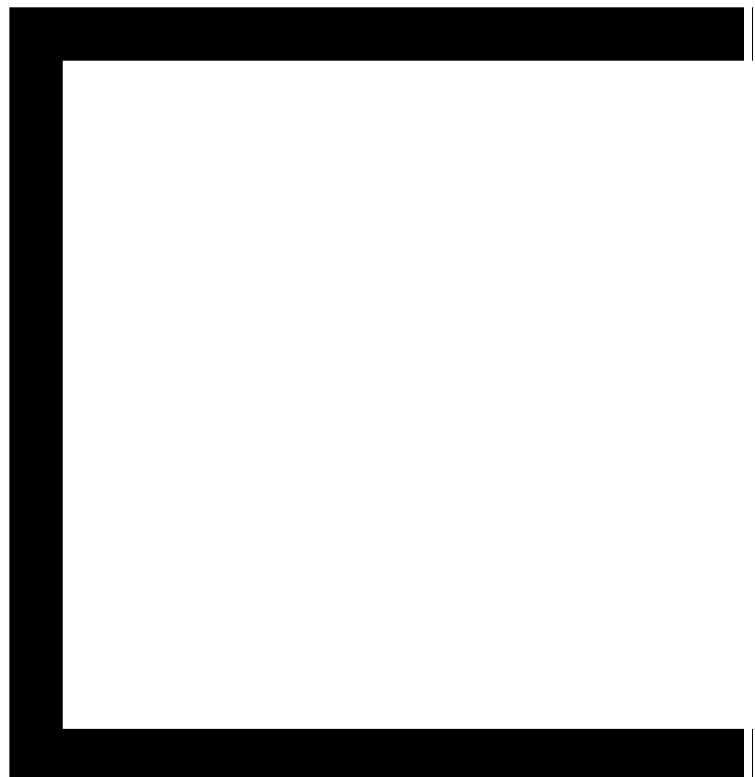


essays



beyond savagery

The Limits of Australian ‘Aboriginalism’

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— I

Colonial representations of the supposedly savage condition of indigenous peoples have provided the basis upon which a now familiar account of colonial discourse has been elaborated. Recalling a European idea of savagery that goes back at least four hundred years, if not to ancient depictions of barbaric savages,¹ this account has drawn upon Edward Said's analysis of a complicity between the formation of colonial knowledge and the exercise of colonial power in the discursive 'construction' of racialised Others.² To condense greatly, the theoretical debt here has been to Michel Foucault's conception of discourse and his notion of dividing practices.³ And together these have provided the basis for a powerful account of how the *construction* of indigenous peoples as savages has served to justify their colonial dispossession and oppression.

The most basic claim here—that racial stereotypes were invoked to support the colonisation of lands occupied by indigenous peoples—is irrefutable. But the specifically constructivist elaboration of this claim has turned it into a 'logic' that has come to define colonialism, in its capacity to construct Others, as a power that saturates, and indeed exhausts, the colonial 'encounter'. Such an encounter has thus been simplified to the extent that its very character as an encounter has been effaced. It is, moreover, on account of this simplification—according to which discourse remains fundamentally indifferent to, and so unaffected by, what it encounters or fails to encounter—that the history of colonial encounters with indigenous peoples has been generalised into what Cole Harris has described as an 'amorphous imperial soup'.⁴

Our aim in this essay is not, however, to offer yet another attempt to rectify the empirical simplifications and generalisations of constructivism. Rather, in the context of an ongoing concern—in cultural studies and elsewhere—with the limits of ‘discourse’ and of ‘discourse analysis’,⁵ our attempt to restore to the Australian colonial encounter something of its specificity is impelled by a concern with how constructivism endows colonial discourse with a power that is not just empirically, but also theoretically, unsustainable. Critically addressing the prevalence of constructivist accounts of the colonial encounter in Australia, we draw less upon Said’s description of the power of discourse and more upon Homi Bhabha’s attempt to elicit its limits.⁶ For this encounter, we will argue, provides a salient, if not a crucial, instance of the *failure* of colonial discourse to construct indigenous peoples according to an idea of savagery that, as Bain Attwood has put it, refers to ‘a place which Europeans … left behind in order to assume “civilisation”’.⁷

Constructivism assimilates colonial representations of Aboriginal peoples to what Bhabha refers to as ‘an instrumentalist conception of power-knowledge’.⁸ And, in so doing, it attributes a ‘remarkable stability’ to this idea of savagery.⁹ What it misses, however, is the fact that, beyond this idea, a radically different notion of ‘savagery’ came to be elaborated and applied in Australia, and then elsewhere. In terms that would be taken up by those who came to argue that the different races were permanent types, if not the product of entirely separate creations,¹⁰ it was precisely in the encounter with Australia’s ‘peculiar’ or ‘anomalous’ peoples that, by the mid-nineteenth century, ‘savagery’ ceased to refer to a state which had been, or was destined to be, left behind and came to describe an innate and irremediable disposition. But this notion of ‘savagery’, we argue, was not a calculated product of colonial discourse. Rather, it arose precisely out of the discursive failure to represent or construct Australia’s indigenous peoples in the terms that had been applied to other peoples in other colonial contexts.

As early as the seventeenth century, and based upon his observation that the Australian Aborigines had ‘no Houses and skin Garments, Sheep, Poultry and Fruits of the Earth’, William Dampier described Australia’s indigenous peoples as ‘the miserablest … in the world’.¹¹ Also remarking upon their apparent lack of development, Cook claimed that their canoes were the ‘worst he had ever seen’.¹² Similarly, Joseph Banks described their ‘houses’ as ‘framed with less art or rather less industry than any habitations of human beings probably that the world can shew’.¹³ To these observations can, of course, be added many others, including those of George Barrington, who observed that ‘[t]hese people certainly have fewer ideas of building a place to shelter than any savages ever discovered’;¹⁴ of David Collins, who described their habitations to be ‘as rude as imagination can conceive’;¹⁵ of Surgeon-General John White who noted, more generally, that ‘in improvements of every kind, the Indians of this country are many centuries behind’;¹⁶ and of Turnbull, who maintained that ‘[t]hese

aboriginal inhabitants . . . are indeed beyond comparison the most barbarous on the surface of the globe'.¹⁷

Representations of the Aborigines' so-called 'miserableness' were also extended to the equally, if not more, remarkable fact that they did not cultivate. In Louis Freycinet's words, 'as for cultivation properly so-called, nature is the sole contributor'.¹⁸ Or on Watkin Tench's account, 'to cultivation of the ground they are utter strangers'.¹⁹ Or again, as William Bradley put it, 'we never met with the smallest appearance of any kind of cultivated ground'.²⁰ And so on. For the colonists, therefore, and as Cook—as well as Barrington, Collins, and Paterson,²¹ among many others—stated explicitly: the country was 'in the Pure State of Nature', 'the Industry of Man' having had 'nothing to do with any part of it'.²²

Explicitly after Said, Attwood has assimilated representations such as these to what he has called an Australian discourse of 'Aboriginalism'.²³ Immediately, however, Attwood describes how this discourse functioned '[i]n Australia, as in other colonial contexts', to 'legitimate European violence' through its 'construction of the Aboriginal other' as 'savage'.²⁴ Also referring to Said, Ryan offers a similar interpretation of such representations. '[I]nstitutional and disciplinary control of the indigenes', he argues, was secured through the 'construction of the Aborigine' in accordance with 'stereotypical images . . . the cannibal, the savage, the "wild" man'.²⁵ Both Ryan and Attwood thus subordinate the specificity of 'Aboriginalist' discourse to its colonial instrumentality.

