

Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory

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Chapter 6 History, Nation, Racism – and Psychoanalysis

If direct amalgamations between psychoanalysis and other disciplines tend to be problematic, what can psychoanalysis offer as a conceptual, heuristic device for the understanding of contemporary political and cultural questions? Can it help with the formulation of other kinds of history, or with understanding the historical problematics of nationalism and racism?

History

Does psychoanalysis challenge linear and progressive narratives of history? It was Althusser who found in psychoanalysis the insight that repetition is not necessarily the recurrence of the past as such but rather the effect of the persistence of a structure. Psychoanalysis argues that the narrative of the life-history of the patient is not a triumphal development but a form of repetition which freezes the individual into a cycle in which he or

she helplessly and repeatedly acts out a fantasmatic past. Yet if it is true that psychoanalysis teaches that we get ill from repetition, then, as Deleuze points out, it also teaches that we are healed through repetition, the repetitions of 'working-through' and sublimation.¹ This has two consequences: in the first place, it means that psychoanalysis covertly places the repetition of trauma within a linear or progressive model which is superimposed when psychoanalysis itself intervenes: the healing process enables the patient to break out of repetition. So the story that psychoanalysis really wants to tell is the saving of history from repetition and its transformation into the narrative of a successful case history.

In the second place, if repetition makes you ill but can also heal you, it means that there are two forms of repetition, a good and a bad one. If today history seems to have shifted from the progressive narrative of the Enlightenment to an uncanny form of repetition, of postmodern recycling, then the question that needs to be asked is whether this is a good or a bad form of repetition. Is it a repetition that will heal us or make us ill?

This actually comes quite close to Marx's account of history, despite the common tendency (in Lyotard for example) to assume that Marxism involves a straightforward Enlightenment narrative. Take Marx's famous comment in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

Hegel remarks somewhere that all great events and historical personages occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.²

This, evidently, is a bad form of repetition: history making a joke of itself, repeating itself as its own pastiche. Marx's emphasis on the limits of repetition, twice only, suggests that there a distinction to be made here between repetition as infinite, unending, the inevitable eternal return of the same, and repetition as a form of doubling, inverting, dis-orientating, or re-empowering. Marx himself saw these as the bad and the good forms of repetition: the dialectic of history, which itself progresses through reversals, means that history is enacted through repetition but a repetition which changes for the good. History, in psychoanalytic terms, is in a constant process of working itself through.

History was thought of as cyclical long before it was radicalized into a progressive narrative. Even revolution meant a cyclical repetition before it meant transformation: the revolution of the spheres, the planets, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 which still repeats itself in Northern Ireland, or, the not-so glorious revolution of capitalism's boom-slump cycles. Even Marx's radical idea of revolution as an overturning was modelled on the prototype of the French Revolution, which the Bolsheviks imitated and self-consciously repeated in 1917. This suggests that it is not necessary to have to accept a simple opposition between linear and repetitive forms of history. The question becomes what forms the narratives of history take, and what kind of repetitions are involved. Making history in the present often involves not only a retrieval of the past but an attempt to make that past repeat the priorities of the present.

In many ways, our current sense that history is repeating itself is something of a luxury: after all, you have to have had a history, or rather have been allowed a history, for any repetition to occur in the first place. In the

nineteenth century, as is well known, a primary criterion for distinguishing between civilized and savage societies was whether they were regarded as having a history: the savage was thought of as timeless, living in an eternal present, like a child—or the unconscious. Meanwhile Europe looked to extend its own history through a narrative which combined its own dynamic progress with repetition: of Imperial Rome, and, in the more distant past, of the spread of Aryan civilization. As I have already suggested, the grand narrative produced by historical philology told of the linguistic diffusion which lay behind the remorseless conquests of the Indo-European tribes, which therefore anticipated and authenticated the perceived contemporary supremacy of the Aryan race. This was the history of diaspora for the English and Germans in the nineteenth century, which they saw themselves as triumphally repeating.

But the twentieth century has shown that this was a history that can be retrieved, turned round and narrated very differently. Today, the diaspora is thought of very differently: it has become the history of the very peoples uprooted and dispersed by European colonial and imperial powers. In a similar way, we have transformed the bad category of race into the good category of ethnicity; while, most striking because apparently least unexamined in its metamorphosis, the bad category of the hybridity produced by inter-racial sex has been recast as the good category of the hybridity of postmodern culture.³ The academic equivalent of this is doubtless the shift from the nineteenth century's preoccupation with taxonomy and disciplinary divisions into the twentieth's penchant for interdisciplinary, creative, generative work. If history repeats itself, therefore, it might seem that what we are experiencing

today is a good form of repetition, in which the negative differentiating categories of the past have been recycled, and transcoded into positives.

