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Originally published in Psychoanalytic review, 92 (5). Pp. 701-734 © 2005 Guildford Publications, Inc.

You may cite this version as:
Hook, Derek (2005). The racial stereotype, colonial discourse, fetishism, and racism [online]. London: LSE Research Online.
Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000954
Available in LSE Research Online: April 2007

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The racial stereotype, colonial discourse, fetishism, and racism

Derek Hook

Abstract

This paper draws on the work of Homi Bhabha to mount an explanation for a facet of (post)colonial racism, the 'paradox of otherness' as exemplified in the racial stereotype. The paradox in question operates at the levels of discourse and identification alike. As a mode of discourse the stereotype functions to exaggerate difference of the other, whilst nevertheless attempting to produce them as a stable, fully knowable object. As mode of identification, the stereotype operates a series of mutually exclusive categories differentiating self and other which unintentionally nevertheless relies upon a grid of samenesses. These two paradoxes follow a similar movement: an oscillation, at the level of discourse, between attempts to generate and contain anxiety, a wavering, at the level of identification, between radical difference and prospective likeness. Bhabha provides a structural and functional analogue with which to account for this double movement of otherness: Freud's model of fetishism. This is an analogue that both enables us to foreground the operations of displacement and condensation in racist stereotyping, and to draw a series of conclusions about the effective functioning of discursive and affective economies of racism.

Radical difference

In a historical overview of some of the first Western writing to be recorded in Southern Africa, novelist J.M. Coetzee makes reference to a series of disturbing depictions of racial otherness. Take for example the following description of the Khoi-San as published in Amsterdam in 1652:

> The local natives have everything in common with the dumb cattle, barring their human nature…[They] are handicapped in their speech, clucking like turkey-cocks… Their food consists of herbs, cattle, wild animals and fish. The animals are eaten together with their internal organs. Having been shaken out a little, the intestines are not washed, but as soon as the animal has been slaughtered or discovered, these are eaten raw, skin and all…A number of them will sleep together in the veldt, making no difference between men and women…They all smell fiercely, as can be noted at a distance of more than twelve feet against the wind, and they also give the appearance of never having washed (Hondius, cited in Coetzee, 1988, p. 12).

On the one hand one is here confronted with an almost ethnographic mode of exposition, an ostensibly factual documentation of otherness. On the other, we have a writing that seethes with anxiety at the radical otherness which it witnesses and which it struggles to contain. So different is the world thus entered, in physical appearance,

in the smells, foods, religion, and society of its peoples - indeed, in all important dimensions of human life - that the text becomes a catalogue of what can barely be believed, a radiant source of otherness, frightened unto itself. The otherness in question is at the same time loathsome, deplorable, yet also somehow stable, an effect of incessant reiteration and repetition. Coetzee makes particular note of the regularity of features that emerges in observations of the Khoi-San (the so-called "Hottentots") of the Cape of Good Hope:

> In the early records one finds a repertoire of remarkable facts about the Hottentots [sic] repeated again and again…their eating of unwashed intestines, their use of animal fat to smear their bodies, their habit of wrapping dried entrails around their neck…their inability to conceive of God…many of these items are merely copied from one book to another…They constitute some of the more obvious *differences* between the Hottentot and the West European…at least the West European as he imagines himself to be. Yet while they are certainly differences, these items are perceived and conceived within a framework of *samenesses* (p. 13).

Two features of the writings Coetzee has in mind are immediately evident. Firstly, the very violence of their descriptions, by which I refer to the de-humanizing terms of understanding, the disgust exemplified by the prose, the focus on what is most objectionable about the 'peoples' in question. Secondly, and apparently in contrast to this first feature, an attempt to formulate a 'category of sameness', a grid or conceptual scheme through which this other can be fixed, reliably known, a grid which, importantly, makes the tacit admission of the perception of similarity, of a common humanity. There is a double paradox here. We have firstly the imperative to exaggerate the differences of the other and yet also make them stable, 'reliably knowable'. Secondly, we witness a situation in which the confrontation with radical difference *threatens to give way to the possibility of identification*, to the perception of similarity or a common humanity.

The theorist who has offered perhaps the most challenging and innovative engagement with these issues, those of racial/cultural otherness and that of the colonial stereotype, is postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. His paper 'The Other question' offers a seminal treatment of these topics, a treatment that emerges from an unorthodox intersection of post-structural and psychoanalytic theorizing. While

Bhabha's approach has much to recommend it on the basis of pure conceptual depth, it remains dogged by a dense, clotted and often somewhat baroque style of expression. He has more than once been accused of an esoteric turn of phrase that defies understanding and that deliberately cultivates abstruseness (Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Van Zyl, 1998; Young, 1990). This, it seems to me is a reasonable claim, a claim which is also a call for a more direct exposition of certain Bhabha's ideas.

In what follows I will attempt to make aspects of Bhabha's theorizing more readily accessible for the purpose of analysing forms of racism within colonial or formerly colonial contexts. I will offer a close reading of aspects of 'The Other question', possibly Bhabha's most resourceful paper in this regard (as contained within *The Location of Culture* (1994)), attempting to develop what is most useful about its argument. I will pose a series of conceptual challenges for how we might understand the racist stereotype in the colonial context, before moving on to discuss Bhabha's hybrid re-conceptualization of how the stereotype might be said to work in ways which outstrip the cognitivist terms of understanding within which it is usually rendered.

Colonial discourse and otherness

The problematic that really concerns us here, as in 'The Other question', is that of racial/cultural difference, and more directly, the issue of the 'other' who embodies this difference at the levels of identification and discourse alike. One may put this slightly differently by saying that the figure of the other represents a nodal point in colonial discourse where intense affective and discursive energies converge. The other as such - and this is crucial to the understanding of Bhabha I will go on to offer - represents a concentration of anxiety and construction, a set of nervous investments in both knowledge and in the processes of identity.

Colonial discourse, a central terms in Bhabha's analysis, is hence provisionally portrayed as "a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that informs the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 67). Its overarching objective is the imperative "to construe the colonized 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" (p. 70). Childs & Williams (1997) likewise emphasize the 'differencing function' of colonial discourse describing it as a "discursive

formation that connects across [the]…spectrum of [racial and cultural] discriminations" (p. 124).

Bhabha, much like Fanon (1986) and Mannoni (1990) before him, maintains that the colonial environment is like no other. Extreme asymmetries of power are played out here, where radical imbalances of privilege, affluence and possession separate marginal from dominant groups. We find here a massive attention paid to otherness, to the generation of knowledge of cultural and racial others. The knowledge thus generated is as much of social science as of fantasy, as much, in other words of a social scientific 'will to know' as of an affective economy of fear/desire. To be doubly clear: this generation of otherness occurs at both the levels of discourse and of identity. The foregrounding of the linkage between discourse and identification is crucial to Bhabha: here indeed he takes the lead of Fanon and Mannoni in arguing that we fail to properly understand the nature of power and resistance in such an environment unless we take account of the unconscious play of identifications in coloniser and colonized alike, a play of identification which entails flows of desire, anxiety, the ambivalence of affect.

