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The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia in British Psychogeography

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Abstract

This article argues that British psychogeography is an arena of conflict between two important and unresolved strands within radicalism: the use of the past to critique industrial modernity and the suppression of nostalgia. The article begins by outlining the emergence of nostalgia as a site of dilemma and creativity within political radicalism. It is shown that as nostalgia became marginalized within mainstream radicalism it became available as a provocative resource for 'counter-cultural' interventions. The article then turns to how the dilemma of nostalgia is negotiated within two forms of contemporary British psychogeography, the travel narratives of Iain Sinclair and the activities of revolutionary psychogeographical groups. Within Sinclair's travel books the modern landscape becomes a site of creative purgatory, a necessary violence that simultaneously anchors the writer in modernism while establishing marginal histories and spaces as expressions of cultural and social loss. In revolutionary psychogeography nostalgia is also refused and deployed. However, this process is enacted in a different way and to different ends. The development of 'magico-Marxism' encapsulates the novelty but also the folk-historical inclinations of this project.

Key words

Iain Sinclair | nostalgia | psychogeography | radicalism

'You walked?' said Ballard, incredulously. 'We do have buses in Shepperton.'
(Sinclair, 2003: 266)

DURING HIS walk around the byways of London's outer ring road, the British novelist, film-maker and poet Iain Sinclair called in at J.G. Ballard's house in Shepperton. In *London Orbital* (2003, first published 2002), Sinclair explains that he wanted to 'pay homage . . . to the man who has defined the psychic climate through which we are travelling' (2003: 268). But instead of a blessing Sinclair receives a polite but bemused

welcome. Ballard is clearly at a loss to understand what Sinclair is up to, including his perverse refusal of modern transport.

Sinclair's ramble around the M25's noisy margins was a journey in and against the contemporary landscape. It was an act of retrieval of radical histories now by-passed. But it was also a kind of romantic tribute to the brute energy of a technocentric, dehumanized environment. In either guise, *London Orbital* is one of the central examples of the 'psychogeographical turn' that can be identified in British literary culture and avant-garde¹ activity in the 1990s (Ho, 2006; Home, 1997a; Keiller, 1994, 1997; see also, Ackroyd, 2000, 2007; Moorcock, 1988). This body of work explores and re-imagines the forgotten nooks and crannies of ordinary landscapes. It seeks to re-enchant and re-mythologize prosaic geographies. The resultant effect is disorientating; funny yet melancholic; utterly of our time but ill at ease with modern Britain.

Critical reaction has tended to locate this strange new sub-genre of travel writing as a postmodern incarnation of a longer tradition of ludic flânerie (Coverley, 2006). A smooth and largely biographical (indeed, often hagiographic) history has been constructed. This lineage usually starts with literary walkers. In Britain the assembled cast includes Defoe, De Quincey and Arther Machen. Twentieth-century psychogeography is offered as the next step; an avant-garde radicalization of earlier forays. However, Sinclair's pilgrimage to Shepperton, along with his awkward reception, implies the need for a more analytical and less deferential approach. For what is most intriguing about Sinclair's travel narratives is their ambivalence. Robert Macfarlane (2005: 4), noticing the presence in Sinclair's work of a mood and style 'usually associated with the *Daily Telegraph* [rather] than with avant-garde psychogeographers', highlights the unresolved nature of his project. He goes on to categorize Sinclair's approach as 'nostalgic radicalism'. In this article I will be developing this interpretation and arguing that contemporary British psychogeography should be understood as a site of struggle over the politics of loss within the radical imagination. More specifically, I will show that British psychogeography is an arena of conflict between two important strands within British radicalism: the use of the past to critique industrial modernity and the suppression of nostalgia. It will also be shown how these tendencies, though they remain discordant presences are, in fact, partially resolved into novel forms of creative praxis.

The term 'psychogeography' derives from the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals. For these groups it referred to spatial practices designed to confuse and re-imagine everyday space. The most important of these techniques was a politically purposeful 'drifting'; a transgressive wandering around and through the many barriers, forbidden zones and distinct atmospheres of the city. I have discussed the relationship between situationist nostalgia and psychogeography in an earlier article (Bonnett, 2006) and I will not be reprising that history here. It is pertinent to note, however, that this phase of psychogeography has received a considerable amount of attention in recent years (see also Pinder, 2005a; Sadler, 1998). What is less often acknowledged is that, over the past two decades, psychogeography has

re-emerged and been reworked. It has not simply been inherited and continued but re-imagined in ways that reflect the changing nature of the relationship between radicalism, history and geography.

This article has three parts. The second and third parts address examples of British psychogeography. However, the article begins historically. The first section outlines the emergence of nostalgia as a dilemma within political radicalism. This historical context is used to explain how and why the politics of loss became an arena of both repression and transgression from the late 19th century. It is argued that, as nostalgia became marginalized within mainstream socialist and communist debate, it became available as a provocative resource for 'counter-cultural' interventions. Hence the uneasy combination of modernism and anti-modernism that often characterizes avant-garde activity is understood to be expressive of a wider difficulty over the place of the past in radical politics. In summary, a political history of nostalgia is offered; an account that shows how nostalgia emerged as a chronic problem and site of provocation within modernity. This approach is briefly contrasted with the representation of nostalgia as a symptom of postmodernism.

In the second and third sections, this political history of nostalgia is used to explore two forms of British psychogeography. The first and most well known of these forms is the travel narratives of Iain Sinclair. The second form is less well known but is shown to be an original response to the crises of the left. Revolutionary psychogeographical groups sprang up in a number of British cities in the mid-1990s (a phenomenon also witnessed in the USA and Italy; as seen, for example, in the New York Psychogeographical Association and the Associazione Psicogeografica di Bologna). These groups shared with Sinclair a quixotic, love-hate relationship with the past. Like Sinclair, they emphasized historical re-readings of the everyday landscape and exhibited an uneasy combination of deracinating modernism and folksy localism. However, the reason I have chosen to distinguish these two forms of the psychogeographical turn is because they work through their fraught relationship with nostalgia in distinct ways. Within Sinclair's travel books, the modern landscape becomes a site of creative purgatory, a necessary violence that simultaneously anchors the writer in modernism while establishing marginal spaces and histories discovered on foot as expressions of a profound cultural and social loss. This double mapping of modernity and nostalgia is then used to imagine a community of creative and other cultural workers who have found a way of being 'at home' and finding friendship in and against an alienating landscape.

In what I call 'revolutionary psychogeography' nostalgia is also simultaneously refused and deployed. However, this process is enacted in a different way and to different ends. The use of a self-consciously exaggerated and, hence, self-subverting rhetoric of class war enabled these activists to evoke and ironize orthodox revolutionary politics. The development within this resolutely 'underground' community of so-called 'magico-Marxism' encapsulates the novelty but also the folk-historical inclinations of their project. I also show that a newly confident politics of nostalgia can

be glimpsed within this milieu: at the counter-cultural margins of society radicalism is (once again) becoming tied to a popular politics of loss.