Here, moreover, their interpretations recall the hierarchical nature of Enlightenment thought, in its elaboration of a racialised distinction between savagery and civilisation.²⁶ They also recall a legal context in which this hierarchy was invoked to support the argument that sovereignty over lands inhabited by indigenous peoples could be acquired by 'discovery' because they were not being sufficiently utilised.²⁷ This argument goes back, through Locke, to the biblical injunction to subdue nature. And it recalls the pivotal role attributed to improvement, and above all to cultivation, in the transition that the social contract and stadial theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries described from a 'state of nature' to civil society.²⁸ Precisely because they were considered to be savages, and so at the lowest level of human social development, indigenous peoples could not—according to this obviously racist schema—sustain a legally recognisable claim to any proprietary interest in their lands. Such lands could thus be colonised as *terrae nullius* because they were regarded as 'effectively' unoccupied.²⁹

Our concern here is not to contest, in some revisionist vein, the fact that Australian explorers and colonists invoked European ideas and categories about indigenous peoples. Immediately, however, the claim that an Enlightenment idea of savagery was simply applied to Aboriginal peoples is at odds with those accounts of Australian colonisation that have focused upon the 'scientific' encounter with Australia's flora and fauna. Far from concluding

that European ideas and categories were simply imposed in Australia, such accounts have maintained that it was the continent's apparent peculiarity, and above all the singular *challenge* it posed to existing schemas of classification and understanding, that characterised attempts to apply European knowledge to Australia.³⁰ It is, then, in *this* historical context—in which the very continent of Australia was viewed as a source of bewilderment—that the argument pursued here may be understood: as an exploration of the possibility that this context may indeed be extended to the colonial encounter with Australia's indigenous peoples.

Whether the so-called 'doctrine' of *terra nullius* was invoked to justify Australian colonisation or was only a retrospective rationalisation of early colonial views,³¹ at the very least our claim here is that this legal context does not exhaust the range of possible interpretations of colonial representations of Aboriginal peoples, and particularly their apparent lack of cultivation. More specifically, it is the assimilation of such representations to an account of the relentless subjection of Aboriginal peoples to the same idea of savagery that was applied to other peoples in other colonial contexts that, we argue, is informed by an implausibly instrumentalist conception of Australian colonial discourse. We turn now to Bhabha's critique of this instrumentalism in Said's account of Orientalism.³² We then return—via a brief consideration of the American context in which the Enlightenment idea of savagery was elaborated—to those early colonial representations of Aboriginal peoples cited earlier, and to what we will then go on to present as an alternative understanding of the Australian colonial encounter.

— II

Bhabha locates this instrumentalism in the attribution of a 'political-ideological intention' to colonial discourse. And it is this, he argues, that causes the author of *Orientalism* to overlook and to occlude the inherent deconstructibility of discourse.³³ Bhabha discerns this deconstructibility in the fact that racial stereotyping is as 'anxious as it is assertive'.³⁴ '[T]he stereotype' is not—as Ryan, for example, would have it—'a fixed category'³⁵ but is rather 'a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated'.³⁶ It is the 'excess' of this repetition that, for Bhabha, betrays the inability of colonial discourse to 'fix' the Other. Discourse returns to repeat an 'act' that, having to be repeated, has evidently failed to construct the Other once and for all. And it is, therefore, according to this failure that Bhabha discerns the anxiety of a discourse that remains exposed, rather than closed, to an excess—or to an Otherness—that it is unable either to name or to contain.

The 'encounter' with this Otherness betrays something *other* than the exercise of a power which, for Said, is able to guarantee the 'constant . . . positional superiority' of the 'Westerner'³⁷ and which, for Ryan, ensures that '[t]he historical narrative in which the relationship between

the colonist and the indigene is constructed by the European can also be characterised as ‘remarkably stable’.³⁸ But Bhabha’s problematisation of this power can be approached differently, through the further constructivist claim that ‘the object/other is constructed “in the interests” of the discourse/self’.³⁹ As Attwood puts it, ‘the category of the “self” or the group is fashioned through the construction of an Other’,⁴⁰ or, in Ryan’s words, ‘stereotypical images of the indigene can be explained by their use in the formation of the coloniser’s subjectivity’.⁴¹

What is ‘constructed’ is only perceptible *even as a construction* if in some sense it is not fully constructed; if the Other, for example, is not totally exhausted by its ‘construction’. If the power of discourse *were* total, it would be impossible to distinguish its ‘constructions’ from mere ‘representations’. As such, the exercise of this power would be impossible to discern—even for those seeking to disclose it.⁴² In its very possibility, therefore, constructivism implies a limit to discursive power. And it is this limit that can be traced to the obvious circularity of the claim that the Other is constructed in a manner that produces (or, undecidably, produces *and* reproduces) the very agency of its construction. For Said, ‘European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient’.⁴³ But, of course, this reference to a ‘gain’ betrays the fact that (the strength and identity of) ‘European culture’ is offered as both the cause and the effect of the ‘act’ of construction, and, here, the ‘act’ of constructing the Orient. Similarly, the ‘agent’ of construction cannot be adequately characterised as a ‘self’ or ‘group’ if, at the very moment of the act of (self-) construction, its agency is as yet unfashioned. And, despite Ryan’s claim, stereotypical images of the indigene can only be problematically traced to a colonising subjectivity that would have to be similarly ‘unformed’ before its use of such images.

For Bhabha, it is exactly this constitutive deficiency of discourse and its power that is missed as ‘the ambivalence, central to the stereotype’ is reduced by an instrumentalist analysis.⁴⁴ Against this reductionism Bhabha problematises the unity of an intention which, as Derrida points out in his own critique of this intentionality, is implausibly considered to be able to ‘govern the entire [colonial] scene’.⁴⁵ As Bhabha indicates, it is the assumed ‘unidirectionality’ of ‘colonial power’ that ‘contain[s] the threat’ to which, in its deconstructibility, colonial discourse remains vulnerable.⁴⁶ And so it is in its *inability* to construct either its so-called Other or—according to the reciprocity of the constructivist argument—‘itself’, that, for Bhabha, discourse remains exposed to an excess or an *Otherness* that it cannot ‘fix’ with a stereotypical representation.⁴⁷

In considering the challenge posed to European categories by Australia’s indigenous peoples, it is something of this *Otherness* and the encounter with it that we want to elicit. But, to be clear, ‘what’ is encountered (as this *Otherness*) is not the Other ‘as such’. It is not the Other in or as ‘itself’, and in the sense that it could be determined according to some

kind of ‘truthful’ representation that might be opposed to discourse.⁴⁸ Our argument here proceeds not from any rejection of discourse but from its deconstruction. In this respect ‘what’ is encountered is the very *Otherness* of the Other. And it is the encounter with this Otherness that becomes discernible exactly because discourse cannot represent, construct or colonise, the Other ‘as such’. This Otherness, then, can only be ‘encountered’ in, or indeed as, a certain problematisation or putting into question of colonial discourse ‘itself’.⁴⁹

— III

The claim that the dispossession of indigenous peoples was legitimised through their construction as savages becomes excessive the moment it is attached to an idea of discourse conceived, not just as a critique of objectivity, but as an instrument of ‘subjectivity’. At this moment, all representations become constructions, not by default but according to an instrumentality that transforms the incontestable fact that discourse must always approach the Other through its ‘own’ categories into a wilful and self-serving exercise of power.

Attwood, for example, introduces exactly this instrumentalist conception of discourse in the midst of warning against a certain objectivism. It is, he argues, according to a ‘mutually supporting relationship between power and knowledge’,⁵⁰ that colonial representations of Aboriginal peoples cannot be traced to any ‘need’ on the part of Europeans ‘to explain the unfamiliar environment and peoples they came into contact with’. Rather, these representations must be referred to ‘the circumstances of imperial expansion and the consequent dispossession of “native peoples”’.⁵¹ Again, the relationship that is posited here between colonial knowledge and colonial power is undeniable. But it is as ‘representations’ of ‘native peoples’ are subordinated to the exigencies of indigenous dispossession and imperial expansion that ‘the’ colonial encounter has come to be conceived in the purely instrumentalist terms that Bhabha criticises.

