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On the political sociology of intellectuals: George Orwell and the London Left intelligentsia of the 1930s*

John Rodden

Abstract. Given frequent observations about the “intellectual backwardness” of the sociology of intellectuals, it proves helpful to broach the conceptual issues of the field through the example of one intellectual and his milieu. The case of George Orwell and the London Left intelligentsia of the 1930s discloses how the dynamics of intellectuals’ political affiliation are much more complicated than the major theoretical paradigms have allowed. Ultimately it also suggests how the historical sociology of individuals can enrich political sociology generally.

Résumé. Comme on a beaucoup déridé la sociologie des intellectuels pour son “retard intellectuel”, il est utile d’approcher ses question conceptuelles via l’exemple d’un intellectuel et son milieu. Le cas de George Orwell et de l’intelligentsia londonienne de gauche pendant les années trente montre comment la dynamique de l’affiliation politique des intellectuels est plus compliquée que ne laisseraient croire les paradigmes dominants. Surtout, il suggère comment la sociologie historique des individus peut enrichir la sociologie politique en général.

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I

Contemporary social theorists have written extensively about the modern intellectual's class origins, political allegiances, and social function (Berger, 1957; Coser, 1965; Gella, 1976). Yet as Charles Kadushin notes, "despite (or perhaps because of) the many works on intellectuals, there is no adequate sociological theory of intellectuals or intellectual life. . . . Theory-building in this field has been marred by an abundance of opinion and moralization, a dearth of facts, and a plethora of parochial definitions" (quoted in Brym, 1987: 208).¹ Much of the scholarship in the sociology of intellectuals is purely descriptive, and even worse: poorly defined normative issues (the intellectual's "proper social function" and "unique political role") dominate the literature on intellectuals, at the expense of substantive theory about intellectuals' political behavior and patterns of mobility (Chomsky, 1967; 1978; Huszar, 1960; Benda, 1955). Moreover, in contrast to their treatment of other occupations, as Robert Brym notes, sociologists have tended to accept the political self-descriptions (or "professional ideologies") of intellectuals at face value (1987: 199). The typical result is uncritical acceptance of an ideal-type intellectual who acts as "a politically autonomous critic pursuing knowledge for its own sake," with little attention paid to the historical contingencies conditioning and circumscribing political activity (Barrow, 1987: 415).

Brym calls for a moratorium on general theories correlating intellectuals' social locations and their ideological tendencies, and he instead urges careful study of the relation between partisan affiliation and the intellectual's career trajectory through the changing social structure (1987: 206-08; 1980: 70-73). Given the observations of Kadushin and Brym about the theoretical imprecision and "intellectual backwardness" of the political sociology of intellectuals, it will prove helpful to broach the conceptual issues of the field through the example of one intellectual and his milieu (Brym, 1978: 208).² In doing so we place intellectual history in a social theoretical context, whereupon the concrete relations between an intellectual's personal experience and the social organization of his generation and the intelligentsia emerge.

George Orwell and the London intelligentsia of the 1930s and 1940s provide an instructive case. The special historical relation of Orwell to the British intellectuals of his day sheds light on the changing situation of the modern Western intellectual. "When the history of intellectuals of the twentieth century is written," William Steinhoff has predicted, "some part of it will be devoted to Orwell's analysis and criticism of his fellow intellectuals" (1976: 57). The example of Orwell, however, possesses more than merely historical interest, for

1. I am much indebted to Brym's work throughout this essay, especially Brym (1987; 1980).
2. The term "intellectual" first entered the French lexicon in the 1890s as a description of the group of prominent defenders of Alfred Dreyfus. It should be taken in this essay as a general characterization of those who are producers, rather than merely consumers, of ideas, especially through the medium of writing. On the problem of defining the term "intellectual," see Gagnon (1987: 4-6).

it represents not just one man's dispute with his fellow literary intellectuals. Rather, it signals the emergent position of the modern writer-intellectual in Britain, responding to two new, related historical developments in the 1930s: the birth of a radical intelligentsia and the rise in Europe of totalitarianism.

How did English writer-intellectuals react under such conditions? What factors contributed to the rise and decline of widespread intellectual dissidence? What accounts for political rebellion and adaptation occurring variously in political, religious, and aesthetic terms? How do the intellectual's class origins, education, and mature social experience shape his or her political orientation?

These broad historical and conceptual questions cannot, of course, be addressed adequately in a single example. Moreover, to approach them via the filter of the vivid historical personalities and complicated social conditions of 1930s and 1940s Britain runs the risk of generalization from skewed or impoverished data. Yet advantages emerge too. The sociologist's restricted case allows for a combination of observational detail and conceptual delimitation seldom found in cultural history, and the case of Orwell, an unusually rich and suggestive one, is particularly well-suited to a study of the political sociology of intellectuals.

His appropriateness arises, perhaps paradoxically, from the adversarial stance which he took toward his adopted "class" of fellow intellectuals. Orwell's distinctiveness offers insight into the typicality of his intellectual generation. Because he was never directly affiliated with the left-wing writers of the "the Auden generation" — a generation he was "in but never but part of," in Stuart Samuels' characterization — he could stand at once inside and outside the Left (1969: 247). He thereby could both participate in and give witness to his generation's experience, reflecting its larger dilemma between political detachment and commitment. "To learn what the world then looked like to an English intellectual," wrote his friend and *Tribune* colleague T.R. Fyvel in *The Intellectuals Today*, "one can go to George Orwell, who wrote so explicitly and precisely about this, and one can also see how the issues of the time were reflected in his own career." His diverse engagement with poverty, imperialism, fascism, and socialism established Orwell, in Fyvel's view, as "the characteristic literary figure of the thirties," and Fyvel urged readers "to consider Orwell's historical role as an intellectual of his day" (1968: 44).

This essay takes this exhortation as a point of departure for addressing the theoretical issues framed by the foregoing questions. Periods of political crisis invariably raise such questions with special directness, and the responses often manifest themselves most clearly in the experience of one centrally involved in the struggle. As his intellectual generation's posthumously proclaimed "conscience" and "voice," Orwell and his work constitute not only a sociological but also an ethical guide to the contemporary relation of the intellectual and politics (Pritchett, 1950: 96; Woodcock, 1950: 28).³

3. On this relation, see Hanson (1969) and Malia (1973). On Orwell's reputation as a "model" intellectual of the Left and Right, see Chomsky (1968) and Wain (1968).