It will, hopefully, be clear that this article has wider ambitions than the provision of a more nuanced account of an often wilfully outré cultural current in late modern Britain. It is a contribution to ongoing attempts to re-examine the relationship between radicalism and the politics of loss. Many recent considerations of nostalgia have edged towards the conclusion 'that nostalgia can actually be radically critical' (Legg, 2005: 488). A more powerful formulation is offered by Peter Fritzsche:

Nostalgia stalks modernity as an unwelcome double, a familiar symptom of unease in the face of political and economic transformation . . . it takes the measure of the distance people have fallen short in their efforts to make themselves 'at home in a constantly changing world'. (2002: 62)

Fritzsche goes on to identify this form of 'unease' as an attribute of oppositional thinking (see also Fritzsche, 2004). Fritzsche is suggesting that social critics can never be 'at home' in a 'changing world'. In the next section I argue that nostalgia is a chronic presence within, and challenge to, the radical imagination.

The Danger of Loss: How Nostalgia Became Counter-cultural

Politics demands the critique of the present and, hence, the necessity of political visions of the past and/or future. Yet within an era that distinguishes itself by its modernity, these are not equivalent options. To be 'backward looking' is unacceptable, inadequate, eccentric. Both conservatives and radicals have struggled with this foreclosing of the past. The unwieldy combination of capitalist deracination and patrician traditionalism that is found within many right-wing and centrist movements suggests that nostalgia is a difficult and often unwelcome presence across the political spectrum. However, while we should acknowledge that a yearning for and an attachment to the past is inherently discordant in the modern world, it appears that the relationship between nostalgia and radicalism is uniquely troublesome. 'Making a new world' is a defining or, at least, central claim of the radical imagination. Indeed, radical politics is often represented as having a literal and metaphorical Year One, inaugurated (in 1792) by the French National Convention. Over the next two centuries – from Owen's New Lanark to the 'New Civilization' of the USSR and Mao's 'New Democracy' – a desire to abolish the old and build an entirely different kind of society provided a core belief for socialists and communists.

The landscape has been the central stage for the proof and spectacle of radical transformation. The eradication of old buildings, old place names and old monuments, and the construction of new places, new names and new monuments, provided the most visible symbols of revolutionary intent. This eagerness to build anew was never simply a mere concretization of radical ideology. It was also an assertion of authority over the past. Thus

acts of destruction have been as important as acts of construction. In *The Destruction of Memory*, Robert Bevan (2006) chronicles the almost fetishistic desire for demolition that accompanied the creation and maintenance of state communism. Thus, for example, he explains the failure of attempts 'to persuade Mao that the new Beijing should be built adjacent to the ancient, scared city' (2006: 127). Bevan points out that:

. . . the obliteration of the past was as much a consideration as the building of the new. The desire to create a socialist man and a socialist city . . . has built within it a desire to bring about that change through the very act of destruction and rebuilding – the violent process of change. (2006: 127)

By the mid-20th century, the idea that radicals are necessarily suspicious of the past had become so dominant that, across the range of radical opinion

– from authoritarian to libertarian – feelings of loss and regret were cast as intrinsically wrong. Indeed, such has been the power of the anti-nostalgic message that even those critiques of modern societies which appear to contain a clear nostalgic component have often maintained an incongruous militancy on the wrong-headedness of looking back instead of forward. For example, in *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett was moved to explain 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. (1977: 259)

Sennett's interpretation of the political function of 'regret' bears little scrutiny. It has the brazen, generalizing quality of a stereotype.

A lack of curiosity about the topic has done much to maintain the image of nostalgia as an alien presence within the radical tradition. However, it is only by addressing the use and subsequent repression of nostalgia in the broader radical movement that we can begin to understand how and why the unresolved problem of the past is played out within contemporary psychogeography. In the rest of this section I emphasize that attachments to the past were once not merely common within, but central to, popular radicalism. I argue that from the late 19th century such attachments became marginalized and, hence, available to an emergent avantgarde as a resource for cultural transgression. It is also suggested that the relationship between the avant-garde and nostalgia has always been uneasy. The way in which the avant-garde imagined and recuperated aspects of the past as pre-bourgeois and pre-civilized is indicative of how it has managed the paradoxes of modernist nostalgia.

The presence of nostalgia within radical history has been explored on several occasions (Glazer, 2005; Rydzeski, 1999; Stafford, 1987; Thompson, 1968, 1976; Ward, 1998). However, discussion of the topic has been distorted by the assumption that the topic is best represented as an unfortunate relic: the chaotic debris of pre-socialist consciousness and romantic wistfulness. The attachment to the land and to myths of traditional

community that are so central to late 18th-century and early and mid-19th-century English revolutionary thought have been consistently underplayed (until recently, see Bonnett, 2007a; Chase, 1988). Against this yardstick even the most militant of early revolutionaries, such as Thomas Spence, becomes 'a poor creature' (Gray, 1947: 257); 'less a harbinger of modern revolutionism than a mutation of the past' (Knox, 1977: 98). The only alternative available fate has been to cast such figures as proto-socialists – naive forefathers whose evocations of the past are a forgivable symptom of the confusions of an immature movement. Thus the attempt to turn 'glorious old Tom Spence' (as described by Friedrich Engels, 1983) into a proto-Marxist requires a constant effort either to excuse or ignore his politics of loss (Bonnett, 2007b).

Well into the 19th century, the identification of radicalism with modernization was far from clear in Britain. For Spenceans and Chartists the past was an obvious resource for the critique of unwelcome social and technological changes and for models of a better society. At the centre of their beliefs was the conviction that the process of commercialization was introducing a new era of inequality and inauthenticity. In the words of William Cobbett (1912: 6), the 'mock grandeur and mock antiquity' associated with the intrusion of commercial relations meant that 'the long oak-table' of village life was no more, disposed of at the 'bottom of a bridge that some stock-jobber will stick up over an artificial river in his cockney garden' (1982: 267). The loss being expressed was not simply of ancient landscapes but, more specifically, of traditional and communal relationships to the landscape. Whether expressed through romantic or practical historical comparison, resistance to the transformation of 'our places' into things owned and traded by an alien class was central to the emotional and political message of early radicalism (see also Barrell, 1972; Burchardt, 2002).

