Lucas Bridges, the famous first colonist of Tierra del Fuego, author of *Uttermost Part of the Earth,* tells in that memoir, of finding among his possessions a 'wonder worker', a cake of Pear's soap with the power to work miracles. It is significant that such a finding should occur on an island already - in the late 1890s - synonymous with the word 'elsewhere', the southernmost point of South America, home of the world's purportedly most primitive inhabitants. As such, the island's early colonial history is perfectly poised to allow an early representative of European colonialism, Lucas Bridges, to coin anecdotes about the colonial contrast of civilisation and primitivism, and to send them back to the metropolitan centres of Europe. It is in this anecdotal realm, and through the eyes of these Indians, that Bridges discovers his 'wonder worker ... a certain magic soap, the miraculous effects of which the manufacturers have been too modest to claim themselves'. For when it comes to claims about the miraculous effects of Pear's magic soap, Indians at the uttermost part of the Earth feel no such modesty - or so Bridges tells us in the anecdote that follows.

A Fuegian Indian living on Bridges' coastal property has been away some time, and in his absence his Fuegian wife gives birth to a boy with remarkably fair skin and blue eyes. Bridges, whose parents were English missionaries, hastens to add that his own eyes are brown. When the Fuegian father returns to see his child for the first time, his wife tells him of the 'incredible transformation' which occurred when she washed the child, initially quite dark, with a cake of Pear's soap given her by Bridges' sister. This leads to even more deception, this time on the part of the colonist, who writes:

The proud father was so impressed by these wonders that he came seeking another cake of soap. Suspecting that he wanted to try its effects on himself and might be foolish enough to doubt his wife's story if the experiment failed, I hastened to tell him that the particular cake of soap given to his wife by my sister must have possessed some special virtue not to be found in any other tablet. He went away disappointed, but satisfied.

---

3 Ibid., p. 220.

Bridges ends this story by ironically musing as to whether 'we should take a photograph of the happy trio and send it to the manufacturers, in case they wished to use it as an unsolicited testimonial to the merits of their magic product'.

Leaving aside for the moment what might underlie the colonist’s irony and dissimulation, let us focus on this notion of the native’s ‘unsolicited testimonial’ to the ‘magic product’ of Western civilisation. The specific content of this anecdote - the Indian who wants the ‘wonder worker’ product that will make him white - points in the direction of a history that could well be written of the rhetorical confluence of racism, sex and cleaning commodities within late colonialism. It is the form, however, of this anecdote as advertisement that we shall to unravel here, as it opens up an interesting question about the nature and nurture of colonial self-fashioning - or rather self-fetishing.

For all the particularity of this anecdote - the world’s most primitive inhabitant marvels at the white man’s magic on a farm perched on the end of the Earth - nevertheless, its form - primitive testimonial, indeed advertisement, of white magic - is remarkably common in the literatures of colonial encounter. Bridges’ text itself recounts numerous other instances of such native testimonial. A few years later, for instance, in 1900, Bridges performs a miracle of modern science for some Indian guests, who have the previous day treated him to a display of their shamanistic powers. The colonist sets up a slide projector, a ‘magic lantern’ which, projecting a picture of Bluebeard, terrifies the Fuegians, many of whom flee this ‘white man’s magic’. Attempts to persuade them that the picture is not real fail for

Unfortunately the Ona word for ‘picture’ or ‘shadow’ was the name of one of their ghosts, so the assurance that this was only a picture would have been no better than telling a frightened child that it was only a bogey-man.

This same structure - representation of native wonder or terror at the magic of our things - is by no means limited to Tierra del Fuego. For a recent parallel one need only think of the extraordinarily popular film The Gods Must be Crazy, which cashes in on what it represents as the wonder of a bushman (again the world’s most
primitive inhabitant) at the magic power of the Western commodity.\footnote{Jamie Uys (dir), \textit{The Gods Must be Crazy}, Johannesberg 1987.} A Coke bottle falls from the sky upon a tribe of innocent bushmen and - by becoming at one swoop contested property, technology and even a medium of exchange for the enchanted bushmen - causes chaos in their primitive paradise of egalitarian communism. So the coke bottle, thus unbottled, releases its genie in its primitive characterisation as 'the evil thing' - or at least these are the words of the narrator who in this way imitates the voice of the bushman, now dodging a 'big animal' (i.e. a car) while - marvel of marvels - a 'great flying bird' passes overhead. The Coke bottle is fetishised and given magic powers of evil while cars and planes are animated as living entities leading one to the film's true conclusion that \textit{The Gods must be things}. What is it that leads the narrator to mimic the native's awe at the power of these divine things, in the process of representing that imputed awe? - and what is it that leads Bridges to tell us of his need to pretend to the natives that he too believes in the power of magic soap, as much as the spirit in the magic lantern?

