

## **Blood and Marmalade:**

### **The Commodification of self within nation state ideology**

Throughout the 1930s George Orwell became more and more interested in the kinds of relationship that were built between the individual and the modern nation state. In the process of addressing those relationships the analytical field of this paper takes in elements from the rhetoric of the nation state and its subjects, specifically the way that ideology operates as ethos; the notions of legitimisation with which the nation works and the practices demanded by the state of an individual; and the split edges of culture and commodity that the capitalist economics of the modern nation state constructs.

It is apparent from the collection of pamphlets that Orwell made, now held in the British Library, that he was acutely aware of the theorising around the formation of both entrepreneurial and socialist state capitalism, that was going on throughout Europe, North America and the Soviets, at this time<sup>1</sup>. The 1930s is a period during which he becomes increasingly aware of what happens to the individual within the nation state, while his writing of the 1940s, possibly focused by the second world war, indicates a move toward analysis of some of the implications for the state itself. For Orwell the earlier concern with the individual is at least partly the response of someone who knows he belongs to an empowered and privileged group, at the same time as recognising that he is not fully part of that group. He was after all lower-upper-middle class by self-definition; he had no university education; and he had worked with growing unease in the military section of the colonial service, riding out the end of Empire. For all that he wrote scathingly of intellectuals he was in exactly that position: of being in power yet wanting to critique that power, that marks the position of an intellectual<sup>2</sup>.

To understand a historical locus for what Orwell was concerned with in terms of the individual within the state, it is helpful to remember that England only achieved male

---

#### Notes

1 Peter Davison, to whom all writers interested in the 1930s and in Orwell are indebted, alerted me to the existence of this archive.

2 Edward Siad's recent Reith lectures cover some of this ground from a contemporary point of view, but with the same emphasis.

enfranchisement in 1919 and full enfranchisement in 1928. Orwell was born in 1903 and was 17 years old, on the border of adulthood, when the first enfranchisement occurred. He was not really old enough to have experienced the lack of it, but just old enough to be part of the extraordinary lightness and illusion of freedom and power that marked the energy of the 1920s. For whatever reason, possibly because of the appalling losses of the first world war, full enfranchisement did not see those whom it should have benefited asserting themselves. For example, women seem to have been diverted from the continued assertiveness that had gained them the vote, into a compassionate withdrawal<sup>3</sup>. Exacerbated by the slump and the depression years, for the first time working-class English women stopped working within the financial/money economy. So an apparently direct result of women's enfranchisement was the final enclosure of all classes of women within domestic space. The labour movement ran into similar stasis.

It is difficult in the 1990s to understand what enfranchisement meant. You get a vote, yes, but what does this imply? After all nowadays in Western Europe and North America, most people grow up simply expecting to vote, treating enfranchisement almost as a 'natural right', certainly taking it for granted. But what if the participation in government had suddenly been achieved after years of struggle and denial? The notion that you could change things, act and therefore have to take responsibility for action, would I suspect be far more immediate in a newly enfranchised population. Technically, every single person could do so. Everyone becomes, suddenly, someone to be listened to. But also immediately apparent must be that the voices are all very different - so how do we listen to each other in this new world? Orwell in the 1930s is focusing on guidelines for action, or looking at precisely what the individual could do within the conditions of enfranchised subjectivity in the contemporary nation state.

To provide a context for what Orwell is doing in his study of individual subjectivities, I would like to ground the discussion in rhetorical approaches to legitimization in politics. Political theory frequently works with the three modes of consensus, corporate

---

<sup>3</sup> See A. Lightfoot, \*\*\*\*.

and authoritarian decision-making, in its analysis of legitimation<sup>4</sup>. The alliance of nationalism and capitalism in the modern nation state develops ideology into a particular rhetorical strategy that creates conditions under which the activity of the consensual is repressed, and the corporate continually elides into the authoritarian. This strategy sets up the particular conditions for assent to and participation in the state by the individual<sup>5</sup>.

