

Place and Time in Socialist Theory

Michael Rustin

Sources of Contemporary Pluralism

Pluralism has become fashionable on the left. This new-found enthusiasm for diversity and choice is in part a defensive response by socialists to the decline of the mass support hitherto provided by the working class, to the 'Forward March of Labour Halted'¹, to the rise of new social movements. The socialists of the Greater London Council attempted to make a politics out of this new vision, seeking out new radical constituencies, and empowering them with funds and political access, in a city in which the industrial working class has long been in decline, and in which it in any case had never been dominant. On the theoretical plane, the concessionary pluralism of Althusserian Marxism – economism and classism qualified, but only to a degree, by the relative autonomy of other levels of the social formation – has evolved in some minds into a thoroughgoing departure from the essentials of Marxism. Paul Hirst² has become a social democrat, and holds decentralised and pluralist self-activity, rather than class struggle, to be the main object of radical hope. Laclau and Mouffe, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*³ have espoused radical republicanism, arguing that only the idea of democracy, not the shared interests of class, can unify the dispersed oppositional subjects constituted by modern forms of domination. Common to these positions is an implicit preference for Rousseau and Durkheim over Marx – the idea that value and legitimacy resides in self-constituted communities with their own distinct moral identities, not with the collectivities of class constituted, ultimately, by modes and relations of production.

Among more orthodox social democrats, like Roy Hattersley⁴ and Bryan Gould⁵, socialist pluralism is concerned less with an accommodation to the claims of new collective identities, and more with the problems posed for socialists by the increasingly individualist climate of market society. The fundamental terms of this revisionist agenda are set, at base, by Kant and Mill rather than by the ideals of participatory democracy. The hope is to reconstruct a defensible social democracy from the idea of rights, by finding some acceptable balance between the claims of equality (political, economic, and social rights conferred on all), and those of freedom. The idea is that the differentiated and selfish ends pursued by individuals can be made compatible with the general

welfare, if there is an appropriate regulatory and redistributive framework. The emphasis on social rights, and the commitment to the framework of an extended idea of freedom suggest that the intellectual antecedents of this perspective lie less in socialist traditions than in the collectivist liberalism of the turn of the century. It is interesting to note that the radical individualism of the present period has thus generated two oppositional responses whose nineteenth-century precedents lie in *social* rather than *socialist* critiques of capitalism. In the recently-revived dialogue between liberal and socialist strands of thought, of which the attempt to reconcile the principles of equality and freedom is a major part, liberalism seems to have been getting the better of the argument.

Parallels can be seen between these lines of thought and contemporary critiques of State socialism in the East. On the one hand, there is the critique in terms of radical democracy, rationality and new subjectivities, of Feher and Heller⁶ and Bahro⁷ which contest bureaucratic socialism in terms of authentic collective self-definition. On the other, there are the ideas of 'market socialism' developed so convincingly by Alec Nove in his *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*⁸, which assert the claims of individual consumer choice and its inevitable consequences for economic organisation. Whilst the former critique demands on democratic Voice, Nove calls for the economic citizen's right of Exit⁹, as the precondition for modernising and humanising State socialist systems. The contemporary appeal of market socialism lies in the dire equivalence of equality and uniformity in East European societies, and proposes by contrast to reconcile the virtues of equality (retained through social ownership of the major means of production) with freedom (achieved through the choices conferred by markets). It is easy to see why these ideas make sense from the standpoint of reformers in Prague or Moscow. Given the realities of actually-existing socialism, the freedoms and differentiations provided by markets seem self-evidently attractive. But from the point of view of those living under market regimes, the appeal of socialism currently seems less strong. (Markets and their attendant hard-selling seem hardly escapable under Thatcherism, whether one is watching the brand-names on footballers' shirts, or dialling 123 on the telephone and hearing that the time of day is now sponsored.)

The Thinness of the Contemporary Egalitarian Idea

Contemporary socialists have had little option but to respond to the break-up of their core constituencies, to the wider choices made available to individuals by the market, and to the diversification of life-styles that seems to have followed the 'desubordination'¹⁰ of the late 1960s. The difficulty for them has been that their core ideal, equality, has become too thin and minimal an idea to anchor an alternative vision of society. Its main referent in experience is a fast-fading memory of working-class communality, born of hardship and territorial segregation. Unfortunately, these communities, and the industrial working class which they supported, have been to a considerable extent dispersed and dissolved, by the positive opportunities provided for mobility as well as, more recently, by the demoralisation of redundancy and industrial collapse. The miners' strike of 1984-5 showed the limits (as well as the remaining strengths) of this declining spirit of rooted class solidarity and endurance.