As the influence of scientific and industrial socialism (inspired by a variety of figures, including Marx, but also Bellamy, 1888, and Kidd, 1902) became pervasive, such backward-looking perspectives took on an increasingly self-conscious and risky quality. Indeed, the most popular and influential introduction to socialism ever written in Britain, Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* (1908; first published in 1894, over 2 million copies were sold over the following decade) alternates between pastoralism and technocracy. Thus, in between railing against 'the factory system' as 'ugly, disagreeable and mechanical' (1908: 25), Blatchford sets out a model of a new efficient society, in which state ownership and state control will sweep away the past and ensure decent housing and living conditions for the workers. A similar combination can also be found in the Garden City movement (Howard, 1902). At the turn of the 19th century, the tension between modernity and anti-modernity was being played out across the spectrum of radical opinion. In the hands of both English quasi-Marxists, such as Hyndman and Morris – for whom the 14th century was 'inhabited by perhaps the most vigorous, freedom-loving set of men the world ever saw' (1884: 13) – to labour leaders, such as Keir Hardie – for whom socialism sought 'to resuscitate a phase of British life which produced great and good results in the past' (1907: 18) – radicalism offered an awkward amalgam of

past and future.

Drawing out these persistent claims on the past, Paul Ward has suggested that between 1881 and 1924 British socialism offered 'a new form of historical politics' (1998: 36). Yet it was also during this period that nostalgia acquired defensive and disruptive connotations. William Morris, the most notoriously anti-technocratic of radical leaders, felt obliged to 'cling to the love of the past' (1915: 57) against a growing tide of socialist opinion that cast his resistance to industrial civilization as arcane and conservative. Speaking in 1895, the year before he died, to one of the architects of democratic state socialism, the Fabian Sidney Webb, Morris grumbled 'the world is going your way, Webb, but it is not the right way in the end' (cited by MacCarthy, 1994: 644). In fact Morris's desire for a society that reconnected community, tradition and nature existed in uneasy alliance with his formal acceptance of scientific socialism. It is a combination that for many later critics, such as Raymond Williams (1971; see also Meier, 1978; Thompson, 1976; cf. Kinna, 2000), reflected Morris's 'fragmentary consciousness'. The 'larger part of his literary work', Williams continued, 'bears witness only to the disorder which he felt so acutely' (1971: 159–60).

As hostility to nostalgia developed into a radical orthodoxy, the past became more attractive to the unorthodox. Hence, one of the consequences of the opprobrium that came to surround the topic was that the past came to take on forbidden connotations and acquired transgressive qualities (especially when cast in the form of the 'primitive' and pre-civilized) that attracted the avant-garde. Among Dadaists and surrealists, the peasant and non-western past were routinely employed and deployed to represent rebellious and spontaneous creative forces. The conservative associations which were, by the 1910s and 1920s, firmly attached to nostalgia, were by-passed by a desire to celebrate the pre-bourgeois and primal. Tristan Tzara in his 'Dada Manifesto' of 1918, explained: 'We want to continue the tradition of the Negro, Egyptian, Byzantine and gothic art and destroy the atavistic sensitivity bequeathed to us by the detestable era that followed the quattrocento' (1992: 63). The desire to 'proclaim', in the words of the Louis Aragon in 1925 'our total detachment from, in a sense our uncontamination by, the ideas at the basis of a still-real European civilisation' (cited by Rosemont, 1998: 7) established the pre-civilized past, both in Europe and elsewhere, as a central repository of avant-garde sedition.

The avant-garde have continued to work through the dilemmas and opportunities of radical nostalgia. However, an attraction to the past triggers automatic suspicion. Indeed, Stauth and Turner charge that a broad range of 'melancholic intellectual[s]' (1988: 525) have been drawn to nostalgia in order to defend an 'elitist' aversion to commercial popular culture (they also narrate the birth of sociology as 'a nostalgic analysis of communal relations', 1988: 517). In the absence of an historical understanding of the changing role of nostalgia in radicalism, Stauth and Turner's criticism of, specifically, the Frankfurt School for its 'elitist' aversion to 'mass culture' and 'the culture industry', risks conflating commercialization with popular democracy. When set within a longer perspective, it becomes more difficult to cast Adorno and

Horkheimer's (1979: xv) desire for 'the redemption of the hopes of the past' as reducible to a snobbish attachment to high culture. It is also pertinent to note that, within avant-garde praxis, it was at the level of everyday space, especially of the changing urban scene, that we find nostalgia most forcefully asserted. The 'gothic' revolutionary spirit of the surrealists, and later the situationists, cast the street as a terrain of intimacy and creativity, a space hidden from and threatened by the 'suppression of the street' augured by modern traffic and modern planning (Bonnett, 2006; Pinder, 2005a; Sadler, 1998). Such nostalgia may have had 'elitist' components. But it must also be understood as an attempt to defend 'popular' or ordinary space within and from the new technocentric and exclusionary landscapes of modernity.

Nostalgia cannot be adequately summarized as either elitist or populist. Indeed, it often acts to confound and confuse such designations and, by extension, the ability of 'melancholic intellectuals' ever to be entirely 'at home' with either modernity or anti-modernity. The term 'counter-culture' is itself expressive of this duality. The term is also useful because it is suggestive of the wider 'alternative' currents that, by the 1960s, had produced a green-tinged, often intensely localist, folk and libertarian radical milieu (Brocken, 2003; Houghan, 1975). For Melville (1972: 100) the counter-cultural 'vision of the good life identifies the good with that which is natural, completely unencumbered by civilisation'. The emergence of the counter-culture helped unite conservative and orthodox Marxist commentators in a hostility towards the 'new Left' as a 'reactionary revulsion against modernity' (Kristol, 1982: 633). However, radicalism and nostalgia were most clearly drawn together within the often uneasy combination of anti-technocratic pastoralism and avant-garde experimentalism found within the hippie and bohemian arts scenes of the 1960s and 1970s (Houghan, 1975). Iain Sinclair provides an example and a point of connection between experimental poets (notably Allan Ginsberg), and the resurgent interest among counter-cultural radicals in environmental sustainability and visions of the pre-industrial, folk past. The DIY localism of the small press Sinclair helped found in 1970 in Dalston, London (the Albion Village Press), exemplifies this combination of avant-garde and folkish themes. Sinclair's first books, published by the Albion Village Press, such as *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* (1971) and *Muscat's Würm* (1972), are resolutely disorientating and antitraditional. Yet the political ethos of Albion Village Press is reminiscent of Morris's socialism. As Sinclair recalls:

It was all that stuff of the previous era – making your own bread, and yoghurt, and living very simply, in a pleasant area where things were cheap, and producing your own books, and walking into the Whitechapel gallery and putting on an exhibition. (Sinclair in Jackson, 2003: 68)

Sinclair's early work was bound into an ethos of subversive localism. As this implies, the dilemma of using and refusing nostalgia may be said to be a persistent presence and possibility in his work.