II

Whereas various Continental traditions of intellectual radicalism stretch as far back as the eighteenth century, Britain possessed no dissident left-wing intelligentsia until the 1930s. The “philosophical Radicals” of the 1820s, including James Mill, were parliamentary reformers, and they numbered in any case no more than a coterie of twenty. The nineteenth-century intellectual “Lights of Liberalism” — led by John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, James Bryce, and Henry Sidgwick — were similarly in or close to the corridors of power and fully assimilated into the governing classes by birth and education. Edwardian Fabians like H.G. Wells and Sidney and Beatrice Webb likewise invested their progressive hopes in gradualism, social planning, technological advance, and administrative efficiency. With occasional exceptions like Robert Owen, William Morris, and Bernard Shaw, English intellectuals were traditionally Liberal or Conservative, or frequently apolitical. Historically they have not been models of the “alienated intellectual,” Robert Park’s “Marginal Man” (Park, 1950: 373; Coser, 1965: 37-82, 171-80).⁴

Alan Swingewood has attributed this intellectual moderation to a British tradition of

political stability, historical continuity, a gentrified bourgeois culture, the strength of philosophical currents relying on common sense, experience, and practicality (utilitarianism, empiricism), combined with the absence of a broadly based revolutionary socialist movement. . . . (1987: 87)⁵

These so-called “peculiarities of the English” have facilitated the integration of the British intelligentsia into society with a smoothness unknown elsewhere in Europe — especially unlike the situations in France and Italy, neither of which possesses an established tradition of cooperative intellectual participation in government and politics (Thompson, 1978: 35-52).⁶ As Lewis Coser once summed up the distinction, the salons led to the French Revolution and the coffeehouses to the 1832 Reform Bill (Coser, 1965: 11-26; on the differences between the French and British intelligentsia, see Reader, 1982). British intellectuals have typically maintained access to important official channels of communication and power, and have thereby constituted an “intellectual aristocracy,” in Noel Annan’s phrase, closely bound to the ruling classes and to one another by family, school, and professional ties. As Annan explained:

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4. Indeed, the example of the Fabians makes clear that there was a socialist, if not radical and dissident, intelligentsia in Britain before the 1930s, but it was a respectable, moderate, anti-revolutionary, Establishment coterie. It was as “unalienated” from British society as it was possible to be.
 5. Among the other reasons for “British exceptionalism” is the fact that workers have traditionally dominated the British socialist movement, a trend which the *спбв* has also reflected since its founding in 1920. Possibly British Protestantism has also played a role. Intellectuals have enjoyed high authority in Catholic France and Italy, where Communism has also proven popular, arguably because it has served as a substitute religion.
 6. Thompson was replying to Perry Anderson’s critical history of the English intelligentsia. See Anderson (1964).

The influence of these families [the Stracheys, Darwins, Huxleys, Stephenses, and others] may partly explain a paradox which has puzzled European and American observers of English life: the paradox of an intelligentsia which appears to conform rather than rebel against the rest of society. The proclivity to criticise, of course, exists; Matthew Arnold flicked Victorian self-confidence with his irony. . . . But the pro-consular tradition and the English habit of working through established institutions and modifying them to meet social needs only when such needs are proven are traits strongly exhibited by the intelligentsia of this country. Here is an aristocracy, secure, established and, like the rest of English society, accustomed to responsible and judicious utterance and sceptical and iconoclastic speculation. (1955: 241, 287)

The main focus of political sociology is the analysis and explanation of partisan affiliation. In their efforts to explain intellectuals' behavior via correlations between social position and political outlook, political sociologists usually identify "malintegration" within the existing social structure as the chief cause of radical protest. Unemployment and underemployment locate intellectuals on the margins of society. Poorly embedded in Establishment institutions, they feel rootless, estranged, and receptive to revolutionary appeals (Brym, 1980: 14-34). What this social malintegration thesis often ignores is whether alienated intellectuals possess "the political resources to change their ire into action" — sufficient numbers, influence on other revolutionary-minded groups, links to communication networks, and high school organization (e.g., journals, societies, discussion circles, co-operatives) (Brym, 1980: 25). As we shall see, in the 1930s Britain sustained a radical intellectual politics so long as both the social structure failed to absorb intellectuals and their political resources could be maintained. With the arrival of World War II, both conditions for the widespread *political* expression of intellectuals' alienation disappeared.

III

The 1930s witnessed the first society-wide dislocation of British intellectuals. They were cut off from many traditional connections to prestige and power, as their sources of private patronage, following graduation from Oxbridge or London, dried up. As Fyvel recalled it, British intellectuals "searched, some of them desperately indeed, for ways of becoming integrated in their society" (1968: 39). The major cause of marginalization was the world depression. Unemployment in Britain hovered above two million for most of the decade. Hard times forced middle-class graduates to make ends meet as journalists, publishers, schoolmasters, and private tutors. W.H. Auden, C. Day-Lewis, Evelyn Waugh, Rex Warner, Orwell, and hundreds of others took poor-paying jobs in private schools. Other graduates travelled to Europe, or (like Malcolm Muggeridge, William Empson, and Orwell) observed how the British Empire operated away from home. They saw conditions no better abroad; capitalism seemed to be failing everywhere. At the same time, the new Soviet state and its romantic promise of equality and prosperity — and its celebration, rather than merely toleration, of intellectuals — struck many young intellectuals as a cultural paradise. Pilgrimages to Moscow became routine for socialists, and

glowing return reports from the Webbs and others confirmed the happy rumors (Hollander, 1981). Outrage about unemployment at home and admiration for the Soviet Union soon led to the formation, as Samuels puts it, “of a radical intelligentsia in England — a body of creative people who, as a group, openly criticized the existing form of society and who established institutions and intellectual pressure groups to mount a campaign to alter that society” (1969: 196).

The criticism actually began in the late 1920s, in the absence of any developed political consciousness, as the college protest of a bourgeois literary elite. The “Left Poets” at Oxford (Auden, Stephen Spender, Day-Lewis) formed the heart of a group (including Warner, Louis MacNeice, Hugh Gaitskell, Isaiah Berlin, Christopher Isherwood, Harold Acton, Edward Upward, and A.J.P. Taylor) known variously as “the gang,” “the Happy Few,” and “the Lads of the Earth.” They resembled an undergraduate Bloomsbury group. They crammed their publications, like *Oxford Poetry*, with insiders’ gossip and private allusions. Art was for the happy few, namely themselves, not for what they considered the ill-bred masses. They were quite self-consciously members of Oxford’s literary minority (the “arties”), contemptuous of the uncultivated, athletic majority (the “hearties”). They aspired to aesthetic priesthood; their bishop was Auden and their vicar T.S. Eliot. Political commitment, social activism, and “artistic responsibility” were vulgar, alien notions to them (Samuels, 1969: 198-211).⁷

Around 1930 all this began to change. Auden, Spender, Isherwood, Upward, David Guest, and some others of the Auden “gang” (e.g., John Lehmann from Cambridge) travelled to Berlin. The initial attraction was decadence, for Weimar Berlin was what Paris’s Left Bank had been a few years earlier. But as Spender put it in 1937: “One began by noticing symptoms of decadence, suffering and unemployment; one looked further and saw, beneath the decay of the liberal state, the virulent reaction of the Nazis and the struggle for a new life of the Communists” (quoted in Samuels, 1969: 202; see also Spender, 1935). Although they themselves were usually quite comfortable because of favorable exchange rates, the young bohemians had brushed up against what they had never encountered before: unemployment, physical suffering, poverty, disease (Samuels, 1969: 210-04; Carpenter, 1981: 96-110).

