

Comment

The Nation and its Post-Modern Critics

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The nation is an historically specific form of economic, political and cultural community which emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century. That is, despite appearing to be primordial or at least being experienced as having roots in antiquity, the nation developed relatively recently in conjunction with changes associated with capitalism. It cannot therefore be defended as a natural entity. It cannot be described as essential to human community. However it has become embedded within our history as generations of people have died and been born with national identity. And in a world with increasing abstraction and attenuation of social relations we have to be careful of dismissing as simply mass madness a level of association which carries such deeply embedded questions of existence as life and death, identity, cultural continuity, tradition, community, and collectivity.

This essay is written as a critique of the post-modernist¹ argument that the nation is nothing more than a coercive social construct that should therefore be dissolved. In the face of Ronald Reagan's invocation of 'One Nation under God' which is having

* With thanks to those people who commented on an earlier draft. This essay should be read in conjunction with Gerry Gill's critique of post-structuralism in this issue.

remarkable success in galvanizing support from America's youth, or similarly, the success of the Hawke Government's ideological consensus as it too draws on a new nationalism,² it would seem that an argument for the death of a nation should be affirmed without question. However it is not so simple. I want to suggest that the post-modernist position grows out of and enhances the very social processes which in undermining deeply embedded ontological attachments and relationships, creates the grounds on which responsiveness to the appeal of the new nationalism is based.

The notion of 'deep embeddedness' is crucial. It is a metaphor which attempts, in contradistinction to the post-modernist notion of a 'surface plane of difference',³ to emphasise the way in which history and cultural traditions underpin and structure the present.

1. Defining post-modernism is a bewildering exercise. It is a concept that since the late 1970s has become central to any discussion of contemporary aesthetic practice from art and literature to architecture. However, as early as 1959 Irving Howe theorized about a shift from modernism to post-modernism in his article 'Mass Society and Post-modern Fiction'. Post-modern aesthetic practice is a sensibility rather than a style: it paradoxically embraces popular culture and attacks traditional modes of representation, while it offers a critique of modernization and attempts to re-establish ties with the past. The present essay does not address this use of the concept. Rather it is used generically to discuss a tendency in recent social theory which links post-structuralism and deconstructionism: the celebration of difference, pluralism and deconstructed form. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Post-modernism?' in Ibad and Sally Hassan eds, *Innovation/Renovation*, Wisconsin, UWP, 1983; also his *La Condition Postmoderne*, 1979, translation forthcoming; Andreas Huyssen, 'The Search for Tradition: Avante-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970s', *New German Critique* 22, Winter 1981, pp. 23-40; Irving Sandler, 'Modernism, Revisionism, Pluralism, and Post-Modernism', *Art Journal*, Fall 1980, pp. 345-347; and Hal Foster ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Washington, Bay Press, 1983.
2. The new nationalism refers to the revival of a populist nationalism in the advanced capitalist nation-states: Reagan's America, Thatcher's Britain, Nakasone's Japan, Hawke's Australia and so on. It is to be distinguished from what Tom Nairn calls neo-nationalism, or Anthony Smith, the ethnic revival, in Scottish, Welsh, Catalan, Basque, Tamil, Sikh or French Canadian nationalism, to take some obvious examples.
3. The emphasis is on the 'field of difference' where meaning is seen not as concealed at a deeper level but existing in relation to how it differs from other elements in the semiotic field. Alex Callinicos brings this out in his description of the work of Gilles Deleuze: "Nothing is more fragile than the surface" [quoting Deleuze]. Beneath lies the undifferentiated, the formless, the indeterminate. Here all is flux, a confused melange of fragments.' In *Is There a Future for Marxism?*, London, Macmillan Press, 1982, p. 92.

To take it further, it suggests that the person is constituted at the most fundamental level of his or her being in a continuity of cultural practices and relationships such as family, ethnicity and nation. The social processes which have led to the undermining of the old forms of cultural practices such as nationalism also produce a variety of responses in different social contexts. At a popular level it leads to the search for roots; amongst intellectuals one response is the broad identity crisis endemic to attempting, in any sustained way, to live pure post-modernism.