The instrumentalisation of such representations defines the colonial ‘encounter’ according to a rationale that excludes everything that cannot be assimilated to the exigencies upon which such a definition is based. What is thereby excluded is the very possibility of a colonial *encounter*, and, with it, any chance that—as something other than a self-enclosed and self-certain structure—colonial discourse could be in the least affected by ‘what’ it encounters. It is, then, because of this simplification that both the history of colonialism and of colonial ‘representations’ of indigenous peoples have been generalised. For both Ryan and Attwood, it was an already established idea of savagery that was applied in Australia. For Ryan, ‘the Aborigine’ was ‘textually engineered by use of semiotic paradigms existing in the European archive’.⁵² And, on Attwood’s account, this archive was compiled ‘by major seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophical and legal authorities’, who drew upon ‘the representation

of antiquity found in classical history' as well as the 'representation of the Americas as "the beginning [of] all the world"'.⁵³

As Attwood's invocation of Locke here indicates, while the idea of savagery that was developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries doubtlessly drew upon older ideas, it placed an unprecedented emphasis upon what Roy Harvey Pearce has called the 'civilized idea of progress'.⁵⁴ The assumption that savagery was a stage, even if the first stage, of a path of universal human development defined the conception of savagery that was developed in the writings of social contract theorists such as Locke and Rousseau, in their postulation of the transition from a so-called state of nature to civil society, and further elaborated in the work of stadial theorists such as Lafitau, de Pauw and Turgot in France, as well as by Adam Smith and William Robertson in Scotland.⁵⁵ In Diderot's words, '[a]ll civilised people have been savages ... and if left to their natural impulses all savage people are destined to become civilised'.⁵⁶ And as pernicious as the 'racial' hierarchies elaborated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries doubtlessly were, the quite specific idea of savagery that supported them was nevertheless subordinated to the assumption that all peoples possessed a capacity to surpass their savage condition.

Here, we depart from periodisations that have presented a notion of innate—and, typically, 'African'—difference as already 'the prevailing scientific paradigm' by the end of the eighteenth century.⁵⁷ Rather, just as the notion of 'race', in its kinship with terms like 'tribe' or 'nation', was considered to be a subdivision or a mere variety of the human, so, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the idea of savagery referred only to the *temporary* condition of New World peoples. The developmentalist paradigm of savagery was invoked by Robertson, for example, in the following terms: 'In every part of the earth, the progress of man hath been nearly the same', he wrote, 'and we can trace him in his career from the rude simplicity of savage life, until he attains the industry, the arts, and the elegance of polished society'.⁵⁸ It was in these explicitly humanist terms that savagery was explained. In America, for example, this occurred through the claim that its peoples had only recently arrived on the continent via some submerged or yet-to-be-discovered land bridge; or, more prevalently, through the assumption that it was the distinct American environment or climate that had inhibited indigenous development, as it would have inhibited that of *any* peoples who were placed in the same situation.⁵⁹

This humanism underpinned colonialism's civilising mission, in its explicit efforts to at least hasten what, for Diderot among others, was the inevitable transition from savagery to civilisation. A universal human *capacity* for improvement, and above all for cultivation, was assumed. Savagery was conceived neither as a static nor a permanent condition. In America, therefore, it was the signs of its surpassing that were repeatedly invoked. Turgot, for example,

noted the raising of corn in Maine, as well as the annual field reallocation practices of the eastern Algonkian Indians and some Iroquois. For Robertson, while it was ‘very slight’, agriculture among America’s indigenous peoples was nevertheless discernible. And for Adam Smith too, among others, it was clear that—despite what he regarded as its rudimentary character—‘the Americans’ did have ‘some notion of agriculture’.⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, these representations of cultivation in America have been largely subordinated to an instrumentalist concern with how they legitimated the dispossession of America’s indigenous peoples.⁶¹ It is according to the same instrumentalism that the specificity, and indeed the singularity, of colonial representations of Aboriginal peoples have also been elided. But, against the background of this brief account of the supposed savagery of indigenous peoples in America, Bhabha’s analysis of the limits of colonial discourse opens up the possibility of an alternative interpretation of the early Australian colonists’ concern, if not obsession, with the Aborigines’ apparently utter lack of improvement, and above all with the ‘fact’ that they did not cultivate.

— IV

Clearly, it was the very idea of savagery that had been elaborated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the colonists, and others, *sought* to apply in Australia. But that this idea *could* be applied is rather less clear. Those early colonial accounts of Australia’s indigenous peoples cited previously do not merely represent Aboriginal peoples as savages, but rather ‘represent’ them as the *most ‘savage’* of any peoples so far encountered. For this reason, such accounts may indeed be regarded as anxious, not just in their repeated attempts to apply to Aboriginal peoples a pre-existing idea of savagery, but, even more palpably, in the evident struggle of the colonists to comprehend and to categorise a people who are ‘represented’ not just as savages but as so extremely ‘savage’ that they are unique. The inassimilable and unpresentable *Otherness* that, for Bhabha, impels the stereotype can here be discerned in the manifest remarkability of the Aborigines’ ‘utter’ failure to have improved their condition. And, given its crucial place in the developmental schemas elaborated by the social contract and stadal theorists, the emphasis in colonial accounts upon the Aborigines’ lack of cultivation may thus be interpreted as something other than the colonists’ anticipation of the ‘lawfulness’ of their appropriation of indigenous lands.

Savagery was defined as a condition that was destined to be surpassed. But, unlike in America, the Australian colonists could find no evidence that the Aborigines were even beginning to surpass a state of nature. As the ‘most barbarous inhabitants on the surface of the globe’, they were, as Turnbull stated explicitly, ‘beyond comparison’. And, as this contradiction indicates, the apparently extreme ‘savagery’ of Aboriginal peoples appeared as so

extreme that it could barely be comprehended or represented without putting the very notion of savagery into question.⁶²

What is discernible in these early colonial representations is precisely the colonists' difficulty in representing or constructing the Aborigines according to a 'developmental' idea of savagery. And it is the further elaboration of this argument that we now pursue. The suspicion that Australia's indigenous peoples were so savage that they could not be represented or constructed according to this idea of savagery was a recurrent and increasingly anxious concern throughout the early nineteenth century. This was the case for the colonists and the colonial authorities. But it was also the case for those ethnologists who were attempting to categorise the world's peoples according to the developmental schema that had been formulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Australia had already challenged, and indeed defied, the pre-existing categories of European naturalists;⁶³ its flora and fauna raising questions about the possibility, as Darwin was to put it later, that 'surely two distinct Creators must have been at work'.⁶⁴ And it was early colonial accounts that presented a similar difficulty for European ethnologists, such as James Prichard, in their attempt to relate Australia's indigenous peoples to other so-called savage peoples.

Citing Dampier, '[t]he Australians', Prichard noted, are 'perhaps, the most miserable of the human family'.⁶⁵ And, in this respect, he repeatedly invoked observations that '[t]he natives of Australia differ . . . from any other race of men';⁶⁶ or again, that '[a]ll New Holland . . . appears to be inhabited by a race, essentially different from all those hitherto known'.⁶⁷ As Stocking has pointed out, 'real indications of disarray' become evident in Prichard's comparative classificatory scheme by the time of the third edition of his *Researches*, in 1836–47.⁶⁸ And here we note Prichard's distinct difficulty in categorising Australia's indigenous peoples. For example, while classifying the Aborigines among the 'Alfurous' nations, Prichard goes on to accord them a separate chapter, entitled 'Of the Natives of Australasia', even though the last section of his discussion of the Alforians carries the heading 'History of the Alforian or Australian Race'.⁶⁹ And in his *The Natural History of Man*, published in 1843, Prichard admitted what was already discernible in the third edition of his *Researches*: that any correct classification of the Australians 'cannot yet be determined'.⁷⁰

In an indication of just how difficult he found it to categorise the Aborigines (and perhaps also providing an explanation as to why for him their correct classification could not yet be determined), Prichard speculated: 'there is reason to believe that we have as yet seen only the most destitute of the whole nation; and that there are tribes farther to the northward, perhaps in inland countries of the great Austral land, who are by no means so miserable or so savage as the people near the southern shores'.⁷¹ Prichard's attempt here to avoid concluding that Australia's indigenous peoples were uniquely impossible to classify—by implying that those so far encountered were, for some reason, atypical—had also been anticipated by Joseph Banks.