But the recent, ghastly appearance of the notion of 'ethnic cleansing' warns us that these transformations are still vulnerable and ambivalent. It cannot be assumed that the currently validated cultural categories have altogether reversed those of the past. Indeed, as the use of the term hybridity suggests, the sublimation may have been too successful, transmuted into the process of forgetting. For however much the past may have been repeated and worked-through, its recurrence will always include bad forms of repetition, in which, like the uncanny, will erupt unexpectedly and repeating on us traumatically where it is least expected. But as long as there are good and bad forms of repetition, then history can still be coerced and transformed: we do not have to resign ourselves to inevitability, to the assumption that any particular bad repetition will always go on repeating. We need to recognize that, as psychoanalysis intimates, history works in a complex dialectic of linear movements and repetition.

Nation

So psychoanalysis suggests that if history can be thought through as a form as repetition, then there are good and bad forms of repetition that are repeated by us or which repeat on us. But it is not only history, or the history of individual patients, that work in this way. The same structures will be acted out by social and political phenomena which achieve their identity through history. Nationness, for example, is a repetition effect of this kind,

an historical repetition both in the sense of the nation being a repetition (or retrieval) of history and as something which constantly repeats.

Nationness might be thought of as a form of sickness, of madness, or at the very least of neurosis.⁴ And since nations must always invoke a Romantic little narrative (as opposed to the Enlightenment grand narrative of internationalism), perhaps it was this that Goethe was thinking of when he said 'Romanticism is sickness, classicism health'. The nation, too, is often imaged as if it existed in a dialectic of sickness and health, but almost any dialectic will do. No nation ever makes the mistake of defining itself permanently, in essentialist terms.

Nationalism after all is a historical, political ideology developed in the eighteenth century in order to provide a new form of legitimation for a country that could no longer find it in its heart to justify the basis of its government by the claims of a ruling monarchical dynasty. A new monarch, this time conveniently spectral and immortal—the nation—had to be invented so that the King's subjects could remain subjects, and as has been pointed out, the new dynasty of the nation was instantly given an appropriately respectable lineage or history, that of ethnicity, culture and language, which it was required to repeat in the present. Obviously, the forms and conditions of nationalism have continued to change and develop since then, particularly in the post-colonial era, to the extent that nationalism in general can hardly be discussed as such. Yet despite the argument that the question that nationalism poses is one specific to different moments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ever since Renan's famous essay 'What is a Nation?', it has also been assumed that whatever the diversity of

particularities, the nation is a category that can be analyzed as such.

This is the challenge that has been taken up by Anderson, Gellner, Hobsbawm and others. What their work shows is the variety of factors that must be brought together to make the successful equation that binds the nation into a state. It also demonstrates that its 'natural' units exist in an unending tension with heterogeneity. The connections that were generally made between race, language and religion in the nineteenth century often assumed as a norm the possibility of some kind of unitary, homogeneous form in which they could all be united: the nation. But according to the norm/deviance model that was endemic to nineteenth century forms of thinking, from racial theory to sexology and criminology, the norm itself became best defined by those things which deviated from it, which meant in practice an obsession with the occurrence of the deviant: not only so-called sexual perversions, but also racial and linguistic hybridity. The 'nation' is constituted through a constant dialectic between these centrifugal and centripetal forces, between homogenization and heterogeneity, sameness and diversity: though it is often claimed that one part of the polarity is a recent phenomenon (for example, heterogeneity from immigration), an antithetical pressure has always been central to nationness. The problem for the nation has always been that it wants to suggest that its political formation, at the level of the state, coincides with a 'natural' cultural identity. Since cultures are always multiple and always involve a great variety of identities, the state therefore has to produce an 'imagined community', which has only been brought into being by virtue of the existence of the state itself.⁵ This accounts both for the diversity of conditions of specific nations,

and also for the necessarily conflictual state of the nation as such. The sickness of the nation is that it will always have too many cultures for its well-being as a state.