The present critique of the argument for the dissolution of the nation has two main themes: firstly, in attempting to demystify and deconstruct the 'components' of nationalism, the post-modernist has lost a sense of the whole, of the nation at a constitutive, embedded social frame. Secondly, the dissolutionist argument has major difficulties in counterposing an adequate, liveable, alternative practice. After briefly elaborating these two problems, this article will focus more particularly on a recent article by Andrew Lohrey called 'Australian Nationalism as Myth',⁴ attempting to indicate how it relates to more general trends in post-modernist theorizing.

The first problem is endemic to all approaches which have demystification as their major or only thrust. We all live the contradictions of our time. And none more so than the 'free-floating intellectual'⁵ who seeks to demystify and dissolve those contradictions. For as one of the semiological prophets, Roland Barthes, recognized, such a project has to avoid embarking on an enterprise, condemned to 'constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness'.⁶ It is one of the major dilemmas of cultural analysis. If we deconstruct the 'object' (cultural practice, discourse or artefact) we appear to be 'freed' from its hold. But to the extent that its self-evident and emotional quality is broken it is 'destroyed'. That is not to say that the 'object' ceases to inform everyday existence; rather that the demystifier only faces a phantom of what he or she was trying to understand.

4. Andrew Lohrey, 'Australian Nationalism as Myth', *Arena* 68, 1984, pp. 107-123.
5. The inverted commas are intended to distance the argument from theorists like Mannheim (at least in the form that he is most often interpreted) who suggest that intellectuals are free agents. Yet it draws attention to the fact that intellectuals generally conceive of themselves as such. Indeed in important ways they are lifted out of the constraints of more parochial contexts. See Geoff Sharp, 'Intellectuals in Transition', *Arena* 65, 1983, pp. 84-94.
6. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1972, p. 159.

Furthermore as the discourse of demystification has tried to become more searching it has tended either to ossify into self-referential technical precision, impenetrable and tightly packed, or alternatively to extend the analysis through a poetic mode of language. Either way the post-structuralist, deconstructionist and semiologist open up a realm only accessible for the initiated. In the process the blank stare of non-comprehension, or the response of the yes-but-so-what kind from the majority of people still relatively embedded in the routinized round of everyday life, confirm the demystifier as floating estranged from those 'objects of analysis' others perversely clutch onto as 'real'. God is given Nietzschean last rites, the Queen is dismissed as '*Women's Weekly*' construct, and the nation is exposed as a coercive myth. Simultaneously, and quite explicitly in the particular post-modernist argument I will be examining, the process through which the individual achieves radical autonomy in the context of 'difference' is heralded as the new apotheosis.

I would argue then that the dilemma of 'drifting between the (deeply constitutive) object and its demystification' has to be pushed against rather than succumbed to. It is the 'free-floating demystifier' who is most prone to misconstruing such a project. Rather than granting the possibility of a conjunction of critical theory and an alternative-but-incorporative⁷ practice, the tendency of the post-modernist is to present the liberating practice of demystification as itself constituting a way of life. With Christopher Norris I want to say that even if it possesses an 'inescapable rigour of its own' it is an 'activity that cannot be consistently acted on — that way madness lies'.⁸

This brings us to the second related theme of this critique: the post-modernist 'programme'. The more political protagonists in the post-modernist mode are critics of what has come to be known as the information society, and yet they can offer no way out except in its 'schizophrenic process' of the demystifying and dismembering passive descent into a 'black hole' of silence, or active participation in its 'schizophrenic process' of the demystifying and dismembering of that which we used to think, in our naivety, was real. This is not to say however that this new nihilism doesn't have fashionable

7. The notion of an alternative-but-incorporative practice is intended to imply that a radically oppositional practice need not take the dissolutionist path, but could reflexively and critically incorporate aspects of social life such as ties of blood and commitment through the family which have (past and present) been associated with varying degrees of oppression.

8. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, London, Methuen, 1982 p. xii.

appeal.⁹ For an increasing minority borne into post-modernism it offers a convincing and clever critique of the modern condition. In more concrete terms, for those people for whom 'god, king and country' have long since ceased to have meaning, the new writing in the post-modernist mode has an exciting, bewildering indeterminacy which accords with their sense of the world. The question which arises is — can post-modernist theory escape the infinite regress which entails that any working through of an alternative life-form has itself got to be deconstructed and dissolved before it reaches the point of any determinacy. As Barthes might have said before he too joined the fray, those who whole-heartedly embrace the post-modern world are bound by their own logic to drift in their own demystification.

Nationalism as Myth?

Andrew Lohrey's article, 'Australian Nationalism as Myth', is written, as he proclaims, in the iconoclastic 'spirit of post-modernism'. It is representative of the new genre of theorizing being published in such places as *Intervention*, *Local Consumption*, *The Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* and *Art and Text*, and it has the general orientation that I was criticizing in the introduction. Lohrey embarks upon a celebration of unbounded, autonomous, free-floating individualism, without any recognition that it too is an ideology. The brunt of his critique is an article I wrote entitled 'Australia in the Corporate Image: A New Nationalism'.¹⁰ That article analysed Australia's new nationalism as emerging as part of the wider process of the internationalization of capital and culture; it proceeded by analysing the increasing importance of transnational corporations in managing images of the nation. It argued that both the state and corporate advertisers have embarked upon a practice of legitimation in which (as previously embedded frames of meaning such as the nation are being pushed into relief) cultural images are drawn upon and instrumentally directed.

Andrew Lohrey misleadingly attributes to this argument the implication that nationalism is a 'state of fullness beyond question',

9. See Gerry Gill, 'Post-structuralism as Ideology' in this *Arena*; Don Anderson, 'A Simulacrum: The Illiterate in Pursuit of the Indecipherable', *National Times*, 3 August 1984; and Charles Ferrall, 'Simulating Post-Modernity', *Arena* 68, 1984, pp. 20-22.
10. Paul James, 'Australia in the Corporate Image: A New Nationalism', *Arena* 63, 1983, pp. 65-106.

a 'pre-existent condition beyond the boundaries of mere discourse; "real" in the way Aborigines are "real";¹¹ a condition having an *authentic* voice and meaning beyond the manipulation of sign and discourse. He maintains that the argument naively sees the nation as a pre-existent entity, a quasi-biological instinct, as being separate from the processes of the conscious uses of culture 'which seek to embed text in emotions through unconscious associations'.¹²

The theoretical underpinnings of 'A New Nationalism' are in need of clarification and development for Lohrey's version of it is far from what was intended. One of the article's limitations was a failure to make explicit a core assumption — namely, that a social change has been in process which enables a more generalized insight into previously taken-for-granted cultural frames. This assumption implies a qualitative difference between the old nationalism and the new. It partially explains Andrew Lohrey's misreading of 'A New Nationalism' as posing the old forms of nationalism as more authentic, more real. A further reason may be that Lohrey has linked the article to a sympathy on the left for what has been derided as an unreconstructed koala nationalism: appeals to Ned Kelly, the Eureka Stockade, Johnny O'Keefe and the Southern Cross. It is a position sometimes given expression in *The Independent Australian*, *Bowyang* and, most recently, *Southern Cross*. Another form of radical nationalism can be found in the tired old Left journal *Overland*. In Mick Carter's article 'From Red Centre to Black Hole'¹³ one gets an account of how the post-modernist identifies marxism with a yearning for a cultural authenticity which draws upon images from the nation's cultural past. Such an assumption about marxist discussions of the nation partially explains the misreading, but for an adequate explication we need also to examine the limitations and blinkeredness of Lohrey's own methodology.

