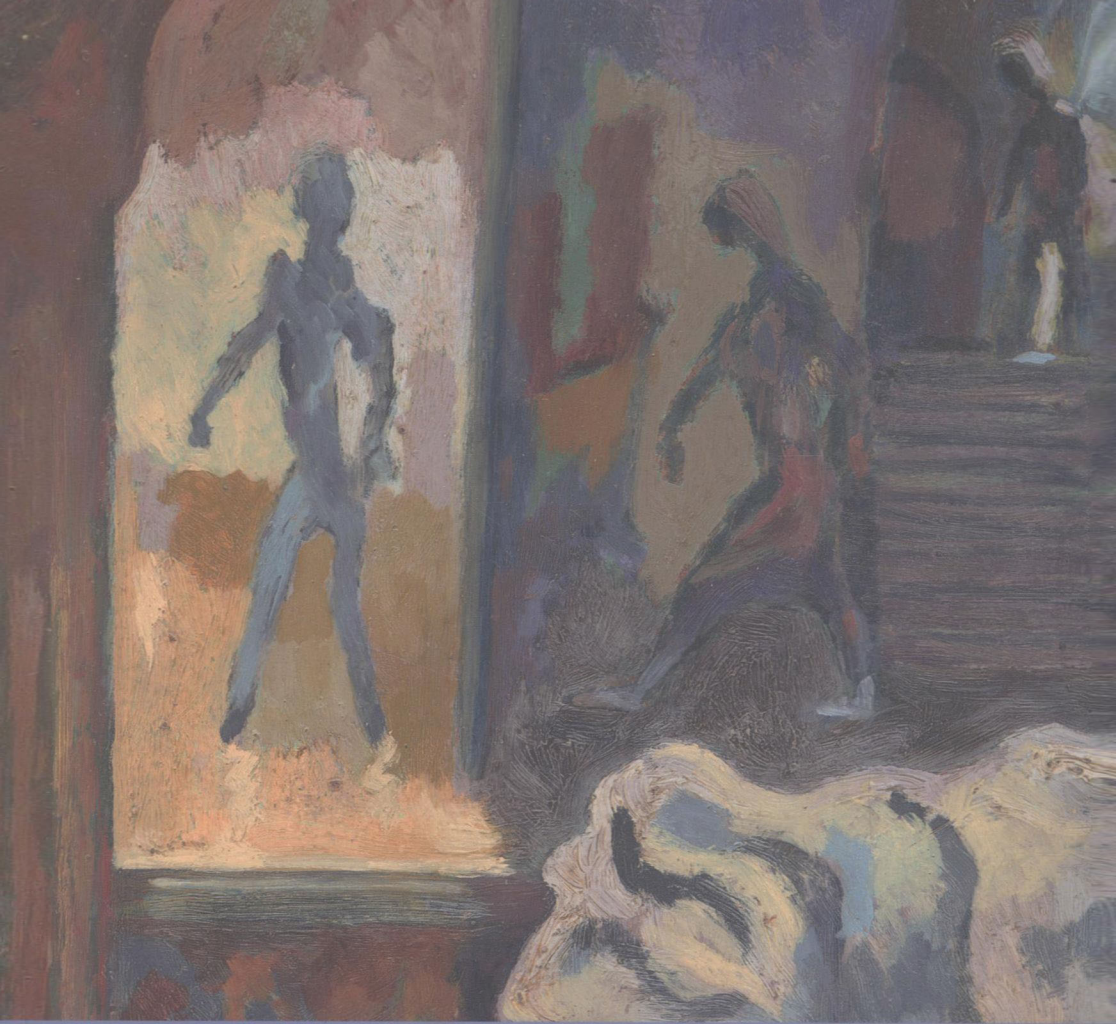

Left in the Past

Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia

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Contents

Introduction

This book argues that nostalgia has been an important but rarely acknowledged aspect of the radical imagination. Throughout the last century nostalgia was cast as the antithesis of radicalism. Emotions of yearning and loss were portrayed as embarrassing defects on the bright body of a movement associated with the celebration of the new and the youthful. Today this celebration is as lively as ever. But its link to the left is no longer clear. The left-radical project is in doubt, its meaning cloudy, its popular constituency scattered. Compared to 40 years ago, the status and influence of the left is diminished beyond recognition. It is not surprising, then, that many hark back to more reassuring times. There is a poignant but steadfast honesty in Svetlana Boym's summary of our condition:

