

TRANSCENDING PESSIMISM: REKINDLING SOCIALIST IMAGINATION

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‘**W**E’RE FREE... WE’RE FREE.’ The last words of Arthur Miller’s masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*, are uttered, sobbing, by Linda Loman over her husband Willy’s grave. Weary and penniless after a life of selling ‘a smile and a shoeshine’, overwhelmed by feelings of emptiness and failure, yet mesmerized by the thought that his life insurance will provide his estranged son with the stake that might induce him to compete and ‘succeed’, Willy Loman’s suicide famously symbolises the tragic dimension of the relentless competitiveness at the heart of the American capitalist dream. ‘He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong’, this son laments at the grave side, even as his other son dedicates himself to ‘beat this racket’ so that ‘Willy Loman didn’t die in vain.... It’s the only dream you can have – to come out number-one man.’ At the end Linda stands over the grave alone. Telling Willy that she had just made the last payment on their mortgage, a sob rises in her throat: ‘We’re free and clear.... We’re free.... We’re free...’¹

When first uttered on stage in 1949, at the start of the Cold War, these words spoke to the ambiguity of the freedom represented by the ‘free world’. Fifty years later, when Linda sobs ‘we’re free’ at the end of *Death of a Salesman*’s 1999 revival on Broadway, she seems to embody the angst of an entire world enveloped by the American dream at the end of the twentieth century. One can everywhere sense the anxiety – an anxiety as omnipresent as ‘globalization’ itself – that has emerged with accumulating awareness of the enormous odds against actually ‘beating this racket’ and escalating doubts about the worth of a life defined by the freedom to compete.

At the same time, however, we still live in an era of foreclosed hope in the

possibility of a better world. What makes the tragedy of Willie Loman so universal now is that even people who wonder whether the capitalist dream isn't the wrong dream see no way of realizing a life beyond capitalism, or fear that any attempt to do so can only result in another nightmare. Overcoming this debilitating political pessimism is the most important question anyone seriously interested in social change must confront.

CONCRETE UTOPIAS

As socialists search for what direction to take under these conditions, it helps to know that others before have faced the same problem. How to make 'the defeated man ... try the outside world again' was precisely the question that impelled Ernst Bloch in the 1930s to write his magnum opus, *The Principle of Hope*.² Pessimism – 'paralysis per se' – was the first obstacle to be confronted:

...people who do not believe at all in a happy end impede changing the world almost as much as the sweet swindlers, the marriage-swindlers, the charlatans of apotheosis. Unconditional pessimism therefore promotes the business of reaction not much less than artificially conditioned optimism; the latter is nevertheless not so stupid that it does not believe in anything at all. It does not immortalize the trudging of the little life, does not give humanity the face of a chloroformed gravestone. It does not give the world the deathly sad background in front of which it is not worth doing anything at all. In contrast to a pessimism which itself belongs to rottenness and may serve it, a tested optimism, when the scales fall from the eyes, does not deny the goal-belief in general; on the contrary, what matters now is to find the right one and to prove it.... That is why the most dogged enemy of socialism is not only... great capital, but equally the load of indifference, hopelessness; otherwise great capital would stand alone.³

Bloch's response was to try to revive the idea of utopia. He insisted that even in a world where socialist politics are marginalised, we can still discover, if only in daydreams, the indestructible human desire for happiness and harmony, a yearning which consistently runs up against economic competition, private property and the bureaucratic state. The 'utopian intention', which is, for Bloch, the real 'motor force of history', may be found in architecture, painting, literature, music, ethics and religion: 'every work of art, every central philosophy had and has a utopian window in which there lies a landscape which is still developing.' Bending the stick against orthodox Marxism's traditional dismissal of 'utopian socialism', Bloch's project was in good part to rehabilitate what Marx himself once called 'the dream of the matter' which the world had long possessed. 'The power of the great old utopian books', Bloch demonstrated, was that 'they almost always named the same thing: Omnia sint communia, let everything be in common. It is a credit to pre-Marxist political literature to possess these isolated and rebellious enthusiasms among its many

ideological insights. Even if they did not seem to contain a shred of possibility... the society projected within them managed without self-interest at the expense of others and was to keep going without the spur of the bourgeois drive for acquisition.' It was this literature which first established that one of the main prerequisites to realize 'the leap of humanity out of the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom... is the abolition of private property and the classes this has produced. Another prerequisite is the consistent will towards the negation of the state in so far as it rules individuals and is an instrument of oppression in the hands of the privileged.'⁴ What made More's *Utopia* 'with all its dross, the first modern portrait of democratic communist wishful dreams' was that

For the first time democracy was linked here in a humane sense, the sense of public freedom and tolerance, with a collective economy (always easily threatened by bureaucracy, and indeed clericalism) ... [T]he end of the first part of the 'Utopia' states openly: 'Where private ownership still exists, where all people measure all values by the yardstick of money, it will hardly ever be possible to pursue a just and happy policy... Thus possessions certainly cannot be distributed in any just and fair way... unless property is done away with beforehand. As long as it continues to exist, poverty, toil and care will hang instead an inescapable burden on by far the biggest and by far the best part of humanity. The burden may be lightened a little but to remove it entirely (without abolishing property) is impossible.'⁵

It was the abstractness of such utopian thinking, of course, that led Marx to insist on the crucial importance of analysing 'objective conditions'. Bloch had no doubt about how necessary this was for 'cooling down... totally extravagant abstractly utopian fanaticism' and for the development of the kind of practical consciousness that would allow the carrying through of the dream to reality through the transformation of social relations. But the unmasking of ideologies and illusions by what he called the 'cold stream' of Marxism's 'historical and current practical conditional analysis' had always to be mixed with the kind of appreciation of 'subjective conditions' present in the 'warm stream' of the Marxist tradition. '[F]ermenting in the process of the real itself', Bloch insisted, '[is] the concrete forward dream: anticipating elements are a component of reality itself. Thus the will towards utopia is entirely compatible with object-based tendency, in fact is confirmed and at home within it.' The best kind of Marxism demonstrates that 'enthusiasm and sobriety, awareness of the goal and analysis of the given facts go hand in hand. When the young Marx called on people to think at last, to act "like a disillusioned man who has come to his senses"', it was not to dampen the enthusiasm of the goal, but to sharpen it.'⁶

In recent years we have seen all too many disillusioned people on the left 'coming to their senses' by abandoning the goal of socialism. Some have succumbed to a post-modernist pessimism, which has indeed proved to be 'paralysis per se'. Even more seem to have jumped from what Bloch called the

‘evils of putschist activism’ all the way to social democracy’s ‘third way’, whose presumption that neo-liberal prescriptions of efficiency are compatible with social justice is the contemporary expression of what Bloch designated as one of the key hallmarks of ideology – ‘the premature harmonization of social contradictions’ within the confines of existing social relations. Frustrated by their inability to change the world overnight through sheer activism, they have not so much abandoned the idea of change but, like the Greek God Procrustes who adjusted the size of his guests to fit the size of his bed, they have shrunk the meaning of change to fit what capital and the state will accommodate.

Yet it is increasingly apparent from the extreme limitations of the ‘third way’ in practice that reviving the goal of socialism is necessary even to make small improvements in the current state of the world. As Bloch put it: ‘If the will-content of the goal is missing, then even the good probable is left undone; if the goal remains, however, then even the improbable can be done, or at least made more probable for later.’ Moreover, as against the kind of ‘third way’ thinking that embraces the novelty, inevitability and progressive character of globalization, ‘even a dash of pessimism’ does not go amiss, for, as Bloch suggested, ‘at least pessimism with a realistic perspective is not so helplessly surprised by mistakes and catastrophes, by the horrifying possibilities which have been concealed and will continue to be concealed precisely in capitalist progress.’⁷

But if such a healthy pessimism about capitalist progress is indeed growing as we end the century, what persists alongside it, even through repeated and deepening capitalist crises, is a profound pessimism about the possibility of realizing any better world. This debilitating pessimism derives not only from the feeling that nothing can be done, or even that nothing other than capitalism is possible, but also from a fear, well-honed by twentieth century experience as well as ruling class propaganda, of the perverse consequences of the attempt to put utopian visions into practice. This is not surprising in light of the experience with Communist regimes in this century, where there occurred, as *The Principle of Hope* already suggested, ‘an undernourishment of revolutionary imagination’ and ‘a schematic pragmatic reduction of totality’ through an over-emphasis on science and technology ‘such that the pillar of fire in utopias, the thing which was powerfully leading the way, could be liquidated.’⁸ ‘All the worse’, as Bloch later wrote after his self-exile from East Germany, was that once it became clear that the ‘revolutionary capacity is not there to execute ideals which have been represented abstractly’, the Communist regimes acted so as ‘to discredit or even destroy with catastrophic means ideals which have not appeared in the concrete.’ This stifled ‘transitional tendencies’ within them which would have been able to move towards ‘active freedom only if the utopian goal is clearly visible, unadulterated and unrenounced.’⁹

It must be said, of course, that Bloch’s remarks only implicitly identify the weakest aspect of the classical Marxian legacy in this respect: the theorization of the role of the political in the transition to socialism. Marx’s central concepts of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, ‘smashing the bourgeois state’ and ‘the

withering away of the state' all obscured rather than clarified the fundamental issues; and Marxists in the twentieth century did not go nearly far enough in overcoming the limits of this legacy.¹⁰ Yet it is at the level of the political that transitions from one socio-economic order to another are effected – or come to grief in the attempt.