It seems too that the identification of nation with shared suffering and hope, achieved during the Second World War in a rare progressive definition of British nationhood, is also for the time being lost. The war and its effects may in any case have prolonged a moment of class history beyond its natural span, not only because of its appropriation and extension of the idea of the popular nation into a consensus for social reform, but also because of the effects of the war in prolonging the hegemony of old industries – and thus the size and strength of their workforces – which were already, in the 1930s, in evident decline. A fatal tilt towards the past may have been imparted to British Labour by its years of greatest good fortune. The idea of a unified 'progressive' nation has in any case now been shattered by emerging division, and national self-respect shaken by decline and the loss of the virtues of peaceful civil life. For the moment, the damaged object of the nation is covered over by strident and unrealistic self-assertion, bearing little relation to any sustainable role that the United Kingdom might play in the world.

I intend to argue that the lack of contemporary resonance of equality as a social ideal is a consequence of the more general limitations of abstract universalism, in both its liberal and socialist forms. Socialists of several kinds have taken over too uncritically from the liberal tradition the idea of the isolated individual subject as the building block of an alternative social philosophy. In the utilitarian tradition, influential through Fabianism on British social democracy, it has seemed natural to contrast the interests of majorities with those of the privileged, as if socialists wanted the same things as liberals except that they should be for more people, or ultimately for everyone. Some versions of Marxism also postulated individual interests as their implicit foundation, though in this case aggregating them not as the greatest happiness of the greatest number (or equality of opportunities or life-chances, in the English empiricist tradition of social book-keeping¹¹) but as the idea of 'the masses'. 'The masses' implies an aggregation or shapeless heap of individuals whether the term is used by conservative mass-society theorists (as Raymond Williams pointed out) or by revolutionary socialists. The idea that the fundamental units of society are social and not individual is in each case implicitly overlooked or denied. The consequence is in each case to legitimise the State as the agency of betterment or control, and to diminish the value to the social order of the intermediary institutions of 'civil society'.

In particular, I propose that it is the denial of the particular location of human lives in place and time that has led to this abstracted individualism of the left, which has so impoverished the vocabularies of contemporary socialism. The universalistic spirit

of the Enlightenment sought to define humanity independent of such local ties and claims, seeing these as the props of feudalism, hereditary privilege, and traditional ways of thinking, and thus as obstacles to rational progress. Marx took over this dynamic spirit of universalism, as the Manifesto makes particularly clear. Liberals, and the dominant streams of socialism, have each defined themselves in opposition to conservative, traditionalist, and organicist ideas, with serious costs, I shall argue, to their vision of life. The influence of the Romantic tradition on the left has been some corrective to this. Through Romantic social criticism, radicals have maintained some links with these pre-capitalist modes of social thought. Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society*¹² was an attempt to rewrite the British socialist tradition in these terms. E. P. Thompson's historical writing, notably *The Making of the English Working Class*¹³, though much more hostile than Williams to conservative thinkers, also took as its point of departure the meaning and value of a particular lived experience of capitalism, against the causal and deterministic grain of much of the existing Marxist tradition. The influence of Gramsci on contemporary Marxist thought has given rise to a similar emphasis on society as a system of lived meanings rather than as a mere aggregation of material interests, and to civil society rather than the State. But the influence of such ideas has so far been confined to the radical oppositional cultures of certain capitalist societies, and has little affected (at least in Britain) the dominant political culture.

Time and Place in Socialist Theory

Marxism is, of course, pre-eminently a historical mode of thought. Marx also attached great importance to local particularities in his analytical work – his writings on the class struggles in nineteenth-century France are the foremost example of this. It may seem odd, in view of this, to protest at the a-temporal character of most socialist views of man. But liberalism too was historical in the sense of postulating a future that would be radically different in kind from the past, and of seeking to find the laws that would explain progression from one stage to another¹⁴. The eighteenth-century account of rational enlightenment, and of the progress to be brought to the world through trade and industry, anticipates and is then taken up and re-made by Marx, who displaces the bourgeoisie with the proletariat and universal man, not as the original heroes (which they remain) but certainly as the final bringers of universal human fulfilment. Whereas conservative and religious modes of thought dwelt continuously on the temporal limits of each life, and the constraints they impose, rationalist thinking (in both its liberal and Marxist forms) instead celebrates the collective, historical transcendence of such limits, through positive transformation of entire ways of life and thought. Time and place cease to be conceived as essential limits of each life (of course, this is not denied, merely ignored) and instead become the mere markers of stages in the development of a higher life for all. It is in this sense that rationalist thought has been profoundly historicist whilst also being radically a-temporal in its social vision.