The nation works through a structure of polarities: images of the nation oscillate between different gender models, of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny.⁶ They also shift strategically between what are seen, at different moments, as essential drives towards homogeneity and heterogeneity: whereas Englishness in the past was fabricated on a principle of sameness, in Britain today the nation is being carefully reconstructed on a principle of difference: through an increasing cultural layering and hybridization. This works even for the minority groups themselves: Paul Gilroy, for example, has noted the modern pluralization in Britain of Black identity, and the development of new diverse forms of cultural identities and identifications.⁷ This suggests that the complex stratifying and hybridization of cultures in Britain is moving it towards an increasing heterogeneity. At the same time the state somewhat ambivalently moves towards enforcing the larger political and cultural identity of the European Union. As European borders are removed, other borders have been developed internally, borders within, outsides on the insides, and insides on the outsides.

What this points to is the possibility that 'nationness' is a state of constant tension or oscillation between heterogeneity and homogeneity, between difference and sameness, the past and the future, between processes of mixing, miscegenation, hybridization and those of separation, purity, cleansing. The nation operates in a constant transformative flow or economy between these polarities, which explains the mechanism whereby in a single historical moment the direction and priorities

of one nation can seem to be so out of sync with that of another.

This double movement is doubtless the constitutive effect of the torn halves of the society which the nation seeks to bind together; but it is the psychoanalytic category of ambivalence that catches the structural economy of its oscillations, even if it removes the antagonism involved. The word nation also tends to mask over this constitutive ambivalence. The 'nation state' is more of a give-away. From a psychoanalytic perspective it might seem that the various other meanings of the word state are not at all fortuitous: alongside a sovereign body of people occupying a particular territory, state also designates a particular kind of existence at a given moment, and a condition of unresolved tension. It is psychoanalysis that helps us to recognize that *the nation will always be in a state*. Perhaps that is why nationalism also offers such a compelling form of cultural identification.

Racism

Alm: I wonder what religion hee's of!
Fit. No certain species sure. A kind of mule!
 That's halfe an Ethnicke, halfe a Christian!
 Jonson, *Staple of Newes* (1631)

Race is often one of the things which the nation gets itself into a state about. Nationalism can, but does not have to, involve racism. Semantically, and paradoxically in terms of its modern usage, the nation is much more intimately connected to ethnicity than to race. Since ἔθνος as a word in Greek means nation, the relation of nation to ethnicity amounts to a tautology. Interestingly, this tautology also

points to a reversal of sorts. 'Ethnocentric' according to its semantic origins ought to mean other-nation-centric rather than centred in one's own nation: for in Greek, τὰ ἔθνη means the non-Israelite nations, that is, the Gentiles. The word 'ethnic' was introduced into English in the fifteenth century, and at that time meant relating to nations not Christian or Jewish, namely heathens or pagans. Ethnic, therefore, already means the religion and the nation of the other: which means that ethnocentric by semantic rights should mean the very reverse of its modern usage. The development of ethnic in the words ethnography and ethnology in the 1830s and 1840s shows it losing the meaning of nationhood—no doubt because the connection between nations and other peoples was itself diminishing at that time in the history of imperialism; so while ethnography means 'the scientific description of nations or races of men' (1834), ethnology is established as the nationless 'science which treats of races or peoples' (1842). As it moves into a scientific theory, therefore, ethnos shifts from nation to race. In our current passion for ethnicity it should be remembered how closely it is affiliated to them both. Today nation, race, culture and ethnicity are still used interchangeably. Despite the fact that you can write it without putting scare quotes round it, ethnicity is little less than our contemporary word for the disgraced term 'race': you are born into your culture and your ethnic group, which are both already in existence; you can, by an act of free will, change your culture (for example through education or by moving to another country) but for the most part you cannot change your ethnicity any more than in the past you could change your race.⁸ Those of mixed race are the major exceptions to this rule, in so far as many societies even now do not allow mixed race as a specific ethnicity.