It can be argued in fact that the historical development of that methodology is consistent with the social changes that mark the emergence of a new more self-conscious nationalism out of the old. In other words both the theory of post-modernism and the practice of the new nationalism are aspects of the sharpening of more general social changes in how people see their world and interact within it. Post-modernism seeks to undermine and deconstruct all 'authoritative' cultural attachments. On the face of it this seems antithetical to the implications of a new nationalism. The new

11. Lohrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

13. In Andre Frankovits ed., *Seduced and Abandoned: The Baudrillard Scene*, Glebe, Stonemoss, 1984.

nationalism is seemingly a reassertion of what the 'free-floating' post-modernist would decry as a closed 'master text'. However the contemporary nation lies at the intersection of two major contradictions which entail an 'openness' despite people continuing to embrace it as if it were as ontologically secure as the old national frame. These contradictions are: firstly the internationalization of capital and culture concurrent with the consolidation of the nation as a primary actor in international relations; and secondly the individuation and privatization of social life concurrent with the media evocation of national culture. The new nationalism thus is carried by a process which impels the dissolution of the old, closed national form. In a quite practical way the nation is beginning to drift beyond its conventional moorings as the boundary of the old nation is crossed by meta-national capital, commodities, and cultural forms. In advocating the dissolution of the nation the post-modernist is then pushing in a direction already in process which has paradoxically had as one of its contemporary expressions the assertion of a new level of nationalism. It is a direction starkly illustrated by Labor's promotion of new nationalism as it simultaneously beckons international banking finance to our shores.

Tourism is another expression of this contradiction. In the 1960s it appeared to some that the tourist would be a new cultural archetype as the Western capitalist world moved into a post-national stage. Paul Ricoeur (1961), as one who argued for the world state (or mondialism),¹⁴ commented ambivalently:

The whole of mankind becomes an imaginary museum: where shall we go this weekend — visit the Angkor ruins or take a stroll in the Tivoli of Copenhagen? We can very easily imagine a time close at hand when any fairly well-to-do person will be able to leave his country indefinitely in order to taste his own national death in an interminable, aimless voyage.¹⁵

He was right about the international hippy wanderer, but that phenomenon could not be sustained nor directly generalized. He was quite prescient about the tendency of present-day World Discovery tourism to treat other cultures as dioramas, however the effect of such tourism has been to *superficially* confirm national difference rather than directly hasten national death. Overseas travel most generally serves (to use an international, née American

14. See Paul Ricoeur, 'From Nation to Humanity: Task of Christians', in David Stewart and Joseph Bien eds, *Political and Social Essays by Paul Ricoeur*, Athens Ohio University Press, 1974.

15. Paul Ricoeur, 'Civilization and National Cultures', *History and Truth* cited by Craig Owens in Hal Foster, *op. cit.*; also Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, London, Macmillan Press, 1976.

cliché) as 'time out' from the routinized rather than an attempt to lose one's nationality.

Ricoeur's picture has its most power if we bring it 'closer to home' through an unintended analogy. Television, the very medium which has become so crucial in the societal integration of people as national 'community' allows for travel far beyond the relatively bounded time-space interstices of the nation. As we engage with *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-first Century* or revisit *Brideshead*, not only is the content of the world opened out and flattened but we are participating in an internationalized cultural form. Side-trips into the staged authenticity (what Baudrillard would call, simulacra) of the life and times of Australia through *Gallipoli* — *Thorn Birds* style nostalgia, or even through the current spate of labour-oriented docu-dramas,¹⁶ provide little basis for orienting the aimless voyage. This is not to imply that an alternative practice should take the path of a simple return to the old, more closed national form; or that Luddite raids on the nation's lounge rooms provide the answer. But in the suggestion that the new nationalism is constituted in a more open, abstract way is the basis for a fundamental divergence from the mode of critique exemplified by Andrew Lohrey's work, and thus from the practical implications that we can live in an unbounded fragmented, traditionless, emotionless culture.

