RACISM, EGALITARIANISM and ABORIGINES

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'I think there will always be prejudice while ever there is the *big handouts* given to
Aborigines.... *I feel the white people are the people discriminated against not the
Aboriginal people...* We see cases where Aboriginal people are given *handouts* for
their children to attend school, and in lots of cases the money never reaches the school,
it doesn't go to their education, it goes to the local hotel and this is why until something
is done about this system of this handout -- I'm sure a lot of Aboriginal people don't
want *these handouts* -- but I feel there is this handout and *this abundance of money* that
there'll always be prejudice and this is a sad thing.'
(Talkback Radio, Kempsey, 1980)

The statement was made in a talkback radio discussion on the issue of welfare
funding for Aborigines. The theme of 'big handouts' and 'this abundance of
money' being directed towards Aborigines is quite a widespread opinion
amongst whites in the town as it is in many other rural towns with significant
Aboriginal populations in New South Wales (See Cowlishaw, 1988). It sustains
an exaggerated view of the degree of financial assistance that individual families
received from the government.

The intention underlying this public statement is to distance the speaker from
any assertions of racist attitudes[1]. In fact, it is argued that 'white people are the
people discriminated against'. The view of the Aborigine as 'victim' is inverted.
Government support for Aborigines in the form of the 'big handout' violates
the principle of egalitarianism inasmuch as Aborigines are treated as a 'special
interest group'. Indeed, the speaker suggests that these non-egalitarian practices
are the real source for perpetuating white prejudice. Such assertions are a
critique of existing government policy. Yet, these concerns remain inextricably
linked to evaluations of Aborigines unworthiness to receive welfare benefits, a
situation only exacebated by their receipt of 'big handouts'. While there is an
appeal to egalitarian principles of equality, the speaker shifts ground in the

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1. The issue of the application of the term 'racist' has attracted wide media attention as a result
    of the debate over Asian immigration, the sacking of a radio personality by the broadcast
    tribunal for discriminatory remarks and the debate about an Aboriginal Treaty. Those
    participants in the debates who have been labelled racist have responded by asserting that
    this is a new form of 'McCarthyism' which stifles debate and critical discussion. Simper,
    writing in national newspaper, *The Australian*, has set out the defence of the position of those
    tagged racist. In support of this, Simper and others narrowly define racism as a belief that
    'his own race or culture is superior to another' (July 16-17, 1988). Racism is reduce to its
    most literal expressions and linked to the ahistorical notion of prejudice.

statement to an assessment of Aborigines which reproduces inferiorising racial typifications. Aborigines are depicted as incapable of handling welfare money, misdirecting its use from the intended purposes. The monies are allegedly frittered away on the most ephemeral desires, drinking in the local hotel, rather than directed towards education, to the acquisition of knowledge and social betterment. Their depiction as a 'problem' has always held a central place in racist reasoning[2].

The positioning of Aborigines as 'problem' in everyday utterances continue to hold an importance in the reproduction of racial discourses. The contemporary form of racism is similar to those of the past in its fixation with negative evaluations of Aborigines and the assumption that Aborigines are historically invariable, incapable of change. Despite these *a priori* assumptions, Aborigines, nevertheless, are a continual source of speculation and evaluation. Such constant speculation and exaggerated concern, I would suggest, reflects an awareness of diverse and countervailing discourses about Aborigines and also commentary by Aborigines about their own social circumstances. The 'Aboriginal problem' becomes an authenticating discourse in the contemporary period, bound up in processes which depoliticise it as racially based. The notion that social conflict is racially inspired is rejected, and conflict is portrayed instead as a consequence of 'natural fact' of observation, as neutral and innocent.