In Britain for example, the Commission for Racial Equality asks individuals to identify their ethnic origin as one of the following:

White
 Black-Caribbean/African/Other
 Asian-Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Chinese/Other
 Other (please specify)

So too in society at large, if you are, for example, of mixed race between white and any other group, then you are generally identified as belonging to the non-white group: you are different, ethnic.⁹

The frequently cited connection between nationalism and racism can pass too quickly over the problem that racism is by no means exclusive to nationalism.¹⁰ Here we need to distinguish two related but distinctive kinds of racism. The first is a racial prejudice that appears, like patriarchy, to be relatively transhistorical, and which amounts to a form of hostility prompted by the cultural transmission of certain stereotypical views, and can be characterized in psychoanalytical terms as a pathological fear of the Other. The second would be scientific racism, sometimes called racialism, the theory of race which was specifically developed in the nineteenth century in the West as part of a political theory justifying slavery, colonialism and imperialism. Scientific racism, sometimes called racialism, consisted essentially of a scientific corroboration of the stereotyped prejudices of popular racism. Apart from racial theory proper, such scientific thinking was also developed through the disciplines (amongst others) of linguistics, anthropology, phrenology, eugenics and social Darwinism in which the typological

notion of race was adapted to a theory in which race became a form of distinct *species*. Such racial theory could consequently be justified by the iron law of nature, and culminated, as is well known, in the racial theories of Rosenberg and others that were central to the ideology of Fascism.¹¹ But in many European countries scientific racism was the basis for the process of the institutionalization of racism—a process that in many ways still continues today. The point of this thumb-nail sketch is to emphasize that, as with nationalism, racism and racialism are historical phenomena, which raises once more the whole problem of the relation of psychoanalysis to history.

The historical specificity of racism in the West means that before addressing the question of what psychoanalysis can offer to its analysis, it must be emphasized once again that the racism of our society is for the most part the continuing effect of nineteenth-century racism and its integration at all levels of the state through the discourses of colonialism and the ideology of imperialism. Although the political, geographical and economic rationale for a theory of the innate inferiority of non-white races has now passed, it lingers on in a kind of time-lag that accompanies the continued expansion of the world economy; one that can be wheeled out at appropriate moments if politically convenient, particularly at moments of economic crisis in the life of nations.

The question of racism broaches the social and historical limits of psychoanalytic explanation, which cannot itself escape the historical specificity of the ideology of racism. Here psychoanalysis cannot evade a confrontation with history because it must itself be historicized in this context: not only Jung's apparent

willingness to corroborate Nazi racial ideology, not only the willing complicity of certain psychoanalysts such as Mannoni or Ortigues with colonial government, but even with respect to Freud himself.¹² The general problem here starts with the ethnocentricity of the assumptions implicit in the universal claims of psychoanalysis. More specifically, psychoanalysis is itself deeply implicated in the norm/deviance model on which racialized thinking was constructed. Sander Gilman's arresting and valuable work nevertheless illustrates very clearly the problems that this leads to: on the one hand he shows how deeply psychoanalysis is implicated in nineteenth-century deviancy theory, and yet on the other hand he continues to use it as the basis of explanation and understanding.¹³ With Freud the problems do not only manifest themselves with respect to his ideas about sexuality. The 'recapitulation' theory is also very much in evidence, probably derived from the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer (to be found, for example, in his essay 'The Comparative Psychology of Man'), and particularly evident in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, but permeating his work throughout. This involves the uncritical survivalist assumption (the origins of which go back at least to the eighteenth century) that in some way so-called primitive peoples constitute a childhood of mankind and can be analyzed on that basis—or the other way round, where childhood can be analyzed by recourse to notions of primitivism. The complicity of certain psychoanalytical assumptions, therefore, in the history of theories of racism suggests that psychoanalysis is hardly likely to prove an effective instrument for an understanding of that which it unthinkingly or unconsciously perpetuates.¹⁴ This is all too evident when some proffered forms of psychoanalytic explanation,

such as the claim that racist revulsion is prompted by an association between black people with excrement, seem themselves to become indistinguishable from racist ideology as such. But rather than suggesting that racism pushes psychoanalysis to its limit, I want to suggest rather that it constitute its very edge.

You might think that of all social phenomena, racism would be something that psychoanalysis would have a lot to tell us about. But there is surprisingly little psychoanalytic material that deals with racism. No doubt this was because psychoanalysis itself was deeply imbricated within the same nexus of ideas as scientific racism itself. Yet one might have expected more given the topicality of racism at the time Freud was writing many of his major texts. As one might expect, such brief discussions as we do get focus exclusively on anti-Semitism. Freud's most sustained account occurs in *Moses and Monotheism* (1937) where he stresses that it arises from a complexity of causes, many of which he suggests, are relatively straight forward, such as envy of Jewish commercial success: the problem of racism thus starts with the fact that is not *just* irrational, it can't just be approached at the level of the symptom. Freud then goes on to give three 'deeper motives': jealousy of the special election of the Jews, that the Jewish practice of circumcision recalls what he calls 'the dreaded castration', finally positing a displaced anger among Christians for being coerced to become Christians in the first place.¹⁵ Psychoanalytic explanation here thus comprises the same story that it repeats incessantly: rivalry and displacement, circulating around the 'bedrock' of castration. It seems that whenever psychoanalysis is brought in as an oracular master discourse in order to explain things that have resisted

understanding according to the terms of their own logic, it always provides the same explanation.

