

# Ghetto of Illusion

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BOOKS REVIEWED:

Edward Shils, *Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.  
Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air:  
The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

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One April morning in Delhi, urban renewal came to the ghetto of magicians. At first, that day, all seemed normal: a tiny bald illusionist was driving knives through the neck of his apprentice; a conjurer was persuading large woolen balls to drop from the armpits of strangers. Then the vans and bulldozers came. Clean-cut youths with foreign educations blared evacuation orders through loudspeakers. The ghetto was an eyesore; the civic beautification program of the Sanjay Youth Central Committee required that slums be cleared and their inhabitants sterilized. By the end of the day, the ghetto was flattened. But some of the magicians escaped. The next day a new ghetto was reported, hard by the railroad station. Bulldozers, vasectomists, and troopers were rushed to the scene; they found nothing. In following days the ghetto reappeared in business districts, suburbs, amid the hovels of the poor and the formal gardens of the

rich. Within a week the magicians' moving slum had become a fact known to all the inhabitants of the city, but the wreckers never found it. The civic beautification program fell victim to escaped illusionists.

This fable appears in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*—a novel that brilliantly uses the techniques of literary modernism to explore the dilemmas of modernization. The fable of the magicians' ghetto dramatizes a Hobson's choice between tradition and modernity, between the filth, famine, ignorance, and superstition endemic in many developing countries and the autocratic methods of modernizing elites who seek to impose sanitized uniformity on entire populations. The fable also suggests the limits of modernization: the impossibility of rubbing out magical thinking with bureaucratic rationality, the obstinate refusal of ordinary folk to be emancipated or improved by their forward looking leaders. The moving slum of the magicians epitomizes the intractability of tradition in a modernizing world.

Loose and baggy words such as modernization and modernism pose a host of problems. Yet they are an indispensable shorthand for the vast and complex process that has overtaken most parts of the world during the last several centuries: the shift from the old morality imposed by patriarch or priest to a new internalized morality of self-control; the replacement of supernatural by secular standards of value and meaning; the drive for systematic development of the physical environment as well as the inner landscape of the self. Contrary to the assumptions of many American social scientists, modernization has not been a universal or inevitable process. Beginning in the capitalist West, modernization has been shaped by particular cultures and economic systems in many specific ways. And it has rarely been an unambiguous liberation. Freeing individuals from old constraints, entrepreneurial and bureaucratic elites have sought to re-systemize the self to meet the needs of the Nation, the Party, or the Firm. And they have provoked popular resistance in the name of indigenous customs and traditions—as Rushdie's modernist fable suggests.

Modernism is an even looser and baggier term than modernization. In general it has been used to describe the literary and visual arts that have experimented with form and style in a self-conscious effort to confront the impact of modernization. The modernist label is more valuable to literary critics than to historians; it tells us nothing about an artist's attitudes toward the version of modernity he experiences. He might be enthusiastic, hostile, or ambivalent, and still be a modernist. Literary critics, preoccupied by formal innovation and by a handful of modernist texts, have neglected to explore the full historical significance of the culture of modernism. A historical exploration of modernism might illuminate the concrete actuality of that abstract modernization process.

Certainly Rushdie's fable suggests historical applications beyond its Indian setting. It has obvious relevance to problems encountered by modernizing elites

throughout the Third World. In Iran, for example, where the cant of economic development concealed the Shah's brutal exercise of power and the preservation of Western influence, the program of progress provoked a fierce Islamic revival. Western journalists tended to view this reaction as an effort to "turn the clock back 1300 years"—as the *New York Times* put it. In actuality it was a revolt against forcible modernization, a revolt energized by a restorationist ideology with deep roots in local traditions. The Islamic revival may have many unlovely aspects under Western eyes, but to dismiss it as a return to barbarism is to fall into the arrogance of the Sanjay Youth Central Committee.

The story of the magicians' ghetto has a less obvious but equally important relation to the contemporary United States. In this quintessentially bourgeois society, tradition in the Old World sense has played a comparatively limited role. Yet in recent years, historians have made clear that possessive individualism—the ideology of capitalist-style modernization—was long hemmed in by indigenous and imported moral traditions. The modern resystemizing of selfhood was delayed, here as elsewhere, by the individual's commitment to family, community, and faith. But during the last hundred years, particularly among the more educated and affluent, these older loyalties became attenuated; the modern ideal of self-development became an end in itself. A cult of personal growth has come to parallel the national creed of economic growth and has eased accommodation to a secular, corporate society, geared to routine work and consumption-oriented leisure.

