake the work of the philologist or of the classic historian of philosophy. Despite appearances, it is probably the most daring way of making the beginnings of a step outside of philosophy.*

Jacques Derrida: *Structure, Sign and Play*

AN IMPORTANT FEATURE of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness.<sup>1</sup> Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. It is this process of *ambivalence*, central to the stereotype, that my essay explores as it constructs a theory of colonial discourse. For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. Yet, the function of ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power – whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan – remains to be charted.

The absence of such a perspective has its own history of political expediency. To recognise the stereotype as an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power demands a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic or functionalist modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse and politics, and questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination. My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the *identification* of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse. To judge the stereotyped

image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its *effectivity*; with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs the colonial subject (both coloniser and colonised). I do not intend to deconstruct the colonial discourse to reveal its ideological misconceptions or repressions, to exult in its self-reflexivity, or to indulge its liberatory 'excess'. In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of 'truth', not to subject its representations to a normalising judgement. Only then does it become possible to understand the *productive* ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity. What such a reading reveals are the boundaries of colonial discourse and it enables a transgression of these limits from the space of that otherness.

The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power. I do not wish to conflate, unproblematically, two forms of the marking—and splitting—of the subject nor to globalise two forms of representation. I want to suggest, however, that there is a theoretical space and a political place for such an *articulation*—in the sense in which that word itself denies an 'original' identity or a 'singularity' to objects of difference—sexual or racial. If such a view is taken, as Feuchtwang<sup>2</sup> argues in a different context, it follows that the epithets racial or sexual come to be seen as modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, cross-cutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific and strategic calculation of their effects. Such is, I believe, the moment of colonial discourse. It is the most theoretically underdeveloped form of discourse, but crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation.

Before turning to the construction of colonial discourse, I want to discuss briefly the process by which forms of racial/cultural/historical otherness have been marginalised in theoretical texts committed to the articulation of 'difference', '*significance*', 'contradiction', in order, it is claimed, to reveal the limits of Western representationalist discourse. In facilitating the passage 'from work to text' and stressing the arbitrary, differential and systemic construction of social and cultural signs, these critical strategies unsettle the idealist quest for meanings that are, most often, intentionalist and nationalist. So much is not in question. What does need to be questioned, however, is the *mode of representation of otherness*.

Where better to raise the question of the subject of racial and cultural difference than in Stephen Heath's masterly analysis of the chiaroscuro world of Welles' classic *A Touch of Evil*? I refer to an area of its analysis

to face both these issues more fully in the book that I am working on at present: *Power and Spectacle: 'Colonial Discourse and the English Novel*, to be published by Methuen.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephan Feuchtwang, 'Socialist, Feminist and Anti-racist Struggles', *m/f* 4, 1980, p 41.

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The chiaroscuro world of racial and sexual difference: *A Touch of Evil*.

which has generated the least comment, that is, Heath's attention to the structuration of the border Mexico/USA that circulates through the text affirming and exchanging some notion of 'limited being'. Heath's work departs from the traditional analysis of racial and cultural differences, which identify stereotype and image, and elaborate them in a moralistic or nationalistic discourse that affirms the *origin* and *unity* of national identity. Heath's attentiveness to the contradictory and diverse sites within the textual system, which *construct* national/cultural differences in their deployment of the semes of 'foreignness', 'mixedness', 'impurity', as transgressive and corrupting, is extremely relevant. His attention to the turnings of this much neglected subject as sign (not symbol or stereotype) disseminated in the codes (as 'partition', 'exchange', 'naming', 'character', etc.), gives us a useful sense of the circulation and proliferation of racial and cultural otherness. Despite the awareness of the multiple or cross-cutting determinations in the construction of modes of sexual and racial differentiation there is a sense in which Heath's analysis marginalises otherness. Although I shall argue that the problem of the border Mexico/USA is read too singularly, too exclusively under the sign of sexuality, it is not that I am not aware of the many proper and relevant reasons for that 'feminist' focus. The 'entertainment' operated by the realist Hollywood film of the '50s was always also a containment of the subject in a narrative economy of voyeurism and fetishism. Moreover, the displacement that organises any textual system, within which the display of difference circulates, demands that the play of 'nationalities' should participate in the sexual positioning, troubling the Law and desire. There is, nevertheless, a singularity and reductiveness in concluding that:

*Vargas is the position of desire, its admission and its prohibition. Not surprisingly he has two names: the name of desire is Mexican, Miguel . . . that of the Law American – Mike . . . The film uses the border, the play between American and Mexican . . . at the same time it seeks to hold that play finally in the opposition of purity and mixture which in turn is a version of Law and desire.*<sup>3</sup>