Marx's ruthlessness in thinking through the consequences of this view is an uncomfortable aspect of his thought for many socialists today. Few now join him in commending the progressive historical role of the bourgeoisie, still less of imperialism¹⁵. Even if some are willing to concede Marx's point about the progressive role of the bourgeoisie in the context of the 1840s, when the Communist Manifesto was written, it is heresy indeed to take this view of our contemporary bourgeois. Yet who is to say, in Marx's terms, that the necessary historical work of capitalism is yet fully done? Marshal Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into*

*Air*¹⁶ more than any other recent work shares Marx's zest for transformation, for the ceaseless overturning and renewal of the given. Yet to most readers the argument of this book, exciting as it is, probably seems more consistent with the spirit of capitalism, and with its author's native culture of New York City, than with a vision of socialism.

Marxists were formerly as rejecting of the claims of place as they have been of the claims of the past. Socialists postulated a universal, placeless, and especially nation-less identity, that of 'workers of the world', to replace conservative particularisms. They have then, in the twentieth century, had to suffer the bitter disillusionment of seeing nation triumph over class, and identities of place prevail over the universal solidarity of mankind, in the onset of two world wars.



More recent developments in Marxist thought have sought to give greater weight to these complicating historical and geographical dimensions of material and social change. Althusser¹⁷, in particular, incorporating the insights of French historical writing of the *Annales* School, and recognising the irretrievable failure of the universal 'stage theories' of Second International Marxism, incorporated into contemporary Marxism the idea of multi-leveled and uneven historical development. Not every sector of social life evolved at the same pace—the 'unified totality' of at least the Hegelian version of idealist Marxism was refuted. Uneven development was acknowledged also in its spatial dimensions. The idea of the particularity of historical conjunctures, of decisive moments (the exemplary cases being those of the Bolshevik and Chinese Revolutions) in which the balance of class forces could be decisively re-shaped, depended on the idea that societies differently located in space as well as in time could be expected to have different developmental possibilities and outcomes. Althusser's work, and the different but nevertheless in some ways parallel kinds of historical thinking developed by Marxist historians in Britain, led to the political conclusion that socialist practice must be grounded on the *particular* analysis of societies, with their distinctive locations in space and time. Gramsci's analysis of the differences between Eastern and Western social formations has generated similar conclusions for socialist practice in the West. Historical materialism is now seen more often as a resource for the description and explanation of specific cases, than as a source of concrete explanations or political prescriptions in itself.

These recent modes of Marxist thought have given searching attention to the specificities of historical development. Yet while

history is viewed in less determinate ways than previously, seen as progressing as often on bye- or back-roads as on the orthodox highways, the object of this understanding remains primarily teleological. The past and present continue to be regarded by Marxism instrumentally, as stages, or stepping stones across a history of exploitation and suffering, on the way to a quite different order of society. This view of the world Marx of course inherited from the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and Hegel in particular, though for liberals the new order was already well on the way to having already arrived. This transcendent perspective also informs Marxist ideas of political practice. Whereas liberalism instrumentalises individual action, as the means to fulfilling personal desires, Marxism has tended towards an instrumental view of social action, viewing it as a means to collective and historical transformation rather than as necessarily of immediate benefit to the collective actors themselves. It is this larger historical vision, this sense of the unintended consequences of social acts (to the actors themselves) which often distinguishes revolutionary from merely ameliorative politics. In this sense Marxism is necessarily a form of historicism. (Merleau-Ponty¹⁸ was one writer in the Marxist tradition who came to understand the potentially tragic consequences of the priority of the claims of historical transformation over present lives, while nevertheless recognising that this historical dimension was central to socialist thought. The relationship between programmes for the long and the short term have been recently discussed in democratic socialist terms by Bernard Crick¹⁹).