But whether the socialist utopian goal can be revived must obviously depend on much more than a clarification and enrichment of socialist political theory. It will above all depend on agency, that is, on what human beings can still discover about their potential. For all the valuable insights, promising signposts and rich hints even the 'warm stream' of Marxism bequeaths, it must be said that the historical optimism in Marx that inspired generations of socialists came with an underestimation of the chasm between the scale and scope of the utopian dream and the capitalism-created agency honoured – or saddled – with carrying it out: the working class. Between Marx's broad historically-inspired vision of revolution/transformation and his detailed critique of political economy, there was an analytical and strategic gap – unbridgeable without addressing the problematic of working class capacities – which later Marxists sometimes addressed, but never overcame.¹¹ Nor has the problem been overcome by recent social movement theory. For the rethinking that is required must be more profound than just imagining that the problem can be resolved by substituting a plurality of new social movements for the old workers' movements. The compensatory stifling of ideals we saw in the institutions of the labour movement has also appeared in the new social movements. Every progressive social movement must, sooner or later, confront the inescapable fact that capitalism cripples our capacities, stunts our dreams, and incorporates our politics.

Where then can socialism, as a movement linking the present with the possible, once again find the air to breathe and space to grow? To answer this we need both to clarify the socialist 'utopian goal' today and to develop a clearer sense of where our potential capacities to create that better world will come from. The rest of this essay concerns itself with these questions, but a few preliminary guidelines will be useful before moving on.

The socialist 'utopian goal' is built around realizing our potential to be full human beings. What separates this ideal from its liberal roots is not only socialism's commitment to extending this principle to all members of society, but also its insistence that the flowering of human capacities isn't a liberation of the individual from the social, but is only achievable through the social. Ideals are always linked to some notion of justice and freedom. Notions of justice revolve around the egalitarianism of certain outcomes (like distribution of income or wealth) or the legitimacy of a process for reaching goals even if the ultimate results are unequal (equal access to opportunities). Notions of freedom generally divide into freedom from an external arbitrary authority (the state) or the freedom to participate in setting the broad parameters that frame the context of our lives (as in current liberal democracies). The socialist ideal

does not exclude these other moral spaces, but locates them on the specific terrain of capacities: capitalism is unjust and undemocratic not because of this or that imperfection in relation to equality or freedom, but because at its core it involves the control by some of the use and development of the potential of others, and because the competition it fosters frustrates humanity's capacity for liberation through the social.

And what is especially important is that conceiving freedom and justice on the terrain of capacities leads beyond mere dreaming: it links the ideal to the possibility of change and so to what is politically achievable. This is what Bloch meant by 'concrete utopias' which, always operating on the level of 'possibility as capacity', incorporate the objective contradictions that create an opening for socialist goals ('capability-of-being-done'), the subjective element of agency ('capability-of-doing-other'), and therefore the possibility of changing ourselves and the world ('capability-of-becoming-other').¹²

These concrete utopias are not blueprints for a new order entirely external to this one. Socialism, as Marx noted, is not '*a state of affairs* which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself... [but] the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.'¹³ That 'real movement' will live or die based on whether the necessary capacities and possibilities can first show themselves, in some substantive way, inside everyday capitalism. Terry Eagleton argues in another essay in this volume that 'the only authentic image of the future is, in the end, the failure of the present.' This is indeed true. And the best measure of the failure of the present is its inability to redeem the glimpses of our potential afforded by our own experiences. In Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Animal Dreams*, a woman asks her lover: 'Didn't you ever dream you could fly?' He answers: 'Not when I was sorting pecans all day.' When she persists and demands: 'Really though, didn't you ever fly in your dreams?', he replies: 'Only when I was close to flying in real life... Your dreams, what you hope for and all that, its not separate from your life. It grows right out of it.'¹⁴

UNREAL UTOPIAS

Despite what is sometimes alleged about the lack of attention paid to 'alternatives' on the left today, there has actually been no shortage of attempts by progressive intellectuals in recent years to rethink and reformulate the utopian goal. While the institutional content of such alternatives extends beyond social democracy, many of those who advance these new utopias for our time do so in ways that, like today's social democracy, reflect a defeatism and thus an over-cautious pragmatism. In the name of 'getting real', these utopias limit democratic expectations of the state and/or the scale of the economic transformations they consider. The result is what Bloch has referred to as 'abstract utopias': a world too small to deliver on the large promises it holds out and a telling neglect of the politics of getting there. An examination of three important books by prominent authors published in the last year, each influenced by a different current of

contemporary thought, provides a rather clear perspective on the demoralized nature of much utopian thinking today and on why the real challenge before us is not to contract, but to expand, utopia's inspirational and visionary function.

The main concern of James C. Scott, in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*,¹⁵ is the 'great state-sponsored calamities of the twentieth century' epitomized by Soviet collectivization and Tanzanian Ujamaa villagization of agriculture. Reflecting post-modernism's influence, Scott characterizes the utopian ideal not in terms of emancipation and liberation but rather in terms of 'high modernist aspirations to a finely tuned social control' implemented by 'progressive, often revolutionary elites... who have come to power with a comprehensive critique of existing society and a popular mandate to transform it.' In taking up the 'utilitarian simplifications' which states employ to 'map' societies, these elites repressed the complex, varied and practical local knowledge which is the fount of human creativity.' Borrowing from Kropotkin's famous declaration that 'it is impossible to legislate for the future', Scott concludes that strategies for change must now be founded on 'taking small steps', with preference, moreover, for the kind of interventions that 'can be easily undone.'¹⁶

This approach sensibly begins from the premise of incomplete knowledge in relation to 'the necessary contingency and uncertainty of the future', and from 'confidence in the skills, intelligence and experience of ordinary people.' His rejection of detailed super-rationalist blueprints is equally valid. But this only takes us back to Marx's own critique of abstract utopias for ignoring what Marx also saw as 'the radical contingency of the future' – hence his refusal to write blueprints that might minimize the potential for humanity's creativity and inventiveness which could be unleashed in the process of transcending capitalist social relations. Scott allows, in passing, that 'utopian aspirations per se are not dangerous' (he approvingly quotes Oscar Wilde's remark: 'A map of the world which does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always arriving.'). Yet it is clear that he has a very limited awareness and appreciation of the 'warm stream' of utopian (including Marxist) thought. And although he counterposes Luxemburg and Kollontai to Lenin, and acknowledges his debt to classic anarchists writers like Kropotkin and Bakunin, his own conception of social change is far removed from their revolutionary spirit.

The trouble with this all-too-common response to the socialist failures of the past century is not only its strategic but also its visionary inadequacy in relation to a global capitalism that Scott himself identifies as 'the most powerful force for homogenization' today. Such passing comments hardly take the measure of global capitalism's ruthless remaking of societies in the name of efficiency, productivity, comparative advantage, and the rest. While Scott recognises that the capitalist market, far from being 'free' is 'an instituted, formal system of coordination' which rests on that 'larger system of social relations', his reversion to 'the science of muddling through' and 'disjointed incrementalism'

provides no larger vision or strategy for transcending that system of social relations.¹⁷ He appears to see ‘the private sector’ as some sort of genial brake on the excesses of political leaders with utopian dreams, rather than as the alienated and socially destructive monster it is.