The problematised nature of racial discourse shows that the conditions of existence that characterised racial thought and practice in an earlier period no longer prevail. Indeed, bureaucratic discourse and practices have gained a pre-eminent place in the contemporary period. Aborigines are located among a broad range of welfare recipients who, within the logic of policy intervention, are defined as victims of the social conditions of their existence. Support and retraining are seen to provide the basis for the individuals return to 'normalcy'. The shift has problematised the commonsense of the interpretive and social practices that sustained earlier racial, essentially biological, discourses and racial segregation and led to the current reformulation: a reformulation that no less seeks to construct Aborigines as historically invariant.

The significance of this reformulation of racial discourse has implications over and above the local level inasmuch as it forces analysis to move beyond traditional approaches to an understanding of racism. The problem of using 'race' and 'racism' as explanatory concepts for understanding human behaviour is the tendency to reify them as pregiven categories of human experience. The critiques of racism have generally focussed on two areas: overt individual acts of racial prejudice which have immediate consequences on the lives of individuals; and institutional forms of racism which are more subtle, less visible and, yet, no less destructive. The latter is measured in terms of the dramatic statistical differences between the Aboriginal and white populations, for

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2.   I have drawn the use of the terms 'victim' and 'problem' from the approach taken by Gilroy (1987).

example, in areas of health, education, and housing[3]. The critiques of racist thought and practice concentrate upon prejudice and discrimination as an aberration, an additional variable, that unnecessarily distorts the functioning of economic and political processes.

These analyses of racism increasingly reduce themselves to a comfortable pedagogical form of moral critique of 'prejudice' or 'discrimination' in which the social construction of racism is displaced as a central issue. Racism is subsumed within a more general phenomenon, prejudice, which depicts the problem as an irrational response to those of different colour, physical characteristics, custom or belief. It is seen to be essentially an irrational reaction based on fear, ignorance or misconception, which may be ameliorated by better communication and more accurate information. In this, racism is reduced to a perennial aspect of the human condition which does not require explanation. In other words, the use of racism in this way as an explanatory concept ultimately reifies it into an ahistorical phenomenon rather than a historical and social construct.

Even marxist approaches, when race relations are treated as social relations (and not human behaviour), are often more concerned to explain the forms of exploitation than racism as a social and historical construct. Racism is reduced to an opportunist borrowing to legitimate 'super-exploitation' in capitalist society where class-exploitation is endemic to the structure of economic relations. Racism is subordinated as an explanatory concept to a more general understanding of capitalist relations rather than analysing the race 'problem' as politically constructed.

The issue of race is culturally and socially constructed and structured, directly or indirectly, by relations of power. The relations may be given expression in forms of legislative repression or discrimination, but their legitimation is premised upon establishing a hierarchy of differences: differences considered incommensurable. Race and racism is a socially constructed way of life which is elaborated and expressed in the mundane, everyday world. The depictions of Aborigines in everyday speech provide an important source for an understanding of the historical and cultural construction of "race' relations. The reproduction of racism in everyday speech appears quite ephemeral, as it is often understood only as an expression of personal conviction/prejudice, lacking efficacy or immediate consequence. The initial problem here is that such an approach provides only a limited understanding of language; language is here

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3. This has been facilitated by a shift to specialised bureaucratic management of Aborigines which has opened the way for the expansion of quantitative studies of Aborigines and the wider population in general. Numerous survey studies have been carried out by government departments and academics in the area of Aboriginal employment, income, crime, housing, health and education (see Morris, 1989: ch.7). Such forms of knowledge are symptomatic of the expansion of bureaucratic forms of intervention into Aboriginal communities in the post war period.

perceived as a vehicle for communicating private meanings, expressing individuals' unique experience. This simply ignores what Eagleton has recently called the 'linguistic revolution' of this century. That is,

> '... the recognition that meaning is not simply something 'expressed' or 'reflected' in language: it is actually *produced* by it. It is not as though we having meanings or experiences, which we then procede to cloak with words, we can only have meaning in the first place because we have a language to have them in... our experience as individuals is social to the roots; for there can be no such thing as a private language, and to imagine a language is to imagine a whole form of social life.' (1988:60)

Language is always a matter of historical and cultural convention and is an important social practice bound up in the ways we act in and on our social world. Speech is doing something other than conveying information inasmuch as it bestows meaning and categorises experience within the world. Everyday speech is an interpretive practice constituting 'commonsense' or customary understandings, which are inexorably linked to political, administrative and other social processes. The 'real', in effect, is constituted by representational and interpretive practices.