However liberatory it is from one position to see the logic of the text traced ceaselessly between the Ideal Father and the Phallic Mother, in another sense, in seeing only one possible articulation of the differential complex 'race-sex' – it half colludes with the proffered images of marginality. For if the naming of Vargas is crucially mixed and split in the economy of desire, then there are other mixed economies which make naming and positioning equally problematic 'across the border'. To identify the 'play' on the border as purity and mixture and to see it as an allegory of Law and desire reduces the articulation of racial and sexual difference to what is dangerously close to becoming a circle rather than a spiral of *différance*. On that basis, it is not possible to construct the polymorphous and perverse collusion between racism and sexism as a *mixed economy* – for instance, the discourses of American cultural colonialism

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Heath, 'Film and System, Terms of Analysis', Part II, *Screen Summer* 1975, vol 16, no 2, p 93.

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and Mexican dependency, the fear/desire of miscegenation, the American border as cultural signifier of a pioneering, male 'American' spirit always under threat from races and cultures beyond the border. If the death of the Father is the interruption on which the narrative is initiated, it is through that death that miscegenation is both possible and deferred; if, again, it is the purpose of the narrative to restore Susan as 'good object', it also becomes its project to deliver Vargas from his racial 'mixedness'. It is all there in Heath's splendid scrutiny of the text, revealed as he brushes against its grain. What is missing is the taking up of these positions as also the *object(ives)* of his analysis.

These objectives have been pursued in the January/February 1983 issue of *Screen* (volume 24, number 2), which addresses the problems of 'Racism, Colonialism and Cinema'. This is a timely and welcome intervention in the debate on realist narrative and its conditions of existence and representability – a debate which has hitherto engaged mainly with the 'subject' of gender and class within the social and textual formations of western bourgeois society. It would be inappropriate to review this issue of *Screen* here, but I would like to draw attention to Julianne Burton's 'The Politics of Aesthetic Distance: The Presentation of Representation in "Sao Bernardo"'. Burton produces an interesting reading of Hirzman's *São Bernardo* as a specific Third World riposte of dualistic metropolitan debates around realism and the possibilities of rupture. Although she doesn't use Barthes, it would be accurate to say that she locates the film as the 'limit-text' of both its own totalitarian social context *as well as* contemporary theoretical debates on representation.

Again, anti-colonialist objectives are admirably taken up by Robert Stam and Louise Spence in 'Colonialism, Racism and Representation', with a useful Brechtian emphasis on the politicisation of the *means* of representation, specifically point-of-view and suture. But despite the shift in political objectives and critical methods, there remains in their essay a limiting and traditional reliance on the stereotype as offering, *at any one time*, a *secure* point of identification. This is not compensated for (nor contradicted by) their view that, *at other times and places*, the same stereotype may be read in a contradictory way or, indeed, be misread. What is, therefore, a simplification in the process of stereotypical representation has a knock-on effect on their central point about the politics of point-of-view. They operate a passive and unitary notion of suture which simplifies the politics and 'aesthetics' of spectator-positioning by ignoring the ambivalent, psychical process of identification which is crucial to the argument. In contrast I suggest, in a very preliminary way, that the colonial stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself.

The difference of other cultures is other than the excess of signification or the trajectory of desire. These are theoretical strategies that are necessary to combat 'ethnocentrism' but they cannot, of themselves, unreconstructed, represent that otherness. There can be no inevitable

sliding from the semiotic activity to the unproblematic reading of other cultural and discursive systems.<sup>4</sup> There is in such readings a will to power and knowledge that, in failing to specify the limits of their own field of enunciation and effectivity, proceeds to individualise otherness as the discovery of their own assumptions.

## II

The difference of colonial discourse as an apparatus of power<sup>5</sup> will emerge more fully as the paper develops. At this stage, however, I shall provide what I take to be the minimum conditions and specifications of such a discourse. It is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledges of coloniser and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. Despite the play of power within colonial discourse and the shifting positionalities of its subjects (e.g. effects of class, gender, ideology, different social formations, varied systems of colonisation etc), I am referring to a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation', appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity. Therefore, despite the 'play' in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognisable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to Realism. And it is in order to intervene within that system of representation that Edward Said proposes a semiotic of 'Orientalist' power, examining the varied European discourses which constitute 'the Orient' as an unified racial, geographical, political and cultural zone of the world. Said's analysis is revealing of, and relevant to, colonial discourse:

*'Philosophically, then, the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality. . . . The tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of*

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, having decentred the sign, Barthes finds Japan immediately insightful and visible and extends the empire of empty signs universally. Japan can only be the Anti-West: 'in the ideal Japanese house, devoid or nearly so of furniture, there is no place which in any way designates property; no seat, no bed, no table provides a point from which the body may constitute itself as subject (or master) of a space. The very concept of centre is rejected (burning frustration for Western man everywhere provided with his armchair and his bed, the owner of a domestic position).'- Roland Barthes, *L'Empire des Signes*, translated by Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, London, Scholar Press 1979, pp 13-14. For a reading of Kristeva relevant to my argument, see Gayatri Spivak, 'French Feminism in an International Frame', *Yale French Studies* 62; 1981, pp 154-184.

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<sup>5</sup> This concept is discussed below.

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1978, p 72.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p 206.

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*repetition and strength. . . . For all these functions it is frequently enough to use the simple copula is.*<sup>6</sup> (my emphasis)

For Said, the *copula* seems to be the point at which Western Rationalism preserves the boundaries of sense for itself. Of this, too, Said is aware when he hints continually at a polarity or division at the very centre of Orientalism.<sup>7</sup> It is, on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements. It is a static system of 'synchronic essentialism', a knowledge of 'signifiers of stability' such as the lexicographic and the encyclopaedic. However, this site is continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability. And, finally, this line of thinking is given a shape analogical to the dream-work, when Said refers explicitly to a distinction between 'an unconscious positivity' which he terms *latent* Orientalism, and the stated knowledges and views about the Orient which he calls *manifest* Orientalism.

Where the originality of this pioneering theory loses its inventiveness, and for me its usefulness, is with Said's reluctance to engage with the alterity and ambivalence in the articulation of these two economies which threaten to split the very object of Orientalist discourse as a knowledge and the subject positioned therein. He contains this threat by introducing a binarism within the argument which, in initially setting up an opposition these two discursive scenes, finally allows them to be correlated as a congruent system of representation that is unified through a political-ideological *intention* which, in his words, enables Europe to advance securely and *unmetaphorically* upon the Orient. Said identifies the *content* of Orientalism as the unconscious repository of fantasy, imaginative writings and essential ideas; and the *form* of manifest Orientalism as the historically and discursively determined, diachronic aspect. This division/correlation structure of manifest and latent Orientalism leads to the effectivity of the concept of discourse being undermined by what could be called the polarities of intentionality.

This produces a problem with Said's use of Foucault's concepts of power and discourse. The productivity of Foucault's concept of power/knowledge lies in its refusal of an epistemology which opposes essence/appearance, ideology/science. '*Pouvoir/Savoir*' places subjects in a relation of power and recognition that is not part of a symmetrical or dialectical relation – self/other, Master/Slave – which can then be subverted by being inverted. Subjects are always disproportionately placed in opposition or domination through the symbolic decentering of multiple power-relations which play the role of support as well as target or adversary. It becomes difficult, then, to conceive of the *historical* enunciations of colonial discourse without them being either functionally overdetermined or strategically elaborated or displaced by the *unconscious* scene of latent Orientalism. Equally, it is difficult to conceive of the process of subjectification as a placing *within* Orientalist or colonial discourse for

the dominated subject without the dominant being strategically placed within it too. There is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is a historical and theoretical simplification. The terms in which Said's Orientalism is unified – the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power – also unify the subject of colonial enunciation.

This is a result of Said's inadequate attention to representation as a concept that articulates the historical and fantasy (as the scene of desire) in the production of the 'political' effects of discourse. He rightly rejects a notion of orientalism as the misrepresentation of an Oriental essence. However, having introduced the concept of 'discourse' he does not face up to the problems it makes for the instrumentalist notion of power/knowledge that he seems to require. This problem is summed up by his ready acceptance of the view that,

*Representations are formations, or as Roland Barthes has said of all the operations of language, they are deformations.*<sup>8</sup>

This brings me to my second point – that the closure and coherence attributed to the unconscious pole of colonial discourse and the unproblematised notion of the subject, restricts the effectivity of both power and knowledge. It is not possible to see how power functions productively as incitement and interdiction. Nor would it be possible, without the attribution of ambivalence to relations of power/knowledge, to calculate the traumatic impact of the return of the oppressed – those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire, in colonial texts. It is precisely this function of the stereotype as phobia and fetish that, according to Fanon, threatens the closure of the racial/epidermal schema for the colonial subject and opens the royal road to colonial fantasy.