That which gives such colonial accounts anecdotal currency, is what Marx, in \textit{Capital}, termed 'the mystery of the fetishistic character of commodities'.\footnote{Karl Marx, \textit{Capital, a Critique of Political Economy}, London, n.d., pp. 43-59.} In Marx's formulation, the relations between producers and products, within a fully fledged market economy, are structured in such a way as to animate the product, as a commodity, with a creative life force simultaneously exorcised from the human producer. In a market economy, the work of human agents is quantified into units of 'homogenous human labour' to become 'labour time', itself a commodity, an exchangeable and thoroughly replaceable thing. In the process the unquantifiable human creativity within such labour is infused into the thing, and further, imagined to be a property of the 'thing-in-itself'. This 'thing-in-itself', reified from its context of human production, is thus infused with the life force of those relationships from which it is taken. Things become like people and even begin to control people at the moment that people are treated like things. By alienating human labour in this way, the fetish, in this movement, enshrouds 'a social relation between human beings', the production process, with 'the semblance of a relation between things'. Marx finds an analogy for these 'theological subtleties' in the 'nebulos world of religion', where:

The products of the human mind become independent shapes, endowed with lives of their own and able to enter into relations with men and women. The products of the human hand do the same things in the world of commodities.\footnote{Ibid., p. 45.} What is most important here, for the present argument, is the unconscious nature
of this fetishism - as Marx states 'they do not know that they are doing this, but they do it'. In advanced capitalist societies we produce and consume and indeed structure our thoughts as if we truly believed that it is things, which enter into relationships - not us - and as if it is those things which control us, not vice versa. Commodity fetishism is then an invisible, unconscious, but nevertheless essential postulate for the 'market organisation of reality'. For Marx, the way of making the unreality of this fetishistic market reality visible is through contrast with medieval modes of production:

all the mystery of the world of commodities, all the sorcery, all the fetishistic charm which enwraps as with a fog the labour products of commodity production is instantly dispelled when we turn to consider other methods of production.11

Michael Taussig, in his book The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America, quotes this same passage to justify his analysis of the remarkably noncapitalist - though equally fetishistic - comprehension of encroaching market realities as they appear to peasants undergoing rapid proletarianisation in Columbian sugar plantations and Bolivian tin mines.12 For these people, whose world is not yet 'market organised' but rather 'market dominated', their labour relations appear fundamentally unnatural, alien and even evil. They quite patently fetishise those very forces which we unconsciously fetishise, revealing the exploitation of people by things, which to us is so naturalised as to be invisible. And so:

the sugarcane of the plantations becomes the 'terrible Green monster', the 'Great Cane', the 'God of the Landlords', an animated being that is said to slowly devour the men who bring it to life.13

Taussig’s intellectual praxis is then, fundamentally contrastive - the patent Indian fetishism of the plantation product as evil, barren and sterile is represented in the aim of revealing and even dispelling the latent fetishism of things within the Western market organisation of reality - and, for that matter, within orthodox Marxist epistemology.

What makes this author uneasy with this contrastive approach - the turn to other systems of production to understand our own, critically - is less the homogenising essentialism of the notion of the 'precapitalist fetish' that underlies it, than the fact that a very similar rhetorical and contrastive technique - their fetish of our

10 Ibid., p. 47.
11 Ibid., p. 50.
13 Ibid., p. 122.
commodities - somehow drives the remarkable popularity of a film like The Gods must be Crazy, (now with sequel and sequel to the sequel) with its Coke bottle, 'the evil thing', similar surely to the 'terrible Green monster' of the sugarcane plantation. This is, furthermore, the same rhetorical structure that Bridges, with all anecdotal levity, adopts to advertise the white-washing capacity of the colonial commodity - as if Pear's magic soap and the 'terrible Green monster' were both very much sides of the same coin (financial metaphor meant in entirety). It needs to be said that the peasants Taussig describes are fetishising their role as labour in a productive process, while Bridges describes a native fetish of the finished product itself, almost a consumer fetish - though all the same, the two instances are united in finding power, both critical and commercial, in their representation of such indigenous representations of the capitalist production process. In this manner they tap into the rhetoric through which colonialism enshrines, much more than dispels, its own power, through contact with the magic it imputes to its 'others'. For it is in this trope - the representation of a native fetishism of the force of modern things - that colonial capitalism gestures toward its own primitivity and finds magic to be a thoroughly Western science.