Most young intellectuals returned to England shortly before Hitler came to power and near the nadir of the depression in Britain in 1933, when unemployment peaked at 2.75 million. Although the German situation, with six million unemployed, was far worse than Britain’s, the social consciences of the Auden group awakened only on their return home, in the face of the hunger marches of 1932 and 1934. As Spender recalled:

I did not, at first, feel that I could do more than pity [the Germans]. This was partly because, as a foreigner, I felt outside Germany. Only when the crisis spread to Great Britain and other countries

7. As Spender (1965: 211) put it decades later: “[A]t Oxford it was possible to forget human injustices or at least to think that they were not the business of ‘the poet’.”

did I begin to realize that it was a disease of capitalism throughout the world. Gradually I became convinced that the only cure for unemployment, other than war, was an international society in which the resources of the world were exploited in the interests of all the people of the world. (1950: 212)

Thus did the “Happy Few” become aware of the miseries of the unhappy multitude.

The names MacNeice, Spender, Auden, and Day-Lewis (“MacSpaunday,” as the quartet was soon dubbed) first became publicly linked through their joint appearance in a little anthology, fitly entitled *New Signatures* (1932). Although it was primarily a rebellion against esoteric, coterie poetry, it also marked the Left Poets’ first halting steps toward political consciousness. In *New Country* (1933) they explicitly repudiated bourgeois values and called for a socialist revolution. They were “concerned no longer with a purely aesthetic approach, with finding a new signature, a new moral code, but with discovering a new country, a new social order” (Samuels, 1969: 206). That order was the classless society — but overlaid with a romantic veneer suffused with fellow-feeling, a self-dramatizing “Marxism of the heart.” “Prepare the way for an English Lenin,” cried Michael Roberts in his introduction to *New Country* (1933: 12). Intellectuals were moving “forward from liberalism,” as the title of Spender’s 1936 book proclaimed. They could “no longer remain aloof from politics,” declared Roberts. Radical aesthetics had given way to radical politics (see also Hynes, 1976; Mendelson, 1981: 137-81.)

Few young intellectuals did remain aloof from politics. Membership in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) rose from 1,356 in 1930 to 15,570 in 1938, an increase due partly to the many middle-class intellectuals who became politically conscious in the 1930s and streamed into the Party ranks (Samuels, 1969: 238; on CPGB membership figures, see Wood, 1959: 23-4). Inspired by Lenin’s conception of the Party as revolutionary vanguard, intellectuals began to spearhead left-wing activities, raising workers’ consciousness by organizing societies and sponsoring publications. Led by John Strachey, whose *The Coming Struggle for Power* (1932) proved one of the most influential books of the decade, middle-class intellectuals set up in 1934 a section of Writers’ International, chaired by Day-Lewis and represented by the journal *Left Review*. A British branch of Artists’ International was formed that same year. Politically minded leftist dramatic groups, like Unity Theatre, Left Theatre, and Group Theatre, sprang up. John Grierson’s GPO Film Unit also launched a revolutionary movement in documentary film. Founded in late 1935, Victor Gollancz’s Left Book Club, boasting 57,000 members by 1938, served as the umbrella group for many of these political and cultural activities. It was as close as Britain got to a Popular Front (Hynes, 1976: 125-293; Wood, 1959: 60-63; Samuels, 1966: 65-86).

Still, neither the Left Book Club nor these other activities were really popular. Nor did they ever enjoy strong Labour Party support. “Political radicalism was not popular with the masses,” wrote Neal Wood in his history of British

Communist intellectuals. “The intellectuals on the Left were somewhat isolated on the whole. . . . The country tended to be to the right of the intellectuals, as was the government” (Wood, 1959: 69). Nevertheless, participation in socialist programs gave many intellectuals a sense of camaraderie as fellow “radicals,” the feeling of being socially useful, of being “in touch” with one another and with “the people” (Fyvel, 1968: 46). Social malintegration therefore sparked political radicalism, but the partial result was that intellectuals’ sense of shared mission integrated the intelligentsia itself. Of course, the interlinked pattern of alienation, malintegration, and radicalization did not cover all intellectuals,⁸ nor were those who were alienated and radicalized uniformly and equally so. Yet as Samuels observes:

By 1935 few young, sensitive English intellectuals could avoid becoming either involved in one of the various intellectual organizations established to mobilize an attack on fascism, economic depression, and war, or convinced of the necessity of making their intellectual products reflect the social crises of the period and serve a genuine social function. Artists became socially aware, poets socially conscious, writers more didactic. . . . (1969: 228)⁹

IV

Eric Blair, a.k.a. George Orwell, however, was one of these uncommitted few, still without what he called “a political orientation.” “By the end of 1935,” he recalled in “Why I Write” (1946), “I had still failed to reach a firm decision” (1968: I, 4). That decision was perhaps further complicated by his reported friendship with devout Anglicans, his casual contact with British socialists and Trotskyists, and his serious flirtations with poetry writing and with modernist aestheticism (e.g., his Joycean stylistic experimentation in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, 1935) (Crick, 1982: 220-76).

Orwell’s indecision about his politics in the mid-1930s furnishes a clue to his lifelong “outsider” stance toward the London intelligentsia. Superficially his career does possess a comparable shape and sequence to other 1930s intellectuals: public school, travel abroad, return to teach, occasional journalism, a “new signature” (in 1933 as “Orwell”), contact with the British unemployed, embrace of socialism, and off to Spain. But that narrative abstract masks and bleaches the very different experience that set Blair-Orwell apart from most intellectuals of his generation, at least after public school. The trajectory of his career suggests

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8. Samuels implies that the 1930s intelligentsia was almost entirely left-wing. Although the trend in the 1930s was leftward, however, there nevertheless were many prominent conservative and right-wing intellectuals from an older generation (e.g., Eliot, Yeats, Chesterton, Belloc, Waugh).
 9. Orwell considered the attitude, “We’re all socialists nowadays” hypocritical and dangerous to the socialist movement. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) the *beau monde* girlfriend of wealthy Ravelston remarks that she finds workers “absolutely disgusting,” and then says to him a moment later: “Of course I know you’re a Socialist. So a I. I mean we’re all Socialists nowadays. But I don’t see why you have to give all your money away and make friends with the lower classes. You can be a Socialist and have a good time, that’s what I say” (1936: 56).

both the fallacy of linking mechanically class origins with political affiliation and the necessity of injecting a dynamic, historical dimension into an inquiry on the conditions for intellectuals' political radicalization.