> Survivors of the twentieth century, we are all nostalgic for a time when we were not nostalgic. But there seems no way back.[1]

In a post-communist era the pursuit of radicalism takes place in an atmosphere of freedom and doubt. It is a moment of adventure but also of bewilderment. It is also a moment of opportunity. For, in a period marked by the collapse of political certainties, awkward issues that were once side-lined may be approached with less trepidation. Throughout these pages I will be making the case that radicalism (a term identified throughout this book with the political left) emerged in and against modernity. This idea suggests another: that the contempt so often directed by radicals in the twentieth century towards nostalgia concealed a difficult and ambiguous relationship with the past.

I should declare straightaway that readers looking for an account of self-declared conservative socialists, or Tory radicals, will be disappointed. Such people do exist and their history deserves to be written but this is not it.[2] For the most part this book concerns itself with reading nostalgia against the grain of radical history. Thus it looks, less at people who think of themselves as yearning for the past, and more at those who think of themselves as fiercely forward-looking. It is the nostalgia that lies within and against the proponents of the modern that interests me. Even when I turn, in Chapter Two, to some of the usual suspects in any line-up of radical nostalgics – such as William Morris – my concern is with the difficulties and dilemmas of maintaining an increasingly *counter-orthodox* stance. The focus of this book is further refined by the fact that I approach these issues by exploring three particular arenas of radical left activity, namely early English socialism, anti-colonialism and post-colonialism and situationism and its aftermath. As this list suggests, it is upon the more radical voices of the left that I will concentrate. I make no claim to provide a representative survey of left opinion. Indeed, in its final chapters, *Left in the Past* explores ever wilder reaches of the avant-garde. In doing so my intention is to track down the awkward presence of nostalgia into the furthest redoubts of those who declare themselves 'partisans of forgetting'.[3]

This book is premised on the idea that we may learn more about the connections between nostalgia and radicalism from *difficult* encounters and *repressed* allegiances than we will do from less fraught situations. To identify and acknowledge such yearnings is revealing but also unsettling. It is no surprise that there are still many on the left who wish to portray themselves in more conventional terms, as part of a bold and marvellous project of tomorrow. In some quarters the recent crises of international capitalism have confirmed this traditional

image. Even before the financial meltdown of 2008–2009, the election of a number of socialist governments in Latin America, as well as the emergence of transnational social movements, was being interpreted by some eager commentators as indicating *The Rise of the Global Left* (to cite one book title from 2006).[4] Although, after more than a century of similarly ringing declarations, this title has an anachronistic quality, the *desire* to narrate our times as an era of radical revolution, of the rising multitude, should not be underestimated. It also implies that the moment when the relationship between radicalism and nostalgia can be discussed in the kind of open-ended way I hope to achieve in this book may not last. To acknowledge ambiguity – the often clumsy juggling of attachments to the past and hopes for the future – is a far less inviting prospect than the heroic, transformational rhetoric that is the stuff of inspiring politics. It promises no cathartic resolution of our present woes and no warm glow of superiority over conservative enemies. Instead a compromised landscape comes into view; a terrain in which what is denied and suppressed is often as important as what is declared.

We should not underestimate how hard it is to rethink a topic that has, for so long, as Christopher Lasch notes, been a 'political offence of the first order'.[5] Any attempt to take nostalgia seriously, to see it as unavoidable, perhaps even an occasionally creative force, is likely to make us appear discontent with modernity. It rips us from some basic assumptions, not just about progress and change, but what it is to be a happy, optimistic and 'well-balanced' citizen.[6] Over the past ten years or so many writers have responded to the challenge of nostalgia. Yet for the most part they have maintained an attitude of deep suspicion. The idea that 'nostalgia can actually be radically critical' has been offered as a daring suggestion, to be hedged in with thickets of provisos.[7] The effort to recuperate selected and sanctioned aspects of nostalgia for radicalism, to make it safe by formulating hierarchies of acceptable forms (discussed in Chapter One), is testament, not just to the new interest the topic is provoking, but also to a continued nervousness in its presence.