Unsurprisingly then, the colonial environment is one that lends itself to the generation of fantasy. There is not one native, in Fanon's famous (1986) declaration that does not wish at least once a day, to take the settler's place; not one settler (we might add) who does not as frequently fear the native's violent reprisals to colonial subjugation. Ambiguities of identity also play themselves out in this environment. Moore-Gilbert (1997) provides a useful description in this regard:

> For Bhabha the relationship between colonizer and colonized is…complex and nuanced…principally because the circulation of contradictory patterns of psychic affect in colonial relations (desire for, as well as fear of the other, for example) undermines their assumption that the identities and positioning of colonizer and colonized exist in stable and unitary terms…the colonial relationship is structured (on both sides) by forms of 'multiple and contradictory belief' (p. 116).

Bhabha thus maintains that the colonial environment is one which yields split subjects – the 'mutual implication' one might say of the colonized in the identity of the colonizer (and vice versa) – a situation to which the 'normalization' of colonial discourse responds with attempts at 'fixity'.

Fixity and the condition of ambivalence

Bhabha begins 'The Other question' by prioritizing this notion of 'fixity' as a pre-eminent feature of colonial discourse. Fixity, a kind of 'buttoning-down' of otherness, a normalization of difference, is an attempt to instantiate notions of racial purity, to maintain ostensibly mutually-exclusive identity categories for colonizer and colonized. Fixity, Bhabha claims, is a vital component within the ideological construction of otherness, which not only marks off the boundaries of cultural, and racial difference, but does so in ways that are both essentializing and paradoxical. Fixity may thus be understood as the outcome of the stereotyping process, a point I will return to toward the end of this paper. Fixity, furthermore, enables seemingly contradictory operations: it connotes a rigid and unchanging order of being on one hand, and evokes a sense of degeneracy a, kind of repetitive, perpetual moral disorder on the other – here we see something of the paradoxical pattern of colonial otherness described in the opening of this paper.

The paradoxical nature of this functioning alerts Bhabha to the usefulness of a psychoanalytic notion of *ambivalence*. Ambivalence of course refers to the co-existence and *interdependence* of two contrary impulses or affects. More than this, as Laplanche & Pontalis (1973) warn, ambivalence must be grasped within the terms of heightened *states of conflict*

> in which the positive and negative components of an emotional attitude are simultaneously in evidence and inseparable, and where they constitute a non-dialectical opposition which the subject, saying 'yes' and 'no' at the same time, is incapable of transcending (p. 28).

Ambivalence, claims Bhabha, has for too long been overlooked as "one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power" (1994, p. 66). Ambivalence henceforth comes to be utilized as a broad analytical category for Bhabha. It is an analytic that he takes to be particularly useful within the colonial context, a context which is characterized, as Fanon (1986) emphasized, by the Manichean condition of two mutually-exclusive and opposing sides that know no possibility of integration. This broad analytic gives Bhabha the basic template from which to fashion the more precise dynamics of fetishistic disavowal in reference to colonial otherness (as I will move to describe shortly). The element of irresolvability is crucial here: hence the preponderance of certain motifs - the shape of the spiral, that of relentless to and fro (oscillating) movement - in attempt to describe the paradoxical

nature of colonial otherness. Not only does the "force of ambivalence" – by which one refers to this continual tension between irreconcilable contraries – give the colonial stereotype its "currency", that is, its form, the dynamics of its nature (Bhabha, 1994, p. 66), it also *ensures its repeatability.* Given that we are here dealing with an unyielding tension between opposing forces, the effect of ambivalence might be likened to that of a perpetual motion machine that produces a single repetitive action *ad infinitum*. This is the 'analytics of ambivalence' that Bhabha advances as the most appropriate methodological frame for thinking about power in the (post)colony. It is an analytics that cannot focus on either one side of a Manichean division of categories in isolation. It cannot be reduced to a dialectical frame that traces the higher-order synthesis of basic oppositions. Indeed, such an analytics appreciates that certain 'fixations', certain 'repetition compulsions' [1] as they manifest at the level of discourse or identity – I have in mind here the repetitive actions of the stereotype - are not merely side-effects of two discrete positions (such as that of colonizer and colonized) rubbing up against one another. Rather than being somehow arbitrary, or secondary to how difference is produced in colonial contexts, these effects of repetition are *integral* to such productions of discourse and identity. They are *symptomatic,* as one might put it, of the fact that difference and sameness are jointly implicated within the world of the colony. Bhabha's 'analytics of ambivalence' is thus an analytics that also speaks to the *anxiousness* of colonial discourse and colonial identification as they attempt the impossible: the fixity of mutually exclusive subject categories for colonizer and colonized.

To return to our point of departure: in Bhabha's analysis the paradoxical qualities of colonial otherness are a result of just such a dynamics of ambivalence. The paradoxical functioning of otherness, to reiterate, is not an anomalous byproduct or a secondary consideration in how the stereotype functions - quite to the contrary, it is in fact the *irreducible condition of their operation.* Hence Bhabha's description of how the stereotype operates in relation to the objective of fixity (be it of discourse or of identification):

> [T]he stereotype…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 prove can never really, in discourse be proved (1994, p. 66).

Bhabha's comments to this effect are apposite inasmuch as anyone familiar with everyday racist speech and banter could testify, the stereotype is never fully stable, never, despite the condensed violence of its affect, fully confirmed. Racism, as either practice of discourse or identity, remains always in need of reiteration, reaffirmation. We have here the rudiments of a tentative answer to one of the paradoxes of racism. Why is it that the racist stereotype always needs to be repeated, despite that the sentiments thus displayed should in fact be axiomatic to the 'logic' of the world-view the racist holds? If the racist 'knowledge' that the racist holds is thought by them to be true, why the need for constant repetition? If the stereotype does work on the basis of ambivalence, then the answer is that this repetition is the result of an inability to transcend a given non-dialectical opposition. This is a dual opposition: a difference between discursive attempts to *exaggerate* and to *domesticate* difference, on the other hand, and between identities of radical difference and of immanent sameness, on the other). The stereotype is, for Bhabha, to be conceptualized as a repetitive oscillation between these two irreconcilable polarities. We have the beginnings here of a promising explanation, one which grapples with the dynamic processes underlying otherness as it is manifest as a production of colonial discourse and identity alike. It is however an explanation in need of careful texturing. Bhabha needs to provide us with a more precise, a more specific analogue for this ambivalence of functioning within the stereotype. Before moving to a description of the particular analogue that Bhabha has in mind, we need turn to the problems of understanding the stereotype in purely discursive terms, as simply an instance of warped representation.

The impossibility of 'decoding' otherness

To recognize 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" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 66-67). Bhabha here is signaling the dangers of assuming that a harmonious or symmetrical relationship necessarily exists between discourse and power. These are not simply commensurate entities that demonstrate a kind of ideal equivalence; neither provides a sufficient analytical basis from which to draw conclusions about the other. We need be sensitive to what conditions or mediates this relationship, to what additional factors - such as practices of identification – might play a role in synchronizing their functioning. The question thus posed by Bhabha is whether

predominantly discursive or socio-cultural forms of criticism have paid enough attention to the unconscious processes (typically, the identifications and desires) of involved subjects, to the issue of the 'mutual implication' of the colonized in the colonizer, and of the colonizer in the colonized. Hence Bhabha's dual approach, the combination of post-structural and psychoanalytic registers in a way that enables the joint scrutiny of the political economy of discourse and the affective economy of identities.