Before I turn to Sinclair's travel narratives, it is necessary to traverse

one last piece of contextual terrain. For, given the history related, the association not infrequently made between nostalgia and postmodernism appears both incongruous and worth investigating. More bluntly, in order for the longer historical interpretation I have been offering to be convincing it is necessary that this association be loosened. This task is eased by the fact that nostalgia has had a somewhat mercurial presence within theorizations of postmodernism. It is often overlooked. One of the clearest attempts to cement the two came in Wendy Wheeler's essay 'Nostalgia Isn't Nasty' (1994). Wheeler identified a 'contemporary insistence of nostalgia as a central feature of postmodernism' (1994: 94). She went on to argue that 'the nostalgic image arises in postmodernity as an almost unbearably intense and uncanny yearning for the homely comforts of a settled way of life' (1994: 97). What Huyssen later described as 'the explosion of memory discourses at the end of the twentieth century' (2003: 4) might seem to confirm Wheeler's account. Yet, when compared to themes of diversity and hybridity, nostalgia did not achieve a consistent or central role within postmodern discourse. Indeed, Stauth and Turner contrast 'post-modern cultural pluralism' with the 'backward looking' and 'nostalgic' inclinations of 'critical theory' (1988: 509). Certainly the irony of late 20th-century Marxist critiques of postmodernism as, in Jameson's terms, a 'nostalgic film' (1991: xvii), a 'desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past' (1991: 19), was hard to miss. Hutcheon asked the obvious question:

Is Jameson's implicit mythologising and idealising of a more stable, pre-latecapitalist (that is, modernist) world not in itself perhaps part of an aesthetics (or even politics) of nostalgia? (2005)

Nostalgia, it seems, is always somebody else's problem. Such accusations and counter-accusations suggest that it has been stereotyped by both post-modernists and Marxists as a sign of failure and conservatism. By approaching nostalgia through political history it becomes easier to see that any attempt to classify it as a symptom of postmodernism (or, indeed, of late modern Marxism) is unlikely to be satisfying. The politics of loss are chained to the politics of modernity. This also implies that the possibility of nostalgia's reassertion in radical politics is best explained by reference to political change (such as the demise of communism) and chronic political dilemmas.

Contemporary British psychogeography may be viewed as a creative space in which feelings of loss and redemption are explored and negotiated. The dilemmas negotiated within this body of work are far from unique. There are many recent examples from around the world of comparable critical deployments of nostalgia by avant-garde groups (for example, Monroe, 2005; Wallis, 1991). Released from the suspicious and censorious gaze of a wider socialist movement, these diverse currents share with British psycho geography a desire to take the hesitant openness to the past exhibited by earlier avant-garde engagements further and into new territory. In a post-communist era the pursuit of radicalism takes place in a curious atmosphere of freedom and doubt. It is a moment of adventure but also of bewilderment. In the next section, which turns to the geographies of Iain Sinclair, it is shown how nostalgia is employed and repudiated; a double mapping that

takes place around the margins and in the interstices of the British capital.

Purgatory and Redemption around the M25: The Radical Nostalgia of Iain Sinclair

The nostalgic content of Iain Sinclair's walks in and around London has not been lost on his reviewers. Corraling his work together with other contemporary writers who excavate London's hidden past (see Ackroyd, 2000; Moorcock, 1988), Heartfield (2005) identifies Sinclair's work as part of a genre of 'Londonnostalgia'. Among 'Londonnostalgics' he argues:

Against the superficial trend towards modernity – millennium bridge and riverside apartments – the stronger current is for a gloomy nostalgia. The London imagined by Ackroyd, Sinclair and Moorcock is, above all, a backward-looking one. The Londonnostalgics adore everything arcane and archaic about the city.

For Heartfield, Sinclair is 'backward-looking' and, hence, a misguided and conservative commentator on London. There is much to dispute in this dismissal. We might first note that Sinclair's attitude towards the past is more ambivalent than Heartfield allows. After all, what kind of nostalgic would insist on a pilgrimage to J.G. Ballard's house? Indeed, Sinclair cites Ballard's creed with approval: 'Rather than fearing alienation . . . people should embrace it. It may be the doorway to something more interesting' (2003: 269; see also Sinclair, 1999). Moreover, we must ask, if Sinclair 'adore[s] everything arcane', why does he write books about the M25?

Sinclair's double mapping of modernity and loss is narrated as an engagement with alienating, often brutally instrumental, landscapes. These places (or non-places) offer disorientation and disharmony while establishing the possibility and the necessity of resistance and human solidarity. Later in this section I consider how Sinclair creates a fragile resolution of these tensions by evoking a community of like-minded wanderers. I start though with the opening passage of the book from which I shall be drawing most of my examples, *London Orbital*.

It started with the Dome, the Millennium Dome. An urge to walk away from the Teflon meteorite on Bugsby's Marshes. A white thing had dropped in the mud of the Greenwich peninsula. The ripples had to stop somewhere. The city turned inside-out. Rubbish blown against the perimeter fence. A journey, a provocation. An escape. Keep moving, I told myself, until you hit tarmac, the out circle. The point where London loses it, gives us its ghosts. I have to admit it: I was developing an unhealthy obsession with the M25, London's orbital motorway. The dull silvertop that acts as a prophylactic between driver and landscape. Was this grim necklace, opened by Margaret Thatcher on 29 October 1986, the true perimeter fence? (2003: 3)

Sinclair suggests that Thatcher's speech, celebrating the opening of this 'grim necklace', also inaugurated 'the introduction of US mall-viruses,

landscape consumerism, retail landfill' (2003: 4).

Thus, from the start of *London Orbital*, it is clear that there is something determinedly perverse about Sinclair's 'escape'. His desire to 'walk away' from one symbol of modern Britain, the Millennium Dome, to another even more depressing destination, is an act of confrontation. Further, to walk around the M25 – 'a legendary presence that nobody wants to confront or confirm' (2003: 375) – is a deliberate entry into hell. Sinclair describes his mission as 'Exorcism, the only game worth the candle' (2003: 44).

Yet Sinclair's attitude to the M25 is not simple. He both repudiates and welcomes its disturbance, its capacity to dehumanize and deracinate. The ceaseless motorway provides the kind of hostile terrain and antagonism to sentiment required by Sinclair, both to explore the creativity born of disorientation and his own profound sense of loss. The road and its surrounding 'retail landfill' are used to experience the violence of modernity. It is a violence that lures those who find themselves in and against their era: the experimental modernist turned into a walker of unusable pathways, 'an antiquated lifeform' (2003: 343). This intellectual structure has been echoed in Sinclair's other travel books (see also Atkins and Sinclair, 1999; Sinclair, 2006). In *Edge of the Orison* (2005) the A1, another huge road, along with various homogeneous commuter hotels along its edges, performs the same function as the M25. Rampant bureaucracy and the urban scars of Thatcherite capitalism do the same in *Lights Out for the Territory* (Sinclair, 1997).