The desire to find in primitives an 'unsolicited testimonial' to the animation and magic of the things of modernity saturates the literature of colonial encounter. This saturation is made more apparent when one compares the purported native fetishism of the colonial commodity - the way they are said to animate, empower and desire it - with the way Europeans, on the other hand, handle native things. Samuel K. Lothrop wrote an account of the material culture and technology of the Fuegians in 1928, driven by a desire to comprehend the 'world's most primitive inhabitants'. He was actually a guest of Lucas Bridges at this time, thirty years after the miracle of the cake of magic soap. In introducing his book, Lothrop justifies his focus on things, not people, because of the marked scarcity of those whom he saw as authentic natives - already by this time the Fuegian population had greatly declined. So he writes about things, and what is intriguing in this is the expectation that Fuegian things can reveal as much about their culture as the people themselves. And yet the thing, for Lothrop, is not a social complex of beliefs, affect charges and fantasies attached thereto - it is the thing-in-itself of capitalist epistemology, that can be measured, described and tabulated completely discrete from its producers and users. This is the reason why Lothrop's extensive description of Fuegian arrow heads, satchels, hair combs and cleavers is so remarkably boring. Unlike the Fuegian faced with white magic, the North American anthropologist is scarcely

---

14 Although critiquing Taussig's The Devil and Commodity Fetishism, the present author is greatly influenced by much of his later work, most particularly the idea that colonialism taps the very magic it imputes its others. See Taussig, Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man, A Study in Terror and Healing, Chicago 1987; id., Mimesis and Alterity, A Particular History of the Senses, New York 1993.

celebrating anything fantastic in the Fuegian thing. There is no further move, whereby the 'thing in itself' reified as such and abstracted from its social context is then infused with any animate quality or power - except in one curious instance where Lothrop tells us that:

Strong and simple as these objects are, they afforded a basis for little more than the mere act of existence and *mutely testify to the cultural poverty* of their makers.\(^{16}\)

The Fuegian thing is here animated only to the extent that it can express its own muteness. And yet for all the 'cultural poverty' of the Fuegians, here attested by their things, one is left with the extraordinary situation, recounted above, whereby the Fuegians are repeatedly called upon to testify to, to advertise even, the cultural richness and power of the civilised things - soap, magic lanterns and so forth - currently cashing in on their land and lives.

It should be stressed again that there is a constant focus, in writings on Tierra del Fuego, on such vocal and 'unsolicited testimonial' of the native fetish of Western things. This runs against the grain of a current academic trend which characterises and criticises imperial observers like Lothrop, for his claim to engage in a pure science of distanced and impartial observation of the other.\(^{17}\) This critical concentration on deconstructing the European representation of indigenous realities leaves little room for realising the way such science, for all its pretensions to transparent vision and universal truth, focuses so unremittingly on the messages it reads in the eyes of the other. The unconscious need for such a native site for observation of the 'White man’s magic', slips into focus in those tense and bizarre moments where the colonial master cannot find himself in the native’s gaze.

Lothrop alludes to this tension, when mentioning how travellers have been confused by 'the indifference of the natives to the wonders of European civilisation'.\(^{18}\) Bridges writes similarly of their 'apparent ingratitude' when given Western

---

16 Ibid., p. 130.
18 Lothrop, p. 92.
things. Both writers, interestingly, go on to state that this indifference is actually only an effect of 'native reticence' - the silence of an excess of awe, that, once more, 'mutely attests' to the sacral qualities of the secular thing.

Sometimes such ingratitude and indifference is not explained away so easily. Turning back one hundred years to the journals of Charles Darwin may elucidate a few moments in which the need, at first contact, to force upon the Fuegians an appropriate sense of wonder at our marvels calls forth the threat of civilised violence, revealing a colonial need to be demonised and feared as much as admired and advertised - both operations requiring ever constant attention to the eyes of the other.