Banks's erroneous conclusion that the interior of Australia was uninhabited was drawn precisely in the context of his attempt to provide a circumstantial explanation for the fact that, in his words, Australia was 'intirely void of the helps deriv'd from cultivation'.⁷² After remarking upon the fact that 'even the North Americans who were so well vers'd in hunting sow'd their Maize', as well as recalling that he had never heard of 'any inland nation who did not cultivate the ground', Banks stated:

We saw indeed only the sea coast ... But should a people live inland who supported themselves by cultivation those inhabitants of the sea coast must certainly have learn'd to imitate them in some degree at least.⁷³

And he then concluded that 'where the sea does not contribute to feed the inhabitants, the country is not inhabited'.⁷⁴

It was according to an Enlightenment orthodoxy that Banks sought to account for the unimproved condition of the coastal Aborigines with reference to their situation. His assumption here was stated more generally by the Australian colonist, Peter Cunningham:

It is only necessity that urges mankind to congregate in fixed habitations, and raise their food by the sweat of their brow; for if it could still be procured in as easy a way by civilised Europeans as by our uncultivated tribes, the European woods would soon abound with creatures nearly as rude and idle as our natives.⁷⁵

For Banks, then, while the lack of cultivation among Australia's coastal peoples could not apparently be denied, the assumption that Aboriginal peoples generally, and in common with other supposedly savage peoples, possessed at least the capacity for cultivation was, as it had been for the social contract and stadal theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, simply uncontested.

What might otherwise have appeared to be the Aborigines' inexplicable lack of cultivation was traced, not to any unique Aboriginal disposition or constitution, but to their distinct circumstances. And, as such, colonial anxiety in the face of the utterly unimproved Aborigine could just about be appeased. It was, however, as continued efforts to 'civilise' the Aborigines and to encourage them to cultivate met with repeated failure throughout the early nineteenth century that, not only their inclination, but their very capacity, for improvement came to be doubted. Initial anxiety at the peculiarity of the Aborigines' condition turned into outright dismay—precisely according to an encounter that came to challenge the developmental idea of savagery that the colonists sought to apply in Australia and so to problematise the very terms of colonial discourse's civilising mission. What was at least an initial suspicion that the Aborigines could not be comprehended, represented or, indeed, treated according to an established idea of savagery was to become confirmed in the face of what the colonial

authorities could only indicate—now ‘beyond’ a stereotypical idea of savagery—as their ‘anomalous’ character.

— V

As Foucault has pointed out: ‘The savage—noble or otherwise—is the natural man whom the jurists or theorists of right dreamed up, the natural man who existed before society existed, *who existed in order to constitute society*.⁷⁶ Like the ‘state of nature’, therefore, savagery could only be imagined,⁷⁷ and imagined from the perspective of its inevitable surpassing. And for the Australian colonists who inherited and sought to apply this idea, as well as for the theorists and jurists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a condition of pure and irrevocable ‘savagery’ was as impossible to conceive as an inland people who did not cultivate had been for Banks.

It was in the context of such assumptions about the inevitable progress of all peoples, including—if not especially—savages, that Governor Macquarie had been optimistic about the possibility of the Aborigines’ improvement: ‘these people appear to possess some Qualities, which, if properly Cultivated and Encouraged, Might render them not only less wretched and destitute by Reason of their Wild wandering and Unsettled Habits, but progressively Useful to the Country’.⁷⁸ Efforts to civilise the Aborigines were thus made throughout the 1820s and 1830s, as part of a broad-based endeavour linking their civilisation to Christianisation, settlement and, of course, cultivation.

Typically, the idea of ‘inducing them to give up their wandering⁷⁹ and grouping them on missions was ‘based on the notion that Indigenous people would willingly establish self-sufficient agricultural communities on reserved areas modelled on an English village’.⁸⁰ In a letter in July 1840 from three members of a mission in New South Wales to the Colonial Land and Emigration Office in London, it was suggested that reserves of land would supply the ‘best means’ for enabling Aborigines ‘to pass from the hunting to the agricultural and pastoral life … wherever they have been induced by any means to abandon their wandering habits’. It was argued that such ‘reserves … would enable them to live not as hunters, in which case no good would be done, but as cultivators of the soil’.⁸¹

Macquarie himself established a so-called ‘Native Institution’ in Parramatta, New South Wales, in 1814, for the ‘civilization of the native black children’, although it operated for just four years. Some time later, and after the second such institution had been closed, it was observed that this attempt to ‘settle them on a portion of land’ had failed entirely.⁸² Despite a number of accounts indicating ‘the decided improvement’ of Aborigines in regions and districts where they had been induced to remain for a fixed amount of time, there were many more reports of ‘little change’ among the Aborigines.⁸³ And while the superintendent of a mission in Victoria insisted, against mounting evidence of the failure of missions in the

Australian colonies, that ‘the means which have been so successful among the Indians in America, the Hottentots in Africa, and the Cannibal Islands of the South Seas, will, by the blessing of God, if faithfully used, produce the same effects among this people also’,⁸⁴ attempts to convert and more generally to civilise the Aborigines were proving as futile as Macquarie’s Native Institution. One commissioner for crown lands in New South Wales, summarised this view in 1843: ‘From their present mode of living, and the great dislike the blacks have to civilized life, I do not consider that there is any great hope that their future prospects will improve’.⁸⁵

In 1844, Captain George Grey conceded to the British government that the Aborigines had ‘resisted all efforts which have been made for their civilization’.⁸⁶ And while Grey, along with others, proposed that yet further efforts should be made, the very possibility of their civilisation was now in serious doubt. The residual optimism of Grey and others was not, for example, shared by Lord Stanley, Secretary of the Colonial Office in London, who stated that: ‘it seems impossible any longer to deny that the efforts which have hitherto been made for the civilization of the aborigines have been unavailing; that no real progress has yet been effected, and that there is no reasonable ground to expect from them greater success in the future’. Stanley, however, could still not bring himself to reach the conclusions that others soon would, and rather desperately maintained his willingness to cooperate in ‘any arrangement for their civilization which may hold out a fair prospect of success’.⁸⁷ But just a year later, in a report from a select committee appointed to assess ‘the condition of the Aborigines in New South Wales’, it was exactly these conclusions that were anticipated, as the colonists’ initial anxiety at the peculiarly non-cultivating Aborigine was recalled.⁸⁸

An ‘intelligent’ Aboriginal witness called before the committee was asked by the chairman: ‘Would any black fellows living about you now like to have a farm and to grow cabbages and other things?’ When told ‘they would not stop by it’, the witness was asked for clarification: ‘They like to walk about?’ To which the answer was ‘Yes’.⁸⁹ The question was then asked: ‘Are you not aware that all the tribes of Indians, in America, have been accustomed in their native state to cultivate the ground?’ And then, most pointedly, and with a discernible perplexity: ‘Can you account for the difference of success that has attended the missionaries efforts with regard to New South Wales, as compared with all the neighbouring islands—does it not appear an anomaly of an inscrutable character?’⁹⁰ These questions recall the early colonists’ anxieties, as well as Prichard’s classificatory struggles. Following, however, the evident failure of attempts to ‘settle’ the Aborigines, those initial suspicions of a unique Aboriginal deficiency were now not so easily appeased.

The Aborigines confounded attempts at their ‘civilisation’, putting into question a colonial policy that was itself premised upon a conceptualisation and understanding of the improvability of all savage peoples. From this perspective, they could not be understood according

to an idea of savagery that, via cultivation, was destined to be surpassed, particularly, as many observers were to argue, in view of the agricultural improvements that the Europeans had apparently managed to achieve in Australia.⁹¹ They were not just anomalous, but inscrutably so. Neither the Australian climate nor its environment could account for the condition of the Aborigines, which now elicited the argument that they were singularly incapable of improvement in general and cultivation in particular.

— VI

In the face of the intractable Aborigine, the very framework of colonial knowledge, as well as the power it supported, floundered. In exceeding the comprehension of the colonists, ethnologists and colonial authorities, the encounter with the Aborigines precipitated a crisis in the idea that all peoples, including savages, were destined to improve. This, moreover, was the beginning of a radical transformation in the idea of savagery that had been elaborated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which was bound to the thesis of its inevitable surpassing. The 1845 committee's chair had invoked a certain 'wanting in their minds' in order to explain the evident failure of policies directed towards Aboriginal civilisation.⁹² And it was out of this failure and the crisis it precipitated that the Aborigines' 'savagery' came to be regarded as the consequence of an innate deficiency and so as their permanent and irremediable condition.