In the history of western analysis of the theory of politics, the rhetorically justifiable strategy for ethos - the way the governing group represents itself to those individuals to whom it is responsible - has always been a variety of consensus. In rhetoric, consensus is technically the discussion of and agreement upon grounds for argument, and then the development of decisions leading to action, on those grounds. This will work in governments representing small groups of empowered people such as Greek slave states or early medieval city states, or indeed the small discrete communities described by H.G. Gadamer<sup>6</sup>. However, once one is dealing with larger groups of people consensus decision-making is more difficult and often moves to the corporate. The corporate decision-making set toward action, takes place on the basis of already agreed-upon grounds which the group tacitly accepts. Aristotle discusses the possibility for corporate decision-making in both *Topica* and *Rhetorica* but restricts it to the sciences, saying that it is justified only in small, coherent, mutually constructed, groups which make prior agreements about common grounds<sup>7</sup>. Yet even corporate decision-making is difficult to handle if the number of individuals in the represented populace becomes very large: Machiavelli's response to the problem was to describe the authoritarian practices of the 'Prince' - but he was able to do so at precisely the point that they were disintegrating and giving way to representative national governments.

---

4 From the political exegesis offered by both Plato and Aristotle on the kinds of agreement that can be made (see especially Aristotle's *Topica*), to among many others D. Beetham's recent account *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1991), these three modes recur continually.

5 The rhetorical concept of the ideology of the nation state was the topic of a paper I gave in May 1993 to the Learned Associations of Canada meeting. That paper has not been published, yet to a considerable extent underlies my current work on Orwell.

6 H.-G. Gadamer, *Reason in the age of science*, trans. F. G. Lawrence (London: MIT Press, 1981).

7 See L. Hunter, 'Remember Frankenstein', *Rhetorica*, IX, 4 (Autumn, 1991).

An acute problem, if not *the* problem, of late Renaissance and early modern politics was the growing number of empowered bourgeoisie emerging within a structure of nationalism that produced specific conditions appropriate for capitalist economics. Capitalism needs a broad power base and competitiveness between players who have the possibility of achieving some equity or have at least similar opportunities. Its ethos therefore presents a diverse set of voices, and needs a political system that will diffuse potential conflict between the competing voices, at the least moving conflict out of the overt aggression of force. Early capitalism in England can be seen as an extension of the court system into national politics, with the commonwealth as an attempt to deal with the broader franchise of bourgeois empowerment<sup>8</sup>.

Nationalism for the first time during this period of the seventeenth century, becomes a political structure that cannot speak directly to the people to whom it is responsible - but it must address them in some way in order to gain legitimacy. Its ethos needs a stable means of mediating its arguments, decisions and actions, and an audience whose reception is constructed as stable. In other words, its needs precisely replicate those of capitalism: both have to have an ethos that stabilises both the perception of the source of power and the receiver of, audience of, subject of power.

From the seventeenth century in Europe, there is an urgent search for stable modes of rhetorical strategy which is usually discussed by current critical discourses in terms of the history and philosophy of science but is also found throughout the humanities, medicine and technology. These recent histories indicate political and institutional structures of nations in western Europe and North America moving toward state systems because they promise a means of delivering stability. State systems, whether enterprise capitalism or socialist capitalism, construct a corporate ethos currently analysed under the word 'ideology', that uses a set of specific rhetorical strategies to construct a stability of representation that depends upon the public's willingness to forget that it is a

---

<sup>8</sup> See T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britania: Crisis and New-Nationalism* (New Left Books, 1977).

representation<sup>9</sup>. This is an appropriate strategy for capitalism with its need to stabilize demand in order to make technology in industry of long-term use and thereby increase profitability. The stabilizing of demand becomes a commodification of need through the process of marketing, and is clearly at the heart of Marx's critique of his own time: the moment at which in Europe, technology and industry combine to produce these conditions for profitability. The stabilizing of representations of the state also answers the nation's requirement for a fixed and stable ethos, for both the source of power and the subject. This is not only commodification of needs but also a commodification of the individual who is increasingly defined as private, isolated, not responsive to the state, and without community.