These reflections on the limitations of solely discursive modes of critique feed into Bhabha's criticism of how the notion of the stereotype has often been understood and applied. Although Bhabha's account is in part an account of representation, an account of how 'otherness' presents a problem to a given regime of knowledge, it cannot be reduced to an analysis of representational politics. Bhabha is emphatic in this regard: the stereotype is not simply a representation; it must not be reduced to a representational act, an image, or an instance of discourse alone. It must, by contrast, be understood with reference to a broader and more complex process of identification. A related problem come to the fore in this respect: the idea that the stereotype is a distortion to a basic underlying identity which may be understood as somehow consistent, whole, original.

It is clear for Bhabha, at least psychoanalytically speaking, that there is very little about identity than can ever claim to be original or singularly unified. These in fact are two axiomatic claims for psychoanalysis: identity is always a function of identification that requires the role of external objects and hence cannot be simply 'self'-originating and/or original. Identity, furthermore, must always be split by virtue of the existence of the unconscious, whose properties of desire continually threaten to emerge in destabilizing, subversive ways to the rational subject of language. Discourses, such as those with a stereotyping function, may attempt to consolidate original and unified identities but this attempt can only ever result in illusion, in a succession of images. Bhabha thus chides those forms of analysis which however inadvertently link up the operation of stereotypes to some kind of underlying basis in the 'reality' of a kind of original ethnic, cultural or racial identity. What is the basis, one might ask, upon which one shows up the stereotype as false, what is the truth that makes the falsity of its appearance apparent? Even in the critical attempt to identify and apprehend the workings of stereotyping discourse one can end up reifying certain

basic identity categories as stable and singular, as somehow avoiding the condition of multiple beliefs and split subjects which characterizes colonial environments.

There is an even more fundamental issue at hand: one cannot in any simple or transparent way simply 'decode' the other, translate the symbols and signs of their world and culture into a set of accessible analogues that ensures a continuum of our and theirs, us and them. The very grid of intelligibility that would make such a reading possible is grounded in a cultural location that cannot but read what is outside through its own values; otherness would hence be 'individualized' as the discovery of our own assumptions. This otherness will outstrip even the most advanced translation of terms.

We are hence less interested in the success of stereotyping, in the accuracy *of the correlation between objects and stereotyping representations* than in the ongoing operation of the stereotype. Our concern lies with the dynamics of its operation, with what kind of balance or 'fixity' is momentarily attained, with a sense of what anxieties are alleviated, what kind of identity is gained in these processes? This has ramifications for the kind of critical activity we are engaged in, for, if we are to follow Bhabha, we need approach the stereotype as:

> a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation [which is] as anxious as it is assertive…[which] demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself (1994, p. 70).

It is less then an issue of "the ready recognition of images as positive or negative" (1994, p. 67) and more a question of the actual processes of 'subjectification' that come to be operationalized through the stereotype. Rather than judging the stereotype in its correctness or 'inaccuracy' we should instead aim to engage with its 'effectivity', as Bhabha puts it, focusing as such on "an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible…through stereotypical discourse" (p. 67).

Challenges of re-conceptualization

It is useful to review what Bhabha takes to be deficient understandings of the stereotype; in so doing I will be able to point out some questions that Bhabha's account will ultimately need to provide answers to. For a start, in addition to being a particular mode of discourse, the stereotype is also *a form of identification*, insists Bhabha, a fulcrum for practices of subjectivity. Childs and William (1997) make this

point well: the stereotype, they claim, “functions as the cardinal point of colonial subjectification for colonizer and colonized alike” (p. 101). Bhabha’s point is that neither of these two levels of functioning – that of discourse, or that of identification as it occurs within contexts of power - can be approached alone. The stereotype is a product each of discourse and identification; both come together in the production of stereotypes. The question we may pose to Bhabha here – especially in light of his wariness of conflating discourse and politics – is how he hopes to avoid conflating discourse and identification in his analysis. It would appear that his account requires an additional explanatory component, a relay mechanism of sorts which functions as the go-between between these two factors of analysis.

Secondly, we have seen how for Bhabha the stereotype is an *ambivalent* form of identification and discourse. If this is the case, then we need to be able to offer a model of the stereotype able to account for an array of affects and representations that are not merely contradictory - for after all, contradictions can be reconciled - but that are precisely *ambivalent* in the sense of co-existing, non-reconcilable contraries. We might take this a step further: more than simply being able to explain this ambivalence of functioning, Bhabha’s conceptualisation should also motivate why such a ambivalence is such a necessary condition, indeed, a constitutive condition, of the stereotype in the first place.

Thirdly, the stereotype for Bhabha maintains an impressive consistency, evidencing the quality of repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures. Despite that I have offered some rudimentary speculations above in connection with this quality of anxious repetitiveness, we must nonetheless press Bhabha’s account further. Given the parameters of the explanatory challenge that Bhabha has set himself, any model of the stereotype must be able to account for this repeatability, and do so in two ways, in terms of the necessity of this repetition, and in terms of its very durability. Furthermore, the factor of anxiety: not only is the stereotype assertive – a kind of aggressive argument as to how the world is – it is also a ‘nervous condition’. There is something deeply vexing about it the stereotype; it is never more consoling than it is anxiety provoking. Bhabha needs to explain why this is so. What underlines the desperate, even compulsive, quality of the stereotype, its apparent lack of stasis, its attempt to exceed what may be proven or logically construed? We need extend the rudimentary hypothesis offered above in this respect. Lastly, by way of summation: what is the stereotype continually trying to do, and

what is unsuccessful about these operations such that they become locked into cycles of necessary repetition? With these questions in mind, we now turn to a brief exposition of Freud's notion of the fetish. Although this seems an unusual kind of theoretical juxtaposition, this model of the fetish is what Bhabha hopes to offer as an analogue for the process of stereotyping.

The threat of loss

Freud's account of fetishism pivots on a particularly traumatic event during the psychosexual development of the male child. This is the first real moment of 'anatomical distinction', the disturbing encounter with a naked female body, or, more to the point: a confrontation with a body that *lacks a penis*. This is a threatening experience for the little boy because it acts for Freud (1908c) as proof of the possibility of his being castrated. The boy's initial assumption is that all other persons are anatomically similar to him; all are thought to possess this particular organ, which is, after all, so valued. That the penis is so highly prized is not something that should surprise us, especially given the wealth of pleasurable sensations it represents for the child. As Freud notes, directing attention to the narcissistic significance of this organ:

> Already in childhood the penis is the leading erotogenic zone and the chief autoerotic object; and the boy's estimate of its value is logically reflected in his inability to imagine a person like himself who is without this essential constituent (Freud, 1908c, pp. 215-216).

We should emphasize the importance of a bodily level of awareness at this stage of development if we are to properly understand the narcissistic threat of such a potential loss. For Freud, the ego is essentially bodily in origin, that the physical sensations on the surface of the body are the basis of a budding awareness of the 'I'. As such, the prospective loss of the penis represents a particularly powerful narcissistic wound to the emerging ego.