The formulation and elaboration of this innatist, and specifically polygenist, idea of 'savagery' (and, more generally, of race) ought not, however, to be too quickly invoked in response to the failure of colonial discourse to comprehend Australia's indigenous peoples in terms of a developmental idea of savagery. The immediate incorporation of this failure into a discourse of innatism would threaten to re-instrumentalise the anxiety that we have sought to evoke and which, in Bhabha's terms, attests to something other than a mutually supportive relationship between colonial power and colonial knowledge. It is, for example, exactly in such an over-enthusiastic attempt to document the violence suffered by Australia's indigenous peoples that Bhabha's problematisation of the power of discourse has been largely overlooked by those who have invoked his work in the Australian context.

Barry Morris, for example, compromises his own explicit concern with 'the inner dissonances' and 'internal instability' of colonial power as he assimilates Bhabha's analysis of the anxiety of colonial discourse to a more general colonial 'fear' of the Aborigine.⁹³ Morris subordinates the ambivalence of colonial discourse to a consideration of 'the efficacy of power and knowledge'. And it is as a testament to this efficacy, rather than to its lack, that for him this fear leads only to a more vehement re-affirmation of colonial power and what, in a constructivist vein, he goes on to call its 'inferiorising mythology'. Morris, then, writes any sense

of the inexplicability of Aboriginal peoples straight back into a constructivist framework that simply ‘authorised and inspired greater acts of terror’ by the colonists.⁹⁴

Ryan also references Bhabha whom, he notes, ‘draws attention to the disturbance to European knowledges in the colonial field’.⁹⁵ But although Ryan follows Bhabha in affirming that ‘knowledge-generation is always incomplete, hesitant and fragmentary’, he also goes on to claim that, despite this, ‘its effectiveness is what is at stake in the colonising process’.⁹⁶ In his concern to document the violence of colonialism, Ryan inverts Bhabha’s attempt to elicit the limits of colonial power’s domination of the indigene, concluding his own discussion of ‘how stereotypes work’ with the assertion that ‘the indigene is trapped within . . . discourse’, and is thus ‘rendered as a safe alterity’.⁹⁷ For Bhabha, however, it is precisely such a containment of the *Otherness* (or alterity) of the Other that colonial discourse cannot achieve.

Morris’s and Ryan’s reading of Bhabha thus threatens to silence the anxiety and the crisis out of which, it may well be concluded, even more violent colonial policies came to be elaborated. But, in this respect, it is in the name of the efficacy of colonial discourse that such a reading tends to render this violence as yet another instance of the exercise of power-knowledge. Which is to say, it misses the possibility that this violence arises precisely out of the breakdown of this ‘mutually supportive’ relationship. Even more significantly—and now more generally—such an overriding concern with the efficacy of colonial discourse does not only miss the breakdown of this relationship, it also obscures the very possibility of a fundamental historical shift in the terms in which Aboriginal peoples were represented or constructed.

Henry Reynolds, for example, tends to minimise the historical changes in representations of Aboriginal peoples that he nevertheless documents. Acknowledging that ‘[o]pinion hardened against the Aborigines as the [nineteenth] century progressed’, he goes on to suggest this amounted to no more than the extension of an Enlightenment conception of savagery.⁹⁸ ‘By the late eighteenth century’, he notes ‘it was increasingly common to place the various “races” in hierarchical order’. And, he continues—now under the heading ‘Phrenology: Scientific Racism’, in which he presents two quotations, one from 1844 and the other from 1851—‘[t]his led to a search for demonstrable differences between the races’.⁹⁹ And later, but now excluding any reference to the mid-nineteenth century altogether, he leaps from the observation that ‘[i]n the first half of the nineteenth century Aborigines were seen by many as being a lower link in a static chain of being’ directly to the fact that ‘[d]uring the second half of the nineteenth century . . . [s]ocial darwinists regarded them as an earlier, less evolved people’.¹⁰⁰ Despite noting a revaluation of savagery (from noble to ignoble), Attwood too makes this leap.

Neglecting to mention any shift in understanding during the nineteenth century, Attwood interprets later nineteenth-century accounts of the Aborigines as ‘doomed to extinction’ as

simply a glorification of colonialism.¹⁰¹ Attwood, then, also produces a seamless narrative of Australian colonisation. The construction of Aboriginal peoples as ‘of another time ... has’, he argues, ‘been an ever present image of “the Aborigine”’,¹⁰² as if, of course, this evolutionary view of Aboriginal peoples as doomed to extinction was entirely continuous with, and simply shared the assumptions of, the Enlightenment conception of savagery that had underpinned earlier efforts to ‘civilise’ them.

In accordance with an instrumentalism that has obscured much, if not all, of the specificity of Australian colonisation, what is left out here is the detail of the mid-nineteenth century. What has been silenced, therefore, is the elaboration of an innatist idea of ‘savagery’; a profoundly radical and influential idea that left a legacy which has been well-documented in Australia¹⁰³ and which, as Nancy Stepan has pointed out, was to persist throughout evolutionary theory’s explicit reversion to a ‘developmental’ account of human difference, to eugenics and beyond.¹⁰⁴

— VII

It was observations such as those of the phrenologist, Combes, that ‘in Van Diemen’s Land and New South Wales a few natives have existed in the most wretched poverty, ignorance, and degradation, in a country which enriches Europeans as fast as they subject it to cultivation’,¹⁰⁵ which became the very basis upon which the argument for an innatist idea of ‘savagery’ was expounded. An anonymous essay published in 1843 in *The New South Wales Magazine* articulated what was to become the dominant explanation: that ‘all attempts to civilize the savage are futile’ because of a ‘deficiency in [their] reflective faculties’.¹⁰⁶ Confirmation that a biological difference, initially considered as unique to the ‘Australian race’, provided the explanation for their continuing ‘savagery’ was also to be found in the case of the ‘half-caste’. In a statement that anticipated later colonial policy in Australia, the question was raised: ‘How is it that the half-caste remains with the white, while the pure black under similar circumstances returns to savage life?’ The response again attested to a certain Aboriginal inscrutability: ‘I am at a loss for any other explanation than this: that the faculties of the half-caste are of a different order from those of the pure black ... and consequently, that nature is too powerful in the other case to be subdued by any change of circumstance’.¹⁰⁷ By 1866, a review in the British-based *Popular Magazine of Anthropology* of Gideon S. Lang’s *The Aborigines of Australia* interpreted that book as vindication of what was by then accepted as ‘the world-wide fact that the savage hunter is irreclaimable by the civilized man’.¹⁰⁸ Now overturning a prevailing idea of savagery entirely, ‘[t]he Australian savage’, the reviewer went on to argue, was not an ‘uncultured type of civilized man’, one ‘who may be schooled in civilisation’. Instead—and in a generalisation that was to implicate other ‘savage’ peoples—‘he’ was rather a lost cause: ‘In the animal sphere we readily admit that there are both birds

and beasts that practically defy domestication ... But we are backward in applying this principle to man'.¹⁰⁹

The ‘sciences’ of craniology and phrenology set about explaining this ‘defiance’. And it was in offering ‘the lowest and most degraded picture of wretched humanity’ that Australia’s Aborigines were considered to provide a paradigmatic opportunity for such an explanation.¹¹⁰ ‘Savagery’ came to be redefined according to an innate deficiency, the source of which, as Combe put it, could be located in ‘the structure of the head’.¹¹¹ Observing that ‘[t]he New Holland skull’ was the most deficient in a variety of respects, including ‘Number, Constructiveness, Reflection, and Ideality’, Combe ‘supported’ his analysis with the ‘evidence’ that had impelled it. He referred to the accounts of Australian explorers and settlers, making particular note of their observations about the Aborigines’ ‘lack of housing’ and their ‘lack of acquaintance with any species of grain’, as well as referring to Governor Phillips’ failure to ‘effect the civilization of that miserable people’.¹¹² Nott also linked evidence that ‘[t]he races of New Holland and the island of Timor ... represent the lowest grade in the human family’ to what he called their ‘remarkable ... anatomical characteristics’. He continued, drawing now on Morton: ‘While, in countenance, they present an extreme of the prognathous type hardly above that of the orang-outan, they possess at the same time the smallest brains of the whole of mankind’.¹¹³ It was, therefore, on the basis of the Aborigines’ apparent inability to improve that the thesis of their innate deficiency was formulated. And, as this notion of ‘savagery’ was extended to other indigenous peoples, it came not just to explain this inability, but to maintain its inescapability.