The theme running through Lohrey's article is that nationalism is and must be 'manipulative and coercive of the individual'. It is an ethereal discourse which contributes to the formation of a disciplined subject. He cannot acknowledge that subjectivity in consumer capitalist society impels and depends upon a self-active formation of identity. Nationalism, to use his post-modernist language, is a closed text which, because it admits no possibility of a nondiscursive order, is dominant and determinant. He attempts to distance himself from Derrida's rejection of the possibility of a nondiscursive order — a rejection encapsulated in the now famous phrase, 'there is nothing outside of the text'¹⁷ — but having entered halfway into the post-modernist labyrinth Lohrey is left confused. The relationship between nation and person he contends is quite arbitrary, conventional and therefore rarefied, whereas ethnicity, local community or Australian Rules football are somehow constrained by meaningful 'semantic' connections. To what? Aren't they equally cultural 'constructions'? In order to answer the question: 'what are the "presences" which ground these

16. This has taken off since it was first noted by Denis Whitburn, 'Television's Big Swing to Labour', *National Times*, 18 March 1983.

connections?', Lohrey would have in these cases to admit of a lived and thus 'real' practice of interaction between social beings. Why is it then that the nation is separated out as inherently and nothing more than a textual construct? If he could allow that being Australian is confirmed in practice (as well as in ideological discourse) rather than simply an oppressive illusion, his discussion of the contradictory emotional hold of the nation would have more cogency.

Instead his argument is permeated by profound problems. An apparently trivial instance is exposed when, for example, Lohrey expresses his thankfulness that, unlike cricket, football retains some of its original impulse merely by virtue of not yet becoming a national text.¹⁸ It is an aspect of his general position: while in the past it was possible to articulate shared values, now once they are 'elevated to the rarefied level of nationalist discourses, not only [do they] lose their original sectional roots and sense of community — their meaning and charge — they also come to assume a coercive role'.¹⁹ However, even though one might want to nominally agree with the direction in which he is pointing, it is as if Lohrey has seized upon nationalism as the instrument of unmitigated evil, rather than seeing it in its commercial manifestation as part of a more general process which includes the commodification of sport and the attenuation of cultural meaning.

In an unformulated way he appears to be responding to what various writings in *Arena* have referred to as a shift of predominance in the levels of constitutive social abstraction in which personal and collective identity formation takes place. A shift, that

17. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore John Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 158. Establishing what is a non-discursive order has become quite problematic for post-modernist theory. For Foucault, for example, discourse is the totality of things 'said', 'a totality in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined.' It must be theorized as 'a practical domain that is autonomous (although dependent), and which can be described at its own level (although it must be articulated on something other than itself)' [emphasis added]. It is this 'something other' which Foucault would designate as the non-discursive: the 'whole domain of institutions, economic processes and social relations' [Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, London, Tavistock, 1972, pp. 55, 121-122, 164. See Callinicos's discussion, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-108.] Callinicos suggest that in Foucault's later writings discourse is expanded into power relations. Lohrey, it seems, cannot theorize about nondiscursive practices, only 'nondiscursive presences': the land, the body, etc. To do so would raise the vexing problem of social determinations.

18. Lohrey, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

is, from identity formed predominantly in 'presence', in the more concrete face-to-face contexts of social interaction, to that formed in the more open extended media of print and television. As Lohrey would I think readily concur, the media extend (and attenuate) the possibilities of communication, as well as enhancing the possibility of cultural management. But unfortunately vilification of the nation overwhelms any such analysis. The closest he comes is to imply a crude analytic continuum from personal, local and therefore to be sanctified, to national, decontextualized and therefore to be deconstructed.

The next problem in Lohrey's article with which I will deal is that of social determination. It relates to the tendency discussed earlier for a mode of analysis which seeks to deconstruct and demystify to be continually drifting between the object and its demystification. Lohrey in this way reduces the deeply embedded, constitutive frame to an ethereal phantom. But, if nationalism is a closed and rarefied text, devoid of community 'meaning and charge', and thus having no social relational basis, how does it get reproduced as a coercive form of integration? Lohrey's answer accords with his post-structuralist emphasis on discourse as determinant, and disseminated (as he says in a lame materialist addendum) 'in the interests of those who have interests'.²⁰ He contends that nationalism is a form of mass madness:

the evangelists, the RSL types, who are not satisfied with their own individual neurosis . . . strive to legitimate it by spreading it around so that everybody else has it as well. Of course by making social their individual aberrations their madness is transformed from insanity into 'normality'.²¹