How and why did Orwell differ from the members of the Auden group and the majority of other 1930s intellectuals? Three factors stand out, all of them reinforcing his antagonism toward English "clubbiness" and shaping his evolving "outsider" stance toward the London intelligentsia.

First, although Orwell was from the middle class, his family was poorer than most of those which produced public school boys, from whose ranks the leading intellectuals of his generation emerged. He evidently retained this acute consciousness of his relative poverty throughout his adult years. Witness the bitterness and anguish of "Such, Such Were the Joys," an autobiographical essay about his prep school years in Edwardian England:

Very early, at the age of ten or eleven, I reached the conclusion . . . that you were no good unless you had £100,000. . . . But it was clear that I could never find my way into that paradise, to which you did not really belong unless you were born into it. You could only *make* money . . . and [then] you were fat and old. But the truly enviable thing about the top-notchers was that they were rich while young. For people like me, the ambitious middle class, the examination passers, only a bleak, laborious kind of success was possible. You clambered upwards on a ladder of scholarships. . . . And if at any point you 'slacked' or 'went off' and missed one of the rungs in the ladder, you became 'a little office boy at forty pounds a year.' But even if you climbed to the highest niche that was open to you, you could still only be an underling, a hanger-on of the people who really counted. (Orwell, 1968: IV, 356).

Second, Orwell was slightly older than the decade's radicals. Although just a year senior to Day-Lewis, he was four years older than Auden and MacNeice and fully six years older than Spender. This age difference may account in part for Orwell's much stronger attachment to pre-World War I England and Edwardian memories. If Cyril Connolly's recollections are accurate, Eric Blair had already read much of Butler, Wells, and Shaw by the time of his entry to Eton (1916), and seems to have possessed an extraordinarily mature (and fatalistic) outlook on the ultimate consequences of World War I for the Empire (Connolly, 1948: 164). It is interesting too that in *Coming Up For Air* (1939) Orwell casts George Bowling, possibly the most autobiographical of Orwell's heroes and a thinly-disguised mouthpiece for many of the author's own views, exactly one decade older than himself. For Eric Blair at thirteen evidently had the political sophistication of Bowling at twenty-three. (Orwell, according to Richard Rees, felt guilty throughout his adulthood for being too young to serve in the war (1961: 123-24) — and appropriately enough, Bowling gets wounded in 1916 on a French battlefield.) It may have been that Blair-Orwell was just over the generational divide which permitted a passionate identification with the "eternal summer" of Edwardian England represented by Bowling's long lazy days at the Binfield House swimming hole.

A third difference was the crucial one: Blair's Burma police service. His Burma years put him on a track which was to divide him permanently and

irrevocably from his coevals, even after his return home. Virtually all of the leading intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s had gone up to Oxford or Cambridge. Very few intellectuals did not go to some university. At the time that Oxford's literary "Lads of the Earth" encircled Auden in 1928, Blair was already back from five grueling years in Burma — where, as John Wain once remarked, five years would seem like fifteen in a young Etonian's development (1961: 75). Indeed Blair had missed the relatively prosperous 1920s and the dramatic political events that would give rise to 1930s radicalism: Lloyd George's fall from grace in 1922; the rise to power in 1924 of the first, short-lived Labour government; and the May 1926 General Strike, prompted by proposed reductions in the miners' wages. Numerous upper- and middle-class families viewed the strike as a possible syndicalist revolution in the making. With their support — and that of hundreds of undergraduates — Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government put down the strike. The Auden group watched from a distance and treated the whole affair as springtime amusement. Quite probably Orwell met some of these same miners exactly a decade later at Wigan.

Blair had also missed the heyday of the literary revolution. By the early 1920s Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and also the doctrines of the publicists of modernism (e.g., Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme, Ford Madox Ford), had begun to filter down to the Oxbridge undergraduates. When Blair returned from Paris at Christmas 1929, having spent little more than six months in England during the previous seven years, many of his peers were already well-established in literary London and the new Auden era of committed political art was dawning.¹⁰

This personal history may suggest that Orwell was always "one step behind" his generation and therefore forever playing intellectual "catch-up" in the 1930s. By choice and circumstance, he never felt completely at home with the modernists and the "committed" Thirties' writers: the Victorian and Edwardian avant-garde of his boyhood (Dickens, Charles Reade, Butler, Gissing, Wells) remained his favorite novelists. Thus, he was still reading the advanced writers of two decades earlier, went to Paris to live like a bohemian when the "poet-in-the-garret" vogue about Paris was ending, and saw lower-class life from the gutter up when the university youths were editing manifestoes and publishing books.

Yet this way of explaining Orwell's development — as if he experienced a literary-political "lag" *vis-à-vis* his generation as a result of having gone to Burma rather than university — frames a comparison which, once again, rests on a superficial appearance of mere belatedness to his contemporaries. For it is not just that his experience was *later*; his experience was *different* from theirs, and he learned different things from it. He did, it is true, come to fashions when they were no longer fashionable. For example, like some of his contemporaries, he

10. On the influence of Eliot and Joyce on Auden and his circle, see Hynes (1976: 27-37). On Orwell during the period 1922-29, see Crick (1982: 139-199).

reached political consciousness abroad, but whereas they arrived *en bloc* as a politicized coterie, he arrived alone, and his stance, unlike theirs, was never simply that of a spectator. Orwell *lived* with the tramps and miners. He *fought* at the Aragon front (significantly, with the anarchist-Trotskyist POUM radicals rather than the Stalinist-controlled International Brigades), not merely visited like Auden and Spender (or like the numerous British delegates to the 1937 International Conference of Writers Against War and Fascism in Valencia). Orwell engaged so deeply in the events of the decade that he could digest and reflect on them only somewhat later — approximately when the intellectual spectators, who had observed events at a distance, were no longer caught up in them. But this participant-witness stance, as an outsider able to describe feelingly what he has seen “from the inside,”¹¹ gave Orwell valuable psychological distance (and consequently, high credibility and immense authority)¹² which most intellectuals of his generation did not possess. When Orwell made a decision, as he did in 1936-37 to embrace democratic socialism, it was a firm and enduring one.