The relativising and reduction of speech to private meanings expressing unique experiences authorises and legitimises much contemporary racist expression. It is an authoritarian relativism which offers itself as the only way of seeing the world. Countervailing discourses can be dismissed on the grounds that they lack validity in terms of alleged commonsense knowledge. The certainty of commonsense prevails; that is, the existence of an external world operating independently of our interpretation. It is assumed in such statements as 'you only have to live here to know what their really like' or 'I've lived with them all my life'. The 'commonsense' that 'reality' is readily at hand legitimates the constant evaluations of and representations of Aborigines as a 'problem'. 'Commonsense', as Eagleton points out, assumes that 'our way of perceiving it (the world) is the natural, self-evident one... (and) believes itself to be historically invariable' (1988:108). The point is that 'commonsense' is ideological in as much as it seeks to claim innocence of the production of meaning, of participation in meaning producing practices.

Historically, racism has been so intertwinned with specific social processes and interpretive practices that it ceases to be recognised as a socially constructed practice (see Morris, 1989). In the more contentious context of the present, racist discourse seeks to canonise its own interpretive practices as 'common sense' knowledge. In this, racism expressed in terms of the Aboriginal 'problem' is drawn from conventional meanings and understandings prevailing within the mainstream patterns of social and political life and applied to Aborigines as a group. The alleged 'transgressions' by Aborigines of mainstream social patterns gives racism its power as an emotive force and pervasive influence on the lives of many people in country towns. What is specific to the commonsense reality of racism is the social construction of notions of ontological difference and hierarchy which reduce Aboriginal lives, the possibilities of their existence, to a singular reality, attributed to an alleged invariant Aboriginal character.

The issue is not what makes racist thought and practice aberrant, but what makes it acceptable and legitimate? From this, we can begin to locate many of the assertions in the opening statement in a wider historical and cultural field. The meanings drawn from the talkback radio statement above only exist contextually. It has meaning and is understood, whether we agree with the sentiments or not, because it is part of a shared cultural and historical context. The social conditions for such a statement did not exist in the past (see Morris, 1989). Hence, the statement itself cannot be detached from its social surroundings, and reduced to an autonomous object, as it can be seen to be part of a range of equivalent meanings expressed in other everyday understanding of Aborigines in a number of contexts, which reinforce its social meaning.

₤ The conditions for the existence of contemporary discussion of Aborigines as 'problem' draws its raw materials from the local social and cultural milieu. The production and circulation of knowledges in the form of inferiorising representations of Aborigines in everyday discourse serves to maintain social and physical distance in a racially divided community. The representations encode in themselves the tension and strained relations that form part of the social fabric of the town. The issue of race has not dissolved, but has been reconstituted in new forms that have their specificity in the present. Historically, such knowledges are shaped and influenced by in wider socio-political and economic changes. In summary, the removal of repressive and discriminatory legislation in New South Wales in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the end of the politics of segregation, played an important role. Aborigines now have equal social and legal rights and access to the major institutions and services available. Previously, Aborigines in Kempsey had been segregated in hospitals and picture theatres, and excluded from schools, cafes, shops, hotels and the local swimming pool. Also, in the past two decades, the major changes in the local economy have removed Aborigines from their structural niche in the economy, as pastoral and agricultural labourers, e.g. fencing, bush work, corn pulling. The introduction of capital and energy intensive production techniques has rendered labour intensive production obsolete (see Morris, 1983)[4]. Aborigines now form part of a pool of chronically unemployed people. Aboriginal dependency has changed from a dependency imposed by political and legalistic controls to the economic coercions of a declining rural economy.