Although it has taken centuries to put into effect, for this is no conspiracy theory, ideology solves the problem of the legitimacy of a government of larger spaces and diversified voices simply by denying, evading, hiding and/or ignoring the awareness of a consensual or responsive ethos. This poses its own problems because that consensual ethos can keep the potentially authoritarian dangers of corporate ethos in check; without it the corporate is always on the verge of eliding into the authoritative<sup>10</sup>. Ideology uses the medium of state institutions to imply that there is a norm, a convention, a natural condition for public life. There is no need to question or interact because the norm is the case. The procedure is equivalent to the denial of a need for rhetoric, and the loss of formal rhetoric in western Europe from the seventeenth century is part of the stabilising effect of ideology and many political theories, including Marxism, are an attempt to remedy that loss<sup>11</sup>.

The rhetoric of the nation state structures its ethos simultaneously to build a norm as an artificial construction and then to forget that it is artificial. Orwell talked about this extensively in his later work under the term doublethink, and began to understand the incredible stress it puts on the relatively empowered for reasons I'll go on to discuss.

Technically doublethink works from the accepted common grounds of corporate agreement,

---

9 B. Anderson discusses nation-states and forgetting in *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1985); see also T. Eagleton on capitalism and forgetting in 'Nationalism: irony and commitment', *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, intro. S. Deane (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press 1990).

10 See W. Rowe and V. Schelling, *Memory and Modernity* (London: Verso, 1991).

11 L. Hunter, *Rhetorical Stance in Modern Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1984), chapter three.

and uses a representing medium in such a way as to repeat without variation, or with as little as possible. This becomes increasingly realisable as technologies are developed to aid the illusion of invariable and exact repetition<sup>12</sup>. The result is a retarding and eventual repression of responsive change, a commodification of need into desire and a commodification of the individual into the state subject<sup>13</sup>.

If Marx and Engels carefully outlined a description of 'false consciousness', or ideology, created by nation state capitalism, Freud could be said to have condensed and outlined some of the ramifications for the subject in terms of the repression of the individual, whether that repression be complete, as in narcissism, or ambivalent, as in neurosis, or displaced, as in psychosis. But Freud did not connect this repression with the commodification of the individual by the state, nor did Marxist theorists, often continental, connect state theory with the effects on individual action and responsibility, particularly in a newly enfranchised population. From one perspective it's possible to read the 1930s as a decade in which many English writers begin to draw the two together, begin to analyse politics and society in terms of culture and technology with an understanding of commodity reification. This early history is usually constructed at least from the 30s to the early 50s around the figures of Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, none of whom were English although the first two were educated there. However, many others, and as I shall go on to argue certainly Orwell, can be read as concerned with similar issues.

Most of Orwell's 30s novels describe the problems of the individual within this kind of modern nation state whose ethos, ideology, requires the public to forget the artificiality of its construction<sup>14</sup>. If we can look at many twentieth century thinkers as people dealing with the problem of knowing how to handle what it is they are required to forget, you could say that never before have there been such large enfranchised populations. Smaller governing

---

12 On the technological control of the media, see among others A. Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Aldershot: Gower Publ, 1981).

13 L. Hunter, 'Bodily Functions in Cartesian Space', *Outsider Notes* (forthcoming, 1995).

14 See E. Gellner, 'Nationalism and the two forms of cohesion in complex societies', *Proc. of the British Academy LXVIII* (London: Oxford U. Press, 1983); for a response, see also J. Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

groups are usually from a similar power base, they have similar interests and make decisions on similar grounds. Large populations with many different positions and different needs have to work in other ways. Pluralism doesn't work in large and diverse populations. Representative democratic systems of various kinds control some of the difference, but from the individual's point of view some needs must be foregone, some insisted upon: but how to make the decision? In someone else's system, where you have no vote or political agency, the disempowered revolt around central issues; otherwise there is no need to examine the structure: the system is someone else's, and there is no pressure on the disempowered individual to remember to forget. But since the early part of the twentieth century most people in northern Europe have needed to learn ways of making decisions about what to remember and what to forget.

