

## FEELINGS ABOUT DIFFERENCE

The senior partner of a well-known professional firm around here put his home on the market with us and he said: 'You sent me a Mr Shah and you sent me a Mr Patel and you sent me a Mr Whatever-it-was.' He said: 'I recognize that a lot of the big money comes from several thousand miles east of Dover nowadays, and I don't want you to think that I've got any prejudice at all, but would you be able to send me an Englishman one day?'

(Suburban London estate agent)<sup>1</sup>

There are several possible routes into the problem of social and spatial exclusion. I want to start by considering people's feelings about others because of the importance of feelings in their effect on social interaction, particularly in instances of racism and related forms of oppression. If, for example, we consider the question of residential segregation, which is one of the most widely investigated issues in urban geography, it could be argued that the resistance to a different sort of person moving into a neighbourhood stems from feelings of anxiety, nervousness or fear. Who is felt to belong and not to belong contributes in an important way to the shaping of social space. It is often the case that this kind of hostility to others is articulated as a concern about property values but certain kinds of difference, as they are culturally constructed, trigger anxieties and a wish on the part of those who feel threatened to distance themselves from others. This may, of course, have economic consequences.

Feelings about others, people marked as different, may also be associated with places. Nervousness about walking down a street in a district which has been labelled as dangerous, nausea associated with particular smells or, conversely, excitement, exhilaration or a feeling of calm may be the kinds of sensations engendered by other environments. Repulsion and desire, fear and

attraction, attach both to people and to places in complex ways. Central to this question is the construction of the self, the way in which individual identity relates to social, cultural and spatial contexts. In this chapter, I will suggest some of the connections between the self and material and social worlds, moving towards a conception of the 'ecological self'.<sup>2</sup>

### ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF

Central to early visions of the self was the idea of human individuality.<sup>3</sup> Rationalist philosophers recognized that only human beings were consciously aware of their own life, which gave them the capacity to act autonomously. Nineteenth-century romanticism similarly encouraged a view of the free spirit, and this notion of the self was reinforced by capitalist forms of social organization according to which people are highly individuated and assumed to have control of their own destinies. The subject was thus detached from his or her social milieu.

A shift in conceptions of the self was signalled by Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud situated the self in society and argued for connections between the developing self and the material world. Central to his thesis was the unconscious, that 'aspect of psychoanalysis that directly challenges the emphasis in Western thought on the power of reason and rationality, of reflective and conscious control over the self'. Although Freud suggested that on one level the unconscious was detached from reality, on another level 'it is deeply entwined with the needs of the human body, the nature of external reality, and actual social relations'.<sup>4</sup> The importance of external reality for the psyche was outlined in *Civilization and its Discontents*, published in 1929. In this book, Freud wrote about the repression of libidinal desires specifically in relation to the materialism of capitalist societies. He claimed that one form of repression was an excessive concern with cleanliness and order.<sup>5</sup> Personal hygiene, for example, is widely accepted as desirable on medical and social grounds, but it removes bodily smell as a source of sexual stimulation. Washing and deodorizing the body has assumed a ritual quality and in some people can become obsessive and compulsive. This kind of observation raises issues about the role of dominant social and political structures in the sublimation of desire and the shaping of the self. What are the sanctions against a group or an

individual represented as dirty or disorderly? In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud brackets cleanliness and order, both distancing the subject from the uncertainties and fears of the urban-industrial environment. However, as Smith observes, 'order is a part of the tragedy of modern urban culture: it brings frustration but it cannot be done without'.<sup>6</sup>

### OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY

Freud's psychoanalytical writing provides a starting point for an examination of relationships between the self and the social and material world. This is the field of object relations theory, which, for Freud, referred to the infant's relationship to the humans in its world, but it is a theory which has been generalized to include non-human aspects of the object world, a wider environment of human and material objects, and extended beyond infancy. The latter is a particularly important contribution of Erik Erikson,<sup>7</sup> who argued that 'the personality is engaged with the hazards of existence continuously, even as the body's metabolism copes with decay'. Erikson tried to model the changes in the self over the life course in the form of eight stages of ego development which he described as the 'Eight Ages of Man'. The details of his schema are not as important as the idea of change throughout life, resulting from continuous engagement with the environment.

Object relations theory, as it has been reworked by psychoanalytical theorists since Freud, has an important role in my argument.

Object relations theory assumes that from birth, the infant engages in formative relations with 'objects' – entities perceived as separate from the self, either whole persons or parts of the body, either existing in the external world or internalized as mental representations.<sup>8</sup>

It suggests ways in which boundaries emerge, separating the 'good' and the 'bad', the stereotypical representations of others which inform social practices of exclusion and inclusion but which, at the same time, define the self. In the following account I draw primarily on Melanie Klein's work but I also refer to authors who put more emphasis on the social context of psychoanalytic theory, particularly Julia Kristeva and Constance Perin.<sup>9</sup>

Klein,<sup>10</sup> like Freud, focuses on infancy but she provides a clear and quite convincing argument about the development of the social self. Her argument is that in the process of birth and immediately after birth the infant experiences

anxieties associated with the initial discomforts of being – light, cold, noise, and so on, but comfort comes from being held by the mother and from breast-feeding, which make possible ‘the infant’s first loving relation to a person [object]’. The infant experiences a feeling of one-ness with the mother, who, ‘in the first few months . . . represents to the child the whole of the external world’. Necessarily, both good and bad emanate from the mother because she is the source of all of the earliest experience of social relationships. The mother is, therefore, both a good and a bad object. However, this initial, pre-Oedipal one-ness with the mother is lost as the child develops a sense of border, a sense of self-hood, and a sense of the social. This comes about through a combination of two processes. The first is introjection, whereby ‘the situations the infant lives through and the objects he or she encounters are taken into the self and become a part of inner life. Inner life cannot be evaluated . . . without these additions to the personality that come from continuous introjection.’ Klein identifies a simultaneous process of projection, ‘which implies that there is a capacity of the child to attribute to other people . . . feelings of various kinds, predominantly love and hate.’ However, objects are not necessarily either polarized or in balance. As she recognized, if projection is predominantly hostile, empathy with others is impaired. Conversely, if the child ‘loses itself entirely in others’, a condition of excessive introjection, it becomes incapable of independent, objective judgement. Seeing the world exclusively as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is, in Klein’s terms, the paranoid-schizoid position. Most personalities exhibit finer gradations of goodness and badness, however, and do, in her view, achieve a kind of balance.