The third feature of this change has been the extension of social rights to Aborigines and the more general expansion of the scope and the range of welfare interventions in the post war period. In this period, there was a shift from policies which saw segregation in one institution i.e., government reserves as a site of control and pedagogical reform, to a multiplicity of sites,, e.g., educational, welfare and legal institutions to facilitate Aboriginal assimilation (see

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4.   A comparison of available survey data between 1965 and 1980 reveals a significant decline in Aboriginal employment (Young, 1982, Rowley, 1982). Young's fiigures reveal that males earning a wage dropped from 56.5 per cent of the surveyed population in 1965 to 41 per cent in 1976, and to 28.7 per cent in 1980 (1982:22)

Carrington in this issue). As part of this transition, equivalent social welfare benefits such as maternity allowances, family allowances and unemployment and sickness benefits (1957) and pensions (1959) were granted to Aborigines in N.S.W. Access was further facilitated by the expansion of welfare services in general[5]. The forms of welfare interventions are consistent with the ethos of economic egalitarianism as they seek to guarantee a minimum standard of living, by way of employment benefits, and/or ameliorate the social conditions of inequality through housing and health cover.

Collectively, these social changes have brought about shifts in the ideological constructions of Aborigines within the local community. The forms of racism that are prevalent gain their significance through their opposition to welfare interventions in general, but more specifically for Aborigines. Aborigines are pejoratively defined by their real or assumed place within, or relationship to, welfare services. However, the representations of Aborigines go further than simply asserting a social fact inasmuch as they identify Aborigines as inherently inferior; a fact, in turn, allegedly verifiable by their dependency upon social welfare and their perceived utilisation of 'tax payer's money'. Aboriginal dependency upon social welfare services is asserted to reveal an inherent essence of Aboriginality.

The criticism of state assistance rejects the view of Aborigines as 'victim', that underpinning welfare interventions and its appropriateness for dealing with Aborigines. The logic of the *formal egalitarianism* of state interventions stresses environmental factors as the source of inequality. The financial and pedagogical interventions seek to ameliorate and remedy the social conditions of individuals and families. At the local community level, formal egalitarianism is rejected and replaced with a *populist egalitarianism*, which stresses that 'all men are created equal' and make their own way according to their own abilities. Given this egalitarian emphasis, the seemingly paradoxical acceptance of racist practices requires further explanation.

The work of Dumont (1972) provides us with an understanding of the paradoxical relationship between racism and the egalitarian ethos of the modern secular or humanist state (see also Kapferer, 1988)[6]. He argues that the pervasive notions of egalitarianism underpin important cultural principles which underlie the constructions of social difference in the modern state. The notion of biological egalitarianism which states that everybody is born equal, provides the fundamental basis of universal citizenship. In other words, the modern state recognises a basic and universal humanity which is accorded rights and dignity. Accordingly, neither group nor class status are given social currency within the

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5.   In 1945, the Public Service Board employed 30,000 people (including teachers) and by 1978 some 77,000 (excluding teachers) an average increase of 4.33 per cent per year. (New South Wales North Coast Region, 1978, Part II:269)

6.   Kapferer's significant work provides a detailed and comprehensive analysis of formative cultural and historical processes associated with ethos of mateship and egalitarianism in the Australian context.

secular state, but rather the individual is made the 'measure of all things'. The principle of biological egalitarianism means that neither birth, occupational status, wealth nor religion may be regarded as impediments to citizenship. Nevertheless, the citizen is recognised as the bearer of rights and responsibilities and must be assessed to be capable of behaving rationally and making rational choices (Turner, 1986:7).