The polygenist John Knox, for example, observed that the crania of ‘the Tasmanians and Australian races show many peculiarities of structure’.¹¹⁴ He quoted Richard Owen’s report on a collection of skulls shipped from Australia to the British Museum, stating that: ‘It is only with regard to the Australian and Tasmanian Aborigines that he [Owen] could feel any confidence in detecting the distinctive characters of a race’.¹¹⁵ Knox then went on to invoke ‘specific characters in the quality of the brain’ in order to formulate his own theory of ‘a physical and, consequently, a psychological inferiority in the dark races generally’.¹¹⁶ It was exactly because of what was considered to be an innate and permanent deficiency among the Australians, and now among all ‘savages’, that ‘the dark races’ were no longer expected to change or to improve. Supporting his calculation that the ‘Australians’ have the ‘smallest brains’ Morton contended, ‘It is not probable that these people [‘The Australian Family’], as a body, are capable of any other than a very slight degree of civilisation’. And, he continued, ‘Forty years have elapsed since the country was colonised ... and I have not yet heard of a single native having been reclaimed from barbarism’.¹¹⁷ Regarding the possibility that savages may be civilised, and in a strident rebuttal of Enlightenment developmentalism, Knox

declared, 'I should say not'.¹¹⁸ '[T]hat they may be converted by education into white men' is, he added, 'an entire delusion'.¹¹⁹

The thesis of an innate deficiency among some peoples had thus come to constitute an argument for racial destiny. And, in a letter to Knox's protege, James Hunt, in 1865, James Bonwick in Australia stated categorically in relation to the Aborigines: 'I see no hope of their so-called civilization and Christianity. We do not improve them. There are those here who are obliged to acknowledge the force of your arguments'.¹²⁰

It was in problematising assumptions of the inevitable progression of all humankind that the 'peculiar' and 'anomalous' figure of the Aborigine came to constitute a crucial referent for claims that 'savagery', and the differences between races, were unalterable. Race became 'everything' precisely in the sense that it, and not what Knox referred to as 'fanciful causes, such as education, religion, climate etc.',¹²¹ accounted for the irrevocable differences between peoples, and the irremediable savagery of some.

For polygenists such as Knox, therefore, savagery was emphatically not 'of another time'. Rather, it was following the encounter with Australia's apparently intractable peoples that 'savagery' came to be considered as so unalterable that it was fixed for all time. This notion of 'savagery'—*beyond* that which was formulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—was not, however, the calculated product of colonial discourse. From an initial suspicion of Aboriginal uniqueness to the outright perplexity evidenced by later assertions of their anomalous character, its elaboration may be understood, after Bhabha, as an anxious response to the *failure* of colonial efforts both to comprehend and to civilise Australia's Aboriginal peoples. As we have argued, this anxiety and the radicality of the shift in ideas about savagery that occurred in Australia, have been elided by constructivist accounts of colonial discourse. The history of colonial violence in Australia, as well as the history of Aboriginal resistance to it, cannot simply be traced to the application of an Enlightenment idea of savagery. Rather, it is precisely the failure to 'construct' Aboriginal peoples according to this idea that invites—or even demands—another understanding of the colonial encounter not simply in, but rather *with*, Australia.

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1. See, for example: R. H. Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1958; H. White, 'The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea', in E. Dudley and M. Novak (eds), *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1972 and A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982.
2. E. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London, 1979.
3. See M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock, London, 1972 and 'The Subject and Power' in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Harvester Press, Hemel Hempstead, 1984.
4. C. Harris, 'How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2004.
5. See, for example, C. Philo, 'More Words, More Worlds: Reflections on the 'Cultural Turn' and Human Geography' in I. Cook, D. Crouch, S. Naylor and J. Ryan (eds), *Cultural Turns/Geographical Turns*, Longmans, Harlow, 2000 and S. Muecke, Cultural Science? Radical Contingency, Radical Empiricism and the Future Habitat of the Humanities, 2007, unpublished paper courtesy of the author.
6. H. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism' in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994.
7. B. Attwood, 'Introduction: Power, Knowledge and Aborigines', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 35, 1992, pp. i-xvi.
8. Bhabha, 'The Other Question', p. 71.
9. S. Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 138.
10. See W. Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-59*, University Of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960; G. Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, The Free Press, New York, 1968 and N. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960*, Macmillan, London 1982. While our argument will touch on the more general impact of the Australian colonial encounter on nineteenth-century racial discourse, our focus will remain for the most part on the discourse of savagery. For an account of the more general implications of this argument, see K. Anderson, *Race and the Crisis of Humanism*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, upon which we draw freely here.
11. W. Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, The Argonaut Press London, 1927 (first published 1697), p. 312.
12. Cited in J. Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere*, printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, London, 1773, p. 210.
13. Cited in J. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks, 1768-1771* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1962, p. 128.
14. G. Barrington, *The History of New South Wales including Botany Bay*, M. Jones, Paternoster Row, London, 1802, p. 20.
15. D. Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, Whitcombe And Tombs Ltd, London, 1804, p. 306.
16. J. White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1962 (first published 1790), pp. 204-5.
17. Cited in Henry Reynolds, *Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p. 101.
18. Louis de Freycinet, *Reflections on New South Wales, 1788-1839*, Hordern House, Sydney, 2001, p. 103.
19. Cited in G. Williams and A. Frost, 'New South Wales: Expectations and Reality', in G. Williams and A. Frost (eds), *From Terra Australis to Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 190.
20. Cited in G. Williams and A. Frost, 'New South Wales: Expectations and Reality', p. 191.
21. Barrington, p. 29; Collins, p. 299; G. Paterson, *The History of New South Wales, from its First Discovery to the Present Time*, Mackenzie And Dent, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1811, p. 493.
22. Cited in Williams and Frost, p. 166.
23. Attwood, 'Introduction: Power, Knowledge and Aborigines', p. i.
24. Attwood, 'Introduction: Power, Knowledge and Aborigines', pp. iii-iv; see also B. Attwood,