No progress can be made in this respect unless we can go beyond conceiving the future of the state only in terms of Foucauldian surveillance and Weberian bureaucratic rationality. Scott recognizes the positive role of certain institutions – especially ones that are ‘multifunctional, plastic, diverse, and adaptable’ but he can’t conceive of any beyond those local institutions (‘the family, the small community, the small farm, the family firm in certain businesses’) which have survived and adapted through history – and which he considerably romanticizes. His conception of the good state is entirely in terms of ‘negative freedom’ – that liberal democratic state which allows space for activity outside of, and for resistance to, itself, and which ‘may in some instances be the defender of local difference and variety’ against global capitalism. Although his argument against social engineering and in favour of local practical knowledges replicates Hilary Wainwright’s important book *Arguments for a New Left*¹⁸ (which he does not, however, cite), he shows, unlike her, little sense of the feminist, environmentalist, labour, and socialist consciousness and institutional practices in our time which have valued and fostered practical local knowledges, impelled by a vision of changing broader social relations, and sought to connect them to political parties, unions and the local and national state. Not to romanticize these is one thing. To ignore them is to cut one’s intellectual contribution off from those broader forces ‘fermenting in the process of the real’ that might realize a better world.

An apparently more positive approach to reviving utopian aspirations has inspired the books published in Verso’s Real Utopia Project, under the editorship of Eric Olin Wright, whose goals are to nurture ‘clear-sighted understandings of what it would take to create social institutions free of oppression [as] part of creating a political will for radical social changes to reduce oppression... utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of muddling through in a world of imperfect conditions for social change.’¹⁹ In the most recent volume in that series, *Recasting Egalitarianism: New Rules for Communities, States and Markets*, Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis, set out to bridge the democratization of the economy, expressed through a radical redistribution of capital assets, with what they view as the real-world need for raising productivity. This is utopia under the influence of supply-side economics.

Bowles and Gintis are, like Scott, sure that states can never be substantively democratized. While they readily assume that managers of firms will be subject to democratic accountability, they emphatically stress ‘the many unavoidable obstacles to citizen accountability over government actions’ and they reject ‘the presumption that state managers and functionaries will faithfully carry out what an egalitarian citizenry would have them do.’²⁰ On the other hand, they claim, again like Scott, that at the level of communities – families, residential neigh-

bourhoods and the workplace – people can readily monitor each others’ activities so as to guarantee reciprocity and trust (even if not altruism and affection) within the context of ‘structurally determined individual incentives and sanctions’ to maximize economic efficiency. It is the reciprocity of fair trade in the market governed by individual material self-interest, rather than the substance of local democracy, that is determining, and this is why they also advocate school vouchers and private home ownership alongside the redistribution of capital assets to workers in enterprises.

Bowles and Gintis accept the doctrine that market competition is necessary for economic efficiency, but they claim that the unequal distribution of capital impedes productivity by imposing costs on the private sector in terms of work supervision and security in the face of labour indiscipline and lack of effort. If workers owned the capital assets of the firm they worked in, while ‘the beneficial disciplining effects of market competition’ between firms were maintained, then all the ‘behaviours critical to high levels of productivity – hard work, maintenance of productive equipment, risk-taking and the like’ – would be forthcoming. Since conventional redistributive policies are *passé* in a global world where all policies have to be ‘sensitive to the competitive position of each economy’, then what is needed is a ‘productivity enhancing’ redistribution of property rights in order to ‘strengthen the economy’s competitive position.’ It is never made clear how Bowles and Gintis imagine the redistribution of capital assets would come about – except that it would not be mandated universally by ‘government fiat’. It seems likely that the authors have some kind of notion of pension fund socialism in mind or that they expect that the banks would be induced to lend workers the money to buy their firms at non-prohibitive rates of interest. Whether banks are also to be worker-owned is not addressed, but there is in any case to be ‘ample room for innovative private entrepreneurship’, including that based on ‘venture capital.’²¹

The main effect of this schema would be to ensure that competition rather than solidarity was the goal – indeed the primary structural characteristic – of the working class itself. For the discipline of competition to be effective, considerable inequalities in wealth and income among workers would necessarily have to be sustained, and it would be rooted in an original arbitrary endowment based on which workers happen to ‘own’ General Motors as opposed to a small asset-poor company – not to mention those who would suffer the effects of the bankruptcies and lay-offs that go with risk taking and competition.²² Although Bowles and Gintis do not situate their model in the 1980s debate about market socialism, the attempt to ‘get real’ involves incorporating so much capitalist rationality that the result, while perhaps ‘feasible’, seems anything but utopian.²³ A number of the critical contributions to that debate were very creative in imagining what the institutions of a democratic economy, in which market relations were subordinated and marginalised, might look like; this was especially true of those that stressed the importance of mechanisms within each firm to attenuate the division of labour.²⁴ But

Bowles and Gintis seem to feel they don't have to delve too deeply into the actual requisites of substantive democracy in worker-owned firms,²⁵ because what really concerns them is to demonstrate that the external coercion of competitive markets, and the internal compulsion that will come from worker-owners pressuring each other to work hard, will yield the main goal: greater productivity and efficiency, greater even, they suggest, than what current advanced capitalist structures might achieve.

Bowles and Gintis have no patience with a vision in which people are primarily inspired by collective rather than individualist concerns. Egalitarian projects, they claim, founder on a presumption of 'oversocialized decision makers'; they fail to take account of the 'incentive structures of the relevant actors.' As for why egalitarians should accommodate to an acquisitive morality rather than attempt to change it, their answer is a familiar – reactionary – one: 'we have no choice', they say, because this morality, founded in 'some combination of genes and culture', has an 'inertial character'.²⁶ For this, they wrongly appeal to Barrington Moore's explanation of revolution and revolt in terms of peoples outrage at the flouting of long-rooted conceptions of social justice and reciprocity.²⁷ But Bowles and Gintis are not inviting people to revolt against the capitalist value system: they are inviting them to buy into it.²⁸

Roberto Unger's 'anti-necessitarian' social theory – most recently advanced in programmatic form in *Democracy Realized: The Progressive Alternative* – seems to provide an antidote to Bowles and Gintis' dictum that we are 'trapped by the present in designing the future.' Reiterating a challenge he has put forth over the past two decades, Unger asserts:

There is always more in us than there is in our contexts. They are finite. We relative to them, are not. We can hope to diminish this disproportion between circumstance and personality by building institutional and cultural worlds that become more supportive of our context transcending powers. Such contexts may fortify our resources and powers of resistance, even as they invite their own revision.²⁹

What has been so important about Unger's work has been his thinking about the kind of reconfiguration of the state that would best facilitate the radical democracy of the socialist utopian vision. As he put it in *False Necessity* in 1987: 'To understand the leftist as the person who values equality over freedom and fraternity is to miss the main point of the leftist undertaking.' This has meant, for him, stressing the need to go beyond the redistributive programmes of the social democratic welfare state, and to embrace a 'vision of solidarity that simultaneously contributes to the enabling conditions for the [generalized] development of practical capabilities.' The greatest problem with social democracy throughout the past century was not its gradualism, Unger has understood, but a reformism limited to policy outputs while leaving the institutional design of the state itself untouched. A different kind of state could only be brought about through the 'militant organization of the oppressed, the poor, and the

angry... [but] it is not enough for these sectors to mobilize, they must remain mobilized. They and their leaders must use the favoring circumstances of crisis, revolution and radical enthusiasm to establish economic and governmental institutions that help perpetuate in the midst of humdrum social routine something of the transitory experience of mass mobilization.³⁰ A transformative state needs to see itself as engaged in a constant process of democratic experimentalism, developing new branches of government ‘friendly to the rise of popular engagement’, endowed with the political legitimacy and practical capacity to facilitate the organization of the unorganized and disadvantaged, and operating under a system of public law which allows for state interventions to maintain these organizations as inclusive and internally democratic while at the same time leaving them ‘free from any taint of government control or tutelage.’³¹

The manifesto for change now presented in *Democracy Realized* still gives priority to strategies for institutional reform over redistributive reform. It seeks to deepen democracy and accelerate political change by removing the constitutional checks and balances, parliamentarist rules and electoralist practices that maintain society at a low level of political mobilization and introducing constitutional reforms that expand direct democracy, encourage popular political engagement in the state and ‘promote democratic experimentalism in all fields of social life.’³² Unfortunately, Unger’s contribution to trying to conceptualize a different kind of state appropriate to a transformative democratic strategy is considerably weakened by its attachment to an economic program that is astonishingly conventional – and, by now, rather dated – in its advancement of a strategy for economic growth founded on the notion of ‘flexible specialization’. Unger’s utopian vision is determinedly post-fordist, and his particular *bête noire*, therefore, is the defensive response of unionized workers in capital intensive industries to the employment of temporary workers and subcontractors. Rather than use solidarity as a means of protecting themselves against this trend, he urges them to make ‘common cause’ with subcontractors in support of schemes for decentralized access to venture capital so as to finance ‘the small and the new’ firms which he takes to be the ‘vanguard’ of economic growth. In face of the difficulty of giving practical institutional content to the notion of securing social control over investment decisions while preserving ‘the decentralized vitality of a market economy’, Unger now calls for an ‘easier’ option than any attempt to expropriate or redirect capital, and arrives at nothing more radical than the public mobilisation of pension funds to finance these vanguard firms.