Orwell is at the heart of this dilemma. He is concerned with the various levels of awareness we can permit ourselves, how far they may be allowed to inform the way we change ourselves, and how difficult it is to manage the continual moral choices that such a system demands, particularly since there is no guarantee of outcome, there is no direct connection between the individual and effective power. Yet the dilemma is especially excruciating for those relatively empowered individuals who are, through some political, social or cultural abutment onto ideology, in contact with policy-making and institutional power.

In the 30s novels Orwell looks at some of the effects of a state system that insists on privacy, and deprives the individual of community better to isolate them and thereby convince them of the 'naturalness' of ideology. But within such a system where does assent and therefore legitimacy lie? where do loyalty and commitment lie? what does betrayal mean? and can civic, or non-state, communities be constructed as alternative sites of power? If there is no immediate group with similar interests, no necessary concept of non-state community, where can the individual have any consensus-building, any notion of assent to grounds whose construction is held in common with other people? And if the construction of ideology is 'natural' or unseen, then policy change or change in party line, becomes an arbitrary shift in belief in order to maintain loyalty. (Blind) Loyalty that is blind outweighs

other values: it is a loyalty that permits constant change, continual instructions on remembering to forget something once valued. This duplicates the procedures of commodity capitalism in the coming together of technology and the state. Brand loyalties, constructed by advertising, work on notions of the completion of desire - desire that is often cast as need. They build expedient trust and serial loyalty. Just so the commodification of self by capitalism within nation state ideology, leads directly to a version of pluralism in which the problem of listening to other voices is theorised in terms of them becoming commodities.

All the central characters in Orwell's early novels are isolated individuals, locked into private worlds. They have difficulties with communication, but also difficulties with community. They are all middle-class, and all described as appalled and deprived in different ways by the banality of their class, the compromise it has made between public and private. Take Flory in *Burmese Days*<sup>15</sup>: he doesn't become aware enough of the compromise; therefore he cannot understand the private deprivation of his life which the state requires by making him lead a double life. He is aware of the brutality he mediates as an agent of imperial Britain which simultaneously requires him to think of himself as a civiliser, a mediator of civilisation. In the end, Flory cannot stand the tension and kills himself. A lot of *Burmese Days* is based on the stand-off, central to many discussions of early twentieth century politics, between totalitarianism and anarchy. As the franchise extended further and further, in some systems the response of authority was to become more and more total, dividing the public and private even further. Within such a system anarchy appears to be the only response of the individual - a result of enforced privacy: but it is a futile gesture without community, without community anarchy is equivalent to solipsism or suicide. The character Verrall is the only anarchist who can succeed: but then, he is a member of the ruling class and not only will his anarchic action be delimited by his background, but also aristocratic anarchy is cast by English culture as being a condoned aberration of eccentricity from a defined community.

---

15 G. Orwell, *Burmese Days* (Penguin, 1969/34).



In similar ways each of the isolated central characters in the other novels is also attempting communication, trying to find a community where the tension or contradiction of the compromise can be discussed. Each turns to different cultures, different races, different gender, and different class - this last most clearly and frequently - but they never manage to fit. Through the novels Orwell begins an analysis of the race/class/gender/religion concerns that dominate contemporary cultural studies. He calls into question how we form and/or belong to communities, making us aware that the process is neither self-evident nor often successful: the return to banality is one way of dealing with the alienation proceeding from failure.

Dorothy, in *A Clergyman's Daughter*<sup>16</sup>, is Orwell's only central female character (apart from Clover), and she unlike his male characters but in an interesting pre-seeing of recent feminist searches, turns to religion. Yet she does so not as belief but as a system; indeed the novel is a kind of textbook exercise in consciousness-raising. With Dorothy, Orwell has moved on from observing the frustration of the double-life to depicting the actions/decisions that need to be taken when it is realised that the public institution is a constructed system. Flory views the state not even as monolithic but as natural; but Dorothy is shown in the process of recognising it as artificial. The novel opens by depicting her as a type of a middle-class persona: she has hobbies, arranges flowers. As we gather later from 'The Lion and the Unicorn'<sup>17</sup>, these are Orwell's analogues for the English version of the private life: if the state isolates you within a private world you have to fill it with something - things you can do on your own, by yourself. But Orwell's notion of 'choice' is very limited; it is more a matter of selection from already curtailed elements.