Darwin’s journal of his visit to Tierra del Fuego in 1832, focuses, from first sight of the Fuegian mainland, upon what lies behind the native’s first sight of Europeans, as he spots ‘some scattered Indians, evidently watching the ship with interest’. The journal reveals the same attention to and fear of native eyes, so unpredictable in intent and opinion. This focus on their focus persists regardless of (or is it because of?) Darwin’s later disparaging and even disgusted characterisation of the Fuegians as the humans closest to animals in their primitivity. Much of the tense and foreboding atmosphere in the journal pivots upon the very unpredictability of Fuegian responses to the European exhibition of superior civilisation - so while, as Darwin writes soon after landing, 'we very soon delighted them by trifling presents such as tying red tape around the forehead' this native wonder is short lived and rapidly turns into a potentially violent demand for more - 'it is very easy to please, but difficult to make them content; the last and first word is sure to be "yammerschooner" which means "give me."' The inability of the native sense of awe to fix itself on European trinkets gives rise to the threat of violence. Darwin fears there will be a skirmish and, obviously quite shaken, makes the following curious comment: 'in treating with savages, Europeans labour under a great disadvantage until the cruel lesson is taught, how deadly firearms are'.

Native desire for Western things must then be pegged to a fear of the forces controlling the movement of those very commodities. For what Darwin’s 'cruel lesson' teaches is a fetishisation of the violence embodied in the gun itself, a fear of the threat it wields - note the weirdly animated wording - 'how deadly firearms are'. Isn’t this, in effect, a desire for the Fuegians to inculcate a similar fetishism to that which Taussig sees as critique of capitalism, the fear of the 'terrible Green

19 Bridges, p. 218.
21 Ibid., p. 117.
22 Ibid., p. 130.
23 Ibid., p. 131.
monster', the fetishised force of evil within the plantation's sugar cane? Perhaps coercion itself requires a certain fetish to engage the threat of its force. It is intriguing to read Lucas Bridges, writing of Indians 100 years later, who have now learnt - too late - Darwin's 'cruel lesson', and can render European fire-power the aura it needs to enforce civilisation: 'They would eye my rifle with the utmost suspicion, as though it were some evil thing, and would even cover their faces to express their horror of it'.

Yet Darwin's cruel lesson does not end here, and as the journal proceeds he pushes even further into the paradoxically nurtured nature of 'market forces'. Fuegian indifference to the European rights of property continues unabated. Darwin imputes this to their inability to perceive the European threat, their failure to focus on the forces surrounding them, as he makes clear in the following extraordinary statement:

> if these barbarians were a little less barbarous, it would have been easy, as we were superior in numbers, to have pushed them away and obliged them to keep beyond a certain line; but their courage is like that of a wild beast, they would not think of their inferiority in numbers, but each individual would endeavour to dash your brains out with a stone.

It requires 'barbarians ... a little less barbarous' to learn the natural accounting of quantifiable savagery that can then lead to the fear of force. Far from discovering nature's true competitive processes through the Fuegians - the 'missing link' for his evolutionary theory as the text books have it - Darwin laments their inability to organise reality into the natural calculus of units of humanity that allows one to tabulate and be tamed by the superiority of numbers. It is as if the primitivist precondition to peopling that Fuegian barrenness with things requires that the Fuegians fetishise what can only be called market forces - a second nature naturalisation of the power of numbers over people. It is at this point that the old debate as to which empowers the other - capitalism or colonialism - takes on a dizzying sort of undecidability, though ultimately what matters is that the European should find himself in native eyes.

From arguing a European need to find a primitive fetish of their own commodities, it has been necessary to dovetail into Darwin and his descendants in order to give a glimpse of the often inarticulate reverence for power from which the observance of colonial capitalism is inseparable. This fetish of force should be read not only as a critique of nascent capitalism (as Taussig would have it), but also as a

---

24 Bridges, p. 195.
precondition to it.

We now to return to the early 20th century, by which time Lucas Bridges can strike fear into native hearts with the 'evil thing' that is his rifle. Lothrop also writes of Bridges and his rifle, while discussing shamanism among the Ona Indians of Tierra del Fuego. 'Ona witch doctors were thought to control the powers of nature', Lothrop tells us and mentions a shaman who once sought, while in Bridges' company, to end a storm sent by the spirit of the mountain by firing arrows into it.\(^{27}\) This magic for some reason fails to work, at which point the natives ask Bridges to fire his gun at the storm - 'and this had the desired effect, for the storm soon ceased'.\(^{28}\) Lothrop leaves this anecdote without further comment, yet it is only two pages later, when discussing Ona mythology, that he refers to a local variant of the 'white-hero cycle' which he finds throughout the Americas, and which, he writes, 'goes to the very base of New World beliefs'.\(^{29}\) Just whose 'New World beliefs' are we discussing here then? Whose fetishism do these anecdotes really recount?