However, *London Orbital* is, to date, Sinclair's most revealing and edgy confrontation with the dilemmas of radical nostalgia. The M25's power to reduce landscapes and individuals to a weary smudge gives Sinclair's attempts to accommodate it, to feed off its virile destructiveness, a desperate and unlikely quality. His 'Ballardian' assertion that the motorway's droning tarmac may provide soil for new creativity – 'that this nowhere, this edge, is the place that will offer fresh narratives' (2003: 16) – has the ring of grim satire. Furthermore, Sinclair's determination to take pleasure in the futuristic business parks that lie alongside the motorway is too staged and eager to be convincing. For example, the transformation of Theobalds Park into the home for the 'Abbey National Centre of Excellence', elicits the comment:

A surveillance checkpoint and voice box to interrogate unlicensed visitors. I loved it. This was the true territory for the fiction that is England. (2003: 15)

A similarly unlikely reaction occurs when Sinclair wanders into one his top 'attractions' (2003: 318) on the motorway periphery, a company building for Siebel. Sinclair goes to some lengths to make the elusive presence of this 'Solutions provider' appear alluring. This 'beautiful bird of a building', he writes, 'appeared, fully formed from nowhere':

You can't date it.... The building doesn't impose, it insinuates: no sweat, today is your first tomorrow. A metal arm, a gesture that divides Siebel-world from the Egham underpass, creaks. The only sound in a perfectly smooth

acoustic environment. A car arrives, the arm cranks up. A man in a lightweight suit, no papers, no case, saunters to the entrance, the green world of indoor tree shadows and underwater light. (2003: 260–1)

Unsurprisingly, the soft-tinted pleasures of the Siebel building (or indeed, the Abbey National Centre of Excellence) soon pall. Like the motorway that sweeps past them, they are explored – and temporarily valued – as territories in which memory and place have been eradicated. It is an extinction which fascinates Sinclair but which appals him. After ambling around ‘Siebel-world’ he abruptly declares: ‘I’ve had enough. . . . If we believe in the Siebel world, we might as well give up the walk now’ (2003: 262). With this turn of the heel, Sinclair’s nostalgia comes into definition as social criticism produced, not by a flight from the modern but through engagement with it.

Despite Sinclair’s hostility to ‘heritage and development scams’ and the ‘false memory’ (2003: 11) of attempts to conserve redundant landscapes, there is no mistaking his underlying contempt for instant landscapes ‘with no memory’ (2003: 166). Describing a new residential park (called ‘Crest Homes’), he tells us that it is:

A stylish no-place that is every place. No attachment to the local, an easy commute to the centre. The ideal Crest Homes estate defies history and computer-enhances geography. (2003: 168)

Wandering slightly off-course in Kent, Sinclair also reminds us that the violence of modernism can find its mirror in a Betjeman-esque rage. He offers no rhapsodies on the theme of sleek efficiency for the Bluewater Shopping Centre. It is simply a ‘Wellsian pit’ (2003: 467), a ‘retail quarry’ (2003: 454). The Dartford Bridge, a nearby motorway bridge crossing the Thames, provides the occasion for a similar grimace of despair:

. . . the Dartford Bridge (with its necklace of slow-moving traffic) is our horizon. Smeared headlights spit their short beams into the wet night. The bridge spells civilisation. And spells it loud: FUCK OFF. Liminal graffiti. A mess of letters sprayed on grey stone wind-breaks. FUCK OFF. (2003: 453)

There is an apocalyptic edge to Sinclair’s work. Thus, although, as we shall see, he attempts to resolve the tensions I have been outlining in a redemptive fashion, it is necessary to acknowledge that he also sometimes coheres and conceals them by way of visions of the coming collapse of industrial society. The ‘slow-mo apocalypse’ he sees around him in London (2005: 189) augurs the final triumph of nature over a vile city which ‘snorts human meat through metallised tubes. And later exhales the de-energised husks, its wage slaves’ (2005: 133). After a conversation with an artist-seer in Bethnal Green, he writes:

It was only a matter of time, in his opinion, before all this trash, dirt and dust was swept away. We were amphibians in remission. On good mornings, looking out on the wet street, I was sure that he was right. (2003: 8–9)

Visions of the doom of Western civilization combine the violence of modernity with a violence towards modernity. They are a familiar avantgarde trope. However, Sinclair's work offers other, less cataclysmic resolutions. Indeed, his wanderings may be represented as a search for restorative and redemptive community. In the film 'London Orbital' (2002) he describes his journey as a 'project of restitution'. This restitutive impulse forges bonds of solidarity and empathy with earlier generations of radicals. The most developed instance is Sinclair's *Edge of the Orison*, which lovingly traces a journey made by the 'peasant poet' John Clare. Tying the knot between his own life and Clare's, Sinclair's walk interweaves places associated with his wife's family with points along Clare's *Journey Out of Essex* (1841). Sinclair places himself in the trusted company of Clare's account. But he is far more dislocated than the earlier poet. 'The birds knew him, knew John Clare', Sinclair writes, 'a wanderer in fields and woods; they recognised him and he belonged' (2005: 79). Sinclair never belongs. Indeed, he implies that belonging is now impossible. But this only intensifies his hunger for company, for a community of the dispossessed. In *London Orbital* Sinclair searches out the landscapes and locales of other predecessors. His most diligent efforts are focused upon the mid-Victorian mystic and artist Samuel Palmer and his fraternity of 'Ancients'. Seeking out the exact spot (near Shoreham in Kent) where Palmer painted *The Golden Valley*, or *Harvesting with Distant Prospect*, Sinclair admits that he is participating in 'a self-conscious restatement of Samuel Palmer's gang' (2003: 410).

Sinclair's reference to his 'gang' reminds us that his 'project of restitution' is not a solitary one. One of the notable characteristics of Sinclair's travel books is that they are accounts of journeys made with friends. Within and against territories of extreme banality and disconnection, Sinclair draws together a circle of fellow travellers: writers, film-makers and artists whose eccentricities are mined for comic effect and whose names the reader soon comes to recognize (including, Lee Drummond, Marc Atkins, Chris Petit, Renchi). Indeed, despite Sinclair's austere claim to delight in the 'warm glow in not belonging' (2003: 19), his accounts are saturated with a very English chumminess. The sense of bonhomie is heightened by Sinclair's fondness for in-jokes and fabrication. The fact that his friends seem delighted to be 'cruelly caricatured' in his books (Jackson, 2003: back cover) only adds to the impression of fellowship; a bond formed, in part, by the act of walking together through landscapes that demand atomization.