Through memory loss Dorothy ceases to be a private person any more, she ceases to have any identity: the text follows her through the reacquisition of a notion of individuality and then to a re-establishment of her private identity that is needed by the public structure. But as it does so, by way of a study of language and psychology, it makes the character and the reader aware every step along the way of the artificiality of ideology. Here the

---

16 G. Orwell, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (Penguin, 1983/35).

17 G. Orwell, 'The Lion and the Unicorn' (1941), *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol 2, eds S. Orwell and I. Angus (Penguin, 1982).

ideological structures are mainly education and the church. In education, Dorothy tries for a new common ground that will engage both teacher and pupil, but is forced back into rote-learning banality by the head teacher. Finally, she goes back to the church, yet this time aware of its construction and re-entering its clichés *as* clichés.

The negotiations and agreements between personal memory and public history form the primary means by which people engage in public activity in nation states<sup>18</sup>. There are other narratives that carry public memory, but those of the nation state are powerful because they are tied to economics. These narratives are mediated by ideology and are therefore bound narratives: what many have come to call master narratives. The individual's need to search for a position within the public history, directs the memory into negotiations between the individual and the social, that construct the self: this is the activity of personal memory. But if the self is defined largely by public history, this is an act of forgetting, neglecting the artificial structures of society, taking the nation's conventional narrative as a system of rights and becoming only a private individual, producing a concept of fixed identity: unnerving because it, like the heroic or fame, dissipates when in contact with an immediate community. But also, in maintained privacy, there is one way that an individual can deal with the often overwhelming responsibility of enfranchisement.

Dorothy's self-aware acceptance of doublethink is one way of dealing with the tensions of the public/private separation induced by ideology: but it does little to address the problem. In Gordon Comstock of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*<sup>19</sup>, Orwell takes the analysis a few steps further. And it's clear that Orwell attributes Gordon's ability to do so to his gender and his class - not only that he's a budding intellectual. If you are aware of the artificiality of the state and its public presence, as well as aware of the doublethink compromise it requires of you, what alternative responses are there? The situation mirrors the postmodern position, which is really only relevant to those people who have a measure of empowerment: the recognition that *even* in an empowered position the individual can do nothing to affect the workings of the state, generates the enervation, melancholia, paranoia and cynicism of

---

18 See L. Hunter, *Outsider Notes* (forthcoming, 1985), part 3, for a fuller account of personal and public memory.

19 G. Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Penguin, 1975/1936).

postmodern theory. Indeed Orwell's early novels could be read as an anatomy of precisely these responses.

Gordon Comstock is very much the cynic, and he plays the cynic's games with increasing confidence. Gordon constructs his life-before-the-bookstore as alternating between poetry-making and advertising-writing, which are the private and public spheres of his world. He is supremely able to turn himself into whatever the public expects of him; just as he can categorise, type, commodify and reify products for advertising, so he can do it for himself. The early part of the book shows him doing just this: making himself into the person that his different customers expect.

The novel works through the various different ways in which individuals commodify themselves, or negotiate versions of themselves with an institutional public that is the state. Gordon deludes himself by thinking that 'poetry' is his true self, his essential identity. Yet by way of a critique of other analogously 'high' art, such as writing by Dickens and Barrie, illustrations by Rackham, art by Burne-Jones (to which he is introduced by a woman), which is set against the escapist literature of magazines and penny-dreadfuls, he realises that the division between poetry and advertising cannot be made on the grounds of 'true' identity. The world of Dickens and Burne-Jones is just as enclosed and escapist as the magazines – hence the poetry, for Gordon, is just as escapist as the advertising. Both are ways of commodifying the self so it fits: poetry answers the demand for isolated private space, and advertising answers the demand for banal participation in public institutions.