What drives Lothrop's host Lucas Bridges to represent Fuegian Indians manifesting such wonder at soap, magic lantern and rifle, and how do these colonial encounters relate to the unconscious commodity fetishism of advanced industrial Europe? Part of the answer lies in the distancing devices Bridges uses to mint these anecdotes about his marvellous possessions. That is, whenever he recounts the native fetish of the commodity he does it in such a way as to show that he himself has no belief in such magic powers. In the anecdote which opened this piece, the famous first colonist pretends to believe in the magic of the soap - and makes this dissimulation clumsily obvious to his readers - indeed, what else could a good missionary boy do but protect the integrity of the Fuegian family? Furthermore it is the Fuegian who demands the soaps white-washing magic be repeated, not the colonist. Bridges, on the contrary, pretends to particularise the abstract magic of industrial soap to only this one cake:

I hastened to tell him that the particular cake of soap given to his wife by my sister must have possessed some special virtue not to be found in any other tablet.\(^{30}\)

Yet there is something in this dissimulating denial of the abstract magic of the commodity through the proof of its particular power makes one suspect that Bridges really does want to have his cake and fetishise it too.

---

27 Lothrop, p. 97.
28 Loc. cit.
29 Ibid., p. 99.
30 Bridges, p. 220.
Take the following anecdote in 1897, as Bridges, on his coastal property, applies the 'white man’s magic’ to an astonished Fuegian visitor. The Ona Indian has a broken collar-bone, which Bridges duly splints, and yet the Indian indicates that such treatment is not sufficiently magical - 'it was too simple’.\(^{31}\) Bridges suddenly remembers a bottle of iodine which he has in the house:

so I took Tecooriolh along there and applied the tincture lavishly to the injured part. What a marvellous balm that was! So red and scented! Tecooriolh went away rejoicing, and was back at work again within a few days. Soon the fame of this wonderful medicine of mine spread throughout the country. The Indians would come with the most flimsy excuses for a touch of this magic paint, which was regarded not only as a cure, but also as a preventative against any possible pain or accident in the future.\(^{32}\)

Here we have the same dissimulation forced upon Bridges by the desiring natives, who demand further magic paint from the colonist, just as an earlier Indian wanted more magic soap. At the same time there is a clearly ironic tone in Bridges’ rendering of all this - a quite patent disbelief on his part in the medicinal, not to say preventative, power of iodine to heal a broken collar bone. Doubtless it is a similar irony that allows a Coke bottle to be so magically unbottled by a bushman under the 'eye' of the camera in *The Gods must be Crazy*.

What is most intriguing in that film is the way in which the Western narrator adopts the imagined tone of the native while representing his thoughts, so that the narrator himself, mimicking, albeit ironically, the bushman’s sense of wonder can tell us of dodging a 'big animal’ while a 'great flying bird’ passes overhead. Similarly, it is the revelation of the native fetish of a bottle of iodine, which allows Bridges, while representing it, to adopt the tone of the admiring native: 'What a marvellous balm! So red and scented! ... this wondrous medicine of mine’. This European mimicry of native wonder at the Western commodity is so commonly enacted in such anecdotes, indeed, such advertisements, that it leads one to question the distance underlying Bridges’ accounts of native fetishisation - where mimicry of wonder is always for the native’s sake, or for the sake of irony, but somehow never for his own sake - never out of any true belief of his own in such magic.

It has already been suggested here that such anecdotes engage the magic beliefs imputed to the world’s purportedly most primitive people, contrasting Western wares with the perceptions arising from 'other systems of production’. Yet here, contrary to Marx’s intent, such contrasts act to unleash, much more than dispel, the European fetishism of commodities, to advertise, much more than criticise, the faith


\(^{32}\) *Loc. cit.*
in things otherwise unconscious. Indeed, the very antipodean position of Tierra del Fuego - the 'uttermost part of the Earth', island of the world's most primitive inhabitants, periphery of the periphery, not only empowers this contrast, it sites the island as the ultimate elsewhere necessary to experience a fetish that can only ever be external to the rationalised market organisation that simultaneously enacts it.