This concern with balance as a desirable personality characteristic is found in much psychotherapy and it represents a more optimistic view of the self than that of those social philosophers who see the psyche as buffeted by social forces.<sup>11</sup> However, this is not the main issue here. Whatever the contribution of introjection and projection to the shape of the emerging self, the significant contribution of Klein is her view of the emerging sense of border, of separateness and self, as a social and cultural process. As Hoggett interprets Klein’s argument,<sup>12</sup> this sense of border is confirmed through the construction of ‘an endless series of misrepresentations, all of which share an essential quality, the quality of otherness, of being not-me’.

Separation from the mother has a cost, that is, an anxiety which results from a fear of merging again with the mother. This internal fear is externalized, and security is gained through associating fear with an external threat. The threat comes from an array of ‘others’ which provide protection for the self. They

define the boundary which protects against dissolution. Countering this fear of dissolution, however, merging is associated with comfort and pleasure and separateness with loneliness. This suggests that some people will have a greater boundary consciousness than others. Some will embrace difference, gain pleasure and satisfaction from merging, while others will reject difference. Most personalities will have a mix of both characteristics.

The self is a cultural production. The perpetual restructuring of the self takes place through what Lacan calls the ‘symbolic order’, which includes social and cultural symbolism. The sense of border which emerges in infancy is not an innate sense but a consequence of relating to others and becoming a part of a culture. Thus, the boundary between the inner (pure) self and the outer (defiled) self, which is initially manifest in a distaste for bodily residues but then assumes a much wider cultural significance, derives from parents and other adults who are, by definition, socialized and acculturated. However, some writers have claimed that the marking of this boundary by bodily waste is particularly characteristic of modern western cultures.<sup>13</sup> Associations are made between faeces, dirt, soil, ugliness and imperfection, but these are particularly puritanical, western obsessions. This initial sense of border in the infant in western societies becomes the basis for distancing from ‘others’, but the question of otherness can only be discussed meaningfully in a cultural context, for example, in relation to racism or to a ‘colonial other’. Thus, enthusiasm for psychoanalysis in the social sciences has to be tempered with an acknowledgement of its failure to deal adequately with difference.

An essentialist notion of the bounded self has been challenged in another way by Constance Perin.<sup>14</sup> She argues that the fear of mixing and merging, which is expressed in the imperative of distancing from shit, reflects a particularly masculine concern for autonomy and separateness. It is the mother who experiences one-ness with the baby: she is the one who is primarily responsible for nappy changing and who has the greatest familiarity with the infant’s bodily residues. Thus, female and male roles in child rearing reflect the masculine value of autonomy and the feminine value of merging and a tolerance for difference. This is, in itself, a polarized and essentialist argument, but it does serve to demonstrate how culture might affect conceptions of the boundary between self and other.

## ABJECTION

Maintaining the purity of the self, defending the boundaries of the inner body, can be seen as a never-ending battle against residues – excrement, dead skin, sweat, and so on, and it is a battle that has wider existential significance. To quote Julia Kristeva: 'Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse [*sic*], etc) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death'.<sup>15</sup> Kristeva's reflections on the pure and defiled in her essay on abjection seem particularly compelling. She maintains that the impure can never be completely removed: 'We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger'.<sup>16</sup>

What Kristeva describes as abject is 'opposed to I', it is 'radically excluded', but it is always a presence. She follows Georges Bataille, who defines abjection as 'merely the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things'.<sup>17</sup> Her view of the abject as something, always there, '[hovering] at the borders of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution', as Elizabeth Gross puts it,<sup>18</sup> points to the importance of anxiety, a desire to expel or to distance from the abject other as a condition of existence. This hovering presence of the abject gives it significance in defining relationships to others. It registers in nervousness about other cultures or about things out of place. In another attempt to define the abject, Gross claims that

[It] is an impossible object, still a part of the subject: an object the subject strives to expel but which is ineliminable. In ingesting objects into itself or expelling objects from itself, the 'subject' can never be distinct from these 'objects'. The ingested objects are neither part of the body nor separate from it.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, the urge to make separations, between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, 'us' and 'them', that is, to expel the abject, is encouraged in western cultures, creating feelings of anxiety because such separations can never be finally achieved. This anxiety, as I hope to demonstrate in the next two chapters, is reinforced by the culture of consumption in western societies. The success of capitalism depends on it.

Feelings about others on one level register as *sensations* associated with the

abject – people, things and places in various combinations. Kristeva describes a sense of the abject in visceral terms. Food loathing, for example,

is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly.

Such sensations can become a part of social experience, however, as Alain Corbin suggests in his olfactory tour through French culture.<sup>20</sup> Historically, Corbin suggests that the bourgeois self separated itself from the working-class other through smell or a fear of smell, which returned the bourgeois to the original source of abjection, defilement associated with bodily residues. Similar feelings of abjection, I will suggest, attach also to place, but to understand the connection between abject things, people and places requires an appreciation of 'the generalized other'.