The fact is, as Samuels remarks in a passage already quoted, Orwell belonged to “a generation he was in but never part of”; he stood outside “a movement he toyed with but never joined” (1969: 247). He could stand outside precisely because, in the most literal sense, he was never part of “the Auden generation” — nor of any other. His Burma years had placed him among working-class men slightly older than himself, many of whom had served in World War I; and even after Burma and Paris in the mid-1930s in Hampstead, he associated not with his coevals but mainly with provincial university graduates and other bohemians (e.g., Rayner Heppenstall, Michael Sayers) eight to ten years younger than himself. Some of them looked upon thirty-two-year-old Eric Blair, in Heppenstall’s phrase, as “a nice old thing, a kindly eccentric” — “ill-read,” middlebrow, without a university degree, and always going on insufferably about Butler, *The Magnet* and comic postcards (1960: 39).¹³ Thus Orwell found himself always

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11. This “outside” stance of a man who had once been “inside” was first identified by Q.D. Leavis in her influential *Scrutiny* essay-review on Orwell in September 1940. She noted that Orwell belonged “by birth and education,” to “the right Left people,” a leftist “nucleus of the literary world who christian-name each other and are in honour bound to advance each other’s literary career.” But she noted that Orwell was “in” yet not “of” his generation: “He differs from them in having grown up. He sees them accordingly from outside, having emancipated himself, at any rate in part, by the force of a remarkable character.” Quoted in Meyers (1975: 187).
 12. Francis Hope’s analysis of Orwell’s reputation as a “witness” is acute. “He always overgeneralized from his own experience: just because he went to Lancashire or to Catalonia, exposed himself to something he did not enjoy, and then wrote it up very well, he was taken as The Authority on a much wider problem — the communists and the Spanish Civil War as a whole, or British working class life in general. But at least he went there; and if his first-hand reports were then made to bear more general application than they should have, it is largely because so few other reporters put themselves forward. . . . It is remarkable how few people go even as far as Orwell did” (1969: 893).
 13. Heppenstall adds that, at thirty-two, Orwell seemed to him and Sayers “a great age,” and they thought it “a little odd in itself that he should have wanted to share premises with us rather than with men more precisely of his own generation” (1960: 59).

“between” and “outside” generations, not just political groups (on Orwell’s “outsider” stance toward all political groups, see Rodden, 1989). That too is why his mature experience was so “different” from that of the Auden group. His apartness is highlighted by Hynes’s choice to open and close *The Auden Generation* with quotations from Orwell’s *oeuvre*.¹⁴

For generational consciousness is acquired only by shared participation in psychologically decisive events, and Orwell possessed the generational consciousness neither of “the Auden generation” nor of the younger and older generational groups in Hampstead and Burma with whom he associated (Mannheim, 1952). Yet his separation from his contemporaries, especially the provincial graduates, probably helped form Orwell’s Quixotic, plain-speaking character: he could be less inhibited with such youthful, unthreatening, still-unestablished fellow bohemians, caring less that they disagreed with or mocked him. Generational discontinuity thus nourished Orwell’s natural antinomianism, inadvertently furnishing him with a setting in which he could do his own thinking, draw on his own experience, and work out his own positions without the pressure to bend to the institutional and intellectual authority of his already-successful coevals (Eisenstadt, 1966: 68-79). As Bernard Crick observes: “His time-out in Burma had made him older than most of the young writers still leading this kind of ‘floating life’; but it also gave him an emotional detachment from them and immunized him from fashion” (1982: 274).

The singularity of Orwell’s early manhood, marked by police work in Burma rather than attendance at Oxbridge, further helps explain the distinctive arc of his career in the late 1930s and early 1940s: his exceptional responses to the course of the Spanish Civil War, to the revelations about Stalin’s crimes, and to the changing CPGB line. Orwell’s non-university “untrained mind,” as Crick notes, turned out to be a fiercely independent radical’s *untamed* mind (1982: 25).¹⁵

Typically, Orwell arrived to the Spanish war late, after the fighting had been on for more than a half year (December 1936) and just as some leading British Marxist intellectuals (e.g., Ralph Fox, David Guest) were killed in action. The Loyalists’ prospects were already dimming by the time Orwell was defending Barcelona in May 1937, and most intellectuals in 1937-38 were quickly growing disillusioned with Stalinism and Left politics. Precisely at this moment, in the face of Franco’s looming triumph and the Stalinists’ suppression of POUM and other non-Communist militias, Orwell was wholeheartedly committing himself to socialism and penning his eloquent *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). “I have seen

14. On the generational consciousness of “the Auden generation,” see Hynes (1976: 17-37). Hynes does note that other 1930s writers possessed Orwell’s guilt for having been too young and having “missed” World War I. The key generational “break” between them, as we have seen, was Orwell’s five years in Burma.

15. Angus Wilson is among those who argues that Orwell, “by leaving Eton not for Oxford or Cambridge, but for ‘experience of the world,’ . . . lost more than he gained. . . .” As a result, says Wilson, Orwell looked down on education and never understood well the English middle class and professional tradition. Wilson (1954: 8).

wonderful things,” he wrote Cyril Connolly from his Barcelona sickbed in June 1937, after having narrowly escaped death from a throat wound, “& at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before” (1968: I, 269). Very few other returning leftists felt the same. And for the intellectuals who stayed home, their skin-deep commitment to socialism was waning, largely as a result of an avalanche of undeniable evidence about Stalin’s betrayal of the Revolution during the 1930s: the Kirov murder, the brutal extermination of the *kulak*, the deliberate scheme of mass famine in the Ukraine, the labor camps, the wholesale purges of rival Party members, the mock show trials of fellow Old Bolsheviks, the ferocious repression of all dissent. Just at the time when most Left intellectuals were beginning to doubt the Marxist pieties, Orwell had found his communitarian vision, symbolized by his chance meeting on his first day in Catalonia with an open-hearted young Italian militiaman (Orwell, 1938: 1).