Despite Said's limitations, or perhaps because of them, there is a forgotten, underdeveloped passage which, in cutting across the body of the text, articulates the question of power and desire that I now want to take up. It is this:

*Altogether an internally structured archive is built up from the literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West. What gives the immense number of encounters some unity, however, is the vacillation I was speaking about earlier. Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar. One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well-known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method*



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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, pp 58-59.

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', in *Power/Knowledge*, Harvester, London, 1980, p 196.

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p 195.

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*of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things. . . . The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either 'original' or 'repetitious'. . . . The orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty.<sup>9</sup>*

What is this other scene of colonial discourse played out around the 'median category'? What is this theory of encapsulation or fixation which moves between the recognition of cultural and racial difference and its disavowal, by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear? Is it not analogous to the Freudian fable of fetishism (and disavowal) that circulates within the discourse of colonial power, requiring the articulation of modes of differentiation – sexual and racial – as well as different modes of discourse – psychoanalytic and historical?

The strategic articulation of 'coordinates of knowledge' – racial and sexual – and their inscription in the play of colonial power as modes of differentiation, defense, fixation, hierarchisation, is a way of specifying colonial discourse which would be illuminated by reference to Foucault's post-structuralist concept of the *dispositif* or apparatus. Foucault stresses that the relations of knowledge and power within the apparatus are always a strategic response to an *urgent need* at a given historical moment – much as I suggested at the outset, that the force of colonial discourse as a theoretical and political intervention, was the *need*, in our contemporary moment, to contest singularities of difference and to articulate modes of differentiation. Foucault writes:

*. . . the apparatus is essentially of a strategic nature, which means assuming that it is a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces, either developing them in a particular direction, blocking them, stabilising them, utilising them etc. The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by, types of knowledge.<sup>10</sup>*

In this spirit I argue for the reading of the stereotype in terms of fetishism. The myth of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority – produced in relation to the colonial stereotype functions to 'normalise' the multiple beliefs and split subjects that constitute colonial discourse as a consequence of its process of disavowal. The scene of fetishism functions similarly as, at once, a reactivation of the material of original fantasy – the anxiety of castration and sexual difference – as well as a normalisation of that difference and disturbance in terms of the fetish object as the substitute for the mother's penis. Within the apparatus of colonial power, the discourses of sexuality and race relate in a process of *functional overdetermination*, 'because each effect . . . enters into resonance or contradiction with the others and thereby calls for a readjustment or a reworking of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points.'<sup>11</sup>

There is both a structural and functional justification for reading the racial stereotype of colonial discourse in terms of fetishism.<sup>12</sup> My re-reading of Said establishes the *structural* link. Fetishism, as the disavowal of difference, is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration. The recognition of sexual difference—as the pre-condition for the circulation of the chain of absence and presence in the realm of the Symbolic—is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence. The *functional* link between the fixation of the fetish and the stereotype (or the stereotype as fetish) is even more relevant. For fetishism is always a ‘play’ or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—in Freud’s terms: ‘All men have penises’; in ours ‘All men have the same skin/race/culture’—and the anxiety associated with lack and difference—again, for Freud ‘Some do not have penises’; for us ‘Some do not have the same skin/race/culture’. Within discourse, the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack). The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse. For the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy—the subject’s desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division, for the subject must be gendered to be engendered, to be spoken.

The stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both coloniser and colonised, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defence—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture. My contention is splendidly caught in Fanon’s title *Black Skin White Masks* where the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit—a grotesque mimicry or ‘doubling’ that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego. The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.

When Fanon talks of the positioning of the subject in the stereotyped discourse of colonialism, he gives further credence to my point. The legends, stories, histories and anecdotes of a colonial culture offer the subject a primordial Either/Or.<sup>13</sup> *Either* he is fixed in a consciousness of the body as a solely negating activity *or* as a new kind of man, a new genus. What is denied the colonial subject, both as coloniser and colonised is that form of negation which gives access to the recognition of difference in the Symbolic. It is that possibility of difference and circulation which would liberate the signifier of *skin/culture* from the signifieds of racial typology, the analytics of blood, ideologies of racial and cultural

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<sup>12</sup> See Sigmund Freud, ‘Fetishism’ (1927) in *On Sexuality*, vol 7, Pelican Freud Library, Harmondsworth, 1981, p 345 ff; Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, Macmillan, London, 1982, pp 67-78. See also Steve Neale, ‘The Same Old Story: Stereotypes and Differences’, *Screen Education* 32/33, Autumn/Winter 1979/80, pp 33-37.