## THE GENERALIZED OTHER

The concept of 'the generalized other' provides a means of spatializing the problem and producing what we might describe as an ecological account of the self, one which situates the self in a full social and cultural context. The term 'generalized other' was first used by George Herbert Mead, who noted the elision of people and objects to whom the child relates in developing a sense of self. He argued that:

It is possible for inanimate objects, no less than for other human organisms, to form parts of the generalized and organized – the completely socialized – other for any given individual... Any thing – any object or set of objects, whether animate or inanimate, human or animal, or merely physical – towards which he acts, or to which he responds socially, is an element in what for him is the generalized other.<sup>21</sup>

Mead's interpretation of the relationship between self and other has fundamental implications for geographical studies of social interaction because it locates the individual in the social and material world. Ian Burkitt gives prominence to Mead's object relations theory for similar reasons.<sup>22</sup> He argues that:

Mead's conception of the self and the psychological apparatus is more useful than Derrida's or Freud's in studying *the body in action*. That is because Mead recognized the practical nature of

the psyche, *that it is always connected to social practice* and does not exist in some separate textual or mental domain. Whereas Derrida and Freud struggled with the metaphor of the mystic writing-pad [for Derrida, a cultural and historical text written into the unconscious, positioning the subject in a textual world], Mead conceptualized that which remains open to new experiences and information as the active person *in their various social locations and settings* (the 'I'). It is the embeddedness in social contexts that allows the individual to be constantly receptive to new stimuli, while at the same time the body carries the forms of history in terms of the cultural image of the self and the disciplines involved in social interaction (the 'me'). So the 'I' and the 'me' are not just psychical but also bodily [my italics].

The social positioning of the self means that the boundary between self and other is formed through a series of cultural representations of people and things which frequently elide so that the non-human world also provides a context for selfhood. To give one example of this kind of cultural representation, in racist discourse animals represented as transgressive and therefore threatening unsullied categories of things and social groups, like rats which come out of the sewers and spread disease, have in turn been used to represent threatening minority groups, like Jews and Gypsies, who are thus constructed as bad objects to which the self relates. To animalize or de-humanize a minority group in this way, of course, legitimates persecution. Interestingly from a geographical perspective, one of the few applications of Mead's generalized other has been in studies of the organization of domestic space by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton,<sup>23</sup> where things in the home which are both positively valued and rejected are seen to have a defining role in relation to the self. They note, in particular, that

the impact of inanimate objects in this self-awareness process is much more important than one would infer from its neglect. Things tell us who we are, not in words but by embodying our intentions. In our everyday traffic of existence, we can also learn about ourselves from objects, almost as much as from people.<sup>24</sup>

People and things come to stand for each other, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton suggest, so that object relations can include relating to others through the material environment. Thus, for one woman,

her home environment reflects an expanded boundary of the self, one that includes a number of past and present relationships. The meanings of the objects she is surrounded by are signs of her ties to this larger system of which she is a part.<sup>25</sup>

This seemed to me to be a promising but little-developed direction for research, one in which the signing of spaces could be examined specifically in

relation to the social self. It had considerable implications for studies of inclusion and exclusion in other spaces.

## CONCLUSION

Object relations theory has a particular value for this study, with its focus on the discrepant. The 'other' could be examined solely as a social category, but feelings about others, the ambivalent sensations of desire and disgust which energize interpersonal and social relations, require an understanding of the self. The emphasis in Kleinian psychoanalysis in particular on introjection and projection connects the self and society, and this then leads to questions about the nature of the border separating self and other as it is constructed in different cultures. The context for this study is 'the West' or 'capitalist society', which are, admittedly, heterogeneous categories, but we can probably talk meaningfully about the characteristic anxieties of the western self, which are explored, for example, by Kristeva in her account of the abject. Abjection seems to me the key to an understanding of exclusion, although the social and spatial contexts of abjection need considerable elaboration.

In subsequent chapters, the geographies of exclusion, the literal mappings of power relations and rejection, are informed by the generalized other. Apart from the collapse of categories like the public and the private which I see as a necessary feature of these geographies, the generalized other of object relations theory gives an invitation to open up debates about otherness, to examine the interconnections of people and things as they constitute and are constituted by places, what I take to be the ecological self (and the ecological other). This has to be taken one step at a time, however. I first look at social boundaries, filling in some details about the people who erect the boundaries and those who are excluded by them, and I then consider the issue of exclusionary landscapes as they have developed in different times and places.

## NOTES

1. Daniel Meadows, *Nattering in Paradise: A word from the suburbs*, Simon and Schuster, London, 1988, p. 40.

2. This term comes from Ulric Neisser, 'Five kinds of self-knowledge', *Philosophical*

*Psychology*, 1 (1), 1988, 35–59. Neisser makes a number of interesting points about the ways in which the self relates to the environment, although he does not say what the environment is. He suggests (1) that we perceive ourselves as embedded within the environment, and acting with respect to it; (2) that the self and the environment exist objectively; information about the self allows us to perceive not only the location of the ecological self but also the nature of its interaction with the environment; (3) that much of the relevant information is kinetic, i.e. relating to movement. Optical structure is particularly important, but self-specifying information is often available to several perceptual modalities at once; and (4) the ecological self is veridically perceived from earliest infancy, but self-perception develops with increasing age and skill. I use the term 'ecological self' in a more inclusive sense, to refer to the self defined in relation to people, things and places, as they relate to each other.

3. Ian Burkitt provides an excellent account of the western self in an historical context in I. Burkitt, 'The shifting concept of the self', *History of the Human Sciences*, 7 (2), 1994, 7–28.

4. Anthony Elliott, *Social Theory and Psychoanalysis in Transition*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, pp. 16–17.

5. Michael Smith, *The City and Social Theory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, pp. 57–58.

6. *ibid.*, p. 58.

7. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970.

8. Claire Kahane, 'Object relations theory', in Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A critical dictionary*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 284.

9. Constance Perin is a social anthropologist who has drawn on psychoanalytical theory in her studies of mainstream America. Julia Kristeva's writing is impossible to categorize, but her psychoanalytical reflections connect with a number of social and political issues. I find her writing provocative and stimulating. Her arguments are wide ranging, touching on religion, literature, social anthropology and the politics of difference.

10. Melanie Klein, *Our Adult World and its Roots in Infancy*, Tavistock Pamphlet 2, London, 1960.

11. Notably, Norbert Elias: 'By his birth [the subject] is inserted into a functional complex with a quite definite structure; he must conform to it, shape himself in accordance with it and perhaps develop further on its basis' (N. Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 14).

12. Paul Hoggett, 'A place for experience: a psychoanalytic perspective on boundary, identity and culture', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10, 1992, 345–356.