Orwell had never been attached to Marxism, Stalin, or Russia, unlike most 1930s radicals. Therefore he (unlike the Auden group, the Webbs, Kingsley Martin and *The New Statesman*, and thousands of other CPGB members and fellow-travellers) had nothing to lose by repudiating “the Soviet myth” — “the belief that Russia is a Socialist country.” The USSR, he declared, embodied “the corruption of the original idea of Socialism” (1968: III, 404-05). While many British leftists became defensive about the transformation of Bolshevism into “oligarchical collectivism,” Orwell only became more confirmed in his negative judgment of Stalinism, which he claimed to have arrived at as early as 1931 (1968: III, 404) — long before the purges and show trials, the Spanish war, and the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. To CPGB members like Day-Lewis and Spender, Russia was “the god that failed.” Not for Orwell: he had already experienced his period of disillusion, much earlier in Burma. He had seen “the dirty work of Empire at close quarters” — and he had hated and finally rejected it (1968: I, 236). His attempts to expunge his guilt and his search for social reintegration followed in Paris, London, and Spain. By the time his fellow intellectuals were touting the organized efficiency of the Soviet state, Orwell’s Burma years had confirmed and deepened “my natural hatred of authority” (1968: I, 4). This early experience — his ordeal in Burma and his subsequent vocational and political crises in the 1920s and early 1930s — was probably no less traumatic than his contemporaries’ agonized reappraisal of Stalin and Communism a decade later. It did, however, act as an ideological vaccine: he became no Stalinist dupe. Thus, what Orwell once described as a waste of five years in a tropical swamp may have actually inoculated him against leadership and literary cliques, and thereby saved him from the more serious political errors of his generation, particularly “the stupid cult of Russia” (Orwell, 1958: 216). He had “chucked” Burma; many of his contemporaries would not do the same with Stalin and the CPGB until years later. In this respect Orwell was not only “behind” but also “ahead” of his generation, as well as “between” and “outside” it.

For whereas the common generational consciousness of his radical coevals was formed via a shared “personal time,” Orwell’s consciousness emerged from a uniquely direct engagement with “historical time,” to use Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang’s concepts (1978: 211-29). “Personal time” involves experiences (e.g., university matriculation, youthful bohemianism) which are part of the typical life cycle of a culture. Such experiences may occur across a wide historical epoch. But they are disproportionately available only to a particular age cohort. All persons will have been affected at roughly the same age. “Historical time” represents experiences available only during a certain epoch, though contemporaries of considerably different ages can respond to these historical events. The cleavages within and between generations turn on their differing relations to personal and historical time. Thus, although young London intellectuals of the 1930s did respond to new historical events (mass unemployment, totalitarianism), their radicalism was usually a temporary “cohort effect” (Lang and Lang, 1978: 228). It occurred mainly due to their collective undergraduate experience and attenuated before the decade’s close. Ultimately it represented merely a life-cycle experience, an intensified version of the liberalizing influence of college historically common to students, British and others. By contrast, Orwell’s turn to socialism emerged from a series of experiences rooted in historical time. He responded decisively and viscerally to the decade’s crisis, so that he emerged face to face with the changing historical conditions of Empire imperialism, urban poverty, provincial unemployment, and European fascism. His political reorientation was a lasting one, the result of an enduring historical effect.

Orwell’s intellectual contemporaries finally did repudiate Communism in the late 1930s and 1940s. Yet, as Orwell, pointed out in “Inside the Whale,” they “had not gotten rid of the urge for something to believe in” (1968: I, 515). The “something” which they embraced was not a political party line but rather a religious orthodoxy or aesthetic doctrine. Many intellectuals discovered the Anglican or Catholic churches; others opted out of politics and rededicated themselves to Art. Cyril Connolly’s editorial policy in the inaugural issue of *Horizon* (March 1940) ushered in the latter aspect of the new mood of the 1940s: “Our standards are aesthetic, and our politics are in abeyance” (1940: 5). Or as Connolly put it two years later in *The Unquiet Grave*: “the true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece . . . no other task is of any importance” (1942: 1).

The turn toward Art in 1940 was, however, sharply different from the case of the 1920s: whereas the undergraduates of the 1920s rebelled via Art, young and maturing intellectuals of the 1940s escaped into it. Whereas political detachment was the posture of the 1920s and commitment of the 1930s, disenchantment was the attitude of the 1940s. One notes here that radicalism and conservatism can take many forms. Religious or aesthetic radicalism may not only accommodate but also often entails political quietism. What had determined the outbreak of

radicalism in a specifically political form in the 1930s was in part British intellectuals' recent rejection of other possible manifestations: God was already dead and Art had failed as Hulmean "spilt religion." In the middle of a depression and with a revolution eastward already succeeding, Marxism and Russia had offered intellectuals of the day a model and a plan of action.

By the end of the decade, however, many leading London Left intellectuals were politically deradicalized. The advent of World War II catalyzed the process by giving them something productive to do *as intellectuals* — in the BBC, the Ministry of Information, the War Office selection boards, military intelligence — and thereby *reintegrated* them into society and deepened their disenchantment with Left ideology.¹⁶ "Probably in no belligerent country had the intelligentsia volunteered so wholeheartedly as in England to serve the State at war," Fyvel later observed. "The meaningful social integration which had been talked about in the Thirties was suddenly easier" (1968: 49).¹⁷ The English tradition of intellectuals' cooperative participation in government and official politics or what one critic has termed the venerable British practice of "massive cooptation of intellectuals by the State" had reasserted itself (Swingewood, 1987: 94). It would continue largely undisturbed through the war years, the Labour government under Attlee, and the consensus politics of "Butskellism" — until the Suez crisis and the birth of the New Left in 1956-57.¹⁸

However, because Orwell was so alienated from and malintegrated within the London Left intelligentsia, he was never quite so well socially reintegrated as a BBC broadcaster in the early 1940s either. The ideological moderation characteristic of most other wartime Left intellectuals began at a time (1939-41) when Orwell was at his most revolutionary and optimistic about the possibilities for an English socialist revolution. In *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941), he

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16. Already by 1937-38, however, as "Macspaunday" became disillusioned with Communism, they were "reintegrating" themselves within British society, partly for careerist reasons. By 1938, Auden had accepted the King's Gold Medal for poetry, Day-Lewis had joined the Book Society selection committee, and Spender had begun writing for Geoffrey Grigson's highbrow *New Verse*. On the tensions within the Auden group over these decisions, see Day-Lewis (1980: 115-17).
17. Fyvel also quotes a BBC acquaintance of Orwell's, Lawrence Gilliam, head of the BBC Home Service during the war, on the socially integrative effect of the intellectuals' war contributions *as intellectuals*: "above all I remember no separation between people. What was happening here was a closing of the gap between intellectual and community. The intellectual found himself not out on a limb, not on a small magazine, writing his poems or articles or critical essays for a tiny audience, but temporarily reunited with the community as a whole and able to service it with his special talents, without losing his poetic identity or his independence" (1968: 49).
18. Indeed, as late as April 1955, Edward Shils could ask in his report on the British intelligentsia "Who criticizes Britain now in any fundamental sense, except for a few Communists and a few Bevanite irreconcilables?" Shils went on: "in the main . . . scarcely anyone in Great Britain seems any longer to feel that there is anything fundamentally wrong. . . . To the British intellectual of the mid-1950s [Britain is] fundamentally all right and even much more than that. . . . Never has an intellectual class found its society and its culture so much to its satisfaction" (1955: 8).

argued that the war would transform Britain into a democratic socialist nation. It was not his hope alone, but few others held such a rosy view, and his own faith soon dimmed.¹⁹ Although he enjoyed much of the social contact of his BBC work, he formally reassumed his stance as intellectual “outsider” and radical iconoclast in 1943, eagerly accepting the literary editorship of *Tribune*, Aneurin Bevan’s still-struggling dissident Left paper (Crick, 1982: 441-46).