By now it should be clear, though, that this accommodation has been as messy and incomplete as the civic beautification program in Delhi. We are in the midst of a widespread revulsion against the effects of modernization. The vision of a society composed of free-floating selves, liberated from oppressive traditions and organizing their lives for maximum pleasure and productivity, has fallen on hard times. Discontent with progressive platitudes cuts across the political spectrum, energizing the Moral Majority, splitting the Democratic party leadership from the more traditional rank and file, provoking neighborhoods' opposition to shopping malls and other "improvements," promoting politicians' obeisance to "traditional values."

It is important to point out that this resurgence of antimodern sentiment is not just a blue collar phenomenon. A sizeable segment of the college educated, realizing the emptiness of the personal growth agenda, has resisted incorporation into the dominant culture. Struggling to preserve larger commitments outside the self, they have also preserved what was strongest in the 1960s counter-culture: the antimodern critique of rapacious economic growth and the bureaucratic warfare state. Despite superficial differences in cultural styles, skepticism about capitalist progress unites a wide variety of Americans.

The muddled, contradictory character of antimodern sentiments is nowhere more evident than in contemporary religious ferment. Despite the secularization of mainstream culture, yearnings for transcendence persist. The resurgence of evangelical Christianity, the reappearance of a religious peace movement, the widespread preoccupation with magic and the occult, the proliferation of sects and cults—all make clear that the confident hopes of the Enlightenment have not been fulfilled: religion has not been cast aside like an old suit of clothes that no longer fits. American culture, like so many others, is pervaded by restorationist ideologies and traditional ways of thinking.

Makers of conventional wisdom, whatever their ideological persuasion, have addressed this confusion by reducing it to a familiar formula: a conservative mood, a resurgence of God-given authority for parents and churches, a New Right conspiracy to promote “apple-pie authoritarianism.” Amid journalistic clichés, it is good to see two books that aim to take a larger view of the cultural dilemmas created by modernization. Both Edward Shils’s *Tradition* and Marshall Berman’s *All This is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* address that subject; otherwise they are about as different as two books can be. *Tradition* is a mature work, gray in style but formidable in range and power; despite its enormous subject it is carefully argued and hedged with qualifications. *All That Is Solid* is an energetic, impressionistic tract, filled with sweeping assertions and breathtaking simplifications. Of the two, Shils’s book is far more worth pondering.

This is somewhat surprising, since from time to time Shils has made some extraordinarily superficial arguments about American culture. His earlier sociological work showed the defects of the functionalist tradition: a neglect of class conflict, an assumption that modern industrial society was a smoothly integrated organism. More recently, he has joined the fashionable effort to trace all current problems of American universities to the misplaced egalitarianism of the 1960s. Some of the same neoconservative myopia mars *Tradition*. Shils tends to see modernism as a monolithic front in behalf of personal liberation and to exaggerate the role of intellectuals in promoting the modernization of culture. This disembodied history-of-ideas approach recalls similar arguments made by Daniel Bell (*The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*) and Robert Nisbet (*The Twilight of Authority*). All tend to divorce culture from social structure and to focus on a few emancipationist manifestoes as the essence of modernism.

But despite these flaws, and despite lapses into banality and sociologese, *Tradition* is a wise book. With much patience and many examples, Shils argues that traditional patterns of thought and behavior are inescapable and indispensable, not only in religion and family life but in scientific research, socialist thought, even avant-garde art. Shils recognizes that his respect for tradition

marks him as a maverick. Despite the current chatter about a return to traditional values, progressive assumptions are embedded in American habits of mind and speech. We have long been encouraged to assume that institutions and values frequently become out of date, that irresistible revolutions occur in everything from sexual behavior to cybernetics, that constant change is irreversible and redemptive. Behind this progressivism, Shils observes, is the modern faith that human beings are "self-determining moral entities, free from original sin and the burden of inheritance." This belief in individual autonomy has sparked resistance to oppression but has also led us to ignore the grip of the past. In Shil's view we are afflicted by cultural amnesia. His willingness to reassert the claims of memory makes *Tradition* often fascinating and sometimes profound.

Part of Shil's achievement is that he deftly explicates the meanings of some key words in the progressive vocabulary. "Originality," for example, in its earliest usage referred to original sin; only after the seventeenth century did it begin to become an honorific term signifying "creative" departure from tradition. And "create" is another key word; until about the same time it had been applied to God alone. Modern evaluations of artistic achievement require that the artist implicitly be deified as a creator who owed nothing to his ancestors—an absurd notion, but consistent with the modern faith in individual autonomy. Shil devotes similar attention to the word "natural," so often used to justify hostility to traditional moral constraints. "The belief that restraint of impulse is bad and gratification good" has become part of the antitraditional tradition of the Enlightenment. It is not a natural phenomenon but a social construction.