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<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, London, Paladin, 1970, see pp 78-82.

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dominance or degeneration. 'Wherever he goes', Fanon despairs, 'The Negro remains a Negro' – his race becomes the ineradicable sign of *negative difference* in colonial discourses. For the stereotype impedes the circulation and articulation of the signifier of 'race' as anything other than its *fixity* as racism. We always already know that blacks are licentious, Asiatics duplicitous....

### III

There are two 'primal scenes' in Fanon's *Black Skins White Masks*: two myths of the origin of the marking of the subject within the racist practices and discourses of a colonial culture. On one occasion a white girl fixes Fanon in a look and word as she turns to identify with her mother. It is a scene which echoes endlessly through his essay *The Fact of Blackness*: 'Look, a Negro... Mamma, see the Negro! I'm frightened. Frightened. Frightened.' 'What else could it be for me', Fanon concludes, 'but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood.'<sup>14</sup> Equally, he stresses the primal moment when the child encounters racial and cultural stereotypes in children's fictions, where white heroes and black demons are proffered as points of ideological and psychical identification. Such dramas are enacted *every day* in colonial societies, says Fanon, employing a theatrical metaphor – the scene – which emphasises the visible – the seen. I want to play on both these senses which refer at once to the site of fantasy and desire and to the sight of subjectification and power.

The drama underlying these dramatic 'everyday' colonial scenes is not difficult to discern. In each of them the subject turns around the pivot of the 'stereotype' to return to a point of total identification. The girl's gaze returns to her mother in the recognition and disavowal of the Negroid type; the black child turns away from himself, his race, in his total identification with the positivity of whiteness which is at once colour and no colour. In the act of disavowal and fixation the colonial subject is returned to the narcissism of the Imaginary and its identification of an ideal ego that is white and whole. For what these primal scenes illustrate is that looking/hearing/reading as sites of subjectification in colonial discourse are evidence of the importance of the visual and auditory imaginary for the *histories* of societies.<sup>15</sup>

It is in this context that I want to allude briefly to the problematic of seeing/being seen. I suggest that in order to conceive of the colonial subject as the effect of power that is productive – disciplinary and 'pleasurable' – one has to see the *surveillance* of colonial power as functioning in relation to the regime of the *scopic drive*. That is, the drive that represents the pleasure in 'seeing', which has the look as its object of desire, is related both to the myth of origins, the primal scene, and the problematic of fetishism and locates the surveyed object within the 'imaginary'

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p 79.

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<sup>15</sup> Christian Metz *op cit*, pp 59-60.

relation. Like voyeurism, surveillance must depend for its effectivity on 'the *active consent* which is its real or mythical correlate (but always real as myth) and establishes in the scopic space the illusion of the object relation'<sup>16</sup>. The ambivalence of this form of 'consent' in objectification – real as mythical – is the *ambivalence* on which the stereotype turns and illustrates that crucial bind of pleasure and power that Foucault asserts but, in my view, fails to explain.

My anatomy of colonial discourse remains incomplete until I locate the stereotype, as an arrested, fetishistic mode of representation within its field of identification, which I have identified in my description of Fanon's primal scenes, as the Lacanian schema of the Imaginary. The Imaginary<sup>17</sup> is the transformation that takes place in the subject at the formative mirror phase, when it assumes a *discrete* image which allows it to postulate a series of equivalences, samenesses, identities, between the objects of the surrounding world. However, this positioning is itself *problematic*, for the subject finds or recognises itself through an image which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational. This is the basis of the close relation between the two forms of identification complicit with the Imaginary – narcissism and aggressivity. It is precisely these two forms of 'identification' that constitute the dominant strategy of colonial power exercised in relation to the stereotype which, as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it. Like the mirror phase 'the fullness' of the stereotype – its image *as* identity – is always threatened by 'lack'.

The construction of colonial discourse is then a complex articulation of the tropes of fetishism – metaphor and metonymy – and the forms of narcissistic and aggressive identification available to the Imaginary. Stereotypical racial discourse is a four-term strategy. There is a tie-up between the metaphoric or masking function of the fetish and the narcissistic object-choice and an opposing alliance between the metonymic figuring of lack and the aggressive phase of the Imaginary. A repertoire of conflictual positions constitute the subject in colonial discourse. The taking up of any one position, within a specific discursive form, in a particular historical conjuncture, is thus always problematic – the site of both fixity and fantasy. It provides a colonial 'identity' that is played out – like all fantasies of originality and origination – in the face and space of the disruption and threat from the heterogeneity of other positions. As a form of splitting and multiple belief, the 'stereotype' requires, for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes. The process by which the metaphoric 'masking' is inscribed on a lack which must then be concealed gives the stereotype both its fixity and its phantasmatic quality – the *same old* stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time.