Even in his earlier work, his notion of skilled process workers, managers, technicians and small-scale entrepreneurs making common cause as a ‘productive vanguard’ by joining together to reap the advantages of flexible, high-tech production was problematic, but the general abstractness of that work, together with the assumption of the socialization of finance, made this less obvious. His more recent proposal, in which the ‘established system’ of finance and corporate power is largely left alone, clearly exemplifies what Bloch meant by the premature harmonization of contradictions. Unger assumes that a legal reform

which ‘automatically unionizes all workers, job seekers and smallscale business owners’ will itself lay the foundations for a ‘growth-friendly’ moderation of conflict between workers and managers so that they work together according to a ‘partnership principle’ governed by ‘cooperation and innovation.’³³ His earlier vision of solidarity that stressed the militant organization of the oppressed, the poor, and the angry to the end of developing their practical capabilities is little in evidence.

Indeed, Unger scarcely seems to notice that social democracy, far from being mainly concerned ‘to defend at all costs the historical constituency of organized labor’, has long since taken up the Blairite ‘third way’ which, except for its continuing institutional conservatism in terms of representative and administrative (if not electoral) procedures, looks suspiciously similar to his own proposals for transcending the sterile debate between state and market at the economic level through the strategy of ‘progressive’ competitiveness. Unger shows he is aware (albeit only in a brief passing paragraph) that the ‘language of flexible specialization and worker engagement in the planning of production...is ready to be captured by the managerial program.’³⁴ But his own proposals, far from exploring the contradictions between the call for cooperation and workers’ resistance to flexibility in a world where ‘capital has the right to move where it pleases’, smother the contradictions in the verbiage of partnership, innovation and cooperation.

What a let-down. It may be said in Unger’s defence that his concern to secure growth via competitiveness for a third world economy like Brazil is rather less obscene than is the concern of Bowles and Gintis to further enhance the competitiveness of the already rich American economy. But his full embrace of post-fordism’s commitment to ‘progressive competitiveness’ and the unstated but consequent logic of subordinating the economy and society into an export-oriented strategy within international capitalism (structured by imperial relations, which Unger scarcely seems to notice), demonstrates how difficult it is for even someone as self-conscious of the problem as Unger to escape being trapped by the present in designing the future. Competition is a constraint that any project for structural reforms has to take into account; but the whole point of addressing alternatives is to liberate ourselves from the notion that it is only through competitiveness that we can address the development of our productive capacities. To accept competition as the goal – even for a poor country and even qualified as progressive competitiveness – is to give up on the project before you begin.

That so much of the contemporary literature seems ‘incapable of imagining any world definitively different than their own’ (as Terry Eagleton puts it), and of even going so far as some pre-Marxist utopias in projecting a social order capable of keeping going ‘without the spur of the bourgeois drive for acquisition’ (as Bloch put it), stands as a sorry comment on the limits of the utopian imagination today. This is intimately related to the failure to come to grips with the question of agency. To Scott, the question of agency is reduced to getting

the state out of the way. Bowles and Gintis don't even bother to dwell on why workers would commit to a struggle for control over capital assets if the economic decisions ultimately made will still be determined by competitive markets. And in Unger, the folding of an independent working class project into cross-class partnerships with export-oriented 'vanguard' firms, erodes the very possibility of the militant organization of the 'oppressed, the poor, and the angry.' There seems little point in worrying a great deal about agency if the transformation being considered is not really a transformation at all.

UTOPIAS AND CAPACITIES: WORK AND 'NON-WORK'

In contrast to the above, and much more fruitful in coming to grips with what really needs to be thought through in rekindling the socialist imagination, stands the work of André Gorz – starting with his primary principle of the strategy of 'non-reformist reforms' enunciated over three decades ago: i.e., 'one which does not base its validity and its right to exist on capitalist needs, criteria and rationales.'³⁵ His eco-socialist critique of productivism in face of the ecological contradictions of capitalist development is obviously of great importance, as is the contribution he has made to prioritizing the redistribution of working time in an egalitarian project. But what is especially significant about his approach is his claim that workers define themselves in terms of productivism and therefore that the problem for any strategy for transformation lies in the way workers are blocked from developing their full human potential, not only by the context of ideology, politics, the consumer culture, but by the very fact of being workers. It is notable that Gorz's critique of Marx came to rest less on the inability of Marxist thought to transcend the productivism inherent in 'economic reason'³⁶ rather than on Marx's investment of the working class with potential transformative capacities – what we designated earlier as the underestimation by Marx and later Marxists of the chasm that needed to be overcome between the scale and scope of the utopian dream and the sheer extent of the stunting by capitalism of working class capacities.

Why has socialist politics given such a special status to 'work' and 'workers'? Ontologically work is a stand-in for the specifically human capacity to conceive of that which does not exist and then to effect its realization. Conceived in historical terms, the use of that capacity to create our material reality through work is intimately linked to the dynamics of social change. And in the specific context of capitalism, the organization of work provides a defining contradiction of the social system and a foundation for working class politics. It is on the basis of these ontological, historical and sociological dimensions of work that so many socialists have concluded that the working class, in spite of surrendering its labour power, is strategically positioned to lead the struggle for universal liberation.

It is in the workplace that capitalism brings diverse people into direct physical contact, and it is here – or at least in the communities that surround these workplaces – that they first build sustainable organisations, backed to some

degree by independent ideologies and resources, to overcome their fragmentation. Workers develop potential leverage on the stability of production and profits, and therefore a base for a degree of countervailing power, by regularly testing their collective strength in the workplace. But what socialists must directly address is the question of whether workers can in fact develop, on the basis of this foundation, a vision of a new society and the ‘all-round development’ which Marx insisted was the condition for the abolition of capitalism. For the workplace is also where workers’ potentials and collective hopes may be crushed.

The worker seems condemned by the very ‘circumstances in which the individual lives ... [to] achieve only a one-sided crippled development.’³⁷ And although the logic of capitalism leads workers into direct conflict with employers and the state, and even though such struggles lead to the creation of new needs, it is not clear that these needs eventuate in a vision of an alternative society rather than in a pragmatic reformism.³⁸ It is not just a matter of a political emphasis on the need for alliances outside the workplace and the need to address the larger question of the state – as important as these issues are. The deeper problem lies in the barriers imposed by the nature of work – and also non-work – under capitalism.

The problem becomes clearer if we consider the limits to developing capacities in the context of workers’ dependency on capitalists’ active role within the economy: in production, the application of science, the introduction of innovations, the economic coordination across regions and the widest and most diverse workplaces. Capitalists are not only privileged, but *needed*; their authority as economic leaders is set against workers’ uncertain ability to do without them. As long as the paradigm is the workplace, there is at least some plausibility to the idea of it being run by workers who are already familiar with its daily operations. But once we begin to address the role of competition in linking workplaces, coordinating inputs and outputs, and enforcing dynamic change, we have to confront the imposing challenge of developing an entirely new order – including an entirely new workplace.

It would, of course, be somewhat easier if our goal was simply to catch up to capitalist capacities – if we failed to question the nature of capitalist economic growth and only sought to mimic it. But the socialist project goes beyond ‘catching up and taking over’ because the particular capacities and institutions that we face in capitalism were developed historically within particular social relations. While some may be adapted, it is not enough to simply ‘democratize’ them to fit a new set of relations and goals. Going beyond capital requires transforming existing capacities and developing new ones, transforming existing institutions and inventing historically unique ones.