The notion of castration is clearly a controversial one - even within psychoanalysis (see for example the cross-section of debates assembled by Mitchell 1974; 1982). Although how I intend to employ the term here is less strictly literal than Freud's usage, and not linked in any necessary manner to the actual physical attribute of the penis, it still requires qualification. In speaking of castration in what follows I am talking about an element of subjectivity (typically bodily, but not necessarily exclusively so) that has been socially valorized and loaded with narcissism – an

element of subjectivity that functions as a vehicle of pleasure, identity and self-investment alike – which represents a kind of 'extinction of subjectivity' when threatened. Importantly, the stakes of loss involved here are seemingly catastrophic, at least from the perspective of the threatened subject, to whom the threat is that of the collapse of a narcissistic or solipsistic image of the world of me (or of others like me that reflect back my image), be that a world of masculinity or that of whiteness (to pick two pertinent examples).

Returning then to the affects of the fear of castration: such related anxieties result in a particularly odd form of denial: the perception of the mother as *not* having a penis *persists*, although a very energetic action has been exerted to keep up the denial of this fact:

> It is not true that, after the child has made his observation of the woman, he has preserved unaltered his belief that women have a phallus. He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up (Freud, 1927, p. 155).

Here two clearly contradictory states of belief co-exist. The particular function of the fetish, as a way of dealing with a threatening, or even *persecutory* reality, is that of an imaginary object that makes both states somehow believable. It is exactly this 'magical' item, or the 'belief-structure' that this item enables that enables the subject to maintain mutually incompatible assertions. The fetish as such serves a protective function and is for this reason considered a precious item. Thus the fetish, whether understood as an actual physical object (as in Freud's explanation), or as a particular discursive operation and mechanism of identity (such as that of stereotyping in Bhabha's application), is a special device for managing co-present and yet opposed beliefs, one that manages this objective towards the ends of *keeping anxiety at bay* and *protecting a narcissistic orientation to* pleasure or subjectivity.

Divided attitude

If we are to properly understand the perpetuation of fetishist activities it is important that we distinguish between disavowal and the fetish, that is, between a particularly unrealistic mode of defence, on the one hand, and the object or activity which enables this irrational defence and makes it somehow tenable, on the other. One way of doing this is by drawing attention to the particular *perceptual* moment that Freud describes as underlying this complex state of 'recognition-yet-denial'. The particular moment is that in which the child refuses to acknowledge the reality of a traumatic perception, a

mode of defence that Freud understands as 'disavowal'. Disavowal has often been understood as a basic synonym for denial. Importantly though, Freud has something more specific in mind here, something more paradoxical in nature than blanket denial. A comparison with another term is useful here. In 'scotomization' a disturbing perception is entirely wiped from the mind, as if the event of perception never occurred, such that the subject of remains unchanged by it. In disavowal, by contrast, the subject of the perception has been changed – the disturbing "perception has persisted" as we recall, despite that "an energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the disavowal" (Freud, 1927, p. 155). Disavowal, furthermore, is not an instance of repression. True, disavowal is a defence, the defence of refusing to acknowledge the reality of a traumatic impression, so it might be likened to repression. However, whereas the work of repression is focussed on vexing *affects*, disavowal focuses on the manipulation of the force of an idea. It consists in a radical repudiation *directed at external reality*.

In review then, the fetish is that object or process, that thing or activity, that 'speech-act' or mode of identification, which ensures the success of the more general defence of disavowal. The distinction here, to be clear, is not that between object and process – the fetish, it seems, can be both of these, both, to take a example, a black leather shoe and the act of rubbing its heel. The fetish is that thing or activity - or, as would seem more common, both of these in combination - which extends the efficacy of disavowal, that gives it some ongoing viability. This of course is a difficult task given that in disavowal we are typically dealing with contradictions of attitude or belief whose co-existence will no doubt be challenged. In this way we can understand why the fetish object/process would come to be so heavily libidinally invested, 'revered' in Freud's terms. It is at the same time the object that 'memorializes' the horror of castration whilst also providing the 'magical' object – the substitute, that is, for the mother's penis (as I will go on to explain) – which makes such contradictions of attitude and belief possible.

Racist disavowal

Interestingly, the idea of disavowal lends itself powerfully to the understanding of ideology, especially given that we might understand disavowal as a kind of 'contradiction-management', which, in a certain way of thinking, is an appropriate definition of ideology itself, certainly in as much as the latter seeks to impede the

awareness of certain social, historical and economic contradictions, and to manage ideas. We might allow ourselves a brief digression in this respect: the concept of disavowal is able to tell us something about the ideological functioning of racism. One of the challenges in understanding racism is exactly the question of how racist attitudes and beliefs seem quite able to function at the level of co-existing irreconcilable ideas. How is it, to give a concrete example, that the racist subject may be divided, between a (genuinely) professed view of racial tolerance, on the one hand, and undeniably racist behaviour and ideation, on the other, both of which exists on a rational and conscious level of functioning. Importantly, such contradictions may not simply be accounted for in terms of *affect* versus *rational idea*. In disavowal we may have attitudes which fit in with *current wishes/anxieties*, on the one hand, and attitudes which fit in *with reality*, on the other, existing side by side. If we take seriously the notion of disavowal, such contradictions of ideas may be more than simply a case of disingenuousness, resembling more closely the compromise of a defence.

Thinking racism in terms of disavowal brings with it another implication: that racism functioning at this level is very difficult to eradicate. Why so? Well, because the racist has more often than not already assimilated the lesson of anti-racism. Disavowal works, as suggested above, by being a less than fully adaptive attempt at adapting to a threatening state of affairs, by saying, as Slavoj Žižek (1992) often mimes: I believe x, I just choose, every once in a while, to believe not x anyway. Each attempt to transform this racist logic is met with the same re-implication of structure: another acknowledgement of the fact that, oh yes, racial differences, whatever they might mean, don't matter, of course not, that much is clearly understood, I just chose to act every now and again (nonetheless) as if they do. As pessimistic as such an implication is, it is important to confront, otherwise we are left with less than effective ways of countering racism. What is particularly important about this understanding of fetishistic disavowal is that it reminds us again of the limitations of the myth of racism as mere ignorance: one can repeatedly challenge the racist with the proof of racial equality in all the ways that matter, without making the slightest dent on their racist perceptions, because after all, they have already acknowledged that race makes no difference, they just opt to act as if it did, anyway.

The object of fetishism

Returning our attention to the fetish: such an object, proclaims Freud, is a substitute for the penis. Not any chance penis though, the fetish is a substitute for "a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but…later lost" (1927, p. 154). This imagined penis of course is typically that of the mother's, although not necessarily; it would stand to reason that this imaginary object is the substitute for the missing penis on whoever's body the boy-child first discovered this apparent lack.

Why though the specific attributes of the fetish object? Freud's answer to this is that fetish objects, as substitutes for the 'absent female phallus', take on symbolic attributes of this phallus, and do so on the basis of metaphoric or metonymic association (although these are not the terms he uses). Here it is useful to rehearse the familiar distinction between metaphor and metonym, two basic devices of language that correspond to what Jakobson (1990) described as two fundamentally opposed axes of language. In using metaphors we refer to something in an altogether different context such that it poetically emphasizes a particular quality of the object of description. To speak of clouds as 'balls of wool' for example, accentuates their texture with a poetic substitution of this sort. An evocative comparison of resemblance is thus set up. There is a kind of a replacement of terms here which works so as to amplify the aspect of the subject in question: rather than simply describing the night as 'dark' for example, we might refer to it as a 'sea of ink'. Substitutions of this sort may be understood as a kind of contraction, a compacting, or *condensing* of terms of reference (night/ink) that delivers a poetic charge by virtue of the unusual equation it makes. In short, the metaphorical or vertical axis thus deals with the selection of linguistic items, and allows for *substitution* across terms.