- 'Introduction: The Past as Future: Aborigines, Australia and the (Dis)course of History' in B. Attwood (ed.), *In the Age of Mabo*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996, p. x.
25. Ryan, p. 138.
 26. Our focus here on the work of Bain Attwood and Simon Ryan is only for the purposes of characterising a tendency in Australian historiography and cultural/postcolonial studies, and is not intended to single them out. As we hope is clear, our own argument is broadly sympathetic to such accounts and is intended to supplement rather than displace them.
 27. For a legal account see K. McNeil, *Common Law Aboriginal Title*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989. More generally, see also J. C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650–1900*, McGill Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2003.
 28. Although, as its etymology implies, this notion of cultivation was invoked quite generally—in, for example, the cultivation of human reason over natural instinct or desire (J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, London, Penguin, 1968 (first published 1763), p. 65)—it was most substantially elaborated in relation to the domestication of animals and, above all, in relation to the cultivation of land: see, for example, J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960 (first published 1689), pp. 290–1 and de Pauw (cited in R. Meek, *Social Science And The Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, p. 146), for whom 'property and all the arts are ... born in the womb of agriculture'. In this latter respect, it is also noteworthy that a number of world historians have seen agriculture as the developmental threshold that provided the basis for the emergence of the great regional traditions of human civilisation (see for example: G. Clark, *World Prehistory: A New Outline*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969; B. Smith, *The Emergence of Agriculture* W. H. Freeman, New York, 1995; and P. Atkins, B. Roberts and I. Simmons, *People, Land and Time: An Historical Introduction to the Relations between Landscape, Culture and Environment*, Arnold, London and New York, 1998). For Maisels, for example, it was plant and animal domestication that enabled a succession of interrelated changes in the scale and complexity of human societies (C. Maisels, *The Emergence of Civilisation: From Hunting and Gathering to Agriculture, Cities, and the State in the Near East*, Routledge, London, 1990); for Whitmore and Turner 'cultivation is a direct expression of the human-environment condition' (T. Whitmore and B. Turner, *Cultivated Landscapes* of Middle America on the Eve of Conquest, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001 p. xi); and, for MacNeish, 'no civilisation has existed without an agricultural base, either in the past or today. Truly, agriculture was the first great step forward by human beings' (R. MacNeish, *The Origins of Agriculture and Settled Life*, University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma, 1992, p. 3).
 29. This argument was, of course, explicitly (though not fully) overturned by the Australian High Court in *Mabo v. Queensland* [No. 2], 1992; it is notable that the claimants in that case were renowned gardeners.
 30. See note 63.
 31. Whilst Attwood has followed the High Court's decision in *Mabo* in contending that 'the British Government determined in 1785 that New Holland [Australia] was a *terra nullius*' (Attwood, 'Introduction: The Past as Future, pp. viii–ix), David Ritter has contended that the 'doctrine' of *terra nullius* was rather a convenient way for the High Court to identify and address the 'rationale' for Aboriginal dispossession (D. Ritter, 'The "Rejection of Terra Nullius" in *Mabo: A Critical Analysis*', *Sydney Law Review* 18, 1996, pp. 5–33). 'When Australia was originally colonised by the Crown', Ritter argues, 'neither *terra nullius* nor any other legal doctrine was used to deny the recognition of traditional Aboriginal rights under the common law' (p. 6). 'Such a doctrinal denial', he continues, 'would not have appeared necessary to the colonists' (p. 6). Although Ritter himself tends to rely upon a generalised discourse of savagery in order to maintain that 'the absence of Aboriginal land rights was not a matter for judicial decisions' (p. 13), his argument is worth noting here, not only in its own problematisation of the legal basis upon which constructivist accounts such as Attwood's have relied, but also in the possibility of its 'radicalisation' along the lines of our own argument.
 32. Here, we will have to leave aside the question of whether Said's analysis of Orientalist discourse constitutes a viable reading of Foucault. But while Foucault resisted at least the explicit attribution of a 'subjectivity' to discourse, he never seriously problematised its capacity to act upon—or indeed to construct—a world that, of course, is 'encountered' only insofar as it has *already* been apprehended according to discourse's own categories and, often enough for Foucault, its own exigencies. Arguably, therefore, discourse has never been just a critique of objectivity, or of representation, but a theorisation—even if, for Foucault, an equivocal one—of its function or rationale.

33. Bhabha, p. 71. The principle of this deconstructibility can be traced to Jacques Derrida's contention that the 'self-presence' of any structure is conditional upon a constitutive delay or detour according to which it can never coincide with, or be present to, 'itself'. In general terms, what is deconstructed—or, more precisely, what deconstructs 'itself—is the identity, the integrity, and/or the agency of, for example, discourse. Most relevantly here, it is its impossible self-presence that puts the capacity of discourse to construct 'others' into question. Among many relevant texts, see in particular Derrida's critique of 'performativity' in J. Derrida, 'Signature Event Context' in *Limited Inc*, Northwestern University Press, Evanstan, Illinois, 1988.
34. Bhabha, p. 70.
35. Ryan, p. 138.
36. Bhabha, p. 66.
37. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 7
38. Ryan, p. 167.
39. C. Perrin, 'Approaching Anxiety: The Insistence of the Postcolonial in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples', in E. Darian-Smith and P. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Laws of the Postcolonial*, University of Michigan Press, Chicago, 1999, p. 22. Here, we draw freely on the argument of this paper.
40. Attwood, 'Introduction: Power, Knowledge and Aborigines', p. iii.
41. Ryan, p. 138.
42. Jean Baudrillard approaches this argument, though somewhat differently, as he asks (rhetorically and, inevitably, somewhat hyperbolically): 'what if Foucault spoke so well to us concerning power ... only because power is dead?' (J. Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1987, p. 11). Although, for us, the point here is owed more directly to what is always the deconstructive critique of performativity as well as constativity (again, Derrida, 'Signature Event Context').
43. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3, emphasis added.
44. Bhabha, p. 66.
45. Derrida, p. 18.
46. Bhabha, p. 66.
47. This *Otherness* (or alterity) is, therefore, to be distinguished from any constructivist—or more generally sociological—notion of the Other as, for example, the 'object' of a construction, or of some process of 'Othering'. Rather, after Derrida (among others), it names a singularity that is impossible to name (or to represent or construct), and which is and can be encountered as *Otherness* only because of this impossibility.
48. Just as our argument here does not simply reject discourse so as to restore some 'truth' to the Other, it does not simply reject its power in order to restore to the Other some 'agency'. It does, however, introduce the possibility of considering resistance as something other than agency. Although we cannot take this up here, such a possibility is indicated by Emmanuel Levinas, who associates a conferral of 'the status of the I' upon the Other with an 'imperialism of the Same'. For Levinas, '[w]hen the Other enters into the horizon of knowledge, it already renounces alterity'. And so for him resistance is associated precisely with the Otherness, or the alterity, of the Other in its resistance to the Same: 'The Other resists my attempts at investiture . . . because of the refusal to enter into a theme, to submit to a regard' (E. Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height' in A. T. Peperzak et al. (eds), *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996, p. 14). The encounter we are trying to elicit here may also, therefore, be described as an encounter—again, not with the Other 'as such—but with this *resistance* (that 'is' the Otherness) of the Other.
49. Levinas characterises such an encounter as a 'putting into question of the self'—according to which, he adds, 'that which is aimed at unseats the intentionality that aims at it'. For Levinas, moreover, this 'putting into question of the self' is not simply negative: it is 'precisely a welcome to the absolute other' (Levinas, pp. 16–17).
50. Attwood, 'Introduction: Power, Knowledge and Aborigines', p. i.
51. Attwood, 'Introduction: The Past as Future', p. ix. See also G. Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of a Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999, p. iv.
52. Ryan, p. 137, emphasis added.
53. Attwood, 'Introduction: The Past as Future', p. ix.
54. Pearce, p. 82.
55. See Meek.
56. Cited in A. Pagden, *European Encounters With The New World: From Renaissance To Romanticism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993, p. 153.
57. D. T. Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1993, p. 33. These periodisations—no doubt following (a certain reading of) Foucault—have privileged such exceptional figures as Voltaire, Edward Long and Lord Kames in order to contend that savagery was already considered to be an innate and irremediable condition in the eighteenth century (see also: M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Man: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1989; P. Fitzpatrick, *The Mythology of Modern Law*, Routledge, New York and London, 1992;

E. C. Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1997; and G. L. Mosse, 'Eighteenth-Century Foundations' in M. Bulmer and J. Solomos (eds), *Racism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999). We concur instead with the broad consensus among race historians and historiographers who, as Banton, puts it, have observed that: 'In the eighteenth century, authors ... used the word "race" to designate a group of people but they could equally well have used some other word. A conception of race as later generations have come to know it was not essential to any of their explanations; it had no analytical value, so in this sense there was no idea of race in the eighteenth century' (M. Banton, *Racial Theories*, second edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 5). According to this consensus, the shift to innatism did not, as we have indicated, occur until around the middle of the nineteenth century. Drescher, for example, has said that 'the turning point in British cultural racialisation should probably be set closer to 1850 than 1770' (Seymour Drescher, Review of *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* by Roxann Wheeler, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2001, p. 483). More generally: Montagu locates this point in 'the 1800s' (A. Montagu, *The Idea of Race*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1965), Gossett 'in the nineteenth century' (T. F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, Schoken New York, 1965), Hannaford 'between 1815 and 1870' (I. Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), and so on.