Such hesitancy is understandable, for nostalgia is still routinely reviled as a lie, as the essence of reaction. For many years it has performed the function of a whipping post. Nostalgia brings people together in the act of enjoyably lashing out at something that everyone agrees is both pitiful and reprehensible. As an emotion it is accused of lacking accuracy. It is, says Peter Logan, 'a problem of memory'.[8] While other feelings are indulged, in all their complicated, sentimental, splendour, nostalgia is routinely taunted as disappointedly subjective. Representations of the politics of nostalgia swarm with expressions of disapproval. Susan Bennett is resolute that '*in all its manifestations* nostalgia is, in its praxis, conservative'.[9] In 1962 Eric Hobsbawm, after reminding us that 'human history was an ascent, rather than a decline or an undulating movement about a level trend', explained that,

> Compared to . . . relatively coherent ideologies of progress, those of resistance to progress hardly deserve the name of systems of thought. They were rather attitudes lacking a common intellectual method, and relying on the acuteness of their insights into the weaknesses of bourgeois society and the unshakeable conviction that there was more in life than liberalism allowed for. Consequently they require relatively little attention.[10]

Offering a similarly Olympian insight, Richard Sennett points out that,

> regret is a dangerous sentiment. Whilst it produces empathy for the past, and so a certain insight, regret induces resignation about the present, and so a certain acceptance of its evils.[11]

Hobsbawm and Sennett's interpretations of the political function of, respectively, 'resistance to progress' and 'regret' bare little scrutiny. They do not offer analysis but gestures of disdain; gestures that speak to and rely on a readership who are already firmly convinced that nostalgia is conservative and, hence, suspect.

Until recently one could say almost anything about nostalgia, as long as it was damning, and few would object. Sean Scanlan argues that nostalgia has long been imparted with the character of 'a sort of political crime causing well-intended leftists of several varieties to flee even the appearance of any connection'.[12] Another cultural theorist intrigued by this spectacle, Marcos Natali, suggests that it may, in part, be rooted in the way our ideas of left and right are mapped onto a language of past and future.

> The very word traditionally used to refer to the left in English and other European languages – variations of 'progressive' – emphasises commitment to the future, while the words that describe the left's adversaries – 'conservative' and 'reactionary' suggests devotion to the past.[13]

However, opposition to nostalgia is not peculiar of the left. Modern market driven societies surround us with messages that extol the future and warn of the dangers of stasis, the failure to change. From boardrooms to classrooms the 'miasma of nostalgia' is pitted against 'the fierce spirit of renewal'.[14] Despite the fact that, today, modernity is itself an object of nostalgia and the great utopian projects of the twentieth century have lost their bearings and most of their defenders (with the notable exception of capitalism), we remain addicted to the grand rhetoric of dismissing the past. It is a narrative that shapes and sorts good and bad political messages. But it is also a personal message. It helps us understand that when we are young we are 'the future', society's most precious resource. We also know that, as we age, our potential, our claim on the future and, therefore, our social value decreases. Perhaps the most effective dismissal of nostalgia is the simple claim that it is 'old people's talk'.

Cast in this way it is tempting to defend nostalgia; to tip into a perverse celebration of this politically mobile emotion. However, I shall try to keep my distance from this false trail. Nostalgia is too ubiquitous and too diverse to need or warrant it. This circumspect view will be extended to those recent re-evaluations of nostalgia that suggest that its critical and reflexive forms can be sifted out and welcomed as progressive. My emphasis is not on a prescriptive guide to nostalgia but on its constitutive and inescapable nature. I offer no check list of how to do nostalgia, or how to get it right. My aim is broader: to show that within the modern, ostensibly anti-nostalgic, left there exists a profound sense of loss. I will also show that such yearnings are not a cancerous or alien intrusion but integral to the radical imagination.

Anti-nostalgia is common place. Yet so, of course, is nostalgia. Indeed much of the recent debate the topic has inspired is premised on the assumption that there is more of it around than there used to be. Observing the prominence of fond yearnings in the arts, advertising and entertainment industries, Yiannis Gabriel finds that 'whole sectors of the economy are fuelled by nostalgia'.[15] The institutionalization of memory in heritage museums and urban gentrification programmes is a largely late twentieth-century phenomenon. In 2005 Glazer identified what he called a 'global epidemic of nostalgia'.[16] In 1989 Shaw and Chase noted that nostalgia had 'recently become . . . pervasive'.[17] A decade earlier Fred Davis observed that nostalgia is 'much in vogue these days'.[18] In fact, comparable remarks depicting the ubiquity of yearnings for the past can be found throughout the last century and even earlier. In 1831