In any specific colonial discourse the metaphoric/narcissistic and the metonymic/aggressive positions will function simultaneously, but

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, pp 62-63.

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<sup>17</sup> For the best account of Lacan's concept of the Imaginary see Jacqueline Rose, 'The Imaginary' in Colin MacCabe (ed), *The Talking Cure*, London, Macmillan, 1981.

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<sup>18</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', *Toward the African Revolution*, London, Pelican, 1970, p 44.

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<sup>19</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, op cit, p 114.

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always strategically poised in relation to each other; similar to the moment of alienation which stands as a threat to Imaginary plentitude, and 'multiple belief' which threatens fetishistic disavowal. Caught in the Imaginary as they are, these shifting positionalities will never seriously threaten the dominant power relations, for they exist to exercise them pleasurably and productively. They will always pose the problem of difference as that between the pre-constituted, 'natural' poles of Black and White with all its historical and ideological ramifications. The *knowledge of the construction* of that 'opposition' will be denied the colonial subject. He is constructed within an apparatus of power which *contains*, in both senses of the word, an 'other' knowledge—a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness, that fixed form of difference, that I have called the stereotype. Fanon poignantly describes the effects of this process for a colonised culture:

*a continued agony rather than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture. The culture once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yolk of oppression. Both present and mummified, it testifies against its members. . . . The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking. . . . As though it were possible for a man to evolve otherwise than within the framework of a culture that recognises him and that he decides to assume.*<sup>18</sup>

My four-term strategy of the stereotype tries tentatively to provide a structure and a process for the 'subject' of a colonial discourse. I now want to take up the problem of discrimination as the political effect of such a discourse and relate it to the question of 'race' and 'skin'. To that end it is important to remember that the multiple belief that accompanies fetishism does not only have disavowal value; it also has 'knowledge value' and it is this that I shall now pursue. In calculating this knowledge value it is crucial to consider what Fanon means when he says that:

*There is a quest for the Negro, the Negro is a demand, one cannot get along without him, he is needed, but only if he is made palatable in a certain way. Unfortunately the Negro knocks down the system and breaks the treaties.*<sup>19</sup>

To understand this demand and how the native or Negro is made 'palatable' we must acknowledge some significant differences between the general theory of fetishism and its specific uses for an understanding of racist discourse. First, the fetish of colonial discourse—what Fanon calls the epidermal schema—is not, like the sexual fetish, a secret. Skin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognised as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political, historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies. Secondly, it may be said that sexual fetish is closely linked to the 'good object'; it is the prop that makes the whole object desirable and lovable,

facilitates sexual relations and can even promote a form of happiness. The stereotype can also be seen as that particular 'fixated' form of the colonial subject which *facilitates* colonial relations, and sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition in terms of which colonial power is exercised. If it is claimed that the colonised are most often objects of hate, then we can reply with Freud that

*affection and hostility in the treatment of the fetish – which run parallel with the disavowal and acknowledgement of castration – are mixed in unequal proportions in different cases, so that the one or the other is more clearly recognisable.*<sup>20</sup>

What this statement recognises is the wide *range* of the stereotype, from the loyal servant to Satan, from the loved to the hated; a shifting of subject positions in the circulation of colonial power which I tried to account for through the motility of the metaphoric/narcissistic and metonymic/aggressive system of colonial discourse. What remains to be examined, however, is the construction of the signifier of 'skin/race' in those regimes of visibility and discursivity – fetishistic, scopophilic, imaginary – within which I have located the stereotypes. It is only on that basis that we can construct its 'knowledge – value' which will, I hope, enable us to see the place of fantasy in the exercise of colonial power.

My argument relies upon a particular reading of the problematic of representation which, Fanon suggests, is specific to the colonial situation. He writes:

*the originality of the colonial context is that the economic substructure is also a superstructure. . . . you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.*<sup>21</sup>

Fanon could either be seen to be adhering to a simple reflectionist or determinist notion of cultural/social signification or, more interestingly, he could be read as taking an 'anti-repressionist' position (attacking the notion that ideology as miscognition, or misrepresentation, is the repression of the real). For our purposes I tend towards the latter reading which then provides a 'visibility' to the exercise of power; gives force to the argument that skin, as a signifier of discrimination, must be produced or processed as visible. As Abbot says, in a very different context,

*whereas repression banishes its object into the unconscious, forgets and attempts to forget the forgetting, discrimination must constantly invite its representations into consciousness, re-inforcing the crucial recognition of difference which they embody and revitalising them for the perception on which its effectivity depends. . . . It must sustain itself on the presence of the very difference which is also its object.*<sup>22</sup>

What 'authorises' discrimination, Abbot continues, is the occlusion of the preconstruction or working-up of difference:

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<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, *op cit*, p 357.