In the process of metonymy, by contrast, we are concerned less with the affects of substitution across contexts, and more with a fluid chain of unbroken meaning, with *connecting terms*. Metonyms typically utilize part-to-whole connections, connections of proximity or contiguity. In metonymy there is a kind of displacement by association, a 'stand in for' relationship of one term by another that is closely and quite evidently related. In speaking of 'white coats' when we mean to refer to doctors, for instance, or 'Geneva' when we mean to refer to the whole of the governmental apparatus of Switzerland, we are pointing to the whole of a thing by

referring simply to a distinctive part of it, a stand-in relationship where a smaller component displaces a broader object of meaning. Whereas metaphors are generally used to create a poetic affect, metonyms are used to emphasize the realistic dimensions of an idea, typically to ground a given idea in a particular physical attribute. The metonymic or horizontal axis of language thus deals with the linking of terms and allows for a generative use of language on the basis of *combination* between terms.

This is a distinction that can be difficult to maintain, because the operations of metaphor and metonymy can and do overlap. A useful shorthand distinction though: metaphors are *analogies*, they substitute a term drawn from a completely different category of meaning for a more choice; metonyms are *connectors*, they make an association between an attribute of a thing and the whole of this thing, and manage a displacement of terms of meaning on this basis. We might extend this by noting that metaphors typically make use of shared meanings across different terms of reference; metonyms make use of historical and cultural associations to enable truncations of meaning.

Fetish objects utilize both these basic operations of language. In the case of metaphor, as Freud (1927) puts it, "the organs or objects chosen as substitutes…would be such as appear as symbols of the penis in other connections as well" (p. 156). Hence those phallic objects that resemble in some ways the shape of the penis, or part of its functioning, may well operate as fetish objects. Likewise, in the case of metonymy, so might any number of objects that share certain distinctive attributes of this object and connect to it on the horizontal or associative axis of meaning, such as velvet and fur - commonplace fetish paraphernalia, according to Freud inasmuch as they represent a condensation of part-to-whole.

Fantasy, 'scene', repeated

There is one last factor that will assist in our exposition of the dynamics of fetishism: the role of fantasy. Importantly, a psychoanalytic perspective refutes the notion that fantasy is simply opposed to reality, that fantasy exists as "a purely illusory product of the imagination which stands in the way of a correct perception" as Evans puts it (1997, p. 59). Fantasy indeed is 'more real than reality' at least in the sense that it is only *through fantasy* that what is taken to be reality is accessed in the first place. Psychoanalysis assumes the "stability, efficacity and relatively coherent nature of the

subject's fantasy life" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 315); it is exactly this – the subject's fantasy - which clinical psychoanalysis endeavours to explain. Importantly also, Freud typically approaches fantasies in the mode of 'scenes', hence emphasizing their visual quality as scenarios through which desire is staged – that which is *seen* - a factor which Fanon continually emphasizes in the colonial context, the visual element of racial difference.

Bhabha's work, like that of Fanon before him, demonstrates a strong political commitment to the importance of fantasy. This may at first sound like an odd claim to make, given that we typically imagine that a political consciousness is one attuned to the 'real' underlying conditions of society. The idea here is that we need to see the world *as it is* beyond the ideological distortions of false consciousness or fantasy. What is required of critical political thought, or so it would seem, is a particular brand of realism, for what is valued here, after all, is exactly the propensity to see the facts through the fictions. Psychoanalysis offers a very different perspective on this problem. If for the moment we accept that unconscious fantasy plays a very dominant role in structuring our lives, in informing our actions and perceptions, then what is required of us is not just the ability to see the real through the fantasy, but the ability *to see the fantasy in the real.*

If it is fantasy that conditions what counts as reality for us, then it seems pointless to try and grasp the 'true real', for it is always, *already* an effect of fantasy. This is particularly important in the case of racism. If we accept for the moment that racism, like colonial discourse, is structured by certain fantasies (the superiority of one race, the degeneracy of another) then confrontation with any contrary 'truth' (rational evidence that opposes these beliefs) will not result in a global change in belief, in the foregoing of racist attitudes, because one's access to such 'truths' always occurs through the filter of fantasy which conditions any access we have to the real world. Reading racism as a set of fictions (irrational beliefs of race superiority/inferiority) against the real (the actual lack of integral differences between races) will hence always be inadequate, particularly at the level of intervention. Why? Because if fantasy structures reality, then those facts which counter my vision of reality thus constituted can always be re-arranged in such a way that my fantasy is not threatened. Part of the intransigence of racism, it seems, is that it does work exactly on the level of fantasy, that certain of its vital premises have, as we might put it, an

‘unconscious depth of rooting’ (which is not, of course, to imply that there is anything naturalistic about racist beliefs).

Fantasy, for psychoanalysis, ‘comes first’, in other words, *preceding* the reality that it thus enables. Here we might make reference to Žižek, who, via Lacan, reminds us that fantasy is what makes reality sustainable:

> With regard to the basic opposition between reality and imagination, fantasy is not simply on the side of imagination; fantasy is, rather, the little piece of imagination by which we gain access to reality – the frame that guarantees our access to reality, our ‘sense of reality’ (1992, p. 122).

To do away with fantasy then will not give us a clear or objective view of the world ‘as it actually is’, it will mean rather that we will *cease to have access to reality at all*. For this reason, the attempt to retrieve truth out of fantasy will always remain an ultimately futile project for psychoanalysis. This is especially so in contexts that are characterized by the ubiquity of heightened relations of fear/hatred/desire, contexts such as that of the colony, where massive disparities of power and formidable discursive ‘mechanisms of otherness’ are also at play, elements that induce formidable degrees of fantasy. These are fantasies that have the power to over-ride more rational modes of perception and social intercourse. Racism, like political ideology more generally, is not based upon a rational belief structure that is thus subject to the alteration or correction of contrary evidence. Contradictions of this sort are simply ‘managed’ by the fantasy structure, rearranged in such a way that poses no threat to its schema of the world.

Protecting myths of purity and origin

How then does this Freudian account of fetishism illuminate the functioning of racial stereotypes? Here it is useful to retrace the steps of Bhabha’s argument in fairly deliberate terms. Colonial discourse and racism alike rely on what Bhabha terms the “myth of historical origination” (1994, p. 74), that is, notions of racial purity, the prioritisation of one’s own racial type as necessarily superior to that of others. These ideas are enacted at the level of fantasy and are produced in relation to the colonial subject. They have as their objective the attempt to ‘normalize’ the multiple beliefs and split subjects (the ‘constitutive ambivalences’) of the colonial encounter. How is the ‘scene of fetishism’ relevant here? Well, the scene of fetishism functions as, at once

> a reactivation of the material of original fantasy – the anxiety of castration and sexual difference – as well as a normalization of that difference and disturbance in terms of the fetish object as the substitute for the mother's penis (1994, p. 74).