John Stuart Mill challenged those who responded to the new 'spirit of the age' by carrying 'their eyes in the back of their heads'.[19] This litany of longing suggests not simply the prevalence of nostalgia but also that the identity and function of the modern social analyst is bound up with her or his ability to challenge this particular social 'problem'. Kimberly Smith goes so far as to argue that the idea of nostalgia is a creation of, and designed to serve, the progressive critic. Thus she identifies it as 'an addendum to progressive ideology', that both 'explains progressives' failure to persuade their opponents' and 'helps to silence the victims of modernisation'.[20]

However, it is also clear that, over the past 20 years or so, themes of yearning, loss and memory have become more important in the humanities and, to a lesser extent, the social sciences. The terrain of nostalgia is now well travelled by scholars. And while the presence of nostalgia within the left remains relatively unexplored, the role of romanticism within the radical imagination has provoked some important interventions. The genesis of *Left in the Past* may, in part, be found in the inspiration provided by such studies. Like many others, I have been impressed by Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy's ability to shed new light on the power and breadth of the revolutionary Romantic tradition.[21] Sayre and Löwy make an explicit connection to nostalgia, noting that 'it is precisely the *nostalgia* for what has been lost that is at the centre of the Romantic anti-capitalist tradition'.[22] They help secure this link by citing Arnold Hauser's opinion that a 'feeling of homelessness and loneliness became the fundamental experience' of the Romantics.[23] Many of Sayre and Löwy's depictions of the ambivalent role of romanticism could be applied to nostalgia. Romanticism, they argue has a,

> fabulously contradictory character . . . simultaneously (or alternately) revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, individualistic and communtarian, cosmopolitan and nationalistic, realist and fantastic, retrograde and utopian, rebellious and melancholic, democratic and aristocratic, activist and contemplative, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystical and sensual.[24]

Sayre and Löwy go on to defend and elaborate the utility of romanticism, probing the question of why we should 'revitalise the Romantic tradition for the left'.[25] However, it is with this question that a number of differences with nostalgia come into view: for nostalgia is not a distinct tradition that can be delimited and defended. It does not deserve or need *revitalization* but *acknowledgement*. These points of difference suggest a larger argument that identifies romanticism as a particular cultural articulation that overlaps with the more expansive and diffuse terrain of nostalgia (although it may also exceed and renounce it). Thus nostalgia appears as both more pervasive and less historically distinct than romanticism. It is conventional to assign romanticism to specific historical periods, the early nineteenth century, for example, or the 1960s. Nostalgia cannot be pinned down so easily. Nor does it have the subversive glamour of romanticism. Sayre and Löwy's depiction of romanticism as 'fabulously contradictory' does not sound quite right for nostalgia. This is not because nostalgia is not contradictory but because it is harder to imagine it as fabulous. Nostalgia is often a prosaic and slightly embarrassed sentiment. Its contradictions are more likely to appear gauche than sublime. And yet it is precisely the unloved quality of nostalgia that makes it so fascinating. It suggests a kind of resilience against the odds: an awkwardness and yearning for attachment that makes it deeply flawed, unlovable but human.

The Changing Meaning of Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a yearning for the past, a sense of loss in the face of change. This definition of the term is not much more than a century old but it is one that I will be applying much further back in time. My excuse for this anachronistic practice is that it helps more than it hinders; it allows us to explore and identify diverse attachments to the past.

The term 'nostalgia' was coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer by combining the Greek *nostos* (home) and *algos* (pain).[26] It referred to what was considered to be a medical disorder, a disabling longing for home.[27] The course of the disease was described by Philippe Pinel, in 1761, as commencing with 'a sad, melancholy appearance, a bemused look . . . an indifference toward everything' and proceeding to 'the near impossibility of getting out of bed, an obstinate silence, the rejection of food and drink; emaciation, marasmus and death'.[28] The earliest English use of the term is from 1770 and derives from Joseph Banks, botanist on James Cook's *Endeavour*. 'The greatest part' of the crew, Banks wrote in his diary, are 'now pretty far gone in the longing for home which the Physicians have gone so far as to esteem a disease under the name of Nostalgia'.[29]

In the sense that these early associations tie nostalgia to the experience of mobility and isolation they also tie it to the experience of modernity. However, the pathological paradigm was giving way, by the end of the nineteenth century, to a broader conception of nostalgia's power. It became connected to the sentimentalization of the past, to common place feelings of loss, yearning and attachment.[30] In the first volume of *Remembrance of Thing's Past*, published in 1913, Marcel Proust is able to depict a form of nostalgia with which we remain even more familiar today. When his grandmother gives him 'the pastoral novels of George Sand' for his birthday, he describes them as,