The construction of hierarchical racial differences in the modern secular state has asserted that inferiority is fixed by nature and is, hence, unchangeable by law. The historical emergence of modern racial knowledge and practice is not coincidental, as it provided the cultural logic for the exclusion of certain categories of people from citizenship rights (see Gould, 1987)[7]. Hence, the emergence of a secular racial thought regarded Aborigines as genetically flawed, and, therefore, as incapable of participating in the rights and responsibilities bestowed upon citizens within the popular sovereignty of the modern state. Ascribed membership to a racial group was equivalent to exclusion from the universal conditions governing membership of the 'family of man'.

The predominance of biological racism as a social discourse was closely linked to the denial of Aboriginal equality before the state. A similar logic of exclusion can be traced to those categorised as insane, and children, who, like those belonging to racial groups, were regarded as incapable of carrying out the rights and responsibilities bestowed upon citizens. Biological racism categorised Aborigines as existing 'outside the family of man', as biologically inferior. These evaluations crystallised around the relationship between assessments of personhood and citizenship rights. In the racial policies of exclusion and segregation the evaluations of Aboriginal humanness have held a central place.

The knowledges of biological differences provided the racial basis for a social hierarchy associated with legislative discrimination for the major part of this century. Dumont's argument reveals the relationship between the pervasiveness of biological egalitarianism as a cultural principle underpinning notions of universal citizenship as well as ontological difference based on alleged biological differences. The exploration of Aboriginal humanness formed the nexus of knowledge/power which asserted ontological difference as the basis for racial custodianship by the State. Yet, Dumont's approach tends to reify the modern state into an autonomous entity rather than exploring the constitutive role of the human sciences in the process of differentiation and evaluation of social groups. He also ignores egalitarian sentiments as expressions of the cultural habits of a class-related capitalist society.

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7.   The work of Gould provides a clear account of the relationship between the development of the modern state and the rise of the human sciences. His material reveals the role of the human sciences in the processes of evaluation and differentiation of certain social groups within the modern state. The claims to truth of the human sciences, as Foucault (1982) has pointed out in terms of criminals, played an interstitial role in the process of creating differentiation within the egalitarianism of modern state.

The reformulation of Aboriginal humanness as not fulfilling the conditions of citizenship in the present is through constructions of difference based on ostensibly cultural, rather than racial criterion. The constructions of their humanness are in terms of an inversion of the conventional economic/moral values of the dominant society. The existence of racism is denied as a thing of the past, identified with previous institutional forms of segregation and expressions of biological inferiority. Further, the removal of these 'artificial barriers' to Aboriginal 'success' is seen to reveal their 'true nature'.

The removal of all discriminatory and repressive legislation in the 1960's has meant that Aborigines formally have the same rights of access to public places as whites. The rescinding of discriminatory legislation has removed one of the important elements maintaining the hegemonic unity of Europeans in racially divided towns: the political confining of Aborigines to reserves and from areas of white social life[8]. The relationship between public discourses about Aboriginal inferiority and their political exclusion in an earlier period can be seen in the blunt statement by a white witness from Kempsey appearing before the Parliamentary Committee inquiring into Aboriginal welfare. As he put it, 'you can smell them' (1967:384). Although crudely put, he was simply reiterating a medical discourse associated with the exclusion of Aborigines from cafes, shops and schools on the grounds of disease and contagion (see Morris, 1989). The decline of these political and institutional forms of racism, under the increasing weight of a liberal critique, has rendered the biological determined expressions of racism problematical.

The extent to which such assertions of Aboriginal inferiority have been problematised and discredited in the contemporary period can be seen in the fact that they no longer form a legitimate part of the public/political domain. The expression of such sentiments has become more a matter of private conviction or personal belief. In this, the relativising of knowledge to the realm of private meanings drawn from experience remains a powerful source of legitimation. For example, as one woman pointed out to me, she believed after a life time of observing Aborigines combined with personal contact (her mother had Aboriginal women in regularly to do her washing) that Aborigines were intellectually inferior to whites. The major qualification made was that 'Aborigines are not stupid though, they're cunning, you know, like monkeys'. On another occasion, I was told that 'full bloods' were alright but it was those who had become mixed with whites (genetically) that were the problem. This 'problem' of the 'half caste' was due to the 'union' between lower class whites and Aborigines. As he put it, 'they get the bad' from whites combined with their own Aboriginality. The expression of these 'private beliefs' is contentious precisely because the link formed between such interpretive practices and the social, political and administrative processes has changed over time.