It is important to emphasize that competition doesn’t just complicate the question of implementing workers’ control some day, but it especially affects the political capacities needed to get to that point. The competitive process of eroding barriers to accumulation and disciplining any resistance to its logic

involves a constant restructuring of all aspects of economic and social life. For capital, this can happen without disturbing their class unity: capital remains united around the accumulation project; it has the resources to continuously introduce necessary institutional innovations; the state adds its support for maintaining capital's coherence; and capital has the technological and administrative capacity to combine a sweeping degree of capital mobility with a continuity, for the elites involved, in their local and national networks. But for workers, who draw on social, geographic and generational continuities to develop their collective capacities, capitalist competition and restructuring often undermines class unity and identity.³⁹ We should not therefore count very heavily on the dynamics of capitalism to do much for maintaining or building a truly independent working class identity and culture; it can only happen *in spite of* capitalism's logic.

If the work-time realities and confusions of power, dependency, and economic complexity make it hard for the working class to develop a post-capitalist vision, can this then happen – as Gorz suggests – in the realm of leisure, in private, family, and community spaces?

If only. Gorz's inspiring utopia at the end of *Farewell to the Working Class* nevertheless still fell short of Marx's integrated and radical democratic vision. This is not only because Gorz's utopia is confined to one rich country (France), but also because Gorz accepts, in a Habermasian fashion, the inevitability of an alienated, albeit much reduced, sphere of production and another of bureaucratic planning and administration. And in spite of his valid criticism of an orthodox forces of production determined socialism, Gorz's own argument is dependent on the assumption that the productive forces of a rich economy will sustain the liberation from work – i.e. that there is no serious on-going economic problem to worry about in his utopia. But while work and non-work occupy different compartments in terms of time and space, the problem lies in how those compartments are integrated within the whole. Capitalism's world of necessity doesn't just lay the material base for less wage-work; it limits, shapes and creates specific necessities even in the realm of non-work. Work time and the location of work determine how much leisure we have, when we have it, and how much of it is absorbed by the need for some minimum of physical and mental recovery time. In capitalism 'recreation' means just what it says: re-creating our ability to work. And leisure, when it is not heavily committed to necessary and compensatory consumption, tends, as Henri Lefebvre has remarked, to be reduced to a respite from work.⁴⁰ Like a school recess or a coffee break, it is devalued by the fact that our relief is short-lived. Free time, it turns out, is not all that free. If non-work time is to play a liberating role, this can only happen if it is part of a broader individual and social project that transcends the barrier between non-work and work, fundamentally changing them both rather than just reducing working time.

Of the variety of physical spaces non-work time inhabits, the household is especially important. The gendered and patriarchal division of labour within

the household pre-dates capitalism, but the nature of the household's new link to the outside world imposed a distinctive dimension to the relationships between men and women, work and family life, work and leisure, and consequently on both women and their potentials and men and their sense of what being a 'whole' person entailed. Housework continued, under capitalism, to directly produce use values necessary for the household's survival and reproduction; for this it needed no external approval or market incentives. But once wages were required for buying necessities, the importance of getting and keeping a job gave wage-work and the wage-earner a special importance and status within the household. The household's activities, schedules, moods, and even its (re)location were subordinated, by way of its dependence on wage-work, to the needs of the wage-earner. The corollary was a supportive and secondary role for women. A woman might make the bread, but it was the man who was considered the 'breadwinner' because his wages paid for the ingredients.

The negative impact on women's options, capacities and potentials needs no elaboration. But the issue extends beyond that of gender equality. The fact that men are generally not expected to actively deal with household and community responsibilities – such as the caring of children, daily coordination with school routines, dealing with sudden needs for emergency medical care as well as routine ones, coping with the impact of pollution to family health as well as with neighbourhood crime and the absence of community recreational space – this cannot avoid also limiting men's sense of themselves. Without the broader everyday engagements and frustrations that situate working class men as more than just workers, it is difficult to imagine them developing the expectations of themselves and of society that are at the center of socialist consciousness: the belief in their own potential as *full* human beings and their demand for social structures to support that dream.

The women's movement has added something crucial to traditional socialist approaches to developing confidence, capacities, and consciousness. Out of necessity, as well as in reaction to male-dominated politics, it has shown a special sensitivity to the need to help people assert their rights and participate in change, and to reach out to 'ordinary' people, focussing on less intimidating local issues, small group discussions rather than interventions at mass meetings, exchanges that are supportive rather than competitive, analyses that are concrete rather than abstract, and not treating work as the sum total of working class life – 'making the personal political.' In going beyond the workplace, this kind of politics has also suggested routes that move the household beyond the private, to its connection with the community and to the relations between generations. No strategic debates about socialism can exclude the insights, nuances, and attention to process that the women's movement has rightfully insisted be part of any universalizing movement.

UTOPIA AND AGENCY:
FROM DOING OTHER TO BECOMING OTHER

The trajectory of André Gorz's work reflected an honest ambivalence about the leadership potentials of the working class in radical change. Even though he said '*Farewell to the Working Class*' in the early eighties, he could not help in his later writings like *Critique of Economic Reason*⁴¹ but return to the trade union movement as the core element of political change, not least in sustaining those varied radical social movements which had grown up 'outside work':

[Their] campaigns of resistance to the professionalization, technocratization, and monetization of our lives are specific forms of a wider, more fundamental struggle for emancipation. They contain a radical potential which has repercussions on workplace struggles and they mould the consciousness of a growing number of people... The fact that the trade-union movement is – and will remain – the best organized force in the broader movement confers on it a particular responsibility; on it will largely depend the success or failure of all the other elements in this social movement. According to whether the trade-union movement opposes them or whether it seeks a common alliance and a common course of action with them, these other elements will be part of the left or will break with it, will engage with it in collective action or will remain minorities tempted to resort to violence... The attitude of the trade union movement towards the other social movements and their objectives will also determine its own evolution.⁴²

Unger's suggestion, raised earlier, that unionization be mandated across the entire workforce may seem to reflect a similar recognition of the importance of unions. But in Unger's case this is less an acknowledgement of their importance than an expression of a desire to settle the issue of recognition and move on to the real vanguard of innovative firms. The focus he and others have placed on changing the nature of the capitalist firm, while more substantive than the communitarianism fashionable among philosophers today, tends towards a depoliticization of both the firm and the union. What this approach underestimates is the social power of capital and the oppositional politics necessarily involved in changing it. We must begin not with the firm, but with changing the role and nature of workers' organizations themselves, their potential as sites of capacity-building and democratization, and especially their scope for moving *beyond* the workplace. Once we approach the issue of class and transformation as being about overcoming dependency on capitalists to the end of developing full human capacities, further expectations emerge around what unions, as the front-line economic organization of workers, might possibly do. And this in turn implies a different kind of unionism in terms of how it chooses and structures its struggles, applies its resources, defines internal democracy and participation, responds to its role as producers and service providers, and relates to the community, political parties and the state.

The problem with unions is not, as Unger and so many others seem to think, that they have been too defensive but that in most cases they have not been defensive enough or at least not defensive in a way that allows them to get beyond merely being reactive. To be defensive doesn't mean to be static. A trade unionism committed to mobilizing its defensiveness would be committed to developing a 'culture of resistance', and nothing is more important to the future possibility of socialism than the current existence of a working class that is determinedly oppositional, organizationally independent, self-conscious of its subordinate position, ideologically confident in the legitimacy of its demands, creatively ready to take on and lead struggles, and insistent that its own organizations be democratic and accountable so as to embody this spirit of popular activism and militancy. In addition to aggressively fighting for traditional demands, the content of union demands would take on new dimensions and be linked to generalizing, within the union, the capacity of members to participate and thereby develop their over-all political and administrative capacities. Examples include: pushing to take productivity gains as time off from the job and for education both at and away from the workplace; linking health and safety issues to debates and demands about how work is organized and the priorities of technology; negotiating learner-driven training; developing, through internal union educational programmes, the confidence and therefore the capacity to participate amongst all members; and extending the collective capacity to discuss and disagree – to debate – *before* the arrival of those moments of crises when external pressures reinforce tendencies to define all internal opposition to the leadership as sabotage.