Orwell himself, of course, also offers the obverse of the commodifying process: that if commodification can be a banal response to the imposition of nation state demands, the identification of needs, the construction of the personal self, may also be responsive. In other words, these generic forms do not only reify; poetry, art, escapist literature and advertisements, can also be constructive if undertaken in response to and in engagement with a community, they don't have to be enclosing, cynical and melancholic. In a naive way, Orwell cartoons this in his bringing together of Gordon and Rosemary in a family. It is the first time that he has permitted his characters *any* lasting relationship, and is an indication of the discussions for supportive structures and strategies for forming communities that he

begins to pursue in his essays. The naivete is also an indication of how well Orwell resists bourgeois embarrassment with the strategies of the disempowered: that a community of commitment where you hammer out common grounds, restores to you your history, gives you the possibility of personal memory, allows you to re-member yourself, gives you back your body, encourages you to resist the fixities of commodification.

Chronologically, Orwell's novel-writing career was interrupted by the work on *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*. Although these are significantly different in that they are assessments of contemporary socialism in England and Europe, they are still mediated through fairly isolated characters involved in individual/state negotiations about memory and action. *The Road to Wigan Pier* is damning of the middle-class and its intelligentsia, with its inappropriate versions of socialism that simply underwrite the capitalist impetus of the British nation state. *Homage to Catalonia* is a major step toward the notion of a *personal* identity as opposed to a private essentialism, personal identities being built in response to community needs<sup>20</sup>.

*Coming Up For Air*<sup>21</sup> extends this project of understanding commodification and the ambivalent relationship of the private/personal/public selves. George Bowling acts out the issues on the stage of a lower-middle-class Britain. He is presented as tensely schizophrenic particularly in response to his family, the wife and children to whom he is alternately verbally cruel and then sentimental, but also with regard to himself as he alternates between the slick sales-talk and heavy irony that undermines the slickness: cliché and parody of cliché. There are occasionally intrusions of a highly unusual domestic male voice, that Orwell develops a little elsewhere, but which from a late twentieth century perspective has many similarities to the domestic voices recently created by women writers in order to lay out new common grounds. A topic of particular significance here is that of the self-perception of desirable body shape. But this domestic voice is not given much scope and soon makes way for a grass-roots intellectual voice, also quite different from that anywhere else in Orwell's writing. The introductory section concludes with a series of commentaries

---

20 The notion of 'personal' identity was a central concept in L. Hunter, *George Orwell the Search for a Voice* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1984).

21 G. Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (Penguin, 1983/1939).

on the ersatz, the things that are 'labelled' as one thing for the public yet are actually another: the memorable example being the hot-dog exploding fish ends and offal into the mouth. The ersatz repeats the way Bowling thinks of himself, fat on the outside and thin on the inside.

Bowling attempts to address this schizophrenia by living again his memory of his childhood, and trying to reattach the private and public bits of his life. It is significant that Orwell has him start off on this journey because he has £17 hidden away: only those who can buy themselves out for a while, buy themselves thinking time, can afford to do this kind of reassessment; and Orwell is quite clear about positioning Bowling's wife Hilda so that this would be impossible for her since she can never get time to herself. Bowling first recounts the historical version of his childhood: the accepted public version of sentiment which is like an ersatz label. Bubbling up into this are isolated fragments of private memory, all associated with violence, with fishing and killing as well as, significantly, with poetry and religion. All the associations are connected to an anarchic violence. He then continues with a recounting of his growing up that presents the private self as contained violence and the public self as ersatz salesman. Finally the character ends up wanting two things: either the destruction of war or escape into the past, either violence or nostalgia; the repressed whether narcissistic, neurotic or psychotic, and the fixed banalities of a stable normative self. The recounting constructs the character's existence as schizophrenic, and more than incidentally paranoid as if he is subliminally aware that outwith the banal there is another set of identities and *vice versa*, but awareness of one precludes assent to the other. The character has built an early version of the doublethink process narrativised and institutionalised in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