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8.   Aborigines, for example, had been excluded from the local pool in Kempsey since it had opened in 1949. They had been banned from using it on the grounds of hygiene by a council by-law. The by-law was revoked in 1965 (see Morris, 1989:159-160).

For the most part, such assertions in overt discourse do not predominate in the social construction of Aborigines as 'symbolic failures'. The major assertions of Aboriginal inferiority today relate to notions of 'individual deviance' associated with the conventional morality of an autonomous self-regulating individual. This is often condensed into the cliched expression that Aborigines are 'drunken', lazy and live off taxpayer's hard earned money'. The dominant position of such overt expressions reveals that racism has undergone a number of fundamental shifts in emphasis and changes in content.

In the absence of political segregation to provide concrete referents of European moral and intellectual hegemony, the 'knowledge' of a transhistorical Aboriginal inferiority is constructed out of their 'deviance' within the private/personal domains. The metaphysical scaffolding on which previous racial discourse was erected, through standardised notions of biological inferiority, seems less evident.

The 'raw materials' that provide the content for the construction of Aborigines as 'symbolic failures' in the contemporary period are drawn from the perceived 'deviant' personal behaviour of Aborigines and their alleged 'misuse/abuse' of personal property/possessions. The 'deviant' personal behaviour was asserted by whites in a number of areas and in numerous ways. The 'failure' of Aborigines to work was seen to be indicative that 'they are lazy' or 'they just don't want to work' or 'that they just don't stick at anything' or as an indictment of the corrosive effects of social security payments, 'they just won't work since they got the welfare payment'. The construction of knowledge within these negative, pejorative characterisations seeks legitimacy for an *a priori* notion of Aboriginality which grounds its claim to authenticity in the empirical evidence, such as of Aboriginal unemployment.

The criticisms of Aborigines as welfare recipients, of course, are applied to whites as well. *Dependency is axiomatically linked with subordinate status.* This is a central tenet of populist egalitarian sentiments. I would argue that populist egalitarian sentiments are associated with the cultural habits of a class-related capitalist culture. As Heller has recently argued, it is the capacity to stratify society along the functional lines of the division of labour, i.e., 'institutionalised function performance', which has given the forms of life and cultural patterns their class relatedness (1988:2-4). Dependency, in this sense, may well be extended to the status of the young (prefunctional) and the aged (postfunctional) (to use Heller's terms), and understood in terms of capacities developed through natural maturity and decline. Subordinate status is synonymous with absence of self-autonomy. Towards the unemployed, dependency is linked to the view that ones' status is reflected in the remuneration that one receives from the utilisation of natural abilities and skills. The notion of self-autonomy operates as a principle of individual differentiation, mystifying the social and historical conditions of existence by reducing them to 'natural' individual attributes.

Populist egalitarianism does not deny hierarchy, but constitutes it as natural. As everyone is born equal, social hierarchy is established through the use of natural skills and abilities. Criticism of the unemployed is part of a class-related discourse which links assistance through welfare payments with notions of a loss of self-motivation and of self-respect for those on government 'handouts'. Such assertions are part of a general stigma attached to recipients of welfare payments which associates welfare assistance with individual deviance.

However, in the case of European 'dole bludgers', dependency is regarded as an individual aberration, atypical of Europeans in general. Such 'deviant' behaviour by Aborigines has been generally considered to have a uniformity and consistency which pervaded the *whole Aboriginal community*: the absence of self-motivation and self-respect is seen as innate. The absence of self autonomy here operates as a principle defining group differentiation, which similarly mystifies the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal existence by reducing them to 'natural' attributes. Ontological difference, mobilised as a vehicle for racism, is *not* expressed in terms of genetic or phenotypical traits, but rather as deviance from the conventional moral values encoded in a productionist ethos.