> regular lumber-rooms of antique furniture, full of expressions that have fallen out of use and returned as imagery, such as one finds now only in country dialects. And my grandmother had bought them in preference to other books, just as she would have preferred to take a house that had a gothic dovecote, or some other such piece of antiquity as would have a pleasant effect on the mind, filling it with a nostalgic longing for impossible journeys through the realms of time.[31]

Yet nostalgia, having escaped from its medical origins, began to lead a double life. In the realm of cultural practice, of personal pleasures, of our flight to the comforts of home or holiday, it is ubiquitous and explicit. However, as we have already seen, within the realm of political rhetoric, of intellectual activity, of public life, nostalgia is routinely vilified. Indeed a willingness to scorn it remains a ready symbol of progressive inclinations and hard-headed vigour. This distinction also suggests that Fred Davis's insistence in *Yearning for Yesterday* (a book that offered one of the first appraisals of the sociology of nostalgia), that the topic must be defined as deriving 'from a personally experienced past', is too restrictive.[32] Davis admits that,

> in light of the word's great vogue in recent years, it is conceivable that in time [nostalgia will] acquire connotations that extend its meaning to *any* sort of positive feeling toward *anything* past, no matter how remote or historical.[33]

In fact, as Proust's use of the term shows, the yearning associated with nostalgia has been mapped widely for many years, taking in collective memories and a shared sense of social

dislocation. Indeed, in 1957, the *Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* spelled out the fact that the 'vogue word' nostalgia 'has come to mean any vague yearning, especially for the past'.[34] However, Davis's attempt to limit the application of the term does usefully highlight how nostalgia nearly always involves a claim to *attachment*. Such a claim implies that a sense of loss is more likely to concern the more recent and proximate past. Though nostalgia for the 'glory that was Rome', or the freedom of hunter gatherers, is common enough to show that distance can itself spur a kind of reverential regard, attachments are more readily and easily formed and maintained with more immediate times and places. Davis's approach is helpful in another way, for it reinforces the suggestion that, even though it is often publicly insulted, nostalgia is a ubiquitous facet of *personal* life. For Raymond Williams nostalgia 'is universal and persistent; only other men's nostalgias offend'.[35] There is a wry charm to William's observation but it misses and, hence, brings into relief, an important point. For while in the public realm nostalgia is rebuked, within the personal realm it tends to be tacitly indulged. We do not expect the treasured objects, the valued images, that we use to personalize our homes and 'work stations' to be sneered at. Indeed, modern etiquette demands that these tokens of attachment are beyond criticism. For, however sentimental they may appear to others, they speak not only of a shared humanity but also of a shared vulnerability, an emotional range that includes love, loss and loyalty. It is, conversely, the spaces that fail to convey nostalgia that 'offend': the blank wall, the empty desk, the absence of signs of depth and connection.

The disjunction between these two worlds of nostalgia – the public and the private – can sometime catch us out. A little while ago I bumped into an academic colleague in one of those publicly owned stately homes and gardens that draw in the weekend crowds across England. Our awkwardness was palpable and mutual. I think we both would have liked to find a loophole; to make a few disparaging remarks about the tweeness and the suspect nationalism of it all. Perhaps we could pretend we had been dragged along. Just observing the crowds. But some lies are too obvious to appear polite. So then what? Could we admit to have travelled miles from the brutal and noisy city to enjoy walking round the beautiful old gardens of a long departed gentry? Not that either. The shame would be too much. We were left with a mutually indulgent set of nods and smirks, registering not simply the humour that we could find in the situation but the fact, thankfully, that *off duty*, our nostalgia was forgivable.

What is Radicalism?