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<sup>21</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London, Penguin, 1969.

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Abbott, 'Authority', *Screen* Summer 1979, vol 20 no 2, pp 15-16.

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p 16.

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

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<sup>25</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, op cit, p 79.

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*this repression of production entails that the recognition of difference is procured in an innocence, as a 'nature'; recognition is contrived as primary cognition, spontaneous effect of the 'evidence of the visible'.*<sup>23</sup>

This is precisely the kind of recognition, as spontaneous and visible, that is attributed to the stereotype. The difference of the object of discrimination is at once visible and natural – colour as the cultural/political *sign* of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural '*identity*'. However, Abbot's account stops at the point of 'identification' and strangely colludes with the *success* of discriminatory practices by suggesting that their representations require the repression of the working-up of difference; to argue otherwise, according to him, would be to put the subject in

*an impossible awareness, since it would run into consciousness the heterogeneity of the subject as a place of articulation.*<sup>24</sup>

Despite his awareness of the crucial recognition of difference for discrimination and its problematisation of repression, Abbot is trapped in his unitary place of articulation. He comes close to suggesting that it is possible, however momentarily and illusorily, for the *perpetrator* of the discriminatory discourse to be in a position that is *unmarked by the discourse* to the extent to which the *object* of discrimination is deemed natural and visible. What Abbot neglects is the facilitating role of contradiction and heterogeneity in the construction of authoritarian practices and their strategic, discursive fixations.

Although the 'authority' of colonial discourse depends crucially on its location in narcissism and the Imaginary, my concept of stereotype-as-suture is a recognition of the *ambivalence* of that authority and those orders of identification. The role of fetishistic identification, in the construction of discriminatory knowledges that depend on the 'presence of difference', is to provide a process of splitting and multiple/contradictory belief at the point of enunciation and subjectification. It is this crucial splitting of the ego which is represented in Fanon's description of the construction of the colonial subject as effect of stereotypical discourse: the subject primordially fixed and yet triply split between the incongruent knowledges of body, race, ancestors. Assailed by the stereotype,

*the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal scheme . . . . It was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but a triple person. . . . I was not given one, but two, three places.*<sup>25</sup>

This process is best understood in terms of the articulation of multiple belief that Freud proposes in the essay on fetishism. It is a non-repressive form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one secret, one archaic and one progressive, one that allows the myth of origins, the other that articulates difference and division. Its knowledge 'value' lies

in its orientation as a defence towards external reality, and provides, in Metz's words,

*the lasting matrix, the effective prototype of all those splittings of belief which man will henceforth be capable of in the most varied domains, of all the infinitely complex unconscious and occasionally conscious interactions which he will allow himself between believing and not-believing. . . .*<sup>26</sup>

It is through this notion of splitting and multiple belief that, I believe, it becomes easier to see the bind of knowledge and fantasy, power and pleasure, that informs the particular regime of visibility deployed in colonial discourse. The visibility of the racial/colonial other is at once a *point* of identity ('Look, a Negro') and at the same time a *problem* for the attempted closure within discourse. For the recognition of difference as 'imaginary' points of identity and origin – such as Black and White – is disturbed by the representation of splitting in the discourse. What I called the play between the metaphoric-narcissistic and metonymic-aggressive moments in colonial discourse – that four-part strategy of the stereotype – crucially recognises the prefiguring of desire as a potentially conflictual, disturbing force in all those regimes of 'originality' that I have brought together. In the objectification of the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject; and in that form of substitution and fixation that is fetishism there is always the trace of loss, absence. To put it succinctly, the recognition and disavowal of 'difference' is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction. The stereotype is in fact an 'impossible' object. For that very reason, the exertions of the 'official knowledges' of colonialism – pseudo-scientific, typological, legal-administrative, eugenicist – are imbricated at the point of their production of meaning and power with the fantasy that dramatises the impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin. Not itself the object of desire but its setting, not an ascription of prior identities but their production in the syntax of the scenario of racist discourse, colonial fantasy plays a crucial part in those everyday scenes of subjectification in a colonial society which Fanon refers to repeatedly. Like fantasies of the origins of sexuality, the productions of 'colonial desire' mark the discourse as

*a favoured spot for the most primitive defensive reactions such as turning against oneself, into an opposite, projection, negation . . .*<sup>27</sup>

The problem of origin as the problematic of racist, stereotypical knowledge is a complex one and what I have said about its construction will come clear in this illustration from Fanon. Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory prac-

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<sup>26</sup> Christian Metz, op cit, p 70.