In contrast to a defensiveness that is part of building a culture of resistance, there is a set of union alternatives that co-opt the language of 'capacity-building' and economic 'empowerment' to the same ends of the supply-side defeatism we discussed earlier. They operate comfortably within the existing framework of power and their emphasis on the 'progressive' in 'progressive competitiveness' is expressed in proposals for 'jointness' in production, partnerships for competitiveness, alliances for jobs, worker representation on corporate boards, and most discussion of the use of pension or labour funds for social investment purposes. Since they assume what labour and capital have in common is more important than any differences, they are oriented to placing worker representatives alongside management in 'problem-solving'. What emerges are not alternative capacities, but only practices which echo capital (e.g. learning to run businesses and funds like capitalists do); and even these are restricted to a small handful of worker representatives and officials who participate in keeping information from their members because of 'corporate confidentiality'.⁴³ The actual access to influencing decisions is, not surprisingly, extremely limited since it is not won through mobilization but offered to *limit* mobilization. The trade-offs made for that access – material concessions and the symbolic distancing of the leadership from the members – carry dangerous institutional implications with regards to rank-and-file suspicions and leadership

credibility. And finally, even if there is something positive that comes out of initiatives such as access to information and input into certain decisions, this can generally be achieved at less cost and with more long-lasting results through the very mobilization this approach pushes aside.⁴⁴

While such so-called alternatives can only take us backwards, they do raise the issue of responding to working class insecurity about their jobs. Although the prime function of unions has been the terms and conditions of the sale of workers' labour power, an increasingly crucial concern of their members has been that of retaining their jobs – something that unions, apart from trying to negotiate the sharing of work through reduced work-time, have been ill-positioned to guarantee. Taking on this defensive concern involves the strategic challenge of unions contributing to workers seeing themselves as not just workers but producers and providers of services, and therefore capable of addressing not only how many jobs are needed, but the nature and purpose of those jobs. This would take private sector unions beyond the workplace and the single firm to thinking in terms of a whole economic sector; and it would take public sector unions beyond their role of representing 'civil servants' who do things *for* others towards mobilizing *with* the people they 'serve' to expand the range and access to social rights and spaces. Worker and consumer councils at the level of whole economic sectors, in contrast to single companies driven by accumulation and competition, would be better able to associate production with use values and with technological linkages across the economy, and would be able to address developing the collective capacities to govern the economy democratically. Public sector councils, for their part, would begin the difficult process of eroding the distinction between public sector workers and their 'clients' as well as between their work and the very different 'consumption' of that work than is involved in the consumption of commodities.⁴⁵

The point of addressing jobs and services in this way is not so much that this is an immediately viable strategy for the gradual encroachment on and eventual takeover of capital and the state, but rather that it involves a gradual development of new capacities and vision, an independent sense of how unions could be 'doing-other' to the end of 'becoming-other': negotiating with employers with a new confidence of workers' potential as opposed to demanding a voice for union leaders on various boards; introducing demands on the state such as access to government departments in terms of expanding the range of information they collect and provide, and state funding of unions' research; organizing meetings of workers in and across sectors to develop their ability to analyse their situation in the economy and society as a whole; and addressing the creation of new political and economic structures to implement this direction, ranging from job development boards and municipal ownership to democratic public financial institutions for controlling and allocating capital flows.

This kind of capacity-building on the part of the labour movement also opens the question of a new relationship to the community – if only, at first, stimulated by the concern in these particular times to avoid isolation. What is

involved here is the broader strategic challenge to position unions as potential centres of working class life. This is not simply a matter of finding support for unions in the community through linking workers to ‘others’, but of highlighting the fact that workers are more than just ‘workers’ and addressing their needs in ways that value such glimpses of their potential as their limited experience of ‘citizenship’ now affords, and raising their expectations of becoming fuller human beings than their social status as workers now allows. For this relationship to the community to be substantive rather than rhetorical (which invocations of ‘the community’ by many union leaders often are, no less than by many academics and politicians), it must affect the kinds of demands unions make on employers and the state. What this means is that issues like the environmental implications of a work-site, reduced work-time to share jobs and ending the inferior status of part-time jobs must become priorities in collective bargaining; and that the nature of union structures must change as well such as by opening up local union committees to include teenagers and spouses to mobilize for changes in school education, urban and regional planning, health administration, etc.. Such a new unionism, committed to enhancing local community life, would inevitably have to play a leading role in joining with other movements to engage the state at every level, from both inside and outside, to force the development of the kind of democratic administration implied by both the sectoral and community aspects of the radical union strategy outlined here.

In both their militant defensiveness and in expanding their role beyond the workplace it is therefore clear that unions, in ‘doing-other’, must inevitably engage the local and national state in ways that go beyond lobbying and support for electoral allies. The struggle to democratize the economy is ultimately about collapsing the distinction between economics and politics in a very particular way: one that alters the nature of the state so that the state does not stand external to everyday economic life as a bureaucratic regulator, but is integrated in the struggles to transform social relations – which is the condition for ‘becoming other’, whereby people and institutions change themselves in the process of changing the nature of the economy.

THE ACCUMULATION OF CAPACITIES: REKINDLING SOCIALIST IMAGINATION

Twentieth century Marxists like Lenin and Gramsci addressed the need for restructuring the state almost exclusively in relation to what would be done *after* coming to power. But if we are to develop the democratic administrative capacities and confidence in our abilities to govern ourselves, we must find ways to constantly engage the existing state. This means that the socialist project can’t advance without rethinking anew the relationship between democracy and the state. In the popular mind, the existing capitalist state embodies the democratic idea, however imperfectly, and declarations that because it is a capitalist state it is undemocratic – while true – won’t change this. Analytical and rhetorical crit-

icisms of this flawed democracy can score points, but without practical experiences that both reveal its limitations and show that something else is possible, they come up against a resigned acceptance that in a complex society this is as good as democracy can get, or mere cynicism. Our criticisms have to be tied to practical steps – aimed at changing not just what the state does, but how the various elements of the state function, showing that democratic and other gains *can* be made, instilling confidence that elements of a different and richer democracy are possible, and at the same time revealing that such gains remain limited unless we keep going further in linking democracy and economic and social transformation.

These dimensions – the need for engagement with the state, structuring that engagement so it has a socialist purpose, accumulation of the resultant capacities, the development of new means of ensuring accountability – raise all the old questions of political organization and class consciousness. But proclamations about praxis and intervention by a revolutionary party are not particularly helpful. The argument that at unique moments of deep capitalist crises and intensified struggles, a socialist consciousness and vision will explode onto the stage of history is unconvincing or, at best, incomplete. What would sustain such struggles and prevent their intensity from burning out, or prevent the severe implications of the crisis from unnerving the movement? Without a socialist culture *already* in existence – which necessarily includes, amongst other things, already committed socialists, a socialist vision and the everyday capacity building we have stressed – there would be nothing for the militants to plug into during moments of crisis and struggle, and therefore no reason to expect these militants, through ‘praxis’, to suddenly adopt a sustained coherent revolutionary perspective. We are therefore back to the question of the source of socialist culture. To say at this point we need a revolutionary socialist party to build that culture again only begs the question. New parties will be needed to give political coherence to labour and other social movements as well as to get elected and to prioritize the institutional reforms and experimentation required to engage the existing state in the process of social transformation. But what exactly would such parties do to develop a socialist culture within capitalism?

Developing socialist theory and clarifying socialist vision are essential first steps to building new parties capable of developing popular strategic, democratic and administrative capacities. At issue here, in other words, is not only the politics of the socialist project but its theoretical underpinnings. Marx’s main critique of bourgeois political economy was that its boundaries stopped at capitalism’s boundaries. It created a sense of the end of history, whereas Marx wanted to open that history up. To this end, he created a better social science. But the socialist project needed something more. Because the socialist project swims in an ill-defined sea of potentialities, because it depends on nothing less than subordinate classes setting out to create a new society, it requires a more comprehensive means of integrating the science of what is to the possibilities and strategic considerations of what might be. It is not a matter of rejecting or

abandoning Marxism, but neither is it just a matter of correcting or improving on Marx. It is about adding a new conceptual layer to Marxism, a dimension formerly missing or undeveloped. Amongst other things, this means a theoretical framework that is centered on the concepts of capacities and potentials. Socialism really is about the development of productive forces, but these 'productive forces' include historically new capacities, above all the collective capacities to govern democratically everyday life, the economy, civil society and the state. Without the development of productive forces in this sense, people couldn't run a society even if power was handed over by the ruling classes.

This means that in addition to analysing the accumulation of capital, we also have to analyse the accumulation of capacities. This requires rethinking the units of analysis and social relationships we focus on. As long as, for example, we limit ourselves to the capitalist firm, we fail to focus on discussions about use values (what should entire economic sectors be doing) and coordination (planning links within and between sectors), in other words, about needs and our capacities to address those needs. Or, to take another example, if the unit of analysis isn't the individual worker, but the household which, through an internal division of labour produces and reproduces labour, sells labour power, and consumes, then not only do we have a better opening to address the capacities of women but we can better locate men and women in a context that bridges work and non-work and therefore their full human potentiality or its frustration. Since both production and households are physically located within communities, this also better facilitates addressing the issue of cross-generational class consciousness and the impact of restructuring on class capacities. And the emphasis on 'democratic administration' as a productive force raises questions of simultaneously politicizing the economy (rather than leaving it to the market) and thinking through what kind of state structures at every level might be involved in such a politicization if it is to conform to developing democratic collective capacities.