It seems to be a distinctive quality of utopian social thought that in its intensity of imagining an alternative possible world (perhaps unconsciously infused by many who think in this way with lost memories of harmony and beauty drawn from infancy), it displaces attention away from the specific qualities of the present. In this respect political utopianism perhaps shares some psychological properties with the experience of being in love, in both its inspirational and delusional aspects. In each case, the present world is obliterated or diminished except in so far as it resembles or leads towards a desired object. Of course without such transformative visions, men would easily remain trapped within limits which only appear to be fixed through lack of imagination of alternatives. On the other hand, a more sustained attention to the innate properties of human lives might enable us to devise 'social imaginaries' which are closer to people's sense of reality and thus of the possible. In so far as a refusal to contemplate the properties of the present is encoded in the forms of socialist thought (in so far, that is, as they are concerned mainly to find means of transforming it to the shape of an imaginary object of desire) these modes of thought may themselves be a limit to development.

My central argument is that the boundedness of human lives in time and space needs a greater acknowledgement and centrality in socialist thought. Both for individuals and collectivities, identity is largely constituted by relation to a specific history. The greater the density and richness of meaning of lives, the more important the awareness of connectedness to the past (or rather, to specific pasts) is likely to be. This developed sense of continuity and indebtedness characterises most of the activities that we might consider exemplary ones for a future of human self-fulfilment. This is no less the case for many forms of popular culture - cinema, sport, rock music - than it is for the high cultural genres of literature or painting. Once anyone gets to be serious about any activity, whether it be philosophy, gardening, or jazz, they need to establish their relation to the traditions and vocabularies of that activity's past. The remembered or available history, in the case of some popular cultural forms, is shorter only because they are of more recent invention, or because they have only lately become objects

of lasting record. One important consequence and gain of 'mechanical reproduction'²⁰ is that it has allowed popular and everyday experience to achieve the same represented and publicly accessible status as the experience of social elites in the past – the family photograph as the universal equivalent of the family portrait. The broadcasters' recall on Cup Final Day of earlier great Cup Finals, the line of past players in which a generation's leading performers in any sport will rapidly be placed, in the light of perceived affinities and contrasts, speak to a widely-felt wish in almost everyone to recognise historical meaning and continuity in their own experience.

The importance of a sense of place is somewhat analogous. It seems to be in the nature of 'modernity' to fracture the continuities of both place and time, making into matters of conscious choice and achievement connections that used to be merely given or ascribed by birth. In pre-capitalist Europe, one belonged in the line of a (patriarchal) family, related by dependence and obligation to other families. One was in effect tied to a place, if not by law then by inescapable circumstance. It is not surprising that rationalist and individualist thought sought to negate such limiting and degrading ties, and instead postulated a free individual, legally entitled to move physically where he wanted and to associate with whom he pleased. Both the positive and critical theorists of capitalism rightly stressed its tendency to surpass the limits of physical space, to make its effective domain the whole world. Even highly-rooted individuals in modern societies, for whom ties to a particular place seem important, are as likely to be attached to a place which they have freely chosen, as to a place which has, so to speak, chosen them. Both the elements of the past and the locations with which we find affinities are now likely to be selected, to a degree, in relation to our specific values and identities. Places and times seem to have become objects of decision, not fixed points around which identities are unconsciously constructed. Traditions too, in the modern world often have this 'arbitrary' or invented form, and sometimes turn out to be of remarkably recent and deliberate origin²¹.

Nevertheless, the idea that Marx took from Hegel that mankind's proper relationship with the world is one which involves the realisation of meaning seems to have implications for the physical world, for relationships to place, as well as to the social world. Places – especially buildings, but also landscapes, contain and convey meanings²², and are impoverished where they do not. Even though mobility and choice of place has grown, territorial locations remain nodes of association and continuity, bounding cultures and communities. It is partly the role of place as itself a locus of meaning, through physical care, conscious expression, shared memories, and the elaboration of such meanings in many forms, which makes belonging to a common place a significant marker of social identity. The idea that it need not and should not be, in the modern world – that attachment to place has been made obsolete by ease of communication – doesn't seem a very promising one, from a social point of view. New countries like the United States have their attractions by contrast with their old ones, in their openness and acceptance of innovation. Nevertheless, it seems that in the end freedom from all particular ties and identities is limited by the absence of texture, density, and difference²³. Freedom is lessened, not enhanced, when there is a dearth of identities and communities among which to choose. What such a condition seems to produce is cultural homogeneity and social estrangement under a surface of freedom and sociability.