V

This brief sketch of the interrelations among the Left intelligentsia, British politics in the 1930s, and Orwell’s development highlights important theoretical issues and inadequacies in the accepted sociology of intellectuals. For the intellectual is that difficult creature, neither worker nor owner. He or she is, as it were, ideologically ambidextrous according to the literature of the sociology of occupations, which argues variously that the intellectual invariably serves the elite, allies with the workers, constitutes a separate class, and is essentially “classless” (Gagnon, 1987: 6-10).

Thus, functionalists (A.A. Berle, S.N. Eisenstadt, Daniel Bell) have portrayed intellectuals as gradually becoming coopted into the service of the presiding bureaucracy and becoming what C. Wright Mills in *White Collar* (1951) termed “Brains, INC.” They experience *embourgeoisement*. Classical Marxist sociology has also cast the intellectual with the middle class, as a *petit bourgeois*, an epithet once much applied by Stalinist critics to Orwell and serving more as a bogeyman tag than an illuminating analytic category. Conversely, neo-Marxists (Bettina Aptheker, Andre Gorz, Serge Mallet, Nicos Poulantzas), influenced by New Left social theory, have taken the opposing view that the intellectuals’ institutional incorporation effectively “proletarianizes” them, making them wage earners. The necessity for “teams” to pursue sophisticated scientific projects, the modern corporation’s demand for the “expertise” of a wide range of specialist consultants, and the existence of large bureaucratic research staffs alienate intellectuals from the fruits of their labor. They became radicalized, “Brain Workers.” Classical and recent elite theorists (Robert Michels, Alvin Gouldner) have held that intellectuals constitute a class in their own right, a “New Class.” In developing countries they often form the political elite; under advanced capitalism intellectuals become a “credentialed,” “professional” class deriving income and status from their “cultural capital” (technical and language skills). Finally, in his *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), the first influential discussion of intellectuals via the sociology of knowledge, Karl Mannheim characterized them famously as “a relatively classless stratum which is not too firmly situated in the social order.” Mannheim held that intellectuals constitute a unique, socially “rootless” class of their own whose spiritual preoccupations enable them to transcend ordinary, material class interests. Intellectuals emerge from various classes, and

19. On the optimistic “revolutionary socialism” briefly espoused by Orwell, Fyvel, Fred Warburg, and a few others associated with the Searchlight Books group, see Fyvel (182: 125-33).

their education, rather than their class origin, decisively shapes their development and unites them in political outlook. Their education makes it possible for them to place “ideals before interests,” in Martin Malia’s phrase, to see political issues sensitively and with an open mind (quoted in Brym, 1987: 200). Intellectuals thus *choose* their partisan affiliations; their class background is a secondary influence.

The case of Orwell and his contemporaries discloses how and where these theories fall short as heuristic tools for understanding the relationship between interwar politics and the British intellectual. Indeed the picture is much more complicated than the theoretical paradigms have allowed. The old Marxist notion of class origins as the lifelong determinant of political allegiance is obviously insufficient. Although Orwell spoke frequently about his “lower-upper-middle class” rearing, friends have pointed out that he exaggerated his poverty and that his middle-class birth was not markedly different from many other public school boys. Nevertheless, his course in the educational system and his subsequent occupational experience *were* very different, and these led him to adopt an “outsider” stance toward the intelligentsia at large: e.g., his early anti-Stalinism and brief active membership in the anti-war Independent Labour Party (1938-39) (Crick, 1982: 353-78).

Nor are intellectuals necessarily “embourgeoisified” — or radicalized — by government or official institutional employment. For many intellectuals in the 1930s who were formerly dislocated from English society, wartime service brought reintegration and a renewed feeling of usefulness, identity, and power. For Orwell, however, the war years first brightened and then clouded his socialist hopes, and he sought by 1943 to escape “integration” and London for independent work and greater privacy (e.g., his purchase in 1944-45 of a home on Jura in the Scottish Hebrides) (Crick, 1982: 465-66). The divergence of Orwell from the patterned responses of his generation makes it imperative to approach the multivariate relationships among class, education, occupation, and partisan affiliation in dynamic, concrete, and interpersonal terms, rather than simply according to mechanical, monocausal formulae: the conditions of political allegiances are not reducible to a single factor or invariable structural pattern.

Yet this does not mean that the intellectual constitutes a separate class or is socially unanchored, as the elite theorists and Mannheim have argued, respectively. Rather, as Brym notes, and as Orwell’s distinctive career exemplifies, attention must be paid to intellectuals’ *shifting* patterns of *rootedness*, to the dynamics of political affiliation and disaffiliation (1980: 13). The case of Orwell points up, in the first place, the significance of how *evolving* intellectual attachments to other mass agents (the British working class, the British war machine), together with “generational consciousness,” condition partisan affiliation. Intellectuals are not “relatively classless” and “rootless” but rather variously and complexly rooted in the spongy soil of social and historical relations. Their political behavior can therefore only be understood

by appreciating the institutional web and the stages of their complicated mobility pattern among different classes and groups, i.e., by scrutinizing the course of their class origins, education, *and* employment and career experience. As Brym, following Gramsci, argues, partisan allegiance is not monocausal but radically contingent:

intellectuals' partisan loyalties [are not] mere mechanical and static responses to their current class and other group locations. . . . In order to explain intellectuals' partisan affiliations one must trace their paths of social mobility, from their origins to their social destinations, as these are shaped by the capacity of classes and other groups to expand the institutional milieus through which they pass in the course of their careers. . . . [T]he determination of intellectuals' ideological outlooks is really a problem of multivariate causation. That is to say, social origins, school, and economic and political opportunities are independent causes of political allegiance, and one variable may reinforce or, at the other extreme, cancel out the effects of another. (1987: 206, 208)

Thus, unlike Orwell, British intellectuals in the 1930s were radicalized during or after their university years; their disenchantment with Communism late in the decade and absorption into the literary Establishment and the war bureaucracy produced political moderates. On the other hand, Orwell's Burma service, his "belated" bohemianism, and the Wigan Pier and Spain trips radicalized him and effectively "canceled out" the integrative potential of his BBC work. The political orientations and actions of intellectuals evolve according to their career mobility paths. No single general factor conditions or freezes their partisan affiliations.