Fetishism then operates like a regression to the scene of original fantasy that is made up of two parts. Firstly, the traumatic discovery of difference, and, along with it, the threat of loss that it represents for the narcissistic or 'originary' subject. Secondly, the attempt at recovery: the hopeful superimposition of another image, a replacement object, over this disturbing scene so as to placate this disturbance, to *normalize* this difference. The basic components that Bhabha outlines as integral to the stereotyping phenomena are hence already in place: the anxiety connected with the encounter with difference, on the one hand, and the attempt through fantasy to normalize the disturbance and to hence stabilize a precarious identity, on the other. Thus:

> Fetishism, as the disavowal of difference, is the repetitious scene around the problem of castration. The recognition of sexual difference…is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks difference and restores an original presence (1994, p. 74).

It is on this basis that Bhabha justifies his use of fetishism as an analogue for stereotyping actions. Two fundamental components then: an initial disturbing encounter with difference repetitively denied and then assimilated into the frame of what one already knows, and the fantasy attempt to normalize this difference with recourse to an additional component. In the first case, claims Bhabha, we have a *structural* link between fetishism and stereotyping, in the second case a *functional* link.

Fetishism as analogue of stereotyping: structural and functional links

Childs and Williams (1997) describe the structural link between fetishism and stereotyping: stereotype and fetish both "link that which is unfamiliar and disquieting (sexual/racial difference) to that which is familiar and accepted (fetish object/stereotype)" (p. 126). Bhabha refers in this respect to Edward Said, and the latter's attempt, in *Orientalism* (1978) to get to grips with the ostensibly psychological problem of how unprecedented experiences in colonial environments come to be assimilated into previously existing structures of understanding. Here Bhabha focuses on the *defence* role of fetishism, that is, on how identity and

narcissistic selfhood are protected in the face of a disturbing otherness. The problem of castration is thus centralized, and what we witness as way of response is the syndrome of a repetitive mechanism, one that is centered on a threatening perception of reality, or, more directly, on a vexing perception of difference which is immediately disavowed.

We have something here like a reflex of denial, a relay reaction in which difference is not properly confronted but instead continually deferred in the ideological equivalent of the 'repetition compulsion' I made figurative reference to above. The 'new' thus is known only as a duplication of the old, as a projection of what one already knows. This disavowal, to clarify, is not so much to do with the difference of the other per se - which, once understood as an issue of inferiority can easily be admitted – rather it has to do with the *threat* this other poses to a world in my own image, to the narcissistic universe of me and mine. It is at this point *of threat* that difference is disavowed, and not simply on the basis of *dissimilarity* alone (which need not always be understood as threatening).

We might say that the structural justification for the link between fetishism and stereotyping especially concerns the role of disavowal, and, indeed, the issue of contradictory beliefs or states. Indeed, I mean here to emphasize the fact of two co-existing and yet contrary positions, whether those positions are of belief (as in Freud's model – there *is* and yet nevertheless *is not* a penis), or of colonial discourse (a 'regularly knowable'/domesticated object of discourse which is also unknowable/threatening), or of identification (an other with whom no identificatory bonds should be possible, whom is also immanently identifiable with).

The functional link on the other hand foregrounds more strongly *the dynamics* of fetishistic processes, the vacillation between the contraries mentioned above. We are concerned here with the play between an archaic affirmation of the precious qualities of me and mine (whiteness, masculinity, etc.), and the castrating threat of difference. The dynamism, *the motor of repetition* underlying fetishism is here central. This is an oscillation between beliefs, as Bhabha puts it,

> in Freud's terms: 'All men have penises'; in ours 'All men have the same skin/race/culture'…for Freud 'Some do not have penises'; for us 'Some do not have the same skin/race/culture' (1994, p. 74).

This *movement* between irreconcilable beliefs, the constant 'to and fro' between contradictory positions, which is almost compulsive in nature, is exactly the activity

through which the subject *attempts to mediate the confrontation with the 'other'*. What is important about this conceptualisation is not only that it furthers the structural links above - that of immediate response, the relay of 'difference disavowal' - but also extends it, views it as an ongoing repetitive schema, a fantasy repeated, like a scratch in a record that causes it to stick. This functional link also points to the necessity of the *activity* of this process, making evident that fetishism itself requires a *repetition of action*, and not just that, but a circular logic of difference realized, disavowed, 'covered over', which then needs be circuitously re-enacted.

Irreparable difference and the scene of fantasy

It is exactly through activity that the 'magic' of the fetish works; this is how it attempts to mediate between the subject and the disturbing object, a mediation which is never completely successful, whose only alleviation comes with the constant action of the fetishist act repeated. Here it helps to stress the role of anxiety in the process, and more particularly, the relationship between anxiety and repetition. The anxiety of threatening difference may be alleviated after the fetishist act is carried out, but because the act and the act are not substantively linked – the act can never 'undo' the realization of difference – the relief from anxiety is only short-lived, hence the compulsion to repeat the action again and again.

If this model holds, then we start to understand something about the repetitive quality of stereotyping. More than that, we understand something about the necessary regularity of its features in stereotyping. The fact that the *same* caricatured figure is repeated again and again is precisely because we have the problem of a stuck instance of representation, and by the same token, a stuck instance of identification. In each case the anxiety of difference can never be definitely eliminated, but can only be briefly assuaged before it (must be) again repeated. We should not reduce this process merely to an analytics of individual anxiety however; Bhabha's analysis identifies a more profound mechanism of repetition, a repetition that must be seen in light of the dynamics of ambivalence and unconscious fantasy. Hence the fixity and the fantasmatic quality of the stereotype for Bhabha; it is because of this fact that "the *same old* stories *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 77).

It is useful here to briefly refer to Lacan's notion of fantasy, in particular his suggestion that the 'scene' of fantasy works not only to stage desire as Freud had

conceptualised, but also as a defence exactly against castration. As Evans (1996) explains:

> Lacan compares the fantasy scene to a frozen image on a cinema screen; just as the film may be stopped at a certain point in order to avoid showing a traumatic scene which follows, so the fantasy scene is a defence against castration (p. 60).

Here then the idea of a frozen image of fantasy which works to conceal the equivalent of castration, the loss, in other words of 'originary' or pure racial identity.

It is clear then from Bhabha's discussion that to 'normalize' difference does not mean to eradicate it, to fully 'repair' its damage. The fetish does not operate so as to remove all traces of sexual difference; that would be to misunderstand the concept of disavowal. The discovery of difference has been made, and despite the psychical reflex to deny this difference, this discovery once made cannot be undone. What can happen though is that this disturbing discovery of difference can be made bearable, *manageable* with the involvement of an additional component. Fetishism, in this sense, is a kind of 'object management' by means of which anxiety is alleviated. It is an operation of fantasy, linked to a particular reality-oriented mode of defence - disavowal. There is an interesting convergence here between the phobic and the fetish object; as desirable as the latter is, it is also always a potential source of anxiety. The fetish thus - and the stereotype also - is a *volatile* object, able to give pleasure and anxiety in equal portions.

The instrumental object

It is hence more appropriate to think of the fetish as *domesticating* rather than *eradicating* difference. I mean 'domesticating' here in two ways, in the sense both of *keeping difference at bay* and concentrating difference within a circumscribed set of attributes. Put differently, difference may thus be domesticated firstly by producing a stand-in object which might take the place of the actual different other, and secondly, by stabilizing this other, by reducing them to a given set of caricatures. If we are to grasp the particular faculty of Bhabha's account it is crucial that we engage with both these particular processes of the domestication (or 'normalization', in Bhabha's terms), both of which recall basic elements of Freud's description of the fetish. This focus on processes is vital, furthermore, because it helps bridge the gap between fetishes as objects and stereotypes as processes – a gap that Bhabha seems not to

attend to sufficiently – such that we might have a better understanding of how the activities of colonial discourse and identification might be seen as fetishistic.