Shil's sensitivity to the social construction of reality is his strongest analytical trait. He is keenly aware of the resources people draw on to give meaning to their lives: the dense textures of family life, the innumerable particularities of communal association, the mysterious bond between generations, the sense of a sacred cosmic order. And he is properly suspicious of ideologies that seek to tear this tissue of social relations in the name of self-expression or spontaneity. Parents who refuse to impose their beliefs on their children do them a profound disservice, Shil argues; the absence of family tradition impoverishes future generations. "A family which incorporates into itself little of the past . . . deadens its offspring; it leaves them with a scanty set of categories and beliefs which are not easily extended or elaborated." As Shil observes, this absence of belief is hardly remedied by compulsory public schooling. The result is an increasing number of young people incapable of moral indignation or commitment.

This sort of argument is the stock-in-trade of the conservative curmudgeon, eternally railing against the misbehavior of the young. But Shil's conservatism is of a higher order. He is no uncritical traditionalist; he realizes that traditions can be stifling as well as sustaining, and that the modern drive for personal au-

tonomy has brought enormous gains. Yet he also recognizes a central irony: the success of the progressives' program has depended on the survival of the traditions they scorned. "Living on a soil of substantive traditionality, the ideas of the Enlightenment advanced without undoing themselves," Shils writes. Moral and cultural traditions, by softening the abrasive effects of individualism, made possible real gains in freedom. Untrammelled individualism has always been unendurable, though many progressives have yet to make that discovery.

Shils's own faith in progress is tempered by observation and experience. Author of *The Intellectual Between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Situation*, he knows the secret of Rushdie's ghetto. He knows that programs of modernization have often run afoul of the aspirations of ordinary people, concealing new forms of chaos with a veil of technical rationality. And he is willing to assert: "the fact that a practice or belief has persisted for an extended period of time is an argument for its retention." There may be more powerful arguments against its retention, but the crucial point is that traditions exist because they serve human needs. They do not automatically deserve contempt. The only reason these statements should seem startling is that our dominant culture is still intoxicated with change. Shils is sober.

**T**o move from Shils to Berman is to leave the dry air of the classroom lecture for the more humid atmosphere of the encounter group. Breathless and upbeat in tone, *All That Is Solid* surveys some classic modernist texts to illuminate "the experience of modernity." Berman begins by presenting Goethe's *Faust* as a "tragedy of development" in which Faust's longings for self-development lead him to "new frontiers" of personal and economic growth—but at a fearful cost to such people as Faust's lover Gretchen and the old couple Philomen and Baucis who are "in the way" of his mammoth construction project. Berman then analyzes the section of the *Communist Manifesto* that describes the melting of "all fixed fast-frozen relationships" in the bourgeois epoch. Again emphasizing the innovative self-destruction promoted by capitalist development, Berman notes that capitalists themselves have usually failed to recognize the destructive dynamism of their own economic system. Baudelaire is then ushered in to show how the modern city street creates a curious mix of anonymity and intimacy. His testimony is followed by that of Russian writers from Pushkin to Dostoevsky to Mandelstam, all of whom are alleged to represent "the modernism of underdevelopment," the blend of envy, admiration, and hostility that "backward" peoples feel toward modernizing, cosmopolitan cultures. Finally Berman discusses "modernism in New York" by describing the modernizer Robert Moses's destruction of older urban neighborhoods, then celebrating the efforts of recent modernists (Jim Dine, Twyla Tharp, Claes Oldenburg) to come to terms with the

demonic "expressway world" Moses created.

This brisk tour contains some interesting analyses of modernist texts (particularly of the *Communist Manifesto*), but fails as an exploration of modernity. Berman's aims are laudable but unfulfilled. He wants to link modernism and modernization, but he rarely strays beyond a half dozen texts. He wants to revive a dialectical approach to modernity, to grasp modern tragedies as well as modern triumphs, but his dialectic remains little more than a rhetorical device. Social and personal devastation are acknowledged but always assimilated to his abiding faith in growth. He never addresses the insoluble conflicts between modern skepticism and ancient faith, between modernizing elites and subject populations, between progressive children and traditional parents. Instead, what really fascinates him is "an emerging economy of self-development that can transform even the most shattering human loss into a source of psychic gain and growth." This is *Creative Divorce* on a cosmic scale. Substituting slogans for analysis, assertions for evidence, *All That Is Solid* is worth very little as cultural history. But it is an interesting symptom of the uncritical progressivism still current on the left.