In his other substantive discussions of racism, in the form of anti-Semitism, Freud describes it in terms of 'the narcissism of minor differences', adding that he is at a loss to explain why such details of differentiation prompt such readiness for hatred and aggression in groups, which can hardly have helped him much in coming to terms with his own expulsion from Vienna in 1938.¹⁶ The problem with such psychoanalytic accounts of racism as do exist is that they bring us back to the habitual story that psychoanalysis tells every time, in which racism inevitably loses any specificity. The question for psychoanalysis is whether it can tell us anything about a fantasy that is *social* rather than individual, particularly one that, as with the fascism to which in many respects it is clearly related, now seems to us a pathological perversion.

Reich

The primary text outside Freud in the context of psychoanalysis and racism must be Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which includes a trenchant critique of the complicity of certain psychoanalysis in racism and colonialism, and attempts a phenomenology of the psychic effects of racism as a preliminary to a call to Black people to exchange the pathological compulsion of a desire for whiteness with an assertion of a new Black identity. The one thing the book doesn't do, however, is to use psychoanalysis as an instrument for understanding the construction of racism's enduring social and historical affect. For this reason I want to consider briefly an earlier,

rather different work, Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* which was published in 1933, the year before he broke with Freud. To the extent that he de-idealized and historicized Freud, Reich in many ways undermines the claim for the necessity of a psychoanalytical explanation. Fascism, he argues, was to a large extent what Hitler himself said it was, a political *doppelganger*, a reaction to Marxism that imitated the forms through which it had achieved success.¹⁷ Despite this duplicitous doubling, Reich contends that Marxism for its parts needs no psychological interpretation because its appeal at the level of political philosophy is entirely rational; fascism, by contrast, does require an explanation because its ideology is fundamentally irrational. This forms the basis for the argument about the irreducible *irrationality* of fascism and racism that was to be developed by Adorno and others of the Frankfurt school.

Reich argues that fascism was specifically the ideology of the lower middle class, and that its key ideological mechanism lay in the family, suggesting that the authoritarian family structure of that class provided the main psychological structure, namely identification, which led its members to endorse the authoritarian precepts of fascism. According to Reich, the sexual repression of the lower-middle-class family allows the sublimation of desire into the various ideals of duty, honour and fatherland, while the unquestioning allegiance to the *Führer* derives from an identification with the authoritarian patriarchal father.

Reich's account of Nazi racial theory demonstrates its clear historical links to the Darwinian accounts of differences between species that, as I have suggested, were assimilated into a theory of racial difference. In

Staying Power Peter Fryer shows how many nineteenth century British versions of this assimilation state quite openly that the elimination of the weaker races, inevitably black, are simply part of the law of nature which has ensured the progress of civilization; anyone taking an active part in such extermination is, therefore, merely helping nature along its way.¹⁸ For Nazi ideologues, the problem with this account rests in its assumption of necessity: rather as Marxist theory can be taken to describe an inevitable process leading to the fall of capitalism which therefore need involve no human agency, so there is no need in such a theory of racial development by natural selection for the active destruction and coercion of non-Aryans.

Nazi racial theory therefore articulated racial evolutionary theory with a theory of history and of the state, which, like that of Gobineau, was predicated upon the rise and fall of civilizations. This posited the existence of three races: the Aryans who were the builders of civilization, the non-Aryans who were destined to serve it, and the Jews who were those who had always brought about the destruction of any great civilization. This gave the Nazi machine the basis for the justification for the appropriation of property, expulsion and ultimately coercive operations designed to exterminate Jews altogether. Reich is concerned to show the degree to which the Nazi argument appeals psychologically and works symbolically in relation to a repressed sexuality. He ascribes the threat of poisoning, syphilis, and miscegenation to the body, and therefore ultimately the soul, of the German race from Jews always associated with dirt, decadence and decay, to a fear of sexuality—and, being Reich, of orgasm—as such, and shows how it operates according to what today, after Said, would be

called an Orientalist structure according to which the 'Nordic is equated to bright, majestic, heavenly, asexual, pure, whereas "Near Eastern" is equated to instinctual, demonic, sexual, ecstatic, orgastic' (121). He points to the complex mixture of sexual fantasies and guilt that lies at the basis of the unconscious emotional impact of Nazi propaganda, such as the following statement by Goebbels, written in answer to the question whether a Jew is a man:

If someone cracks a whip across your mother's face, would you say to him, Thank you! Is he a man too? One who does such a thing is not a man—he is a brute! How many worse things has the Jew inflicted upon our mother Germany and still inflicts upon her! He [The Jew] has debauched our race, sapped our energy, undermined our customs and broken our strength. (93)

Perhaps this proves that Goebbels really did have 'ner balls' after all.

It is in the context of analyses of this kind of propaganda that Reich criticizes Marxist accounts that remain narrowly economic in favour of a broader 'cultural politics' that demonstrates the effectivity and significance of ideological factors. His study of the complex mode of operation of 'seemingly irrelevant everyday habits' (103) is impressive, as is his insistent emphasis on the patriarchal, authoritarian family at what he calls the 'sex-economic core of cultural revolution' (120). But unlike Freud, the difficulty of his analysis comes from its very historical specificity: the force of his inquiry suggests that racism is specifically the product of lower middle class sexuality: whether this was true for Germany in the twenties and thirties or not, it is

obviously little help in a discussion of, for example, contemporary working-class racism—particularly given that Reich claims that the working class maintains a far less fettered attitude to sexuality than any other (though interestingly he suggests that the proletariat themselves suffered the contradiction of a split psychic structure that anticipates Adorno and Althusser). The paradox of Reich's work, therefore, seems to be that when psychoanalysis (of a sort) is brought to bear in a more specific historical register, then its explanatory power becomes equally restricted.

For psychoanalysis as a system of understanding to have something to say about racism it must assume that racism is derived from a fundamental psychic structure or constitutes a specific form of social neurosis. Reich's analysis shows the difficulties that arise when psychoanalysis is obliged by its own model to offer a theory of racism as a perversion from the norm; when the norm itself is perverted as in Nazi Germany, South Africa or the American South into a pervasive ideological fantasy, then things become more difficult, for it necessitates a form of mass psychology that quickly becomes a theory of Weberian types (itself closely related to the typology of nineteenth-century racism). At this point, psychoanalysis is itself in danger of reverting to type, that is to the first use of psychology in relation to race, 'ethnopsychology' (1886) which involved the 'study of the psychology of races and peoples': 'The negro is lazy, crafty etc.'

To turn it the other way round, the problem is that there are so few specific examples of case histories involving questions of racism—presumably because in general a racist doesn't regard his or her racism as a neurosis needing a cure: it's hard to imagine the scenario

of a Nazi worried about his anti-Semitic tendencies consulting Dr Freud. For a racist, psychoanalysis, given its strong Jewish identity, would itself be regarded, à la Karl Krauss, as a symptom of the illness that the racist wants to rid society of. The one specific example of a case history I've come across outside of Fanon is not a happy one. In his book *White Racism*, Joel Kovel recounts the case of a patient analyzed by Terry Rodgers; the patient was an American white Southerner, who:

under the emotional pressure of the self-realization of psychoanalysis, moved from a stance of nonracist, liberal support for the Negro cause to membership in the local White Citizens Council.¹⁹

As always, the problem for psychoanalysis seems to emerge with the notion of cure.

For all that, however, Reich's work in this area is important because he was the first to isolate what he called the characteristic ambivalence of fascist ideology, and, crude as his analysis may in certain respects sound today, to stress the link between sexuality and racism, a link that is constantly repressed or subject to social amnesia. What is important about Reich's work is his demonstration that racism can't be separated from sexuality: positive or negative racist feelings share a structure of obsession with the loved or hated object. This suggests that if it were asked where psychoanalysis itself comes closest to a symptomatic discussion of racism, then it must be in the only concept that it takes from the racial arena, and that is fetishism. A term first used by travellers with reference to the religious icons of Africa—the Africa that Freud also identifies as the dark continent of female sexuality.²⁰ The structure of fetishism, of simultaneous