It is this fact - that the fetish must be elsewhere - that will be argued by highlighting the very incongruity of Bridges' obsessive mimicry of native wonder, in the face of the unarguable fact that he himself clearly has no wish to 'go native'. Indeed, Bridges' own wishes are largely irrelevant, for the Western fetish of its own commodities that his mimicry both unleashes and enshrines lies outside his own individual consciousness. His mimicry and his dissimulation is neither for the natives' sake, nor for the sake of irony, nor even for the sake of Bridges himself - but rather in the interest of the very commodity organisation of reality. This is how, following Slavoj Zizek, we shall read Marx's statement on the unconscious nature of the fetishism of commodities: 'they do not know that they are doing this, but they do it'. The belief in 'magic soap', or miraculous iodine, is utterly exterior to Bridges because it is an objective belief inherent in the very form of relating to things under capitalism - it is outside the realm of individual subjective self-awareness, but as an objective social fact it nevertheless impinges upon that subjectivity and its way of encountering the world.

But how can the fetish exist elsewhere, outside the subject who acts under its sway? In his exegesis of commodity fetishism, Zizek quotes a passage in Lacan's works where the 'objectivity of belief' is explained by way of reference to the Chorus of Greek tragedy, 'even if you do not feel anything, the Chorus will do so in your place'. Zizek continues, saying that:

> to avoid the impression that this exteriorisation, this transference of our most intimate feeling is simply a characteristic of the so-called primitive stages of development, let us remind ourselves of a phenomenon quite usual in popular television shows or serials: 'canned laughter'.

Canned laughter, Zizek argues, has nothing to do with telling us when or how or at what to laugh. On the contrary, for people coming home 'tired from a hard day's stupid work', it allows an externalised enactment of emotion and feeling, outside ourselves, because 'the Other - embodied in the television set' does the laughing for us.

---

34 Jacques Lacan, quoted in Zizek, p. 35.
35 *Loc. cit.*
36 *Loc. cit.*
The Fuegians then, offer a sort of unconscious 'canned fetish' to the 'rationalisation' of market reality which Max Weber characterised as the 'disenchantment of the world'. The fetish is unconscious, but not in any individual psychological sense - only, on the contrary, as the fantastic animated underside of a social fact that itself only exists outside the individual subjectivities that nevertheless combine to create it. Bridges has no personal belief in the magic power of Pear's soap, the very nature of the fetish is social, abstracted not from individual beliefs but rather actions. The New World belief in the magic of the commodity belongs to Lucas Bridges only to the extent that he consciously disowns it, contracting that belief out to the world's most primitive inhabitants. This has a certain sort of uncommon sense about it, for, as Alfred Sohn-Rethel has argued, the fetish, the as if postulate - that commodities have power over people - can only operate when, at the very moment of exchange, those people who enact it, fail to believe it on any conscious level. Such a belief can only appear exteriorised, represented as belonging to the Fuegians, for instance, and then mimicked by Bridges in this weird puppetting of his own desires which aren't even his. This gives us a very odd, anecdotal even, site for finding faith in the sacred things of secular modernity - not only outside Europe, but outside the Europeans themselves.

But what of the 'white hero cycle' which, according to Lothrop, 'goes to the very base of New World beliefs'? Look at Lucas Bridges, representing native wonder, puppet miming the beliefs that his subjectivity cannot allow him to own as his own. As such, Bridges is perhaps as good as any example of the sort of alienation - a man alienated from his own creativity, his autonomy and desires - that for Marx is the subordination of labour to commodity, the domination of man by thing forming the fetish. Yet if Bridges represents such an alienated subjectivity, it needs to be seen that there is something in his story that exceeds such rationalised