13. Constance Perin asserts that 'Evil is embodied according to Western beliefs in excrement: Defilement, Devilry, Disease and Sin shape this conceptual system' (C. Perin, *Belonging in America*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1988, p. 178).

14. *ibid.*, pp. 198–207.

15. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 71.

16. *ibid.*, p. 3.

17. *ibid.*, p. 56.

18. Elizabeth Gross, 'The body of signification', in J. Fletcher and A. Benjamin (eds), *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The work of Julia Kristeva*, Routledge, London, 1990, pp. 80–103.

19. Elizabeth Gross, 'Julia Kristeva', in Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A critical dictionary*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 198.

20. Alain Corbin, *The Fragrant and the Foul: Odor and the French social imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1986.

21. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1934.

22. Burkitt, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

23. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic symbols and the self*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.

24. *ibid.*, p. 91.

25. *ibid.*, p. 104. In a later essay, Eugene Rochberg-Halton suggested that

the meaning of things one values is not limited just to the individual object itself but also includes the spatial context in which the object is placed, forming a domain of personal territoriality. In other words, the background context or gestalt of the thing also reveals something and results show how different rooms reveal different conceptions of the self

(Eugene Rochberg-Halton, 'Object relations, role models and the cultivation of the self', *Environment and Behavior*, 16 (3), 1984, 335–368)

## IMAGES OF DIFFERENCE

The determination of a border between the inside and the outside according to 'the simple logic of excluding filth', as Kristeva puts it, or the imperative of 'distancing from disgust' (Constance Perin) translates into several different corporeal or social images which signal imperfection or a low ranking in a hierarchy of being. Exclusionary discourse draws particularly on colour, disease, animals, sexuality and nature, but they all come back to the idea of dirt as a signifier of imperfection and inferiority, the reference point being the white, often male, physically and mentally able person. In this chapter, I will discuss ways in which psychoanalytical theory has been used in the deconstruction of stereotypes, those 'others' from which the subject is distanced, and I will then examine some of the particular cultural sources of stereotyping in western societies. Stereotypes play an important part in the configuration of social space because of the importance of distancing in the behaviour of social groups, that is, distancing from others who are represented negatively, and because of the way in which group images and place images combine to create landscapes of exclusion. The issues I examine concern oppression and denial. I try to show how difference is harnessed in the exercise of power and the subordination of minorities.<sup>1</sup>

### STEREOTYPES

The reception and acceptance of stereotypes, 'images of things we fear and glorify', as Sander Gilman puts it,<sup>2</sup> is a necessary part of coming to terms with the world. In the following passage from his psychoanalytical account of the

deep structure of stereotypes, Gilman assigns a central role to stereotyping in the structuring or bounding of the self:

The child's sense of self splits into a 'good' self which, as the self mirroring the earlier stage of the complete control of the world [the stage of pre-Oedipal unity with the mother] is free from anxiety, and the 'bad' self which is unable to control the environment and is thus exposed to anxieties. The split is but a single stage in the development of the normal personality. In it lies, however, the root of all stereotypical perceptions. For, in the normal course of development, the child's understanding of the world becomes seemingly ever more sophisticated. The child is able to distinguish even finer gradations of 'goodness' and 'badness' so that by the later Oedipal stage an illusion of verisimilitude is cast over the inherent (and irrational) distinction between the 'good' and 'bad' world and self, between control and loss of control, between acquiescence and denial.<sup>3</sup>

Both the self and the world are split into good and bad objects, and the bad self, the self associated with fear and anxiety over the loss of control, is projected onto bad objects. Fear precedes the construction of the bad object, the negative stereotype, but the stereotype – simplified, distorted and at a distance – perpetuates that fear. Most personalities draw on a range of stereotypes, not necessarily wholly good, not necessarily wholly bad, as a means of coping with the instabilities which arise in our perceptions of the world. They make the world seem secure and stable. While both good and bad stereotypes serve to maintain the boundaries of the self, to protect the self from transgressions when it appears to be threatened, most people have a large and sophisticated array of objects to draw on. As Gilman reminds us:

Our Manichean perception of the world as 'good' and 'bad' is triggered by the recurrence of the type of insecurity which induced our initial division of the world into 'good' and 'bad'. For the pathological individual, every confrontation sets up this echo... for the non-pathological individual, the stereotype is a momentary coping mechanism, one that can be used and then discarded once anxiety is overcome.<sup>4</sup>

It is evident that good and bad both resonate in stereotypical representations of others. As Zygmunt Bauman commented on taboos, which is what many stereotypes are, 'the human attitude is an intricate mixture of interest and fear, reverence and abhorrence, impulsion and repulsion'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the stereotype may capture something that has been lost, an emotional lack, a desire, at the same time that it represents fear or anxiety. The good stereotype may represent an unattainable fantasy whereas the bad stereotype may be perceived as a real, malign presence from which people want to distance themselves. A common good stereotype of Gypsies, for example, locates them in the past or in a

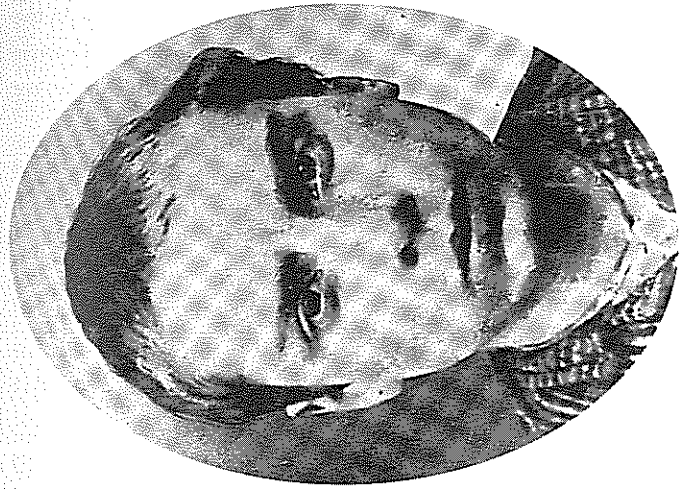




BOY MORALLY INSANE



BOY MORALLY INSANE



HEAD OF CRIMINAL



HEAD OF CRIMINAL

Plate 2.1 'Criminal types' from Cesare Lombroso's collection. Lombroso's use of photographic portraits in his work on criminality and madness demonstrates the historical importance of physical categorization in the cultural construction of normality and deviance (source: Ferrero 1911)



distant country where they are seen through a romantic mist. This is convenient because the good stereotype does not then contradict the bad stereotype. The Gypsy as a 'good object', an association of Gypsies with desire, is conveyed nicely in Hermann Hesse's poem *Glorious World*:

Sultry wind in the tree at night, dark Gypsy woman  
World full of foolish yearning and the poet's breath.