Human identities are of course created in infancy through the highly particular, emotionally intense, and asymmetrical relationships of parents and children²⁴. A sense of the particularity of physical space seems initially to be a genetically-given aid to survival (an aspect of 'species being') in the infant's need in early

life for proximity to parents or parent substitutes, and then to extend culturally outwards from this origin. Relationship to the past is established through the knowledge of parents whose lives and memories extend prior to the child's experience; a relationship to the future is lived in both parents' and children's minds by the knowledge that children are likely to outlive their parents, and in turn bear children of their own. It is hard to see the importance of this basic fact of generational succession being modified greatly by any likely social transformation, even though the reciprocal roles of older and younger can be and are assigned by many means and criteria other than those of physical kinship. On the whole such ties between generations seem a source of cultural strength and richness, as well as of well-being, and the segregation of generations by age – for example, in the establishment of the retirement community as the locus of a whole life-stage – seems hardly a desirable pattern to follow.

The origins of the human sense of relatedness in infancy and childhood also reveal to us the complexities and ambivalences inherent in the adult relation to place and time. There is, unavoidably, an inherent conflict between the life-worlds of young and old, reconciled by graceful compromise or ultimately by nature as this may or may not be. (Mental or cultural conflicts do not necessarily end with the physical death of a protagonist.) Timpanaro, discussing the consequence of the life-cycle for Marxism²⁵, drew attention to the unavoidably tragic aspects of the limited life-span. Equally important, however, are the conflicts which follow from generational succession. Respect the past as we may, there is never going to be room to preserve all of it and also to make space for what members of new generations create for themselves. Each canon of admired works of art stands in the way of alternative valuations and criteria. Attacks on an established canon (such as those of 'expressive realism' or humanism in English literature in recent years²⁶) lead to an unstable situation, since any set of evaluative criteria is liable to generate a new canon in its turn. It is difficult to do without some ordering and selective principle in the transmission of a culture. Nevertheless, to create, as many radical innovators have realised, it is usually first necessary to destroy. Just as it is a crass kind of traditionalism that does not recognise the inevitability of such destruction, so it is a simplistic radicalism that imagines that *everything* can or should be made anew, and that our experience would be richer if it were. One's view of this balance changes with age.

Foundations of a Socialist Pluralism

Socialist pluralism would have a more adequate foundation if it was built on an acknowledgement of the specific temporal, spatial, and relational ties of most human lives. These are major axes of difference from which a pluralist culture can be built. It is such a relational perspective which should distinguish a socialist pluralism from the more usual liberal-socialist attempts to balance individual against collective needs, according to which the collective is mostly perceived as the minimal or basic precondition making it possible for the real source of value, the individual, to develop. A good society would acknowledge and cultivate the space for such relations, both for communities and individuals. It would value the activities of memory, of external public expression, and of specific social attachment, which give meaning to such differentiated identities. It is to these purposes of developing distinct and different forms of life and culture that man's huge material powers should be devoted, once elemental scarcities have been overcome.

These kinds of awareness have been an important topic of some recent socialist writing, as well as, of course, central preoccupations of earlier socialists such as Morris. Benedict

Anderson's *Imagined Communities*²⁷ gives an unusually sympathetic account of the meaning of nationalism, as the attempt to create a social identity in a rapidly-modernising society in which traditional identities were breaking down. Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country*²⁸ describes a number of instances of the defence or celebration of some aspect of 'Englishness', from the National Trust's cult of the country house, to a householder's defiant attempt to defend her cottage from demolition by the planners. Wright is well aware of the usual appropriations of national traditions for conservative purposes, but he also understands and empathises with the need for some expressive relationship to the past. While particular definitions need to be contested, as part of any adequate contemporary politics, the general importance of these dimensions, for left as well as right, is demonstrated by Wright's book.

Historical writing has been a principal means by which concerns such as these have become recognised on the left. *History Workshop Journal* and those associated with it have developed a form of work (following the example of E. P. Thompson) which is often evocative and commemorative of the experiences of past generations more than it is interested in scientific generalisation or in drawing prescriptive lessons. The often descriptive, memorial, or reportorial method of this work has the effect of making those described into objects of value and meaning in themselves, in virtue of having lived their lives. Such writing is an act of moral identification and solidarity, helping to define a social identity (for example a feminist identity) in the present by finding ancestors or virtual kin in the past.