---

38 So if the fetish exists on the level of a Durkheimian social fact, this factuality resides in the reality of its existence as an invisible collective fantasy. This fantasy or fetish is unconscious in the sense that it exists not as a concrete, albeit fantastic, idea, but rather as a fantastic form which structures the exchange of things as much as the shape of ideas - and which reveals some of its structure in the slips, starts and juxtapositions of anecdotes such as the ones we have been considering. The usage in this article of psychoanalytical terminology to convey such social realities and unrealities derives largely from Zizek, op. cit., passim but especially 'How did Marx invent the Symptom?' pp. 11-23. While also making some use of the Freudian slip here in this analysis of colonial anecdote, the fetishism considered here relies on Marx's anthropological usage, not Freud's sexualised one ('Fetishism' [1927] in Freud, Collected Papers, Vol. 5., ed. James Strachey, New York, pp. 198-205) though there may well be an avenue for a further, and more gendered analysis of such texts, by playing Marx off Freud in this respect too.
disenchantment. This something resides in Bridges’ status as famous first colonist, as romantic representative of the combination of technology, commodity and violence which he, the son of missionaries, calls civilisation and brings in triumph to Tierra del Fuego.

He brings in triumph because in such peripheral spaces, civilisation, as an item of faith, once made missionary and magical, opens up an extraordinary space for a human reanimation outside the alienated labour units of advanced capitalism, outside any sort of Weberian rationalisation. Here in colonial Tierra del Fuego, the superior magic of things is now embodied in the romantic life of the ‘white hero’ who comes with soap, guns, civilisation and the adventure of enforcing them. Lothrop’s anecdotal account of Bridges’ rifle shooting down the storm and so outdoing native magic, seems almost to attribute to Bridges himself the shamanistic power his rifle spouts. It is as if these things, outside the context of their production, animate the white male hero bearing them and create the site for the metropolitan fantasy of the colonial adventure that exists elsewhere.

Existing elsewhere, such adventure can then be vicariously experienced through its mechanical reproduction in book, photo and newsreel - and in documentary form, creating ‘canned heroism’ for the alienated urban wage earner ‘tired from a hard day’s stupid work’. Lacan’s Greek chorus, which does the feeling for you, and Zizek’s television, which does the laughing for you, might well explain the televised colonial documentary which does the adventuring for you - elsewhere of course. Interestingly, there is a long literature of colonial encounter this century which documents, advertises even, precisely this miraculous fact - that life, through such media, can be lived inside the machine and thereby elsewhere; Bridges’ magic lantern is only one instance of a tradition reaching right into the present. The potential objectivity, or exteriority, of existence which the machinery of mechanical reproduction open up, perhaps explains the power of the *Spirit of Television* documentary screened so recently here in Australia, which allowed the viewer to marvel at the footage of Brazilian Indians (the world’s most primitive) marvelling at the spirits that they see within the television set.40

Once more this focus on primitive eyes - to unleash the fantasy of an unalienated life enacted elsewhere, as much as the fetish of civilised things empowering that

---

40 Taussig addresses precisely this issue - white fascination with primitive fascination with modern mimetic machinery in ‘The Talking Machine’, *Mimesis and Alterity*, pp. 193-211. His approach, via Walter Benjamin’s theories of the primitivism of modernity, seeks to unearth unconscious social connections between the discourse of primitives as natural mimics, and the mechanical mimicry imputed to modern mimetic machinery. The route taken here, through Lacan, focuses much more on the weirdly displaced and disjointed European subjectivity entailed when the magic found in such things (whether it is the magic of manufactured mimicry, animation, or even domination) can only be experienced in primitivist encounters and, by reflection, through native eyes.
fantasy. This has its Fuegian antecedents too. Take another of Bridges' guests, this time a European surgeon, Dr. Frederick Cook. Dr. Cook performs eye surgery on one Fuegian and manages miraculously to save his sight. Bridges tells us that he is forced to introduce Cook to the Fuegians as 'Joon, the Ona word for a magician or wizard', for they have no word for doctor - so once more Bridges is compelled to dissimulate belief and mime out the magic of modernity. While Cook, giving sight to the blind, becomes wizard, harnessing the miracles of modern technology, to become magical himself in the eyes of the native. Those eyes, now operated upon, refocussed and restored, open up an animating vista of adventure for the 'white hero' of secular modernity - the white hero whose liberating life of power over things, as much as his unconscious beliefs to the contrary, can only but exist elsewhere, outside Europe, outside himself, under native eyes. For it is the eye of the native whose gaze illuminates - envisions even - the magic of European enlightenment.

Paul Magee
University of Melbourne

[The author would like to thank Klaus Neumann, Vera Mackie, Andrew Sartori and Madeline Andrews for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper].

---

41 Bridges, pp. 239-40.