The cognitive, strategic and inspirational purpose of such a theory is to help us conceive how to inhabit capitalism while building bridges to those individual/institutional capacities to get socialism on the agenda. What the socialist project needs today, therefore, is not so much the details of how socialism would work or what we would do if we took state power, nor just more measures of why capitalism is not good enough. Rather it needs something transitional between these, beginning with a commitment to developing capacities to keep 'the utopian goal clearly visible', as Bloch put it. To that end the motivating vision, incorporating a utopian sensibility with a concern with capacity- building, must encompass at least the following ten dimensions:

1. *Overcoming alienation.* This is not a matter of escaping work in order to fulfil our lives but rather transforming the nature of work as well as giving people outside of the world of work 'the possibility of developing interests and autonomous activities, including productive activities' so that they are no longer 'passive consumers of amusements.'⁴⁶

2. *Attenuating the division of labour.* The principle at the heart of the socialist project – the potential of each of us to become full human beings – cannot be achieved in the context of hierarchical structures ‘that obstruct participation or deny equitable access of all workers to equal opportunities for fulfilment and influence.’⁴⁷ Because this won’t be easy socialists are obliged to begin this process in their own parties, unions, movements, NGO’s, offices, plants, universities, etc.
3. *Transforming consumption.* Socialists must recognize that any ‘transformation of the relations of production and the organization of work would be conditional on a number of other, equally dramatic, changes of life-style and mode of consuming.’⁴⁸ This is not only a matter of ecological sanity but of connecting consumers to the decisions about what is produced, the development of capacities for diverse enjoyments rather than the consumption of homogenized commodities, and the expansion of accessible and generally more egalitarian spheres of public and collective consumption.
4. *Alternative ways of living.* The household as a space where glimpses of socialist capacities are afforded suggests that experiments with more communal forms of living that have the potential of extending ‘intense, affectional bonds’ to a broader supportive community beyond the nuclear family and other forms of household relations can provide ‘a compelling point of entry for a prefigurative politics which proposes new kinds of sharing relationships and new kinds of public places.’⁴⁹
5. *Socializing markets.* Bringing decisions about capital allocation into the democratic public sphere, alongside transformations in modes of consumption and ways of living, allows us ‘to envision ways of reclaiming and transforming markets and money, so that they become a means of facilitating mutually beneficial exchange based on a mutually beneficial division of labour in an economy with an egalitarian distribution of economic power.’⁵⁰ Only these kinds of markets and social relations will allow us to escape the steel bonds of competition that entrap so much of what passes for utopian thinking today.
6. *Planning ecologically.* The socialist project means developing the capacities within each state for the democratic allocation of time and resources and the quantitative and qualitative balance between production and consumption. The goal is to ‘maximize the capacity of different national collectivities democratically to choose alternate development paths... that do not impose externalities (such as environmental damage) on other countries, by re-embedding financial capital and production relations from global to national and local economic spaces.’⁵¹
7. *Internationalizing equality.* Envisioning this type of planning at the national level means developing international alliances and, eventually, an interna-

tional system that facilitates rather than undermines these efforts. In turn, developing the consciousness and capacities that allows for the building of egalitarian social relations within states must include a growing commitment to a solidaristic transfer of resources from rich to poor countries and to facilitating the latter's economic development via common struggles to transcend the geopolitical barriers to the development of socialist capacities. This not only means recognizing the existence of contemporary imperialism but coming to terms with the 'geographical conditions and diversities' of working class existence and learning how to 'arbitrate and translate' between these diversities and spacial scales in reviving socialist politics.⁵²

8. *Communicating democratically.* Socialists need to give priority to developing a vision and strategy for a diverse, pluralist communications media in place of the commodified market-driven media today, so as to allow for the capacities for intelligent collective dialogue to grow as well as to nurture the capacities for rich cultural development. 'For a renewed collective debate about the fundamental principles of social organization to be possible, and for a new socialist project to be articulated and get a hearing, a new media order is needed.'⁵³
9. *Realizing democracy.* The whole point of a socialist project conceived in terms of developing individual and collective capacities is to make the deepening and extension of democracy viable. This entails the most serious commitment to conceiving and trying to establish the types of representation and administration that contribute to breaking down the organizationally reinforced distinctions between managers and workers, politicians and citizens, leaders and led, and to overcoming the barriers that separate what we are from what we might become.⁵⁴
10. *Omnia sint communia.* Progressive intellectuals in our time have devoted enormous energy to trying to get around what was obvious to many pre-Marxist utopians, that is, that you simply cannot have private property in the means of production, finance, exchange and communication and at the same time have an unalienated, socially just and democratic social order; and that you cannot begin to approach a utopia on the basis of the acquisitive and competitive drive. There is no way of rekindling socialist imagination so long as this basic principle is obscured, not least because doing so avoids all the difficult questions about making democratic collectivist capacities into real potentialities.

Socialists are living through a unique period: the collapse of communism and the complete abnegation by social democratic parties of any vocation for radical change has left us, for the first time in over a century, with no organizational focus for our goals. The lacuna we consequently face is, not surprisingly, accompanied by a great deal of pessimism. But overcoming that pessimism is not a matter of asserting a new, yet equally short-sighted optimism. Rather, it

means drawing inspiration from the continuity between the utopian dream that pre-dates socialism and the concrete popular struggles in evidence around the world as people strive, in a multitude of diverse ways, to assert their humanity. It means drawing encouragement from the activist left's broadening of its political project to encompass many of the ideals we have set out above. And above all, it means apprehending what the very power of capital is inadvertently proclaiming as it over-runs, subordinates, and narrows every aspect of our lives – that capitalism is 'the wrong dream', and that only an alternative that is just as universal and ambitious, but rooted in our collective liberating potentials, can replace it. Rekindling the socialist imagination and accumulating the capacities to develop that alternative are not only necessary but possible.

NOTES

1. Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp. 111-2. The famous Beijing production in the early 1980s, just as China's Communist capitalism was being launched, had already demonstrated the play's growing relevance.
2. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, translated by N. Plaice, S. Plaice and P. Knight, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1986, p. 198. Largely written during his exile in the USA between 1937 and 1949, the first two volumes were first published in East Germany in 1954-5 and the third volume in 1959. It is worth noting, in light of the use made here of *Death of a Salesman*, that Bloch regarded theatre as a 'paradigmatic institution' in terms of its ability to 'influence the will of this world, in its real possibilities.' (p. 424) He saw in theatre proof of people's 'mimic need... connected positively with the... tempting desire to transform oneself.... The Curtain rises, the fourth wall is missing, in its place is the open proscenium... From the life we have had the narrowness disappears into which it has so often led...' (pp. 412-3) For an insightful appreciation of Bloch's work by a former student, see chapter nine of Stephen Eric Bronner's *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists*, Cambridge, Mass:Blackwell, 1994. Cf. Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan, eds. *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, Verso, New York, 1997.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 445-6.
4. See *The Principle of Hope*, pp. 530, 582.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 519-20.
6. See *The Principle of Hope*, esp. pp. 148, 197-8, 209, 622-3.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 444.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 622.
9. *A Philosophy of the Future*, translated by John Cummings, New York: Herder and Herder, 1970, p. 92.
10. See Leo Panitch, 'The State and the Future of Socialism', *Capital and Class*, no. 11, Spring 1980 (reprinted as Ch. 9 in *Working Class Politics in Crisis*, London, Verso, 1986), and 'Liberal Democracy and Socialist Democracy', *Socialist Register 1981*. It needs to be noted that Bloch himself tended, at least through the 1930s and 1940s, towards a 'premature harmonization' of the contradictions he discerned in the Soviet Union.
11. The richest attempt to explore this lacunae ('the question before us is – why did Marx ever think that workers could go beyond capital?') is Mike Lebowitz, *Beyond*

Capital, New York: Macmillan, 1995.