In George Bowling's present, and as an ending to these memories, Orwell sends him to a Left Book Club meeting to listen to an anti-fascist speaker. What Bowling hears on one level is about complete manipulation by the state; on another what he hears is a private fear responding with violence. Not only do the fascists hate because of fear, but those against fascism respond to their own fear with violence. There's an argument here that people allow themselves to be motivated toward war because it permits a legitimate expression of the

violence engendered by the authoritarianism of the state: an idea that is reiterated explicitly in the opening paragraphs of 'The Lion and the Unicorn'(p.74). The state manipulates the violence, under the banner of nationalism, as yet another strategy to define its identity, which strategy is also directly analogous to racism<sup>22</sup>. Fear also comes where there are no personally valid grounds for individual decision-making, in other words no community within which to hammer out common bases. This is *how* the state creates fear: as a spin-off from the need for isolation in order to convince of the stable representation of ideology.

Bowling, for this moment, rejects both the violence of war and the nostalgia of the 'decent' people whose 'minds have stopped' - who have forgotten the artificiality of the state entirely. However, the moment is shortlived. Bowling quickly reenters his schizophrenia. He goes to Lower Binfield, the physical site of his childhood, only to find that his own nostalgia is completely misplaced. Of course it is; he even says to the reader 'you saw this coming, but I didn't'. Only if he had stayed there would his memory have had a chance to change in response to the place; but he left and he commodified it into a fixed thing. With the nostalgia gone Bowling is overwhelmed by feelings of violence: as he comments, the blood gets mixed up with the marmalade, the violence crushes into the banality. The sequence indicates a further parallel, that nostalgia, banality, the possibility of the repetition of nearly exact actions, is one way of controlling the violence engendered by the state. Depriving people of banal repetition unleashes enormous/ endless brutality.

With the sides of his self collapsing into one another, Bowling can no longer think of the private and public worlds in terms of true and false, both are part of him. And he has a momentary, frightening glimpse of their simultaneity. But in order to cope he rigidifies his new world; he goes home, where each conversation with his wife, who unlike him has no leisure to reassess and is tied to the economic realities and pressures of this middle class existence, draws him back into his ability to forget the immediacies of his life. She reminds him to forget until he reenters the banal. After all, he has run out of money. Yet the writer, through this tale, allows the reader the understanding that the public persona is just as much

---

<sup>22</sup> See E. Balibar, \*\*\*\*\*, who has written extensively on the double-face of nationalism and racism in the modern nation state.

the actuality as the private self; it is not merely a label but a part of the reality of an individual human being.

As usual Orwell is writing in exemplary style, offering a pastiche and parody of what we need to recognise and be wary of. The writing is postmodern in these generic choices; but also self-consciously so in the statement about the way that those with power don't actually want to change while those with some power are caught in the stress of schizophrenia or doublethink. Any suggestion of change, as he outlines in 'The Lion and the Unicorn' will get people reassessing the social and political basis for the structure of the state in England (p.88 ff). Any suggestion would and will make it all too apparent that those *in* power have been in the business of maintaining state repression to exploit the poorer, the disempowered, the colonial possessions. The powerful especially must remain isolated and private, for if they ever attempted community the stability of the state would be fundamentally challenged.

More pertinently to Orwell's own position, and my own, is what he offers to the analysis of the relatively empowered, for example the intellectual. The relatively empowered hold the position they are in because the state system defines them as such. If they accept the definition then they also accept the grounds upon which it is made and yet the degree of their disempowerment indicates the degree of gap or strain between having to accept those grounds at the same time as recognising that they are beyond assent or question. The relatively empowered have to live with the strain, not of the repressed or forgotten, but of remembering continually to forget. They are on the inside looking out, a position Orwell discusses in depth in *Inside the Whale*<sup>23</sup> as a womb-like position in which one may be simultaneously aware of both violence and sentiment. It is only those who have no effective power who understand the labour involved in the construction of new common grounds - but by definition these often have no money and no time to commit to the labour.