One of the most important features of the miners' case in the 1984-85 strike was its assertion of the claims of generational continuity by mining communities, as Raphael Samuel and his colleagues have pointed out²⁹. These claims were for continued livelihoods for children in the places where their fathers and maybe grandfathers had worked, thus linking the concepts of place, time, and identity through family. The Coal Board's offer to safeguard the interests of presently-employed miners, through a no-redundancy guarantee and the option of relocation, was seen as insulting and beside the point in this argument, misdefining, in typically capitalist terms, as a problem for separate individuals what was being experienced as the crisis of a whole community and way of life. The widespread involvement of miners' wives in the organisation of the strike further demonstrated and extended these communal meanings.

Unfortunately this was by no means the only way in which the miners' struggle was conducted, represented, and perceived. Widespread sympathy won for the rights and needs of communities was at the same time driven away by the triumphalist style of the miners' most visible leader, and by the tone of militant self-assertion of the NUM as a vanguard group seeking to repeat its 1973-74 success in bringing down a Tory government. The argument of a universal right to consideration for whole communities to retain their means of life required a more inclusive and conciliatory call for solidarity than was in fact chosen. The arguments of physical and moral force in this struggle were not easily combined. The political resonance and potentiality of a politics which explicitly incorporates the moral claims of connection with place, and of the ties between past and future generations of workers thus still remain to be tested in other circumstances, and by different means.

There has also been a reassertion of the significance of the category of space within the field of urban geography. David Harvey³⁰, in particular, has developed a theory which describes the dynamics of capital accumulation in spatial terms. Territorial space, in this major development of Marxist ideas on a geographical plane, is seen as generating factors favourable to the accumulation of profit

(through locational advantages of different kinds) and of resistance to exploitation, through the social relations which are built up through the sharing by workers and their families of a location and a life-space. The rise and fall of land values is explained by the dynamics of class struggle, stocks of capital invested in buildings and the urban fabric being upwardly or downwardly revalued as profit potentials rise and fall. The interventions of the State in the spatial domain – through land-use planning, housing, infrastructural investment – are seen as largely determined by the interests of capital in maintaining the conditions for accumulation. The relevance of Harvey's work to the present argument is its recognition that collective identities are formed through the common occupancy of space, and are constituted in relations of particularist kinds. Capital is mobile, universal, and free; resistance to these forces most often defines itself in terms of the local identities of a specific group defined by its common history in a location. The recognition of a specifically spatial level of determination of social relations has been the objective of a significant school of social geographers³¹, in addition to Harvey.



We can thus see a new emphasis on the particularities of time and of place in contemporary radical thought. The development of interest in primary relationships, especially those of family (good and bad) through the influence of feminism and also through interest in psychoanalysis, are a further aspect of the new particularism of radical thought. The ecological movement focusses its version of this attention to the given – to the facts of being – on man's relation to nature, identifying irreplaceable gifts of the earth – threatened species, natural environments, etc. – as objects to be protected against the dynamic forces of universal accumulation or abstract power. It seems clear that these tendencies of thought incorporate into a radicalism of the left themes whose origins lie in a conservative, organicist, even religious mode of thought. At the same time, these ideas continue to infuse more traditionally conservative movements, which sometimes overlap, in conservation-

ist causes for example, with anti-capitalist protests of the left. (In recent years the membership of a wide range of conservation-related organisations, conservative and radical, has gone up substantially³².) The ideological identification of such campaigns in opposition to the instrumental rationality and the power of market forces or bureaucratic States is often clearer than their location in more conventional left-right terms. The electoral success of the Greens in West Germany seems due in part to their success in incorporating some of both these strains of protest against the dominant economy and polity.

It seems that an attention to the specific qualities of the social is now given by many radicals, in an examination of the possibilities of the present, where formerly radicals would project their demands forward into a mainly utopian future. Socialists adopted the dynamic, future-oriented, interest-based logics of capitalism itself, in order to decipher the means of its destruction, and took over in the process a similarly instrumentalist view of the present. The actual hardships and miseries of exploitation may also have encouraged such radical displacements of human hope, either backwards, in an idealisation of ways of life being destroyed by change, or forwards into a post-revolutionary dawn.