58. Cited in Meek, p. 141.

59. Meek, p. 124.

60. Cited in Meek, p. 118.

61. See, for example, R. A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, but, more generally, see also H. Augustein and A. Pyle, *Race: The Origins of an Idea, 1760–1850*, Thoemmes Press, Bristol, 1996 and E. Morton, 'Race and Racism in the Works Of David Hume', *Journal Of African Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002.

62. We will not, here, speculate as to the ultimate basis of this anxiety that may, after Bhabha, be understood just in relation to an inability to comprehend or to classify, and so to 'fix', Aboriginal peoples. Elsewhere, this anxiety has been traced to a problematisation of the thesis of human exceptionalism, and to its hitherto universal assumption of a distinctly human separation from nature (again, see Anderson, *Race and the Crisis of Humanism*). It may, however,

also be possible to trace it to an anticipated problem of colonial governance, of its legitimisation according to the idea of a civilising mission, or—at least in the first instance—to a concern that the continent was simply not amenable to improvement.

63. See, for example, P. J. Marshall and G. Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, Melbourne and Toronto, 1982; B. Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985; A. Moyal, *A Bright And Savage Land*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1986; S. Martin, *A New Land: European Perceptions of Australia, 1788–1850*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993; and H. Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1997). In 1783, the collector Sir James Smith, for example, complained that 'When a botanist first enters ... New Holland, he finds himself as it were in a new world. He can scarcely meet with any certain fixed points from which to draw his analogies' (quoted in Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, p. 168). And similarly, Francois Peron remarked in 1809 that 'New Holland defies our conclusions from comparisons, mocks our studies, and shakes to their foundations the most firmly established and most universally admitted of our scientific opinions' (p. 306). Bernard Smith concludes his summary of such accounts with the observation that, in Australia, 'traditional European ideas concerning the nature of the universe were exposed to novel and difficult questions' (p. 167).
64. Cited in G. De Beer, *Charles Darwin: A Scientific Biography*, Doubleday, New York, 1965, p. 107.
65. J. C. Prichard, *The Natural History Of Man*, H. Balliere, London, 1843, p. 545. See also J. C. Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, second edn, 2 volumes, J. & A. Arch, London, 1826, p. 397 and J. C. Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, fourth edn, 5 volumes, Houlston & Stoneman, London, 1841, p. 262.
66. Citing Wilkes, in Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, fourth edn, p. 263.
67. Citing Peron, in Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, second edn, p. 407.
68. G. Stocking, 'Introduction' to J. C. Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, first edn, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1973 (first published 1813), p. lxxii). James Hunt, John Knox's protégé, and co-founder of the innatist or, more specifically polygenist, Anthropological Society of London, also pointed out that 'There are many indications in

- Dr Prichard's writings that even he was becoming alive to the difficulty of his own [monogenist] theory' (J. Hunt, 'Race in Legislation and Political Economy', *Anthropological Review*, XIII, April 1866, p. 326).
69. Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, fourth edn, pp. 256–7.
 70. Prichard, *The Natural History Of Man*, p. 354.
 71. Prichard, *The Natural History Of Man*, p. 545.
 72. Cited in Beaglehole, p. 113.
 73. Cited in Beaglehole, p. 122.
 74. Cited in Hawkesworth, pp. 227–8.
 75. Cited in Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 6.
 76. M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, Penguin, London, 2003, p. 194.
 77. That this condition could not be witnessed 'as such' is further indicated by the difficulty that such theorists had in providing any exact account of how it was (or was to be) surpassed. Condorcet, for example: 'We are obliged to guess how the first degrees of improvement were obtained' (cited in Fitzpatrick, p. 68).
 78. Cited in Reynolds, p. 104.
 79. Colonial Department, 1834, *Aboriginal Tribes (North America, New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land And British Guiana)*, British Parliamentary Papers, pp. 161, 158.
 80. Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Bringing them Home: Report of the Inquiry into the Forcible Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, HREOC, Sydney, 1997, n.p.
 81. Colonial Office, 1844, *Papers Relative to the Aborigines, Australian Colonies*, British Parliamentary Papers, pp. 61–2.
 82. Archdeacon Broughton, cited in Colonial Department, 1836, *Minutes of Evidence Before the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, British Parliamentary Papers, p. 14.
 83. Colonial Office, 1844, pp. 176, 182, 199.
 84. Colonial Office, 1844, pp. 243–4.
 85. Colonial Office, 1844, p. 334.
 86. Colonial Office, 1844, p. 100.
 87. 20 December 1842, cited in Colonial Office, 1844, pp. 221–3.
 88. Colonial Office, 1845, *New South Wales, Aborigines: Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines*, British Parliamentary Papers.
 89. Colonial Office, 1845, p. 4.
 90. Colonial Office, 1845, pp. 8–9.
 91. Although, as Warwick Anderson has pointed out, the colonisation of south-eastern Australia was no confident act of mastery, but a difficult and anxious exercise of reconciling the mismatch British colonists perceived between themselves and a land in which they felt acutely alienated (W. Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002).
 92. Colonial Office, 1845, p. 20
 93. B. Morris, 'Frontier Colonialism as a Culture of Terror', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 35, 1992, p. 75.
 94. Morris, pp. 84–6.
 95. Ryan, pp. 11–12.
 96. Ryan, p. 16–18.
 97. Ryan, p. 138. So, although Ryan goes on to consider Aboriginal resistance to colonialism—as with Said's own 'sequel' to *Orientalism* (E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Knopf, New York, 1993)—it is far from clear how such a possibility can be admitted without simply dispensing with the concept of discourse that informs the bulk of his discussion. Although we are here leaving aside the extent to whether Foucault can be read in constructivist terms, as well as—again—any explicit theorisation of the notion of resistance that our discussion invites, we will just note the 'divine surprise' that, for Baudrillard, is elicited by Foucault's own invocation of resistance in the first volume of his *The History of Sexuality* (Baudrillard, p. 37).
 98. Reynolds, p. 97.
 99. Reynolds, p. 107.
 100. Reynolds, p. 114.
 101. Attwood, 'Introduction: The Past as Future', p. xi.
 102. Attwood, 'Introduction: The Past as Future', pp. viii.
 103. See, for example: Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, and McGregor.
 104. Stepan, pp. 85, 96.
 105. G. Combe, *A System of Phrenology*, fifth edn, 2 volumes, MacLachlan and Stewart, Edinburgh, 1853, p. 332.
 106. Anonymous, 'A Few Words on the Aborigines of Australia', *The New South Wales Magazine*, January 1843, pp. 58–9.
 107. Anonymous, 'A Few Words on the Aborigines of Australia', p. 59.
 108. Anonymous, 'On Aboriginal and Savage Races of Man', *Popular Magazine Of Anthropology*, vol. 1, no. II, April 1866, p. 50.
 109. Anonymous, 'On Aboriginal and Savage Races of Man', p. 59.
 110. Aeneas, 'Phrenology', no. VII, *Colonial Literary Journal*, vol. 1, no. 10, 1844, p. 156.
 111. Combe, p. 335.
 112. Combe, p. 240.

113. J. C. Nott and G. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, seventh edn, Lippincott Gramoo & Co.; Trubner & Co., Philadelphia & London, 1854, p. 434.
114. R. Knox, *The Races of Man: A Fragment*, Henry Renshaw, London, 1850, p. 227.
115. R. Knox, 'On the Application of the Anatomical Method to the Discrimination of Species', *The Anthropological Review*, II, 1863, p. 269.
116. Knox, *The Races of Man*, pp. 224–5.
117. S. G. Morton, *Crania Americana; or, A Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America: To which is Prefixed an Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species*, Lippincott Gramoo & Co.; Trubner & Co., Philadelphia and London, 1839, p. 94.
118. Knox, *The Races of Man*, p. 244.
119. Knox, 'On the Application of the Anatomical Method to the Discrimination of Species', p. 268.
120. J. Bonwick, 'Extract of Letter to James Hunt, President of Anthropological Society of London, October 25th 1865', *The Popular Magazine of Anthropology*, no. 1, January 1866, n.p.
121. Knox, *The Races of Man*, pp. 6–8.