Compare this with a characterization of Gypsies by Gina Ferrero, the daughter of the racist anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, in a commentary on her father's writing:<sup>6</sup>

an entire race of criminals, with all the passions and vices common to delinquent types: idleness, ignorance, impetuous fury, vanity, love of orgies and ferocity.

Both a fear for the boundaries of the self and a desire to merge are intimated in these representations, but in fact both dehumanize and contribute to a deviant image because both are, by definition, distortions. As Homi Bhabha suggests,<sup>7</sup> the stereotype is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation which denies the play of difference. 'Others' disturb the observer's world-view, but the stereotype removes them from the scene in the sense that they are distinct from the world of everyday experience. Because there is little or no interaction with 'others', the stereotyped image, whether 'good' or 'bad', is not challenged.

Obviously, it is negative stereotypes which are of greatest consequence in understanding instances of social and spatial exclusion. Here, Julia Kristeva's conception of abjection, that unattainable desire to expel those things which threaten the boundary, and the abject, that list of threatening things and threatening others, seems to me to be fundamental. The earliest experience of abjection in the child is a reaction to excrement as the infant is socialized into adult categorizations of the pure and the defiled, and this then becomes a metaphor for other sources of defilement which are embodied in stereotypes. The sources of bodily defilement are projected onto others, whose world is *epidermalized*. As Iris Young argues:

When the dominant culture defines some groups as different, as the Other, the members of these groups are imprisoned in their bodies. Dominant discourse defines them in terms of bodily characteristics and constructs those bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated or sick.<sup>8</sup>

Or, as Stallybrass and White put it succinctly: 'Differentiation depends upon disgust.'<sup>9</sup> Verbal and visual images which have their source in the idea of defilement shade into those which represent the body as less than perfect. Thus, the photographs in Plate 2.1, which come from Cesare Lombroso's catalogue of the other,<sup>10</sup> point to a connection between visual images of physical imperfection, according to his scale of being which differentiates the normal and the deviant, and mental illness or disability, conditions which threaten the boundaries of the self. An obsession with scaling and measurement of physical characteristics in order to determine moral boundaries and marginalize the other was particularly characteristic of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century science, but the association of appearances and moral characteristics is an enduring one.

I suggested in the last chapter that the social self could also be seen as a place-related self, and this applies also to stereotypes of the other which assume negative or positive qualities according to whether the stereotyped individual or group is 'in place' or 'out of place'. The cases that I discuss later in the book demonstrate how this condition of being discrepant or, conversely, of belonging, is identified. The issue concerns the extension of the 'generalized other' to things, material objects and places. Thus, a place stereotype might be a romantic representation of a landscape to which a social group are seen to belong or not, depending on the consistency or incongruity of the group and place stereotypes. For the moment, I will focus on some of the main signifiers of otherness in western cultures as a prelude to an integration of the social and spatial dimensions of the problem. The key areas that I examine are those of colour, disease and nature.

## BLACK AND WHITE

The use of colour to signify positive/negative, life/death, superior/inferior, safe/dangerous, and so on, is evident in all cultures. Here, I will refer only to the use of colour in white European cultures, and then only black and white, because a cross-cultural account of the use of a wide palette of colours would be long-winded and not particularly relevant. The justification for considering these two colours is, first, that European nations are implicated in most accounts of racism and colonialism and rules expressed in terms of black and white have been important in the process of regulating and dominating the colonized and, second,

Dirt brings Flies  
Flies bring Disease

Cleanliness means Health  
Dirt means Suffering

The result of Cleanliness is Happiness

The result of Dirt is Misery

**Where there's Dirt there's Danger**

DESIGNED BY THE HEALTH & CLEANLINESS COUNCIL, 5, TAVISTOCK SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1. CARLISLE

Plates 2.2a and b Dirt and blackness as signifiers in a white society. Moral instruction by the Health and Cleanliness Council, London (probably 1920s)

**Baa/Baa/BLACK SHEEP  
Run & wash your face  
If TEACHER sees you dirty  
You'll soon be in  
Disgrace!**

**HEALTH & CLEANLINESS COUNCIL, 5, TAVISTOCK SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1.**

CHILDREN KNOW WELL THEIR TEACHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS DIRT.

that they are readily associated with defilement and purity.

Black is used routinely to describe dirt which, in turn, is associated with shame and disease. In other words, it has both practical and moral associations, which make it a potent marker of social difference. In the common usage of white Europeans, it is a negative signifier of class, race, ethnicity. The way in which black has been used to indicate class difference is suggested by the illustrations in Plate 2.2a and 2.2b, which come from a teachers' guide to health and cleanliness (published by the Health and Cleanliness Council in London in the 1920s and written by two Ph.D.s, one of whom was also the author of *Psychoanalysis in the Classroom!*). Black is also the colour of death, a source of defilement, a state which threatens life, and of the corpse, which signifies decay and contagion: 'If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of all wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.'<sup>11</sup> It is notable that organizations that have been devoted in a big way to death, the extreme rejection of difference, like the Nazis and other fascists, have adopted black for their collective identity.