Second, contrary to what Gouldner and Mannheim imply, the example of Orwell makes clear that "*the* intelligentsia" is not monolithic. Nor does education lead to uniform intellectual-political outlooks, as demonstrated by the postwar decline of the Left's dominance of intellectual life and the rise of strong conservative and neo-conservative intellectual movements throughout the West in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite our casual use of the word "intelligentsia" in the singular, intellectuals constitute a heterogeneous stratum whose members' diverse ideologies are linked to various mass institutional groups and classes (business, labor, working-class movements, etc.). Intellectuals do not constitute an ideological bloc, and even in the British thirties the degree and intensity of their radicalism was by no means uniform.

Third and finally, the frenzied embrace of Communism by numerous intellectuals throughout the West in the 1930s also problematizes Mannheim's thesis that intellectuals grandly "choose" their political allegiances, dispassionately and with reasoned calculation, as if immune to the historical pressures, acting upon lesser men and women. Intellectuals do *in part* choose their loyalties, as do other historical actors, but their choices are enabled and constrained by their historical situations. Their choices are neither fully conscious and "free" nor mechanical, static responses to their social structural locations. Intellectuals are neither simply "bureaucratic" nor "proletarianized" nor "unattached" — neither snugly integrated nor marginalized nor free-floating. Rather, they exhibit a complex range of involvements in social life. Moreover, their "commitment"

takes many forms (political, aesthetic, religious), represents diverse sorts of attachments (to government, institutions, social movements), and reflects various roles (as critic, expert, moralist, aesthete). Indeed the personal and group histories of intellectuals are embedded in social history: one must approach the study of their political allegiances in historical and social context, for intellectuals' ideas are developed in an engagement with events and thus can only be understood via an attempt to recover that engagement.²⁰

VI

To approach intellectuals' destinies in historical context not only illumines the intricate relations between social structure and intellectuals' patterns of mobility. Equally important, it also reminds us of the inseparability of sociology and history (Abrams, 1980; 1982; Bendix, 1984; Bonnell, 1980; Brym, 1978; 1980; Chirot, 1976; Hamilton, 1987; Jones, 1976; Mills, 1959; Scocpol, 1984). And it thereby suggests how the historical sociology of individuals can enrich political sociology generally. Or, to phrase it more provocatively, it points to the possibilities of a broadened conception of the sociology of deviance, whereby "deviance" might be approached as any variation which marks someone as distinctively individual.

From this standpoint the case of Orwell exemplifies what Philip Abrams calls "the historical sociology of moral careers" (1982: 298).²¹ In this light, Orwell's "deviant career" as a radical intellectual emerges as a history of self- and societal construction. It was not miraculously or accidentally exceptional, not a matter of adventitious random occurrences, but rather the outcome of what Abrams terms "the social organization of contingencies" (1982: 273). The decisive moments which led Orwell successively to Burma, Paris, London, Wigan, and Spain represent one man's partly willed, partly inherited, always negotiated passage to a possible but not prescribed identity, "a *sequence* of action and reaction,

20. Neglecting the historical dimension of political sociology not only blurs the process whereby radical movements form and fragment. It can also impose a false set of polarized categories on the past, which, if they persist, skew analyses of subsequent political configurations. And, as George Watson argues, the dissident politics of the 1930s has bred precisely such distortions. That single, aberrant decade of British radicalism has drawn a false line of demarcation between supporters of "Left" and "Right" which stretches into the 1980s. The very language of "spectrum" politics, imported from the continental (especially French) tradition of ideological politics, is historically inappropriate to the liberal, British political heritage. Indeed, the entry of the terminology "Left" and "Right" into the English political lexicon around 1930 invited the "reclassification" of figures from the Victorian age — who had not thought in terms of the sharply dichotomous, near-monolithic, party-line ideological taxonomies of Right and Left. Thus Dickens, Cobbett, and others soon became "writers well worth stealing" by Marxists and Tories alike. The irony is that Orwell's reputation, subject to repeated grave-robbing by intellectuals of all political stripes, has fallen victim since his death in 1950 to the very same oversimplifications from the 1930s which he so clearly saw through. See Watson (1977: 85-97) and Rodden (1989).

21. I am much indebted in this conclusion to Abram's excellent chapter in *Historical Sociology*, "The historical sociology of individuals: monsters and heroes: careers and contingencies" (1982: 267-80).

labelling and learning in the face of organized power and organized opportunity” (Abrams, 1982: 274). Abrams’s position is neither voluntarist nor determinist, but rather contextual:

What is exceptional about the life history of an exceptional individual is the location of that life in a particular historically organized milieu and the interactional patterning of the series of experiences through which individuation is then achieved — in fact, the meshing of life history and social history in a singular fate. Individual lives are indeed unique but their uniqueness . . . is not a matter of some elusively private personal factors but of the diversity of movement available to historically located individuals within historically located social worlds. . . . [W]hat sociology is ultimately about is the relation of the individual as an agent with purposes, expectations and motives to society as a constraining environment of institutions, values and norms — and this relationship is one which has its real existence not in some abstract world of concepts, theories and jargon but in the immediate world of history. . . . (1982: 297, 7-8)

Abrams’ invocation of historical process is no license to slip into plain historical description. Both the historian and sociologist are concerned with the relationship between personal experience and social organization. The historian’s focus on particularity and specificity should ground, not replace, the sociologist’s abstract models and categories of analysis, thereby investing social theory with the texture of concrete reality.²²

Informed by a case-based, concept-rich Weberian historical sociology, the political sociology of intellectuals might progress beyond description and moralizing, and emerge as the study of the identities, careers, and generational movements of intellectuals as products and makers of history.²³ It would then address the fluidity of social structure and the subtleties of historical process, while engaging in multivariate, comparative analysis in order to establish the elective affinities between individual consciousness and evolving social structures. In doing so it would exemplify how, in the broad sense, “All sociology worthy of the name is ‘historical sociology.’” For the “task and promise” of the sociological imagination is nothing less than to enable men and women “to become aware of historical structures and their own place within them” (Mills, 1959: 146, 7).

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22. For an excellent discussion of the potential of historical sociology, see the entire issue of *Social Science History* 11 (Spring 1987). See also Skocpol (1984). On the general topic of the resurgence of historical studies within sociology, see Hamilton (1987).

23. Reinhardt Bendix has pioneered such an approach in other sociological sub-fields. See Bendix (1984).

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