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<sup>27</sup> J Laplanche and J B Pontalis, 'Phantasy (or Fantasy)', *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, London, Hogarth, 1980, p 318.

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<sup>28</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, op cit, p 80.

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<sup>29</sup> see Karl Abraham, 'Transformations of Scopophilia', *Selected Papers*, London, Hogarth 1978.

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tices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse:

*My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage. the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up.*<sup>28</sup>

It is the scenario of colonial fantasy which, in staging the ambivalence of desire, articulates the demand for the Negro which the Negro disrupts. For the stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow. By acceding to the wildest fantasies (in the popular sense) of the coloniser, the stereotyped other reveals something of the 'fantasy' (as desire, defense) of that position of mastery. For if 'skin' in racist discourse is the visibility of darkness, and a prime signifier of the body and its social and cultural correlates, then we are bound to remember what Karl Abrahams<sup>29</sup> says in his seminal work on the scopoc drive. The pleasure-value of darkness is a withdrawal in order to know nothing of the external world. Its symbolic meaning, however, is thoroughly ambivalent. Darkness signifies at once both birth and death; it is in all cases a desire to return to the fullness of the mother, a desire for an unbroken and undifferentiated line of vision and origin.

But surely there is another scene of colonial discourse in which the native or Negro meets the demand of colonial discourse; where the subverting 'split' is recuperable within a strategy of social and political control. It is recognisably true that the chain of stereotypical signification is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple belief. The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. In each case what is being dramatised is a separation – *between* races, cultures, histories, *within* histories – a separation between *before* and *after* that repeats obsessively the mythical moment of disjunction. Despite the structural similarities with the play of need and desire in primal fantasies, the colonial fantasy does not try to cover up that moment of separation. It is more ambivalent. On the one hand, it proposes a teleology – under certain conditions of colonial

domination and control the native is progressively reformable. On the other, however, it effectively displays the 'separation', makes it more visible. It is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonised the capacities of self-government, independence, western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power. Colonial fantasy is the continual dramatisation of emergence—of difference, freedom—as the beginning of a history which is repetitively denied. Such a denial is the clearly voiced demand of colonial discourse as the legitimisation of a form of rule that is facilitated by the racist fetish. In concluding, I would like to develop a little further my working definition of colonial discourse given at the start of this article.

Racist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its constitution of knowledge and exercise of power. Some of its practices recognise the difference of race, culture, history as elaborated by stereotypical knowledges, racial theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalise a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory, vestigial, archaic, 'mythical', and, crucially, are recognised as being so. By 'knowing' the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate. The colonised population is then deemed to be both the cause and effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation. What is visible is the *necessity* of such rule which is justified by those moralistic and normative ideologies of amelioration recognised as the Civilising Mission or the White Man's Burden. However, there co-exist within the same apparatus of colonial power, modern systems and sciences of government, progressive 'Western' forms of social and economic organisation which provide the manifest justification for the project of colonialism—an argument which, in part, impressed Karl Marx. It is on the site of this co-existence that strategies of hierarchisation and marginalisation are employed in the management of colonial societies. And if my deduction from Fanon about the peculiar visibility of colonial power is acceptable to you, then I would extend that to say that it is a form of governmentality in which the 'ideological' space functions in more openly collaborative ways with political and economic exigencies. The barracks stand by the church which stands by the schoolroom; the cantonment stands hard by the 'civil lines'. Such visibility of the institutions and apparatuses of power is possible because the exercise of colonial power makes their *relationship* obscure, produces them as fetishes, spectacles of a 'natural'/racial pre-eminence. Only the seat of government is always elsewhere—alien and separate by that distance upon which surveillance depends for its strategies of objectification, normalisation and discipline.

The last word belongs to Fanon:

*... this behaviour [of the coloniser] betrays a determination to objectify, to*

<sup>30</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', op cit, p 44.

*confine, to imprison, to harden. Phrases such as 'I know them', 'that's the way they are', show this maximum objectification successfully achieved. . . . There is on the one hand a culture in which qualities of dynamism, of growth, of depth can be recognised. As against this, [in colonial cultures] we find characteristics, curiosities, things, never a structure.*<sup>30</sup>

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