It is a position easily derided, but Lohrey is not alone in resorting to such language. We can find it in the writings of a New Left theorist like Tom Nairn. Nairn's argument about the janus-faced nature of nationalism and its moral, political and human ambiguity may be far more subtle than Lohrey's outright dismissal. And he may not need to use the language of psycho-pathology with the same explanatory force as Lohrey. However, in attempting to give a sense of the excesses of nationalism, Nairn, in a grand slip of rhetorical exuberance penned the following:

nationalism is the pathology of modern development history, as inescapable as 'neurosis' in the individual, with much the same ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies), and largely incurable.²²

20. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

The highlighting of the irrational suggests a (frustrated) incapacity to adequately explain the continuing condensation of issues of social existence in the category of the nation during times of upheaval (such as fascism) or in a society in which people are constituted as individuals (advanced capitalism). The New Left theorist retires into explaining 'collective irrationality' as the inevitable outcome of the disruptive ordeal of uneven capitalist development. Unconvinced, the post-modernist pushes on. However, it is the argument of this article that despite the radical sounding logic of the post-modernist programme, its conclusions for an alternative practice are untenable. The following brief section attempts to schematically describe the directions that such a logic takes.

The Post-Modernist Labyrinth

Because the nation can be deconstructed and therefore is rightly recognized as a cultural rather than natural entity, the question quickly becomes asked: 'how can a social invention (with the emphasis on invention-as-fiction have not just self-evident plausibility, but evoke attachments of loyalty?' 'How could someone be willing to die²³ for a fictional relationship?' asks our archetypical post-modern theorist. To such a question the post-modernist has a two-fold answer: the phantom-nation invests its textual hollowness with material properties which causes the person to see the illusion as real; and secondly the person in a more general sense is enclosed in an irrational unconscious. In the first statement is the conclusion of a theory of the object as mystified-text, and in the second the outline for a theory of the subject (the person formed in myth).

The search for a theory of the subject takes us further into post-modernism. Whereas Althusserian structuralism reduces subjects

22. Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1981, p. 359. Moreover, Nairn has his own problems in developing an adequate materialist account of the 'rise' of the nation: see Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, (Second Edition) London, Duckworth, 1983, pp. xvi-xvii, and *The Ethnic Revival*, Cambridge, CUP, 1981, pp. 36-43; and Eric Hobsbawm, 'Some Reflections on "The Break-Up of Britain"', *New Left Review* 105, 1977, pp. 3-23.
23. A strong argument could be made to the effect that the new nationalism does not engender this loyalty to the same degree as the old. A questioning of national purpose descending into cynical 'Scragging' resentment became the norm for the Western soldier in Vietnam. For how long would the fervour of the Falklands war have lasted after body bags started to return home?

to bearers of structures (in fact for Althusser the 'true subjects' are the 'places and functions' that agents occupy) post-structuralism has, working within the same problematic, attempted to get away from the subject as mechanically inhabiting an ideological space. In an elaboration of the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan some post-structuralists present the person as a subject-in-process. That is, the person has no fixed identity. We are cleaved by contradictions but become positioned as coherent beings in ideological discourse.²⁴ One approach to post-modernism hurries on from here incorporating it as the basis for a (supposedly) revolutionary practice. Another approach, associated with the later writing of Jean Baudrillard, recommends the abandoning of subject centred discourses and has conservative implications for social practice.

A work which marked the crystallization of the former approach, a book often cited in the contemporary Australian post-modernist scene, is *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.²⁵ Its authors, Deleuze and Guattari, engage in a dazzling, bizarre confrontation between the political economy of Marx and the nihilistic pluralism of Nietzsche. They argue that 'the insanity of the capitalist machine' can only be broken in the thorough-going dismantling of all oedipal attachments, all simulations of coherence: ego, family, religion, state, nation. It is the capitalist machine which makes possible this revolutionary process of schizophrenia, for capitalism is itself a constant process of decoding and deterritorializing. However capitalism works equally to reinstate pseudo-codes and factitious reterritorializations upon this infinite flux. If opposition is incorporated and deviance is nullified in this ever-turning screw, how will capitalism be undermined? Deleuze and Guattari suggest that 'it will be (through) decoded flow, a deterritorialized flow that runs too far and cuts too sharply, thereby escaping from the axiomatic of capitalism'.²⁶ The task of schizoanalysis then is to break any restraint that arrests the flow of desire and the chaos of difference.