Difference is, nevertheless, ascribed as ontological and asserted as the basis for hierarchy. Such assertions, obviously, are not applied to Europeans. As an Aboriginal woman put it,

> 'If a whitefella does something wrong, he's wrong, (but) if a blackfella does something wrong, we're all wrong.'

In the contemporary period, as many Aborigines were aware, the chronic unemployment in their community was transformed into a general ahistorical characteristic of Aborigines. The evaluation and understanding of Aborigines was as a *group* in which selective elements are utilised to ascribe general characteristic which exist outside of time and place.

Other empirical sources for European evaluation were provided by a continual focus on Aboriginal gambling and drinking. The public display of drunkenness usually provided the reference point for the perceived high incidence of drinking amongst Aborigines. More often, however, the primary criticism was that most of the money they received from government 'handouts', as they were inevitably called, only went to the local pub or TAB (State government betting agency). In this regard, it was pointed out to me, that whereas 'most whites would only have small bets, Aborigines place bets in $50 notes'. Similarly, it was pointed out to me that if I really wanted to research Aborigines, I should sit on the library steps opposite the pub that Aborigines frequented and count how many went in. Then, I was assured, I would know what Aborigines were really like.

What is explicit in these characterisations of Aborigines is that they are wasteful and indulgent and misusing 'taxpayers's money'. But they are saying something more than this. Such depictions of 'deviant' personal behaviours underpinned an ontological view of Aborigines as 'irrational beings' who, in terms of

'taxpayers' money, are incapable of controlling the quantitative allocation of welfare money. They are, in effect, beings who cannot calculate. Such characterisations suggest that Aborigines exist primarily through sensations, that is, through the satisfaction of desires. This is seen to be all that they are capable of doing.

Here, there is a unity linking the assertions that Aborigines are incapable of work, are drunks, and are spendthrift gamblers. Such representations are derived from the inversion of the conventional moral values embedded in the productionist ethos of a capitalist culture. It is through these cultural lenses that Aborigines are constructed as 'symbolic failures'. Central to this are the cultural habits associated with the notion of work. It is through work that individuals become independent entities capable of controlling their own existence. Furthermore, work is a regular, disciplined and purposeful activity which stands in direct contrast to the consequences of receiving 'handouts', considered to be money for 'doing nothing'. The conventional attitudes associated with the idea of work are not simply instrumental values relating to the satisfaction of wants but associated with moral values of acting rationally and responsibly. This self-conscious rational individual, an individual with conscious purposes, one who consciously shapes his/her own existence, is juxtaposed against the irregular and undisciplined behaviour of Aborigines whose unrestrained desire seeks to satisfy only the most ephemeral and immediate wants.

In terms of consumption, personal deviance is associated with the failure to comply with cultural notions of deferred gratification. The contrast is with a more restrained and calculative form of pleasure, such as the small bet, which implies the harnessing of desire to reason. Notions of dignity and self-esteem are seen here to be maintained through a continual opposition to the fragmenting tendencies of desire and impulse.

A similar unity in the evaluation of Aborigines by Europeans is found in the characterisations of Aboriginal housing, characterisations which also build up a picture of Aborigines as irrational beings who misuse and abuse their property and possessions. Perhaps, the most striking expression of this was encapsulated in an account of an Aboriginal family, who allegedly, had chopped a large hole in the floor of their house so that they could drop all their rubbish and food scraps through to the pigs which lived under the house. Chicken wire had been run around the foundations by the occupiers to enclose the pigs. The themes of abuse of personal possessions, and the unhygienic and the polluting properties of pigs and rubbish, are self evident. But what is also important is the satirisation of Aboriginal rationality as primitive or naive which is posited in the inappropriate use and violation of private space. The critique embodied in this anecdote was founded on a clear cut demarcation of inside/outside space, a norm which the Aborigines were regarded to have violated. The pigs should be located in outside space but are attached to inside space and, likewise, the rubbish and food scraps should be dispatched to outside space but remain within inside space. The Aborigines in this anecdote had, in primitive and irrational style, privatised