The commodification of self is a way of controlling the schizophrenia of the relatively empowered subject felt by those who have the time, money and leisure to become aware of

---

23 G. Orwell, 'Inside the Whale' (1940), *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol 1, eds S. Orwell and I. Angus (Penguin, 1982).

the contradiction: here and at this time of the enfranchised individual within a representative democratic system still in the hands of the old power. It is clear that Orwell finds the drawbacks in this as well as the needs that are answered. Looking back from the 1990s, what he has to say is perhaps most pertinent to the theorising around commodity in terms of the fetish: the notion of the fetish as either banal or reciprocal lies coincident with Orwell's understanding of cliché and community. Orwell goes on to discuss the pros and cons in detail in terms of the artist and writer both in 'Art and Propaganda' and 'Literature and Totalitarianism'<sup>24</sup>. At one extreme in the totalitarian state, the writer will 'disappear' because totalitarianism will ask all people continually to alter their line on something<sup>25</sup>; and the writer, conventionally, is not there to reproduce the private fixities defined by the state but to open negotiation for communities, to destabilise the representative structures of the state, either their rhetorical strategies or their reified objects: the strategies and images that construct ideology as ethos. But also, the artist or writer is necessary to the state to provide ways of representing, building or constructing acceptable ideology, to provide places where people can agree about evaluation. In doing these things the writer is externalising or articulating the activity of any individual's negotiation between personal memory and public history, which is precisely what concerns many of the novels of the 1930s. But also the articulation acts as a focus for making these voices heard; Orwell's novels are exercises in the evaluation and placing of the 'many' voices; they are illustrations of the near impossibility of maintaining a continual assessment of them, or even at all, without a supportive community.

What is interesting is to watch Orwell begin to transfer this theorising out to a global politics, even in 1940 he understood the inevitability of global economics. In 'The Lion and the Unicorn' he looks at the way that 'nations' are becoming important for their cultural identity within global politics (p. 75). It is one step from this recognition to national cultures becoming important because they are being targeted as markets within transnational

---

24 G. Orwell, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda' (1941) and 'Literature and Totalitarianism' (1941), *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol 2, as above.

25 'Literature and Totalitarianism', pp. 163-4.



economy<sup>26</sup>. Again, the commodification is seen as necessary to those markets because it stabilizes 'audience' demand. This of course is part of recent economic theory and is not discussed by Orwell, who was still, in 1940, hoping for a non-capitalist socialism. But what he does perceive is that an arbitrarily defined national culture, like the banal commodification of the individual, is not helpful. It leaves a set of pluralist voices within the global, the multinational dream where those who lack power are simply cut to the cloth of those with power: the ethnocentric bazaar that replicates the frustration of enfranchised individuals within a state where all are equal but some are more equal than others<sup>27</sup>.

On the other hand, a responsively constructed national culture, here of course Orwell's socialist revolution of 'The Lion and the Unicorn', could act as the check on the increasingly authoritative tendencies of the corporate power of global agencies. Orwell argues in the essay that 'war' in the context of World War II could make this possible in England as nothing else (p. 117). Possibly in an optimistic transfer of his experiences of the Spanish Civil War, and possibly in a propagandic move against the brutality of the 1940s experience of war, he suggests that this 'kind of war' breaks down the notion of private comfort and security, and instead of merely legitimising violence, can be used to get people to commit themselves to work on community. Of course, this 'kind of war' cannot happen, and we have watched time and time again the potential events for political focus fail to draw people together. But the awareness of national culture as civic discourse, not populist, that Orwell's exemplary mode suggests, is vital to the critique of transnational *ethos*. This is particularly so for the 1990s because transnational ethos is not yet formulated or understood, and is already being taken for granted in for example post-materialist economics. Without ways of articulating an awareness of its constructed devices, nations run the risk of the intolerable half-awareness of doublethink erupting through cultural commodity into racism and war.

Lynette Hunter

---

26 See P. Hertner and G. Jones (eds), *Multinationals: Theory and History* (Alershot: Gower Publ. Co, 1986).

27 R. Rorty advocates this in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1991), p. 209.

Leeds