24. This development is exemplified in the work of Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject*, Boston, RKP, 1977. The journals *Screen* and *Tel Quel* were influential carriers of such theory. All labels such as 'post-structuralist' are necessarily tentative appellations for we have moved into the era of theoretical individualism: theoreticians refuse to be located within a particular discipline or connected to a particular school or movement.

25. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New York, Viking Press, 1977.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 378.

Whereas a mainstream conservative theorist like Clifford Geertz describes the layers of condensed, structured meaning, what we see proposed here by Deleuze and Guattari is a surface skin of meaning (bound differences) stretched taut into a plane of 'representation', artificially overlaying and opposed to the open, formless nomadic distribution of difference beneath. The political dimension to this is that any structure such as national community which is imbued with meaning has to be dissolved. Those who offer us a glimmer of this process already at work are nomads 'half out of society':²⁷ schizophrenics, the unemployed Black youth of Brixton, radical separatist feminists and (in relation to the nation) the eternal travellers.

The 'nomadology'²⁸ of Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, Foucault, Donzelot and the early Baudrillard has common ground with the artistry of novelists Henry Miller and William Burroughs, playwrights Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett, Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols of *The Great Rock'n Roll Swindle* fame, Andy Warhol and Werner Fassbinder and local artist Juan Davila. The list goes on and on from Marge Piercy in *Women on the Edge of Time* and John Fowles' recent excursion into *Mantissa*, to the architecture manifesto of Robert Venturini. The clearest connection is that they highlight the outsider. More importantly, though they are not bound together in a common project or able to be classified by an easy periodization, they are self-conscious, individualistic 'inventors' of new fissures in what previously were

27. In a more recent work, *On the Line*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1983, pp. 42-43, Deleuze and Guattari suggest strangely that 'America should be considered a place apart . . . everything of importance that is happening proceeds by means of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, the subterranean mobs and gangs'. Yet *as they acknowledge* and criticize in their quaint metaphoric style 'it is not exempt from domination by trees and the search for roots. This is evident even in its literature, in the quest for national identity, and even for a European ancestry or geneology (Kerouac sets off in search of his own ancestry)' This is an illustration of the double-sided tendency that the present essay is concerned to highlight.
28. See Callinicos, *op. cit.*, p. 110. As he points out it is formulated within quite a different framework from that of Marcuse who also argued that marginal social groups provided a basis for revolutionary change. For a post-modernist informed critique of Callinicos see Paul Patton, 'Marxism in Crisis: No Difference', in Judith Allen and Paul Patten eds, *Beyond Marxism?*, Sydney, Intervention, 1983, pp. 47-72. For a local, defensive elaboration of nomadology see Stephen Muecke, 'The Discourse of Nomadology: Phylums in Flux', *Art and Text* 14, 1984, pp. 24-40. Interestingly he extols a neo-Blainey Triumph-of-Nomadism. Aboriginality is used as a metaphoric way of 'being' for oppositional strategies.

unquestioned, routinized cultural boundaries. They are on the edge of (rather than outside) the society they rail against. They are rightly critical of the excesses and emptiness of modernism, and aware of its masking of artifice through simulating meaning, but in the end (with the partial exception of Piercy's counter-cultural otherworld) they are part of the process of pushing the dissolution of meaning to its limits, confirming a human emptiness.

The other approach, that associated with Baudrillard, is consistent with the (oversimplified) progression sketched thus far. In his later writing he tells us that we have arrived at the age of simulation: 'simulation is no longer that of territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation of models of the real without origin or reality.'²⁹ Opposition in this age is futile for 'Nothing changes [even] when society breaks the mirror of madness . . . to bow down before "differences"'.³⁰ In a single sweep the marxist emphasis on forging an alternative social practice, as well as the espousal in nomadology of the possibility of subjective resistance, are rejected. In the information society, overloaded by the media with its frantic production of simulations of meaning, change will come, but it won't come through purposive human activity. The challenge to the cacophony of the media and political establishment will come, asserts Baudrillard, through the silent apathy of the masses. 'Resistance' entails descent into silence.³¹ What I have been calling the post-modernist labyrinth becomes, to use a characteristically Baudrillardian metaphor, an endless black hole.