It is in *Edge of the Orison* that Sinclair comes closest to the kind of heartfelt sense of remembrance that one always suspects lies just below the rather glassy façade of *London Orbital*. Exploring places and pathways associated with his wife's family in north Essex Sinclair sunders all ties to his ostensible magus, J.G. Ballard. Instead, he offers a straightforward plea for remembering: 'They live in us, the old ones', Sinclair writes, 'and we have a duty to honour their presence. There are no clean slates' (2005: 332).

Our walk made something happen, happen to us. Nothing changed out there, in the drift of the motorists and their suspended lives; in my conceit, we were

transformed. On a molecular level. Very gradually, and with considerable reluctance (on their part), forgotten ancestors acknowledged our feeble interventions. We re-lived their histories and remade our own. (2005: 6–7)

Fired against the ‘virtual landscapes . . . laid down over something drowsy but not quite dead’ (2005: 262), Sinclair seems ready in *Edge of the Orison* to be explicit about the intrinsic importance of recovering ‘our own drowned memories’ (2005: 326).

Like William Morris, whose ‘fragmentary consciousness’ has long annoyed critics, Sinclair’s politics have been pronounced ‘curious and inconsistent’ (Macfarlane, 2005: 4). However, unlike Morris, Sinclair is writing in an era when communist revolution is understood to have come and gone, a failed project of yesteryear. Indeed, Sinclair does not conceal his disaffection with 20th-century revolutionaries, noting that ‘even by the mid-sixties’ he ‘was getting very dubious’ about these kind of political agendas (cited in Jackson, 2003: 29). Reading Sinclair one may wonder how his melancholic concerns could be ever be compatible with the rhetoric of class struggle. Such an incongruous mix is precisely what can be witnessed within the agitational psychogeographical groups to which I now turn. In *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997) Sinclair records coming across the newsletter of the London Psychogeographical Association. It is ‘the most useful of all London’s neighbourhood tabloids’, he writes, despite (or because) it is ‘mysterious and fugitive’ (1997: 25). He adds: ‘If you need it, it finds you. It writes itself.’ I have a more prosaic analysis to offer. My argument addresses the way revolutionary psychogeographers negotiate the politics of loss in a post-revolutionary era.

Radical Re-enchantments: Magic, Preservationism and Nostalgia in Revolutionary Psychogeography

The early 1990s witnessed the birth of an intriguing political subculture. Across Europe and the USA local psychogeography groups sprang into existence.² Although, in part, inspired by situationist antecedents, these groups charted novel, idiosyncratic, trajectories. From the late 1990s activity among these revolutionary groups diminished and interest in psychogeography passed to the arts community (where it remains vigorous, for example, Conflux, 2007; Hart, 2004; Pinder, 2005b; Proflux, 2007) and related ‘urban explorers’ (see Deyo and Leibowitz 2003; Ninjalicious, 2005; see also Solnit, 2006).³ However, although the work of the British agitational groups which I shall discuss here ceased some years ago, they remain one of the most provocative recent reinventions of the radical tradition. They also represent the most explicitly activist example of the turn in the 1990s towards the politics of ‘everyday space’ and, hence, of the wider ‘spatial turn’ within intellectual life.

The originality of these groups arises from their willingness to play with notions of revolutionary intent and folkish anti-modernism. Out of this intersection came a highly self-conscious deployment of the rhetoric of class

struggle. Indeed, they aestheticized and ironized communism so heavily as make it appear more akin to a cultural provocation than a political project. This process was also bound up with two other novel ideas, both of which turned on the way the past connects to the present within the landscape. The first concerns a so-called 'magico-Marxist' reading of the landscape; the second an assertion of the radical role of landscape preservation. I shall address both in turn.

However, before going further I should mention that my knowledge of this community is, in part, derived from having been part of it. I once edited a magazine that sought to be, among other things, a repository of the new revolutionary psychogeography. It was called *Transgressions: A Journal of Urban Exploration* and ran for five issues between 1995 and 2000 (published by Fabian Tompsett, the leading figure within the London Psychogeographical Association). I soon came to regret the title. The concept of 'transgression' captured a partial truth and had, in the early 1990s, a lively ring. Yet I already suspected that to conflate psychogeography with transgression was misleading; that it obscured something fundamental about the nature of the enthusiasms and influences I saw about me. Thus, in a rather bewildering editorial for issue 1 of *Transgressions*, I announced that it was not 'a journal dedicated to the celebration of transgression'. Indeed, that we were 'as interested in acts of conformism as we are in acts of transgression' (Bonnett, 1995: 7). It was a confusing message. I was grappling, clumsily, with the odd amalgam of preservationism and radicalism, modernism and anti-modernism, that I saw propelling psychogeographical activity. Thankfully, others were working through the same tension with more flair and a greater sensitivity to the range of influences upon the new psychogeography.

Among the most important of these influences were the sensuous, irrationalist situationism of Asger Jorn and a politicized version of New Age notions of sacred landscape. The influence of Iain Sinclair's London novels (such as *Lud Heat* [1995; first published 1975], which offers a 'high occulting' [1995: 113] mapping of the city) may also be discerned. The main thesis of the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA) and, somewhat less explicitly, the Manchester Area Psychogeographic (MAP) group, was that class power relies on and demands the analysis of hidden knowledge and undisclosed networks and traditions. It was argued that the nature of power can be disclosed through an understanding of the way these concealed forces have been deployed and imposed upon the landscape. It is important to stress that this analysis does not accept or offer occultism. Rather it seeks to scurrilously construct and imagine occultism (along with other hidden forms and sources of power) as a class strategy, a technique of control in the management of the spectacle. These ideas came to be categorized as 'magico-Marxism' (the first usage of this term appears to be Bin, 1996).⁴ As with many avant-garde interventions magico-Marxism is determinedly disorientating: it is evasive, infuriating, constantly asking that we see the city in new, unexpected, ways. However, I would also argue that the disorientating game played by these psychogeographical groups acted to conceal and cohere the tension between anti-nostalgia and nostalgia, modernist and

anti-modernist politics, that animated their project.

Magico-Marxism and its kindred re-enchantments combined communist militancy with a romanticization of landscape and memory. The most outrageous examples derive from the London Psychogeographical Association, which was 'brought back into being in the Rosicrucian Cave at Royston Herts' in 1992 (Tompsett, 1998: 2).⁵ The LPA's characteristic style was an ingratiating amalgam of class struggle rhetoric and antiquarian dottiness. The numerous trips it organized to ancient and otherwise mystic sites were frequently turned into excuses for nostalgic regression. Participants were advised to 'bring stout shoes in case of rain' (LPA, 1994: 4). The 'motor car' became an object of affected fascination: 'This device, little more than a box with wheels and an internal combustion engine, enabled [psycho geographers] to roam around at high speed' (LPA, 1993a: 2). The LPA's report on a visit to the ancient earth figure, the Cerne Giant (on the day that its 'penis is directly oriented towards the sunrise'), recalls that 'as we sat eating our sandwiches, two comrades emerged from the swirling mist. They were using a map of Canada to guide their way' (LPA, 1993b: 3).