12. See *The Principle of Hope*, pp. 232-3.
13. *The German Ideology*, Moscow: International Publishers, 1972, pp. 56-7.
14. Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, New York: Harper Collins, 1990, p. 133.
15. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven and London: Princeton University Press, 1998.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 88-9, 101-2, 342-4. At the same time Scott recognises that 'Revolutionaries had every reason to despise the feudal, poverty-stricken, inegalitarian past that they hoped to banish forever, and sometimes they also have had reason to suspect that immediate democracy would simply bring back the social order... Understanding the history and logic of the commitment to high-modernist goals, however, does not permit us to overlook the enormous damage that their convictions entailed when combined with authoritarian state power.' Nor does he go so far as some others do in his critique of the enlightenment and modernism which '... has provided us with a knowledge of the world that, for all its darker aspects, few of us would want to surrender. What has proved to be truly dangerous to us and our environment, I think, is the combination of the universalist pretensions of epistemic knowledge and authoritarian social engineering.' pp. 340-1.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 327.
18. Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
19. Erik Olin Wright, Preface to S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Recasting Egalitarianism: New Rules for Communities, States and Markets*, New York: Verso, 1998, p. ix. Wright is not sure himself whether Bowles and Gintis's model is advanced 'in the spirit of a thoroughgoing institutional redesign of society' (p. 87), but neither is it at all clear that the two previous volumes in this series – on a guaranteed annual income and associational democracy respectively – would qualify by this test. In fact, by focussing on a redistribution of property rights, albeit within a competitive market economy, Bowles and Gintis clearly see themselves as challenging the limitations of those volumes.
20. *Recasting Egalitarianism*, p. 364.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
22. To compensate for the latter (presented mainly in terms of inducing workers not be risk-averse when it comes to borrowing and investment), the state would provide self-financing unemployment insurance (only limited payments would go to those whose 'own actions' – including, it appears, failure to work hard enough to raise productivity – are 'implicated in their joblessness') and bankruptcy insurance (it is unpersuasively claimed that it would be not be difficult to insure firms on a self-financing basis against 'exogenous' risks like economic down-turns and to distinguish these from 'controllable' risks like bad management or investment decisions). *Recasting Egalitarianism*, pp. 50-1.
23. See Bertell Ollman, ed., *Market Socialism: The Debate Among Socialists*, New York: Routledge, 1998.
24. An excellent early overview and assessment of this literature was provided by Pat Devine in his essay on 'Market Socialism or Participatory Planning' in the special issue on 'The Future of Socialism' in the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 24, nos. 3 & 4, Fall & Winter 1992. The most creative contributions were Devine's *Democracy and Economic Planning*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988; Diane Elson's 'Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market?' *New Left Review*, no.

- 172, November/December 1988 and, especially for the attention they paid to attenuating, if not entirely transcending, the division of labour in a complex economy, Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel's *Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty-First Century*, Boston: South End Press, 1991.
25. All they have to say by way of elaborating on the worker-owned firms being 'governed by their elected representatives' is: 'We assume that workers direct the managers of the democratic firm to select investments, systems of work monitoring, and other policy options to maximize the workers' welfare.' *Recasting Egalitarianism*, p. 37.
 26. *Recasting Egalitarianism*, pp. 390-91.
 27. They ignore Barrington Moore's retort to those who relied on assumptions of cultural inertia: 'To maintain and transmit a value system', he wrote, 'human beings are punched, bullied sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, and sometimes even taught sociology.' And these days, we might add, supply-side economics. See Barrington Moore, Jr. *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship*, Boston: Beacon, 1967, p. 486.
 28. As one of their critics puts it: 'Bowles and Gintis are... so busy making a pitch for egalitarian policies to soft-hearted efficiency worshippers that they risk inviting their readers to forget what egalitarianism is all about. It is not about Nintendo games in every home and more trips to the Mall. It is about self-respect, fairness, equal respect and fraternity.... The fundamental mistake is that they fail to ask what economic growth is for, and they surrender all thought of questioning, let alone controlling, the future that markets dictate to us. Even if Bowles and Gintis are right that those concerned with efficiency should support egalitarian policies, egalitarians... should keep their distance from supply-side economics.' Daniel M. Hausman, 'Problems with Supply-side Egalitarianism' in *Recasting Egalitarianism*, p. 84. It is one of the virtues of Verso's Real Utopia series that each volume also contains such critical essays followed by a response by the main authors.
 29. Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Democracy Realized: The Progressive Alternative*, New York: Verso, 1998, p. 9.
 30. Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *False Necessity*, Part I of *Politics: A Work in Constructive Social Theory*, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987. pp. 392-5.
 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 406-9, 438. At the time this was written in the mid-1980s, this could be seen as a theorization of the kind of political practice that had already been articulated by the activists who created the Workers Party in Unger's own Brazil, or by Tony Benn and the activists of Greater London Council in the early 1980s. (Unger himself was associated not with the Workers Party but aligned with Cardoso in the formation of the less radical Brazilian Democratic Movement, PMDB. See Eyal Press, 'The Passion of Roberto Unger', *Lingua Franca*, March 1999.) At the time he wrote *False Necessity*, Unger's hope was that the proponents of 'empowered democracy' would be able to work loosely within reform, labor, socialist and communist parties as well as within 'the extrapartisan grassroots movements most open to their vision' (p. 409). By the time of *Democracy Realized* over a decade later, however, Unger seemed much less confident about where to find 'the missing agent of an inclusive politics' (p. 245).
 32. *Democracy Realized*, pp. 1, 213-15, 263ff.

33. Ibid., p. 174.
34. Ibid., p. 43.
35. André Gorz, *Strategy for Labour: A Radical Proposal*, Boston, Beacon: 1967, p. 7.
36. 'The condition of post-Marxist Man is that the meaning Marx read into historical development remains for us the only meaning that development can have, yet we must pursue this independent of the existence of a social class capable of realizing it.' *Critique of Economic Reason*, p. 96.
37. *The German Ideology*, p. 104.
38. See Sam Gindin, 'Socialism with Sober Senses', *Socialist Register 1998*.
39. See Jerry Lembcke, 'Class Analysis and Studies of the U.S. Working Class: Theoretical, Conceptual, and Methodological Issues' in Scott G. McNall, Rhonda Levine and Rick Fantasia eds., *Bringing Class Back In*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1991.
40. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume 1, London, Verso: 1991 (1947), p. 33.
41. *Farewell to the Working Class*, Boston: South End Press, 1982; *Critique of Economic Reason*, London: Verso, 1989.
42. *Critique of Economic Reason*, pp. 232-3.
43. One of strongest examples of union involvement in decision-making is co-determination in Germany. However, when Daimler made the decision to merge with Chrysler, this was not discussed at the board level where the German metalworkers were involved; it was deemed too sensitive and the worker input was to ratify it after the fact. Similarly the issue of outsourcing, which is so crucial to German workers is not dealt with at the board level because it would be too 'controversial'. In Canada, there has been a mushrooming of government-subsidized 'labour worker investment funds' to allegedly give the labour movement some control over jobs and the direction of the economy without the capacity to control any particular project, invest in directions which may meet criteria other than profitability, or insist that the jobs created include unionization. For a detailed critique of the latter, see Jim Stanford, *Labour Investment Funds*, Toronto: CAW, 1999.
44. For instance, demanding, through collective bargaining and legislation, reports from the company that are accessible to non-accountants, resources for independent technical assistance in interpreting information, time during working hours to get updates and raise questions of management, union approval of work re-organization or outsourcing decisions, and input through sectoral councils as discussed below.
45. See Greg McElligott 'An Immodest Proposal, or Democracy Beyond the Capitalist Welfare State', *Socialist Studies Bulletin*, no. 52, Winnipeg, (April-May-June 1998), pp. 24-48.
46. Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, p. 231.
47. Albert and Hahnel, *Participatory Economics*, p. 35.
48. See Kate Soper's essay in this volume. Cf. the debate on Juliet Schor's 'The New Politics of Consumption' in *Boston Review*, 24: 3-4, Summer 1999.
49. See Johanna Brenner's essay in this volume.
50. See Diane Elson's essay in this volume.
51. Greg Albo, 'The World Economy, Market Imperatives and Alternatives', *Monthly Review*, December 1996, p. 19. And see also Albo's ten point

programme in his 'A World Market of Opportunities? Capitalist Obstacles and Left Economic Policy', *Socialist Register 1997*.

52. David Harvey, 'The Geography of Class Power', *Socialist Register 1998*, esp. p. 70.
53. Colin Leys, 'The Public Sphere and the Media: Market Supremacy versus Democracy', *Socialist Register 1999*.
54. See Greg Albo, David Langille and Leo Panitch, eds., *A Different Kind of State*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1993.