As we have seen, the confrontation with difference yields anxiety, an anxiety that is never completely dissipated, but that is alleviated with recourse to the 'object management' of fetishism. This management utilizes an additional component – which, to be sure, is neither the subject, nor the threatening other - as both *a stand-in object* (that is, an object of displacement) and as an object of concentration (in which we see a poetic compacting of terms of reference, an object of condensation in other words). Here, importantly, we must not make the mistake of assuming that in racism we are dealing with a two-party (subject-other) transaction; rather we are dealing with an interaction between three terms: subject, fetish (or stereotype) and the 'racial other'. This is a *three-part interaction* that is frequently short-circuited such that it is played out predominantly between the first of these two terms. This is by no means to minimize the damage suffered by the 'racial other', but rather to suggest that the actual presence and activities, etc. of this other will typically be mediated (for the racist) by the operation of the stereotype (or, the fetish).

The (fetish/stereotype) object both *stands in for* the other (or a part of them), and functions as *a point of concentration* for what are taken to be their most essential attributes. This is an instrumental object - or an instrumental activity – which has a mediating objective. It is more easily controlled and manipulated than is the original disturbing (sexual or racial) other who 'evidenced' the difference that is experienced as threatening. It is a means that is almost magical - certainly fantasmatic - in terms of the task that it is asked to perform, that of mediating and stabilizing a world of threatening difference. Here a comparison with the traditional anthropological usage of the designation of 'fetish' benefits us: the fetish is precisely a magical object worshipped by a given society because it creates a sense of order and control in a frightening world whilst holding a given (supernatural/cosmological) belief-structure in place.

Two points of clarification are important. Firstly, to state the obvious: in Freud's account *there is in conscious, rational actuality, no mother's penis.* This is the case despite the crucial structuring role a given *fantasmatic* object takes on in the life of the fetishist. The fetish as absent female penis must indeed be made, *fantasized*, and done so as part of the defence-attempt of disavowal. The same is clearly true of the stereotype, which, by the same token, need have no 'realist' basis outside of the

racial fantasy. Furthermore, there is no 'pre-set', no primal object of fetishism; many different objects and associated sets of practices can become fetishized, as Freud's clinical illustration makes abundantly clear. I make these points as way of emphasizing that the fetish, like the stereotype, must always be a *constructed* object, both in the sense that there is no underlying realist basis for its presence (it is precisely *fantasmatic*), and in the sense that it is idiosyncratically determined relative to a contingent set of social and historical circumstances. These are important points of clarification because they make allowance for the fact that the fantasy scenario that is constructed – the fetish object/activity, the stereotyping process – is just that, *constructed*, a fact that permits for the role of the discursive in the psychical operations of racism. The tropes of fetishism can be codified within discourse, can, to an extent, be socially conventionalised and done so in different ways according to different historical locations. This is helpful if we are to avoid the pitfalls of psychological reductionism and keep open the possibility of articulating fantasy with external social structures.

Emphasizing the non-realist basis of fetish/stereotype objects and behaviour benefits us also in showing up the fact that the racist stereotype requires no 'realist' basis despite that it plays such a prominent anchoring role in the discourse and identifications of the racist, no 'realist' basis beyond *the anxious need to repudiate the threat of castration.* Hence Bhabha's concerns with those conceptualizations of the stereotype which attempt to tie it to a realist foundation, or to models of representational distortion. Stereotypes can function quite adequately outside this domain of reference; not all instances of racism need be linked to the conscious or rational precepts of the racist's own personal experience. To the contrary, if we are to properly grasp what is so insistent, so tenacious about racism, we need to look outside this domain of reference.

Condensation and displacement

We may now move to align the features of the fetish/stereotype as emphasized above (that it is a stand-in object, and one of concentration) to two rudimentary aspects of the primary process functioning of the unconscious. Two psychoanalytic terms are useful in refining our conceptualisation here, those of *condensation* and *displacement.* These are terms Freud (1900) uses to describe two of the most basic operations of unconscious processing in the effects of the dream-work. In the case of the former we

have the process in which several images or figures come to be condensed into a single composite image invested with the meaning and energy of its component parts. The substitutive process thus implied – the 'compacting of terms of reference' - lead Lacan to liken condensation to the *metaphoric* properties of language (as described above).

In the case of the displacement, we have a linkage of related terms. This is a process in which one mental image (and its attached mental energy) comes to stand in for another on the basis of a series of associative connections. Lacan relates the horizontal connections of displacement phenomena to the operation of metonymy. Both of these functions are of course crucial to the distortion of the dream-work, a distortion that enables the playing out of certain disguised unconscious contents which, in a process of over-determination, become enmeshed with more immediate contents and wishes from recent experience. The usefulness of Bhabha's intervention in this respect is to point to the fact that displacement and condensation might be crucial operations within which to understand the functioning of stereotypes. Such behaviours and modes of speaking might best be apprehended, and might only in fact be sustained, by these primary process functions, operating here not principally as means of disguise or concealment, as in the case of the dream-work – but as means of regularizing difference and hence safeguarding against anxieties of castration.

Metaphoric/metonymic manipulation of the fetish

Although perhaps not strictly a fetish, and certainly not in the sexual sense, the idea of the Voodoo doll makes for a useful illustration of the functional qualities of the fetish object (or process). An object of magical manipulation, this doll is both metonym and metaphor. It is associated, by virtue of content, to the person to whom its magic is directed, containing actual material elements of the subject in question. Clearly here we see a relationship of *contiguity;* it is a metonym, a 'stand in' for the original object in which we see a displacement relation embodied. The doll though also *resembles* the object of its desired affect, calling them to mind on the basis of likeness, and is such also a metaphor, a substitution of an object from one given category (figurines, dolls) for another (living human beings).

In the example of the Voodoo doll then we have an object that is used both metonymically (as a displacement) and metaphorically (as a substitution, as a 'condensation of terms of reference') to exercise a certain fantasmatic control over the

world. These are the basic mechanisms that ensure the 'efficacy' of the fetish - it is through connections of this sort (metonymic displacement, metaphoric condensation) that it succeeds in its role as 'magical' object (or process) that affects the world, that sets a particular (ideological) version of the world in place. This, after all, is the role of the fetish: creating a sense of order and control in a frightening world at the same time that it holds a set of supernatural (or ideological) beliefs in place. The fetish in this sense not only enables certain magical ways of thinking, it also orders the world around the co-ordinates of the fantasy (or magical beliefs) it thus makes possible. Here we strike to the heart of the usefulness of Bhabha's model: racial stereotypes help structure and stabilize a world of racist ideology. Through the provision of a fantasy object, they enable a 'buttoning down', a point of fixity for racist colonial discourse and identifications alike.