The LPA made use of humour both for its own sake and in an effort to disorientate and denaturalize authority. Their account of the London Marathon in 1996 provides a helpful and typically startling example. The LPA Newsletter mapped the run onto a set of ley lines. It claimed that the route 'snakes around a conflux of ley lines' and, hence, would induce 'mass psychological processing' among participants. For reasons too obscure to detail, this ruse of ruling-class power is claimed to be 'part of the preparation of a site for ritual murder' (replacing Prince Charles with a monarch more to the liking of 'the establishment').

. . . the essence of our approach is that we seek to prevent that which we predict from happening. If our goal is achieved, and it is impossible for the ritual murder to take place, we will have substantially weakened the psychogeographical subjugation of the proletariat. (LPA, 1996 [dated 397]: 4)

It is pointless interrogating the validity of such assertions, or even whether they are seriously meant. What is of interest is how a revolutionary rhetoric can be spliced with an overt rejection of modernist rationality. It is a combination that is genuinely unsettling. Yet it also has the unintended consequence of satirizing class politics. The use of the term 'the proletariat' in the passage above elicits a smile; it has a self-consciously anachronistic quality that topples into farce by virtue of the framing discussion of 'ley lines' and other esoteric mysteries. Another illustration of this same process came with the LPA's decision to abandon the Christian calendar, and adopt an ancient Egyptian alternative. 'How can we expect the working class to take us seriously', the LPA explained, 'when we still use the superstitious calendar of the Christians imposed by the bosses?' (LPA, 1997 [dated 398]: 4). Such playful ideas absorb class within an aesthetics of provocation. They rely on a sense of nostalgia for 'real' class politics but exhibit a brazen confidence that revolutionary rhetoric is today so hollow that it can be scripted as a kind of elaborate joke.

The determinedly eccentric nature of the LPA's activities attracted a small amount of media attention (Gill, 1996; Hugill, 1994). The Observer published 'A Psychogeographical Gazetteer' in 1994, in which the LPA was described as at the 'outer edges of reality' (Hugill, 1994: 3). Another militant group that courted this label was the Manchester Area Psychogeographic (MAP). MAP members' desire to 'to walk unregulated, unrepaired, atmospheric streets' was first provoked by urban gentrification (MAP, 2007). This concern was soon aligned to an interest in the rites of capitalism, for only those who 'open their mindset to invisible forces can comprehend the mental, imaginary fields where the post-industrial landscape is being mapped' (MAP, 2007). Like the LPA, MAP's effort to 'disorientate the public and destabilise the scientifically-enforced version of the present' (2007) reached back to pre-modern sources not simply to engage the modern landscape but in order to find a radical rhetoric that uses the past to supersede the present.

This leads us to the second of the two original themes within British revolutionary psychogeography, namely the linking of preservationism with radicalism. Reviewing the work of the Nottingham Psychogeographical Unit (NPU) and two American groups (the New York Psychogeographical Association and the Washington Psychogeography Association), Bin observed that a 'conservationist instinct is something one can detect' in the Situationist International. 'However', Bin continues:

. . . it was a hesitant emotion, something often masked by other claims, such as the notion that the old bits of cities are inhabited by the working class (and, hence, are the locations of dissent). The contemporary psychogeographical associations . . . by contrast, are much clearer and bolder in their preservationism. They belong to a new generation of radicals that are convinced that clearing away the landscapes of the past is a reactionary rather than a revolutionary activity. If their declarations have a conservative, traditionalist sound to them (and, of course, they do), it is partly because so many socialists and communists remain unable to reimagine social liberation as something that grows from within an existing society rather than as something imposed by a modernist elite. (Bin, undated: 97)

Both the Manchester Area Psychogeographic and the Nottingham Psychogeographical Unit offered explicit attempts to reconnect radicalism and nostalgia. This was done in two ways: through a romanticization of decayed and abandoned landscapes and through a hostility to the destruction of old buildings. The first attitude has the flavour of a punk version of William Morris's 'anti-scrape' campaign of the late 1870s. It is equally Morrisian in its horror of commercial civilization. A MAP-organized walk around a derelict churchyard in September 1996 illustrates the point. The trip is said to have allowed an encounter with a graveyard that is:

. . . magnificent in a way no well-kept churchyard could be. From the vandalised vaults to the used condoms, the overgrown lawns and trees, the graffiti, the remnants of the Church and the weathered gargoyles, the

atmosphere and emotional responses generated were absolutely overwhelming. And to think Aldi are going to destroy it and turn it into a buck cheap supermarket. (MAP, 1996: 4)

The Nottingham Psychogeographical Unit offered even bolder statements of preservationism. Not unrelatedly, and in contrast to the other groups mentioned, the NPU arrived at a form of psychogeography which jettisons avant-garde iconoclasm. For the NPU psychogeography is a form of community critique of the contemporary landscape, a critique based unapologetically on memories of past landscapes. The following account of one of their projects, from 1997, exemplifies the group's methodology and central concerns.

Set in the inner city area of Sneinton, the Salvation Army charity shop doubles up as a drop-in centre for local people of all ages and walks of life. We asked them to sit down and draw their own map of Nottingham out of memory alone.... A sad journey for most as for years they helplessly watched their hometown being systematically destroyed and rebuilt.... At dawn, I wandered around for an hour following the mental maps we collected. People were also able to blindly guide me through the Internet. Aimlessly strolling around the waking city I found myself making my way towards Sneinton windmill. I reached it as the sun rose, a rage for building sites building up inside me. (NPU, 2007)

The emotions of both the elderly and the psychogeographer described in this passage were later developed into a polemic on the relationship between memory and environment, titled 'An Appeal to Stop Building Altogether' (NPU, 1998). Hostility to new buildings is not uncommon in Britain. But to hear it expressed by psychogeographers, former denizens of the wildest shore of the avant-garde, putative transgressors of all things conventional, is significant. It tells us that the relationship between radicalism and nostalgia is changing. The hostility to the past that shaped the socialist tradition from the late 19th century onwards is no longer the force it was. This weakening may also be witnessed in the convoluted creativity of the magico-Marxists. However, unlike those psychogeographical groups, who stage an ironic redemption of modernism by way of a hollowed out class rhetoric, the NPU appears to have lost interest in the spectacle of modernist revolution. The explorations of the London and Manchester groups are stranger and more ludic than the NPU's engagements with ordinary people in ordinary places. But they are also more easily slotted into a familiar lineage of avant-garde provocation. The Nottingham group is less familiar. Perhaps it must be classified as post-avant-garde. More productively, the NPU may be represented as having overcome the anxiety towards the past that has played such a large part in shaping 20th-century radicalism. Ironically, in doing so they surrender some of their claims to originality. For they offer a moment of reconnection with earlier traditions of British radicalism. The Nottingham Psychogeographical Unit's undiluted and unblinking antagonism towards the violence of modernity reminds us of a time when popular attachment to the past was treated as an inevitable component of radical culture.