One of the consequences and indications of the decline of the left and the emergence of a post-socialist era is the fact that the meaning of radicalism has entered a period of considerable mobility. To many contemporary ears the word is more likely to evoke fundamentalist Islam or a new business plan as to suggest the left. As this implies, my use of the term as synonymous with those traditions of anti-capitalist egalitarianism, social emancipation and agitation which constitute the left, is in danger of appearing old-fashioned. It is, moreover, a usage that rolls together radicalism with socialism, communism and anarchism, in a way that obscures the fact that the earliest incarnations of these movements often sought to extricate themselves from radicalism. In the mid-late-nineteenth century, radicalism was often understood as a more combative form of liberalism. It was associated with a cross-class, populist and democratic agenda. British socialists of the period were often fierce critics of radicalism.[36] Adding further to the complex history of the term, in the late twentieth century it was reclaimed by some sections of the left as a marker of distinctly bold forms of political

commitment. Hence the distinction between radical and socialist feminists was premised on the idea that the former offered a separatist politics of sexual difference while the latter viewed feminism as one part of a wider anti-capitalist struggle. 'Radicalism' came to evoke a range of anti-orthodox political forms, including anti-racism, queer politics and environmentalism, that were aligned to but also often critical of the 'traditional' left.

There are a lot of different claims upon the term 'radical'. Many of the objections that could be made to the employment of the term as a portmanteau for the left have merit. But the diversity of these claims also suggests that this is a word regularly deployed rather than owned by any one tradition. Moreover, while the link to the left is far weaker than it was, it retains enough purchase to be both defensible and comprehensible. Radicalism evokes a wider political landscape than the left and it is likely to outlast it. But the connections between the left and radicalism are so deep and run so powerfully through nearly all the material that I will be introducing over the next six chapters that I can claim, at least, a good excuse for collapsing the two.

The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia

Any study of the relationship between nostalgia and radicalism is a study of dilemmas. These dilemmas take different forms and each opens up questions that inform different chapters in this book. The paradox that is most fundamental to my enquires may be stated as follows: nostalgia is integral to radicalism; yet, radicalism has been offered as a narrative of anti-nostalgia. If nostalgia is not merely an error or lie perpetrated by reactionaries but an inherent aspect of modernity then the possibility of its complete suppression appears small. The fact that nostalgia is reviled does not necessarily mean that it has been banished. Instead we find it sustained in unrecognized and unidentified forms. It is a nostalgia that cannot be named, yet it fulfils an important role, guiding us back to authenticity, to solidarity, to the culture of the people.

The other dilemmas identified below suggest other areas where nostalgia appears as an uncomfortable moment or rupture within the left, an unacknowledged presence that produces anxiety but also sustains and coheres. A temptation when approaching this material is to organize it in terms of conflicting radical traditions. Sometimes these distinctions might be ideological (e.g. anarchists versus Marxists), sometimes they might be social (e.g. the middle class versus the working class). Yet the utility of separating out such constituencies is easily overestimated. They produce a misleadingly neat sense of discrete positions in a field characterized by precisely the opposite. In fact, the paradoxes identified below exist within and against a broad range of radicalisms. They are sites of dilemma found across the left.

Roots: Pulling Them Up or Letting Them Grow?

The word 'radical' derives from the Latin for root (*radix*). Used as a political term, radicalism refers to the desire to grasp and pull up the roots of an existing political arrangement, usually with the hope that an equally deeply planted but very different alternative can be nurtured in its place.

Yet radicalism has another, very different, relationship to roots. In this version radicalism grows from roots: it emerges from authentic social experience; it is the voice from below, the cry of the people against an uprooted elite. This narrative identifies the enemies of radicalism

with those who seek to dig away at memory, to grub up organic identities and reduce communities to malleable individuals without ties of loyalty or attachment.

The desire to preserve or change the landscape provides a prominent example of the interplay and clash of these different ideals. The radical eye is often represented as looking beyond 'backward villages' and 'dirty old towns' to the gleaming modern vistas of tomorrow. Yet it is within the old places, the real places, the streets and the living communities, that narratives of popular identity, as well as class and community solidarity, are found and admired. This potentially fraught combination of aspirations creates ample opportunity for paradoxical responses: for *regret* that it is *necessary* to replace living communities with soulless housing blocks; for the uncertain hope that the destruction of so much will prove, in the end, to have been worth the pain.