Returning then to the case of the stereotype: in the case of displacement, or what I have referred to as the 'stand in' relation of the fetish, we have a focussing on certain supposed attributes of the 'other', a kind of fixation of representation upon particular features that come, metonymically, to be emphasized over and above the diverse qualities of the object as a whole. This is, in effect, a distillation: certain given characteristics dominate in the stereotype - "the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability…the stupidity of the Irish" (Bhabha, p. 77) - becoming all that is necessary to know about the figure in question. It is vital we not skip over this point, because it helps us understand the currency of the stereotype, so to speak, the fact that what are essentially no more than caricatures function to provide all the knowledge one needs to understand the essence of the other as a whole. The psychical process of displacement provides a useful means of understanding how the discursive operation of essentialization might work on a psychical level.

In reference to operations of condensation: the substitutive processes of this operation suggest that actions taken upon (or with) this replacement object come to take the place of interaction with the actual object (of the other). The stereotype comes to operate as something which is real, continually affirmed, always retained, 'truer' than objective truth itself; not only a measure of the real, but, in a way, the real thing itself; a condensation of terms of reference. We might put this differently by saying that the stereotype is a potent kind of reification, a concretising (or evidencing) of racist notions into actual people, situations, experiences, a means of making the truth. This, it seems, is a prime ideological operation, a 'making of one's truth' in the

objects of the world, a continual reconfirmation of what one already 'knows' in the spiralling repetitions of the stereotype, which precisely attempt to actualize a certain ideological apparatus of ideas. Two crucial elements of ideological construction then: essentialization and reification, two means of protecting against the castration of difference. These are the two operations that enable the fixity Bhabha speaks of in the opening of his discussion of colonial otherness, that constant and repetitive action of the paradoxical and essentializing marking off of cultural/racial difference.

In metonymic displacement and metaphoric condensation we have two concepts that pertain as much to the functioning of ideology as to the basic procedures of the psychical apparatus. This, it would seem, is one way of conceptualizing the closeness of practices of discourse and of identification in the stereotype without simply conflating them. We see here the possibility of a political functioning of psychical mechanisms that is not reducible to psychical procedures alone; likewise a psychical functioning of political discourse not reducible merely to an ideological play of representations, to the force of discourse alone. In these bridges between the psychical and the political, between fantasy and structure, we have the relay components, the 'go-between' mechanisms that I argued that Bhabha's account would require if it were to avoid conflating discourse and identification.

Stereotyping and similar racist activities are as such always deeply nervous, for they occur as instances of disavowal in which the acknowledgement of the potential castration of difference and the repudiation of this threatening difference go hand-in-hand. This is why ambivalence is a constituent condition of the racial stereotype: the stereotype is the irreconcilable movement of disavowal that denies difference despite acknowledging it. The stereotype attempts to forever forestall the distressing effects of a difference of lack. It thus becomes a 'fixated' and endlessly repetitive mode of representation and identity, affectively 'stuck' in its attempts to forestall difference. It is for this reason that the functioning of the stereotype cannot be fixed simply within the domain of representation, just as it cannot be adequately grasped with reference to realist terms of analysis, that is, with reference to true and false types of representation. The stereotype, to paraphrase Bhabha, is not a simplification because it is a *false representation* of a given reality; rather, the stereotype is a simplification

> because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference…. constitutes a problem for the representation of

> the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (Bhabha, 1994, p 75)

The narcissistic schema of racism

In closing it is useful to draw out some implications of this discussion for the further conceptualisation of racism. In extending the discussion above we might advance that stereotyping processes are, like fetish objects themselves, kinds of wishful mechanisms. They function as hopeful ways of dealing with, or understanding the 'object' in question, the racial 'other', *without actually engaging them* in the fullness of contradictory experience and diversity. The stereotype, in this sense, protects against contradictions, and works as an endlessly repeated means of keeping diversity at bay, reducing difference to the stark contrasts of a Manichean dichotomy. It becomes apparent then how the object of racism, the racial 'other' - along with the stereotyping processes through which they are known and approached - might be seen to be precious, because he or she enables a kind of protective functioning of subjectivity. Here phobic and fetish objects (or processes) come to be linked, and not simply in the sense that fetish objects have the ability to disturb and frighten, but in the sense that frightening objects are precious precisely because of their ability to hold a tremulous subjectivity together against that which threatens it.

The 'logic' that thus seems to be enacted is one in which racist practices must continue, must not abate, least the object of racism, the fetish of the stereotype should disappear, and my subjectivity thus be threatened with lack. The fantasmatic factor of the racial 'other' is vital here. Indeed, it would seem exactly by virtue of such fetishistic practices that this fantasmatic 'other' is continually sustained. In this strange logic, I need to continue being racist such that I continue to generate an object of racist hatred for my ongoing racism. This racism, of course, serves an ostensibly protective function, keeping at bay that which protects me from the difference of lack, the threatening body of the 'other' which fails to reflect my own narcissistic qualities. In this line of speculation we have a narcissistic mode of racism that emphasizes the racist's dependence on the object of their hatred, a view which resonates strongly with Sartre's famous declaration that 'the Jew' is the invention of the Anti-Semite, which, in turn, is taken up by Fanon (1986) to the effect that 'the negro' is said to be the invention of the racist white subject.

We have here something like a narcissistic schema of racism that exhibits a great deal of actual detachment between subject and other. If we refer back to Freud's clinical picture, we recall again that the actual mother's penis does not exist, that the fetish is itself a replacement for a fantasmatic object – indeed, it *is* that fantasmatic object. Not only then is it the case that the stereotype is not 'real', despite that at some level it functions as the real thing itself, it is also the case that that which it supports, the racial 'other', is *itself* an object of fantasy in so far as they are always understood via the fantasmatic object of the stereotype. To reiterate, the maintenance of this fetish object or stereotyping process is sustained not by the real actions or role of the 'other', but by the racist's ongoing need to defend against a threatening lack. This is a form of protection against difference – a continual foreclosure of the object of difference – rather than an actual engagement with the difference in question. There is hence a quality of the virtual about all such interactions with the racial other. Moreover: it matters little what the racial other actual does or how they are, such factors will not mitigate against their 'hate-worthiness'. The details of the actual black man or woman, of how they live their lives and disprove the racist stereotypes of the white racist, are, in a sense, completely incidental to the latter's racism. We have thus a conceptualisation of how racism might function in a primarily narcissistic capacity - which is not to say that it is somehow 'asocial', removed from the domain of discourse and material politics. This is a conceptualisation that extends Fanon's (1986) contention that in Manichean conditions the white subject and the black subject alike remain narcissistically locked into their (respective) whiteness and blackness.

The above arguments in relation to how stereotyping functions as an arrested form of identification/representation leads to an intriguing speculation on Bhabha's behalf. What is denied the colonial subject – and here he implicates colonizer and colonized alike – is a form of negation "which gives access to the recognition of difference" (p. 75). Bluntly put: there is, in reference to subject and their 'other' in colonial contexts, a profound inability to think (and identify) outside of essentialist notions of race and culture, precisely because these significations and subjectifications cannot effectively be negated. Hence the suggestion that "the stereotype impedes the circulation and articulation of the signifier of 'race' as anything other than its fixity as racism" (Bhabha, 1994, p 75). It is perhaps towards such a negating objective that we should direct anti-racist strategy. For without this

form of negation we are left with a paradox in which the very inability to engage difference is what compounds it, what reverberates and extends its effects, reifying absolute categories of the other, amplifying their otherness in a vicious circle of racism and difference.

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Endnotes

[1] I use these terms in a figurative and descriptive way rather than in a strictly technical psychoanalytic sense.