fixity and mobility, operating together at once in a dialectic of attraction and repulsion, seems at least to get at the constitutive ambivalence of racism, derived from what is in effect a surplus of signification in the other—which explains why its other constant feature is paranoia, the disease of overinterpretation. This recalls Freud's idea of the narcissism of minor differences. If the constitutive factor of racism is that it finds a constant surplus of signification in the other, it can, interestingly, work both by there being a difference, too much of a difference (in relation to black people) but equally well through there being a danger of their being *no* difference (as in anti-semitism, anti-Irish racism). There's no pleasing the racist: the bastards are either too different or too similar. Such a logic is a kind of perverted mirroring of the liberal position on cultural difference, that is, ethnic minorities are the same but different. This reversibility may suggest that either liberalism is simply the other side of racism, or that the structure of racism doesn't have to be dismantled but can rather be turned round. Either way, only psychoanalysis is placed to deal with this perverse kind of paradoxical double logic—because this is the logic of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is uniquely placed to understand the operation of such structures: psychoanalysis itself operates as a kind of illegitimate, unlegitimated form of thought that infiltrates the home territory of different disciplines, the other that has been brought in to the same but which far from being assimilated remains inalienable and other to it: here psychoanalysis itself reproduces the very structure that is the object of racism—so that it appears as the apparently foreign body within that disturbs, producing the uncanny effect of disquiet which characteristically purists within the discipline seek to expel outside. Compare the

insistent desire of psychologists and analytical philosophers to prove psychoanalysis wrong, to delegitimize yet again something that after all already has no legitimacy, with the insistently repeated attempts to refute racism and racialism on logical or scientific grounds. Psychoanalysis can locate, and even dislocate, the logics of racism precisely because, like racism, it is a discourse whose object is its own ravelled fantasy.

If racism involves a structure of sameness and difference, it also suggests a realignment of any simple model of 'the Other'. There is an immediate problem about using the term 'the Other' dualistically in relation to racism in a psychoanalytic context in so far as for psychoanalysis the Other is already a part of the psyche, the unconscious that remains unacceptable and uncanny because it is other to the ego and is not centred in a determinate self, amounting rather to the disturbing effect of the self dislocated, as it were, into the third person. Now if the symbolic structure of the social is that of the other, then the social is already the other—whereas those who are the objects of racist antipathy are precisely those who remain other to the social, in psychoanalytic terms, therefore, other to the other. At this point the trauma becomes the inkling that the other's other could in fact be the same, the double of yourself.

Forcing an uncanny recognition of what should have remained hidden, racism articulates desire and disavowal. Neither subject nor object, the structure of racism takes the form not of simple negation, but of 'denegation' (*Verneinung*), that is negation simultaneously accompanied by disavowal. This is the paradoxical form of what Kristeva calls the 'abject', a state of simultaneous revulsion and desire:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful – a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned.²¹

These two incompatible but inescapable poles of attraction and repulsion enforce a blockage that produces its own narrative logic of repetition: the point about the racial stereotype is indeed that it *is* always a stereotype, the other is thus paradoxically always the same. The threatening heterogeneity is always reduced, while the desire that the other conjures up is displaced into the (dis)pleasure of repetition, a repetition that energizes and ensures the perpetuation and continuity of the cultural and ideological forms of racism through the ages—a parasite that lives on the exercise of power.

(1993)

Notes

1. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 287.
2. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte in Surveys from Exile*, 146.
3. See my *Colonial Desire*.
4. Cf. Bhabha, 'A Question of Survival'.
5. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
6. See Parker, *Nationalisms and Sexualities*.
7. Paul Gilroy, 'Ethnic Absolutism', in Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, *Cultural Studies*, 187-98.
8. Certain societies have had more fluid, 'Lamarckian' notions of ethnicity. See Linnekin, 'Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity', 446-8.
9. Glazer and Moynihan, *Ethnicity*.
10. Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*. See also Balibar, 'Racism and Nationalism', in Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, 37-67.
11. See Burleigh and Wiperman, *The Racial State*.
12. See Dalal, 'The Racism of Jung'.
13. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*.

14. Freud is particularly vulnerable in his social psychology, which draws on the work of Le Bon and others.
15. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 334-6.
16. In 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' (1921), *Civilization and its Discontents*, 12:131. In a footnote Freud links it to life/death instincts.
17. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 73. Further references will be cited in the text.
18. Fryer, *Staying Power*.
19. Kovel, *White Racism*, 53.
20. Apter and Pietz, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. cf. Lyotard in Benjamin, *The Lyotard Reader*, 67-8.
21. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1. Kristeva has more recently elaborated her analysis of racism in *Strangers to Ourselves*.

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