Like most progressives, Berman has no interest in the past except as a foil for the exciting present and future. He appears to believe that modern urban society has a special claim not only to tragedy and conflict but also to "glamorous spectacle" and artistic achievement. "The twentieth century may well be the most brilliantly creative in the history of the world," he announces, recalling Richard Nixon's confidence that he had just lived through "the most important week in the history of the world since the creation." When professors (or politicians) pontificate about "the history of the world," it is time to raise a skeptical eyebrow. The skepticism only deepens when Berman endorses Goethe's (alleged) view of traditional European society: "all it has to offer is dead weight pressing down on its subjects, crushing their bodies and strangling their souls." Berman cannot imagine anything but a "closed, repressive, vicious Gothic world" before the coming of modern Enlightenment. Even a nodding acquaintance with social history would have presented him with a very different picture. During the past twenty years, E.P. Thompson, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Jacques Le Goff, and legions of other social historians have made clear that traditional societies in Europe were far more complex and fluid than had previously been supposed. And the people of those societies were not the rutting brutes of progressive fantasy: they formed erotic unions, raised children in joy and sorrow, feared loneliness and loss and death. The point is not to romanticize them but simply to grant them their full humanity. They experienced all the conflict that human flesh is heir to; their lives could be as baffling as our own.

Yet the people of traditional societies had symbolic resources which are

now depleted in many parts of the world. For many, religion made life understandable and tolerable. Here too it is possible to sentimentalize: many did not believe, or believed halfheartedly, or were browbeaten into belief. Religion could tyrannize as well as console. But the astonishing thing about Berman's book is that it contains almost no discussion of religion beyond a few predictable shuddering at the tyranny of priestcraft. Only once does he hint at the complexity of the subject: when he mentions the Russian priest George Gapon's "naïve and intensely religious radicalism—far more typical of the Russian masses, Lenin said later, than his own Marxism." Somehow (we are left to wonder how) religion could promote radicalism as well as reaction. Despite his ambition to grasp the experience of modernity, Berman ignores the tangled and essential relation between religion and modernization.

Berman's ignorance of history is equally apparent in his treatment of the rise of industrial capitalism. His chapter on *Faust* traces early industrialization in Europe to "the romantic quest for self-development." This is a literary conceit, not a historical argument. It does not seem to occur to Berman that the coming of industrial capitalism involved the exercise of power relations, that some classes of people sought to meet their needs and interests by dominating other classes in novel ways, and that the dominant classes promoted a modern ethic of self-control that often sanctioned far less spontaneity than the traditional ethos he scorns. For him, modernization in any form has always been rooted in ordinary people's desire for "more abundant life."

From this perspective Berman can dismiss the antimodern resentments of Third World leaders. "What they are projecting onto aliens, and prohibiting as 'Western decadence,' is in fact their own people's energies and desires and critical spirit." In spite of his understandable affection for metropolitan craziness and diversity, Berman's cosmopolitan pretensions mask a deeply provincial contempt for cultures outside his own secular, urban experience. From his view, anti-Western restorationist ideologies have simply resulted from despots' ability to keep their followers in the dim light of false consciousness. The same condescension pervades progressive commentary on American evangelicals—all those dolts duped by TV preachers. If, as Berman assumes, the modern worship of "ever-renewed development" is an upthrust from below, then antimodern tendencies must be antidemocratic.

Berman's conviction that modernization has democratic roots leads him to some extraordinary assertions about contemporary scientific policy. "If scientific and technological cadres have accumulated vast powers in modern society, it is only because their visions and values have echoed, amplified, and realized our own," he writes. "They have only created means to fulfill ends embraced by the modern public: open-ended development of self and society, incessant trans-

formation of the whole inner and outer world." Of course, the modern public has little or no influence on scientific and technological cadres. Scientific policy, like so much else in the bureaucratic corporate state, is primarily shaped by people with wealth and power. Overlooking the obvious fact of elite domination, Berman insists that "in the process of development, we are all experts." So be reassured. The nuclear arms race is really an exercise in democracy.