Black, then, has been used in white societies to signal fear. A clear example of the use of black and associated images to convey a threatening otherness appears in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, in which, as Rosemary Jackson notes,

The family excludes everything foreign to itself as being unnatural. It guarantees ontological stability through limitation and closure. By the end of *Wuthering Heights*, the threat represented by Cathy and Heathcliff has been exorcised by confining it to their own vampiric relationship: they are merely restless spirits drifting around the abandoned closure of the Heights.<sup>12</sup>

The fear instilled in the family by Heathcliff depended on his portrayal from the beginning as other, as an outsider. Thus, as he came into the family (chapter 4):

We crowded round, and over Miss Cathy's head I had a peep at the dirty, ragged, black haired child . . . I was frightened, and Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors. She did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for?

Black-haired, dirty, Gypsy combine to suggest a threatening difference, drawing on an ethnic stereotype well established in British culture.

Black and white as racial signifiers have deep significance. In white, former colonial societies, as Dyer observes,

there are inevitable associations of white with light, and therefore safety, and black with dark and therefore danger, and . . . this explains racism (whereas one might well argue about the safety of the cover of darkness and the danger of exposure to light).<sup>13</sup>

In a colonial context, black and white represent a whole set of social characteristics and power relations. Dyer's conclusion about three films portraying the white presence in colonial Africa – *Jezebel* (USA, 1938), *Simba* (Britain, 1955) and *Night of the Living Dead* (USA, 1969) – is that 'they all associate whiteness with order, rationality, rigidity, qualities brought out by contrast with black disorder, irrationality and looseness'.

This use of white and black is clearly intended to make white social behaviour virtuous and to legitimate white rule. However, white people should consider the question also from a black perspective. bell hooks argues that whites have a deep emotional investment in the myth of 'sameness' even as their actions reflect the primacy of whiteness as 'the sign informing who they are and how they think'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, whites do not think about themselves as white but only about others as not-white and other, which was the point of Dyer's examination of whiteness in films about colonialism. It is useful then to compare the dominant white view of blackness with black experience, like bell hooks's observations on the meaning of whiteness in her own childhood:

Returning to memories of growing up in the social circumstances created by racial apartheid, to all black spaces on the edge of town, I reinhabit a location where black folks associated whiteness with the terrible, the terrifying, the terrorizing. White people were regarded as terrorists, especially those who dared to enter the segregated space of blackness.<sup>15</sup>

An-other voice? White has been normalized in Europe, North America and Australasia and, in order to recognize that what seems normal is also a symbol of domination, it is important to listen to and to appreciate black perspectives rather than, as bell hooks suggests white people do, '[travel] around the world in pursuit of the other and otherness' – a sobering comment on academic enthusiasm for difference.

Returning to the wider associations of blackness in white societies, the association between black and dirt, between dirt and disease, emphasizes the threatening quality of blackness. Removing blackness, injecting light, removes fear, but this fear may be a fear of others as much as a fear of darkness. Thus, Corbin maintained that Haussmann's plans for Paris in the mid-nineteenth century were designed to make the city 'the city of light'. 'His team also planned to make

aimed at eliminating the darkness at the centre of the city, where darkness stood for the foul-smelling environment of the poor, the smell of the poor' – and the poor themselves.<sup>16</sup> However, despite the common use of black to signify obscurity, shade, shadows, fear, misfortune, death and evil, it has not always been so. Thus, in mediaeval Europe, black knights were courageous; numerous black madonnas, as in Tarragona cathedral, Spain, and Czestochowa, Poland, were objects of reverence. The positive associations of blackness were lost with colonialism, however, and with industrialization and the development of the class system under capitalism black assumed wider significance through its association with dirt, disorder and the threat to the bourgeoisie posed by the working class.

In the same system of values, whiteness is a symbol of purity, virtue and goodness and a colour which is easily polluted. Since whiteness is often not quite white, it is something to be achieved – an ideal state of pure, untainted whiteness. Thus, white may be connected with a heightened consciousness of the boundary between white and not-white, with an urge to clean, to expel dirt and resist pollution, whether whiteness is attributed to people or to material objects. As Sassoon remarks, white 'has a highly accentuated hygienic symbolism', although, in consumer culture, there has been to some extent an 'emancipation from white [which] has come about after several decades of emblematic monochromatism [*sic*]'.<sup>17</sup> As a marker of the boundary between purified interior spaces – the home, the nation, and so on – and exterior threats posed by dirt, disorderly minorities or immigrants, white is still a potent symbol.

### DISEASE

Disease, often in combination with other signifiers of defilement, has a role in defining the self and in the construction of stereotypes. It is a mark of imperfection and carries the threat of contagion. Disease in general threatens the boundaries of personal, local and national space, it engenders a fear of dissolution, and, thus, we project the fear of our own collapse, or of social disintegration, 'onto the world in order to localize it and . . . to domesticate it'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the 'diseased other' has an important role in defining normality and stability.

Disease metaphors were characteristic of nineteenth-century scientific

discourses which attempted to harness scientific knowledge in support of racist myths. Disease represented a threat of contagion, often a coded term for racial mixing, but to be diseased or disabled was a mark of imperfection. Western science was notable for its concern with classification and, particularly in the human sciences, with charting the contours of normality. Visual representations were particularly important for measuring and classification and the possibilities were increased considerably by photography. The case of Cesare Lombroso, engaged in cataloguing physical characteristics which were supposed to signify mental disability, mental illness, immorality and criminality, one slipping easily into the other, was not exceptional. This kind of scientism lent itself to racist theory and practice in Nazi Germany where Jews, defined in terms of physical difference or imperfection, became dangerous, like the mentally disabled, because of the threat they posed to the purity and stability of the Aryan race. The fascists engaged in 'object substitution', the threat personified interchangeably by Jews, women, homosexuals, communists, and so on. The disease metaphor, because it is universally threatening, was an appropriate one to elide with these demonized others.