elements of outside space. What is signified here is the belief that Aborigines are incapable of understanding the most rudimentary cultural codes associated with domestic life. What is mystified here is that both the selection of elements defining Aborigines and the interpretation is unified and given meaning by particular cultural codes.

The distinguishing feature of such representations of Aborigines is their claim to legitimacy through 'empirical verification'. Such claims are made on the grounds of personal experience, observation, or the communicated personal experience of others, for example, those who lived next door to an Aboriginal family, who had occupied a house after the family had moved out, or who had been give information by a serviceman who had made calls to repair appliances. If the pejorative characterisations of Aborigines are inaccurate it does not necessarily follow that they are illusory. The raw materials are drawn from the present and are structurally reinforced by the Aborigines present circumstances. Both the selection of elements and the interpretation are mystified by such 'commonsense' verifications.

The connection between empirical evidence, inaccuracy and illusion can be made apparent in the degree of welfare assistance ascribed to Aborigines. Aborigines in Kempsey receive the same range of welfare payments and pensions as do members of the European community, except in the case of a secondary school allowance provided for Aboriginal children ($2.50 per week). Yet, the level of 'handouts' was seen by local Europeans to be far in excess of those available to Europeans. It was pointed out to me, for example, that if Aborigines abuse their homes or their cars, the government would pay for the repairs. The source of the evidence for car repairs was derived from those who serviced the cars and inferred from the fact that Aborigines paid by government cheque. No such government policy has ever existed. In fact, they were cashing their social security benefits. Similarly, it was assumed that the government paid for financial instalments on houses, cars, television sets and so on. Consistent with this was the view expressed that 'Aborigines received a cheque every second day for some form of allowance' (Talkback Radio, Kempsey 1980).

Such exaggerated claims could be said to demonstrate the social distance between Aborigines and the rest of the community. I would argue, however, that this is not a matter of ignorance but that such 'inaccuracies' are ideological statements of Aboriginal inferiority. The structuring of this racial discourse is grounded in an opposition to those points of bureaucratic intervention associated with formal egalitarianism. These expressions of racism gain their significance through their opposition to the objectifications of Aborigines as 'victim'. Within the context of the negative perception of welfare, *the assertions of such overwhelming welfare dependency continually act to provide a symbolic index of the degree of Aboriginal inferiority and confirm their incapacity to manage*

and control their own affairs. What has emerged is a form of racism in which ontological difference is constructed out of alleged personal deviant behaviours, misuse/abuse of property/possessions and the levels of welfare dependency.

The 'objectivity' of such constructions is authenticated in the personal observations or personal knowledge which provide 'commonsense' verification from the everyday. Such 'reality' appears to have 'naturally' selected itself. Underpinning such assertions, however, I have argued is a *culturally constituted* and transhistorical view of Aborigines as irrational beings incapable of calculative reason. They cannot control the quantitative allocation of taxpayers' money nor appreciate other benefits from government services. The issue of race and race relations in public discourse is erased in such representations, and yet, Aborigines continue to be constructed as historically invariable, and their social circumstances reduced to the realm of the natural and inevitable. In this respect, it follows that the political efficacy of government policies is denied as well as the objectifications of Aborigines as 'victim' that accompany them. Despite the invisibility of 'race' in public discourse, the Aborigine remains an eternal 'problem', insensitive to ethics, the negation of values. Such typifications sustain the hegemonic unity of whites in the community of a racially divided town. The abolition of judicial forms of racial discrimination from the domain of the political state has not abolished racism nor 'freed' Aborigines from inequality.

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