Conclusion

The point of the day, the walk, was to lift that grey lid, the miasma of depression that hangs over the city and its inhabitants. To wait for the moment when the sun breaks through, evening beams cartwheeling over an heroic landscape. You have to be there all day to be sure of getting it. The remission. The pay-off that makes urban life worth enduring. (Sinclair, 2003: 29)

Modernity turns the past into an arena of provocation and danger. Attachments to the past and feelings of loss become sites of repression and potent resources for resistance and critique. These processes can be seen at work across many political projects. However, they appear to have a uniquely troubled relationship with that set of ideas and ideals associated with the pursuit of equality and the critique of commercialization that we can, perhaps, still call radicalism.

I have argued that the transformation of the politics of loss from a prominent part of the radical tradition to a site of anxiety and dilemma began in earnest in the late 19th century. It is not coincidental that this period also witnessed the birth of the avant-garde, a cultural and political margin within which myths of the past (and future) could be deployed. The examples of British psychogeography I have explored in this article may be approached as part of the avant-garde tradition. However, I have also suggested that they have a querulous, uncomfortable relationship with this lineage.

The psychogeographies discussed in this article illustrate different ways the dilemmas of radical nostalgia have been negotiated. Across all these examples we can identify the balancing of anti-modern and modernist impulses. In the travel books of Iain Sinclair the non-place urban realm becomes a site of creative purgatory, a necessary violence that simultaneously positions the writer as dependent upon and antagonistic to deracination and alienation. This double mapping of modernity and nostalgia is also used to imagine an alternative community of cultural workers who have found a way of being 'at home' and finding friendship in and against a backdrop of noise, flux and dissociation.

In what I have called 'revolutionary psychogeography' we also find the simultaneous evocation and refusal of modernity. However, in this tradition this tension is organized around themes of communism, occultism and preservationism. The development of 'magico-Marxism' encapsulates the novelty, but also the folk-radical inclinations, of the most startling (and selfconsciously baffling) aspects of this work. Magico-Marxism glories in its own scurrilous obscurity. Its principal thesis – that class power relies on and can be disrupted through occultism and ritualism – is offered as a kind of creative game of disorientation. Yet the end result mocks and ironizes proletarian identity as much as it mocks and ironizes ruling-class power. Magico-Marxism pursues and explores the most outrageous reaches of radical

nostalgia. Yet it also has a rather desperate quality: it wants to be communist but it no longer believes; it wants to articulate the sense of loss that sustains it, but it does not know how. However, we can also identify a preservationist tendency within revolutionary psychogeography capable of offering a confident articulation of the politics of loss. This tendency will appear to many as more culturally conservative, more attuned to the concerns of the old than the iconoclastic energies of the young, and more querulous about the point and possibility of industrial civilization. These concerns are all well founded. Yet they also reflect a political paradigm that, although dominant, no longer inspires the automatic loyalty of creative radicals. With the collapse of communism and the widespread questioning of the sustainability of industrial modernity, the radical imagination has been profoundly challenged. Old assumptions and prejudices can be overturned. And not the least of these concern the role of past in the politics of the present.

For many years, William Morris's (1915: 57) exhortation to 'cling to the love of the past and the love of the day to be', has curled many a radical toe. It has been cast as an embarrassing relic of the incoherent and immature naivety of early British radicalism. Yet today the shame of nostalgia is fading. It is perhaps fitting that it is radicals at the most iconoclastic edges of political and cultural life who are beginning to grapple with the fact that the poetry of the future is no longer enough.

Notes

1. The term 'avant-garde' remains a necessary anachronism. With the collapse of socialist and communist movements, and the absorption of the tactics of dis orientation into an ever bolder commercial culture (notably within the realms of advertising and design), the avant-garde has lost definition, along with its social and political role. However, the term continues to be inevitable shorthand for transgressive and experimental cultural provocations.

2. British groups active in the 1990s and their associated journals/newsletters and websites (where still up in some form at the time of writing) include: Manchester Area Psychogeographic (Manchester Area Psychogeographic; <http://map.twentythree.us/index.html>); London Psychogeographical Association (London Psychogeographical Association Newsletter; <http://www.unpopular.demon.co.uk/lpa/organisations/lpa.html>); Nottingham Psychogeographical Unit (Nottingham Psychogeographical Unit Stories; <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Rue/5383/index.htm> and <http://www.corinna.it/qui/>); North East Essex Psychogeographical Project (Outer Space Wayz). See also Vague (undated a, undated b, 1997, 1998); Transgressions: A Journal of Urban Exploration; Network News (<http://www.earthlydelights.co.uk>). Outside the UK, revolutionary psychogeography groups and/or publications include: the Washington Psychogeographical Association; New York Psycho geographical Association (<http://www.notbored.org/the-nypa.html>); Oblivion: A Journal of Urban Semioclasms and Spatial Practices; Days Between Stations; Associazione Psicogeografica di Bologna (Luther Blissett: Bollettino della Associazione Psicogeografica di Bologna); Associazione Psicogeografica di Milano; Luther Blissett: Revista di Guerra Psichica e Adunate Sediziose.

3. The line between arts and agitational psychogeography is disputed territory. Both types of activity, as well as a mingling of the two, were in evidence at TRIP, a recent 'psychogeography festival' and conference held in Manchester, 19–21 June 2008.

See <http://trip2008.wordpress.com/>

4. Stewart Home (1997b) describes them as 'avant-bard'. It should also be noted that Home has offered an explicitly anti-nostalgic version of this kind of 'psychic warfare', contrasting 'material science in the form of proletarian postmodernism' with 'pastoralism [which] stands for stasis and death' (Home, 2002: 1).

5. The original London Psychogeographical Association was an organization in name only. It was 'a pure invention, a mirage' devised by Ralph Rumney in order make the groups that merged in 1957 to form the Situationist International sound 'more international' (Rumney, 2002: 37). By contrast the re-formed LPA was very active, splitting into a number of sub-groups. As well as publishing 18 Newsletters between 1993 and 1997, the LPA hosted numerous events and produced a number of pamphlets (for example, Jorn, 1993; London Psychogeographical Association, 1992).

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