Disease is a more potent danger if it is contagious. The fear of infection leads to the erection of the barricades to resist the spread of diseased, polluted others. The idea of a disease spreading from a 'deviant' or racialized minority to threaten the 'normal' majority with infection has particular power. This is apparent in current anxieties about AIDS, which reinforce homophobic or racist attitudes – AIDS as the gay disease, AIDS as the black African disease. A variant of this is evident in the Russian parliament's decision in 1994 to require all foreigners entering the country to have an AIDS test, in an attempt to 'seal [the country's] borders to "dirty" foreign bodies' (the *Guardian*, 12 November 1994). Here, the threat is embodied in the decadent West.

In the past, fears about class were expressed in similar terms. Contagious diseases like cholera or venereal disease were 'working-class diseases' which threatened the bourgeoisie and threatened to invade bourgeois space. A fear of infection was a fear of sexual touch; venereal disease, like AIDS, violated personal boundaries. It should be noted, however, that the presumed source of infection, the working-class prostitute, was also an object of desire. Disease, the working class and dirt were closely associated in nineteenth-century moralizing discourse. Today, disease, homosexuals and Black Africans have been similarly bracketed together. It is important to have somewhere (else) to locate these threats. It is a necessary part of distancing. Thus, Africa and, in the recent past, San Francisco, have served as convenient depositories for



threatening disease and diseased others, although hostile communities may simply be concerned with distancing themselves from the threat of infection by wishing 'diseased others' elsewhere.

## NATURE

Nature has a long historical association with the other. Imperial science and theology both established hierarchies of being which put white civilization at the top and black people below, with groups like Australian Aborigines at the bottom because they were assumed to be a part of nature. Fitting species and human groups into taxonomic schemes was a major concern of nineteenth-century European science. Thus, Francis Galton, one of the founders of statistical analysis, put 'the average standard of the Negro race . . . two grades below our own; that of the Australian native . . . at least one grade below the African'.<sup>19</sup> Science confirmed the global dominance of white societies, a dominance which the church in colonial powers like Britain also asserted with its argument that peoples closest to nature, in a primitive state, needed saving. Salvation often involved not only accepting Christianity but also adopting European styles of dress and the discipline of a Christian education in the mission school. This was the fate of indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada, for example. The civilizing mission distanced them from nature. Brody noted that until quite recently the white stereotype of the Inuit in the Canadian Arctic placed them in the wild, as a part of nature, because of their capacity to withstand extreme cold and survive in a harsh environment by hunting and gathering.<sup>20</sup> While this image is a romantic one, projecting onto the Inuit what the white, urban Canadian has lost, it also serves to dehumanize. If they are a part of nature, they are less than human.

In a discussion of patriarchy, Capra made a similar observation in relation to the oppression of women. He argued that:

Under patriarchy, the benign image of nature changed into one of passivity, whereas the view of nature as wild and dangerous gave rise to the idea that she was to be dominated by man. At the same time, women were portrayed as passive and subservient to men. With the rise of Newtonian science, finally, nature became a mechanical system that could be manipulated and exploited, together with the manipulation and exploitation of women. The ancient association of women and nature thus interlinks women's history and the history of the environment.<sup>21</sup>

Gillian Rose discusses the feminization of nature, the merging of women and nature, and the converse of this, the appropriation of culture by men, at some length.<sup>22</sup> However, observations on the representation of indigenous peoples and colonized others suggest to me that the nature association is not a peculiar characteristic of patriarchy, as Rose seems to argue, but is a more general feature of the scaling of beings by dominant groups which is closely associated with the history of colonialism, the rise of science and the growth of capitalism. Relegating dominated groups to nature – women, Australian Aborigines, Gypsies, African slaves – excludes them from civilized society. However, the inclusion of women in this list depends on their situation. In a colonial context, for example, civilized society would include those women who belonged to the colonial power although, at the same time, they would be subject to exclusions which result from the exercise of patriarchal power. Privileged membership of a dominant group or exclusion from it can only be explained in the particular contexts of race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality, as Judith Okely perceptively observed in her early essay on difference in Gypsy communities.<sup>23</sup>

The relegation of some groups to nature, where they are 'naturally' wild, savage, uncivilized, is also expressed in the representation of people as animals, either as animals generically distinct from humans or as particular species which are associated with residues or the borders of human existence – animals as the abject. Here, we find some of the most imaginative but also some of the most destructive stereotypical representations of others. Constance Perin notes that

In the Great Chain of Being, humans are one mammal among the many . . . species of mammal. We are different from others yet not wholly so and, from that worrisome ambiguity, less-than-perfect human beings are perceived as resembling animals the more and placed below 'perfect' people in the social order.<sup>24</sup>

To dehumanize through claiming animal attributes for others is one way of legitimating exploitation and exclusion from civilized society, so it is unsurprising that it is primarily peripheral minorities, indigenous and colonized peoples, who have been described in these terms.

Mayall makes this observation about Gypsies, a minority who were subject to very harsh laws, including transportation and execution, in several European states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

Perhaps the most overtly antagonistic and antipathetic of all the images of a race of Romanies was the likening of people to animals: 'The Gypsies are nearer to the animals than any race

known to us in Europe.' This statement appeared in an article entitled 'In Praise of the Gypsies!' The intention, then, was to place the Gypsies on the lowest possible level of human existence. They were said to eat more like beasts than men [sic].<sup>25</sup>

Rats, pigs and cockroaches<sup>26</sup> have had a particular place in the racist bestiary because all are associated with residues – food waste, human waste – and, in the case of rats, there is an association with spaces which border civilized society, particularly subterranean spaces like sewers, which also channel residues and from which they occasionally emerge to transgress the boundaries of society. The potency of the rat as an abject symbol is heightened through its role as a carrier of disease, its occasional tendency to violate boundaries by entering people's homes, and its prolific breeding. Thus, the rat has been readily adopted in racist propaganda such as anti-Semitic films produced by the Nazis which portrayed Jews as rats. Similarly, in England in the nineteenth century the rat was one stereotype of the Irish minority. As Stallybrass and White observed:

Once the metaphoric relations were established, they could be reversed. If the Irish were like animals, animals were like the Irish. One of the sewer workers . . . described the sewers (which Irish labourers had helped to build) as full of rats 'fighting and squeaking . . . like a parcel (!) of drunken Irishmen'.<sup>27</sup>

The Irish were seen as uncivil, belonging outside English civil society because of their association with dirt, like rats, both through their work on canals, sewers and railways and through their rural Irish background, 'where the imagined connection between peasants and dung was very close'. This dehumanization was, of course, a necessary part of the colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland. Otherwise, it is a very clear example of the way in which dirt, disease and nature are combined in an animal metaphor. Transgressive mammals and insects have played an important part in the construction of negative stereotypes.