This unstable terrain maps onto the uncertain status and role of *the people* in radicalism. Radicalism is often presented as a popular tradition; indeed as inherently and by definition the politics of the people. It is an association that suggests that the memories and traditions of the people should not only be cast as the fertile earth of radicalism but be respected, collected, preserved, revered. Allied to this association are many others, such as the connection between radicalism and patriotism (a connection central to early European radicalism and still widespread in the global South) and the assumption that radicalism is, or should be, 'from below', 'street-level', ordinary not posh. Yet as soon as these links are made doubts rush in, both about the authenticity of the popular claim and the advisability of handing political power to the masses. Populism is an object of intense suspicion within left-wing thought, often because it is associated with demagogy. Such scepticism is sustained by the belief that the unreformed culture of ordinary people is conservative and backward-looking. This perspective identifies the authentic locus of radicalism as the militant, a revolutionary agent who stands with, for, but in front of the people. However, the constant claims of engagement, of *returns* to the people, of populist symbolism, that we find across vanguardist radicalisms in the last century, also suggest that this is another arena, not of discrete political choices, but of dilemma. The radical is nothing without the people. She wishes to be rooted in the people. Yet the peoples' 'rootedness' makes her suspicious and uncomfortable.

Towards Authenticity or towards Alienation?

The desire to overcome alienation and return humanity to authenticity is an important radical motif. Thus radical visions of the future often suggest visions of the past, more especially a time before class, before power, before hierarchy, before money. This paradoxical historical sensibility has been cohered within Marxism through a dialectical understanding of the interplay of revolution and alienation. The communist insurrection which will abolish alienation is made possible by proletarianization; that is, by the formation of an alienated and, hence, rebellious class identity. In this way past and future come together into an image of reintegrated, authentic existence being created out of the maelstrom of revolution.

Yet alienation is not easily tamed. How can communist authenticity be rendered out of the impersonal bureaucracies and mass society of modernity? Even among those radicals for whom alienation appears to have a clear value, the desire to valorize authenticity often comes into view as a form of yearning. An obvious way out of this dilemma is to condemn the quest for authenticity as a sham and celebrate deracination as providing its own kind of liberation. Yet, as we shall see in Chapters Three and Four, although this possibility seems to appeal to some radical 'anti-essentialist' theorists, it is itself stalked by a sense of loss.

Towards Nature or Escaping Nature?

The dilemmas of authenticity evoke a closely related set of concerns about the idea of nature. The concept of nature is one of the foundations of the radical tradition. It has been offered many times as a source of rights and freedoms. It has also been central to the extension of radicalism beyond purely political worries and into a larger, romantic, sensibility that grasps the wonder and fragility of life on earth. Indeed, environmentalism is often represented as a form of radicalism, especially when it is portrayed as a critique of consumerism and of lives alienated from the earth.

Yet radicalism can just as easily be identified as a tradition that is premised on and encourages an escape from nature. It seeks the politicization of social choices and an affirmation of people's capacity to shape the world to their will. The twentieth century saw radicals, especially those who had won power, embrace technology and industry so enthusiastically that electricity plants and tractors became icons of communism. The left became associated with the subjugation and, in many countries, the ruination of the environment. Those sceptical of technocracy became marginalized into a green counter-culture. This counter-movement is now mainstream. But its relationship to the left is contested and uncertain.

Solidarity beyond Politics?

Solidarity is a central word in the radical lexicon. It is associated with others: struggle, comradeship, co-operation. Radicalism is an ideology of fellowship, of the power of union and alliance. Within these emotional and organizational bonds lies a conviction that human beings are meant to act and work together. It is a conviction that inevitably evokes a sense of authentic community (even of 'primitive communism') and of the strength of close, intimate associations (the ties that bind 'the people', 'brothers', 'sisters' and 'comrades').

However, the nature of this solidarity is ambivalent. It is offered by many socialists as something forged, not natural but created in conflict. Thus it is cast as distinct from 'conservative', organic, solidarities. Unlike them it is not passive, backward-looking and insular but politically conscious and oriented to the future, towards change and action. Yet the lines of distinction between these types of solidarity are hard to maintain. The idea of solidarity always contains a hope of human togetherness that cannot be reduced to political utility, to mere strategic value. Hence, the ideal of solidarity exceeds politics, it calls on and looks for something more. And by doing so it inserts a potentially troubling sense of loss into the radical project.

Acknowledging Nostalgia: Four Provocations

Paradoxes are rarely enough. On its own the recognition of ambiguity is too bloodless an ambition. And it fails to convey the danger and the excitement that must be part of any rethinking of the relationship between nostalgia and the left. To get us thinking critically about nostalgia we also need provocations. Below I offer four.

Against Reducing Nostalgia to a Tool of Resistance

The power of the past is often domesticated within radical history into a resource, a set of useful tools, to apply to the present. Memories and loyalties are valued but only in as much