Conclusion

The post-modernist programme thus nullifies itself at its furthest reaches. It is clear that Andrew Lohrey would want to withdraw from its 'procession to silence in simulacra' well before it descends into a nihilistic void. But like many of the other critics of the post-modern condition (of pluralism, fragmentation and attenuation of meaning) he is caught up in its logic. It is not an age which has just suddenly exploded upon us. It has a history, albeit at an increasingly accelerating level of change. In the middle of the

29. Jean Baudrillard, 'The Procession of Simulacra', *Art and Text* 11, Spring 1983, p. 3.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

31. See Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majority*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1973; and Jacques Dalaruelle and John McDonald, 'Resistance and Submission' in Frankovits ed., *op. cit.*

nineteenth century, caught up in the ambience of a world that was beginning to undermine previously taken-for-granted social relations, Marx ambivalently wrote the following:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned . . . 32

The work of the post-modernists confirms a new stage of a trend only incipient at the time which Marx, and soon after, Nietzsche, described as a period where everything is 'beginning to be pregnant with its contrary'. At a descriptive level the post-modernists undoubtably have something pertinent to say about the 'post-modern condition'. Baudrillard seems right in concluding that humanity appears to have lost the capability to produce the limits of its own being. We can agree in part with Guattari that:

it is just when there is most universality that we feel the need to return as far as possible to national and regional distinctness. The more capitalism follows its tendency to 'decode' and 'de-territorialize', the more does it seek [overlooking for the moment the functionalist tinge] to awake or re-awaken artificial territorialities and residual encodings, thus moving to counteract its own tendency.³³

But when it comes to suggesting an alternative, as I have attempted to indicate, marxism and post-modernism part company. Running with the dissolutionist drift does not provide a viable practice which challenges the mainstream. When Andrew Lohrey puts his faith in the self-determining, autonomous individual he is confirming rather than challenging the contemporary ideology of individuality. It is interesting to reflect on the extent to which Lohrey is rewriting at a more developed level, and for a new age, Max Stirner's philosophy of the irreducible ego. Stirner's proto-existentialist philosophy was criticized by Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology* by outlining a theory of individuality as only possible in community:

Stirner imagines that he can destroy the state by an intellectual act, when he is really only displaying his inability to criticize it in a material fashion.³⁴

Lohrey however wants to destroy the nation, not the state. He is quite comfortable with the 'sensible' notion of an instrumental legislature divorced from nation. His is an individual liberationist stance

32 Karl Marx, cited in Marshall Berman, *All That is solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, London Verso, 1983, p. 21.

33. Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984, p. 36.

34. Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 168; see pp. 163-171 and following.

akin to the dominant fashion in contemporary American Left discussion to accentuate and reify one aspect of full social being — autonomy in difference.³⁵ He only objects to the state insofar as it is legitimated through emotional consent. Yet as Lohrey seems unaware the instrumental state is always likely to turn its janus head and face us with its authoritarian-totalitarian potentiality. Recent studies, for instance, have indicated that Stirner's doctrine not only influenced anarchists, but also inspired various groups immediately precursive to German fascism.³⁶ It is the unbounded-individualistic or routinized-but-fractured society which is most likely to throw up the sort of Hawke-Reagan inspired crass, emotional nationalism which Lohrey tries so hard to deconstruct. To use Anthony Giddens's words,³⁷ people become particularly vulnerable to figures and discourses of authority as ontological security becomes fragile in the 'wasteland of everyday life'.

35. See the excellent critique of both the individual-liberationist and populist approaches in Harry Boyte and Sara Evans, 'Strategies in Search of America: Cultural Radicalism, Populism, and Democratic Culture', *Socialist Review* 75 & 76, May-August 1984, pp. 73-100.
36. Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
37. Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* London, MacMillan, 1981, pp. 13, 195.

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