## CONCLUSION

This discussion has one important practical implication. In local conflicts, where a community represents itself as normal, a part of the mainstream, and feels threatened by the presence of . . .

and 'other', fears and anxieties are expressed in stereotypes. However, engaging with the other, what bell hooks calls repositioning,<sup>28</sup> might lead to understanding, a rejection of a stereotype and a lesser concern with threats to the boundaries of community. Any optimism about such a move should be tempered with the thought that limited engagement, a superficial encounter, might result in the presumption of knowledge which could be more damaging than ignorance if this knowledge were in the province of state bureaucracies or academia. Thus, I would see repositioning as problematic. The acquisition of authentic knowledge also raises important methodological questions which I will consider at the end of the book.

More generally, I have been concerned in this chapter to demonstrate the link between object relations theory and images which play an important part in the construction of stereotypes. The good and bad objects of Kleinian theory are not catalogued in any detail but it should be clear that both the self and stereotypes are products of culture and society, so it is important to identify some of the images that stand for the other and to contextualize observations on selfhood and constructions of otherness. Verbal and visual images, as they are rooted in culture, are the things to which people, as individuals and as social beings, relate. I have begun to sketch in some of the stereotypes which have currency in western cultures, but in subsequent chapters these pictures will become more detailed and elaborate.

## NOTES

1. Some recent post-modern writing, for example, Iain Chambers's *Migrancy, Culture and Identity*, Routledge, London, 1994, celebrates difference with some enthusiasm. The theme of Chambers' book is that there are fusions, hybrids and new forms of difference that follow from increasing global movement and interconnectedness. I think that it is important not to be carried away by this. Problems defined by the firm contours of territorially based conflict, associated with race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability, are persistent features of socio-spatial relations. Many people live in one place for a long time and some have difficulty getting along with those who are different from themselves. Unfortunately, the African musicians whom Chambers admires and who have certainly enriched British culture are still subject to racism outside the sympathetic environment of the club or the music festival.

2. Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of sexuality, race and madness*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1985. This book, with its emphasis on visual representation, develops object relations theory to incorporate the world as it is perceived.



4. *ibid.*, p. 18.
5. Zygmunt Bauman, 'Semiotics and the function of culture', in Julia Kristeva *et al.* (eds), *Essays in Semiotics*, Mouton, The Hague, 1971, pp. 279-295.
6. Gina Ferrero, *Criminal Man*, The Knickerbocker Press, New York, 1911, p. 140.
7. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994. Bhabha presents a deep analysis of the 'colonial other', but his arguments have much wider relevance.
8. Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1990, p. 126. Young bases her argument on Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*.
9. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Methuen, London, 1986, p. 191.
10. The subjects of Lombroso's moralizing discourse were primarily people with learning disabilities. The importance of photography as an aid to classifying mentally ill and disabled others is discussed in some detail by Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1988, pp. 39-43. Lombroso's photographs are reproduced in Ferrero, *op. cit.*
11. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 3.
12. Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The literature of subversion*, Methuen, London, 1981, p. 129.
13. Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on representation*, Routledge, London, 1993, pp. 142-145.
14. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and representation*, Turnaround, London, 1992.
15. *ibid.*, p. 170. Later in this chapter (p. 174), she remarks:

Reminded of another time when I was strip searched by French officials, who were stopping black people to make sure we were not illegal immigrants and/or terrorists, I think that one fantasy of whiteness is that the threatening Other is always a terrorist. This projection enables many white people to imagine there is no representation of whiteness as terror, as terrorizing. Yet it is this representation of whiteness in the black imagination, first learned in the confines of [a] poor black community, that is sustained by my travels to many different locations.

16. Alain Corbin, *The Fragrant and the Foul: Odor and the French social imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1986, pp. 134-135.
17. Joseph Sassoon, 'Colors, artefacts, and ideologies', in P. Gagliardi (ed.), *Symbols and Artefacts: Views of the corporate landscape*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1990, p. 172.
18. Gilman, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
19. Cited by C. P. Blacker, *Eugenics: Galton and after*, Duckworth, London, 1952, p. 325.
20. Hugh Brody, *The People's Land: Eskimos and whites in the eastern arctic*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975. This romantic construction of the Inuit corresponded to the 'real Eskimo', as opposed to the welfare-dependent alcoholic of the bad stereotype.
21. Frijtof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, society and the rising culture*, Bantam Books, London, 1987, p. 24.
22. Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993, chapter 4.
23. Judith Okely, 'Gypsy women: models in conflict', in Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Perceiving Women*, Dent, London, 1975, pp. 55-86. Okely's research demonstrates the value of participant observation in discerning roles and power relations in a community which had formerly been portrayed as an undifferentiated other. Her writing anticipated Michelle Barrett's plea for the

- deconstruction of categories like 'women' -- Michelle Barrett, 'The concept of difference', *Feminist Review*, 26, 1987, 29-41.
24. Constance Perin, *Belonging in America*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1988, pp. 144-145.
25. David Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, chapter 4.
26. Cockroach symbolism is discussed by Hoggett in a study of racism in the East End of London, where the Muslim Bangladeshi population constitutes the other for the working-class whites. The cockroach 'signifies a complex knot of resentment, fear and hatred', directed at the Bangladeshis, although, of course, cockroach infestations are caused by structural defects in their homes. P. Hoggett, 'A place for experience: a psychoanalytic perspective on boundary, identity and culture', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10, 1992, pp. 345-356.
27. Stallybrass and White, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
28. hooks, *op. cit.*, p. 177.