Now, with previously undreamed-of material abundance achieved for the majority of citizens in the West, it is hardly convincing to most to imagine the future as a wholly different world, the negative of what is already known in experience. Most would not, in any case, change everything – why should they wish to? More consistent with reality is the idea that the future has to be made from materials already at hand, sometimes casting aside, sometimes preserving, most often developing from an existing model or example. For better or worse, the future has in part already arrived. It is this sense that any contemporary socialism has to take account of what *is*, of what is valued in people's actual lives, that has brought this hidden turn of some radical thought away from its dialectical engagement with liberalism against the common enemy of traditional reaction, and cautiously instead towards some of the concerns of conservative thought, always more attentive, like romanticism, to the feelingful and aesthetic aspects of human life.

That is not to say that the project of modernisation and universal emancipation is complete, still less to endorse the revived claims of conservative traditionalism against it. The expressive, textured, and rooted lives identified by conservatives as possible only for a privileged minority should by contrast be claimed by socialists as universal human goals, made imaginable for the vast majority by the overcoming of material scarcity. The point is that the realisations of such human possibility are bound to be particular in their form, related in innumerable different ways to specific locations in time, place, and cultural tradition. What must be recognised and repudiated is the inheritance of 'mass thinking' which the left took over uncritically from the frightened liberalism of the mass society theorists of the early years of this century. (This unconscious appropriation of mass society ideas included communists' own habitual use of the idea of 'the masses' as a term of mobilisation. Even the socialists' alternative of 'class theory' to the right's 'mass theory' took over some of the reductionism of their opponents' conceptions, each influenced by the social upheavals and conflagrations of the early twentieth century³³.) A hostility to differentiation has continued to pervade the socialist movement, in both East and West, and to some degree accounts for its vulnerability to critique from the individualist right. What we require are vigorous social imaginaries to contest the dominant values of individual freedom and satisfaction now so effectively deployed by the advocates of market society. Time and place are essential constitutive dimensions of such a pluralism³⁴.

This is not to say that the project of modernisation and universal emancipation is complete, still less to endorse the revived claims of conservative traditionalism against it. Continued economic development remains essential for the world-wide conquest of material scarcity, costly and even catastrophic as this frequently is in its specific effects. This process of modernisation is often contradictory to the needs and moral claims of existing communities whose members have only one life to live. The dilemmas of how to balance such claims of generalised future benefits against present and concrete harms might be dealt with better if they were the subject of more conscious reflection.

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- 1 See the essay of this title by E. Hobsbawm in *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, ed. M. Jacques and F. Mulhern, Verso, 1981.
- 2 See P. Hirst, *Law, Socialism, and Democracy*, Allen and Unwin, 1986, and on Paul Hirst's development see G. Elliott, 'The Odyssey of Paul Hirst', in *New Left Review* 159, Sept-Oct 1986.
- 3 E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Verso, 1985.
- 4 Roy Hattersley, *Choose Freedom: The Future of Democratic Socialism*, Michael Joseph, 1986.
- 5 Bryan Gould, *Socialism and Freedom*, Macmillan, 1985.
- 6 F. Feher et al, *Dictatorship over Needs: an Analysis of Soviet Societies*, Blackwell, 1986.
- 7 R. Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, New Left Books, 1978.
- 8 A. Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, Allen and Unwin, 1983.
- 9 A. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations*, Harvard University Press, 1972.
- 10 This useful idea was put forward in R. Miliband, 'A State of Desubordination', in *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 29, 4, 1978.
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- 30 David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, Basil Blackwell, 1985; *The Urbanisation of Capital*, Basil Blackwell, 1985.
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- 32 Data showing large increases of membership of a large number of conservationist organisations such as Friends of the Earth, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the National Trust, are given in *Social Trends* 17, HMSO, 1987 (ch. 11).
- 33 Raymond Williams's important critique of the idea of 'masses' in *The Long Revolution* (Chatto, 1961) and *Keywords* (Fontana, 1976) omits reference to the damaging role of this concept in left-wing thought.
- 34 Time, space, and the individual are the three categories set out by Kant as constituting 'bounds of sense'. From the point of view of social thought it seems valuable to take the first two seriously as well as the third. It may be a different matter to universalise the conception of individuals located in a specific relation to time and space, than to think of the rational individual agent in a wholly abstracted and mentalistic way. The phenomenological concept of the embodied self developed by Merleau-Ponty (and in England, Stuart Hampshire) is a complementary step towards viewing human experience in relation to its necessary biological and material constraints.