Berman's naïveté is the *reductio ad absurdum* of progressives' common assumption that the people are on their side. The problem with this view is that ordinary folk have usually been the most tenaciously traditional element in society—yet their cultural conservatism has often promoted political and economic radicalism. Culturally conservative radicals have preserved moral resources for challenging possessive individualism and the unjust distribution of power. Looking backward to traditional values of self-sacrifice and mutual obligation, they have looked forward to a more just society. Recall the "intensely religious radicalism" of Gapon's peasants, the communal and religious roots of American radical movements from the Populist Party to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Contemporary antimodern sentiments constitute an untapped reservoir of resistance. Instead of fretting about apple-pie authoritarianism, would-be democrats might address the concerns of those who (like Philomen and Baucis in *Faust*) are in the way of modernization.

Berman, like many other progressives, seems curiously isolated from the concerns of ordinary people. He dismisses Philomen and Baucis, along with their "distinctively Christian virtues," as obsolete. He fills his book with lofty pronouncements about what modern people have done and must do. He asserts that "the vast majority of modern men and women do not want to resist modernity: they feel its excitement and believe in its promise, even when they find themselves in its way." (The obvious question is: how does he know?) Coercive language creeps continually into his prose, as when he mentions "the dialectic [of ceaseless creation and destruction] that modern men must embrace in order to move and live." Obsessed with the "adventure" of self-development, Berman seems unaware that most modern work is not a matter of Faustian dynamism but of settled routine, interrupted by the irrationalities of the business cycle. Assuming they are lucky enough to find work, the file clerks and keypunch operators who staff our corporate system can hardly be expected to embrace their labor as an adventure.

Unable to contemplate the everyday experience of modernity, Berman also seems insensitive to the modernist culture he claims to know so well. He grossly oversimplifies modernism as "the realism of our time"—a reflection of the chaos, the novelty, the cravings for change that characterize modern times. There is some truth in this view, but it overlooks the dialectics within modernist culture:

the desire for stillness amid manic modern striving; the longing for a sacred center of meaning even as one accepts the knowledge which erodes it. Many of the greatest modernists simply cannot fit inside Berman's framework: Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, Bruno Schulz, Henry Adams, Mark Rothko—to mention only a few, all of whom rejected progressive pieties and chose to live with conflict rather than evade it. Berman commits the unpardonable modernist sin by dissolving insoluble conflict in the spurious harmony of growth. His highest hope is to "get back in touch with a remarkably rich and vibrant modernist culture . . . that contains vast resources of strength and health, if only we come to know it as our own." In other words, modernism can be a kind of tonic if only one can learn to like the taste.

**F**or the victims of modernization, under either corporate capitalism or state socialism, the therapeutic idiom does nothing to address the widespread sense of powerlessness, disintegration, and drift. It cannot revitalize participation in public life or restore a larger sense of meaning and purpose to people's lives. Even Berman, with all his hymns to the autonomy of the modern individual, glimpses the underlying sense of helplessness when he complains that "we have mostly lost the art of putting ourselves in the picture, of recognizing ourselves as participants and protagonists in the art and thought of our time." Leaving aside the problem of who "we" are, the question remains: why has a numbing sense of passivity become a chronic cultural malady of the twentieth century?

To begin to answer the question, it is important to realize that the relation between modernism and modernization is more complex than either Berman or Shils suggests. Both treat the modern cult of self-development as the creation of a handful of artists and intellectuals whose lust for intense experience was fundamentally at odds with bourgeois restraint. This view represents the first, heroic stage in the historiography of modernism: an epic of Bohemian manifestoes and success by scandal. A firmer historical grounding for modernism might cast stronger light on current cultural predicaments.

Struck by superficial antinomies between Bohemian and bourgeois, historians of modernism have failed to see that the avant-garde cult of self-development through intense experience was not the exclusive property of a coterie. It was the most extreme expression of a cultural tendency pervading the Western bourgeoisie during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the United States, as an entrepreneurial, Protestant culture became more secular and bureaucratic, longings for emotional spontaneity and instinctual vitality began to

pervade the middle and upper classes—those who felt their lives had become arid, safe, devoid of both danger and ecstasy. By the early twentieth century, the gospel of self-development was heard in suburban Sunday schools as well as in Greenwich Village.

Yearnings for more abundant life were not incompatible with bureaucratic imperatives of efficiency, as Berman and Shils assume; on the contrary those rebellious desires were assimilated by social scientists, teachers, advertising executives—the professional and managerial elites who sanitized and popularized the ethic of self-development. Far from challenging bureaucratic rationality, the new ethic promoted a rationalization of the inner life, an anxious, calculating hedonism well suited to the daily rhythms of routine and release under corporate capitalism. Promising self-development on the installment plan, managerial elites became the enemies of the traditional values many still claim to defend.

Besides examining the institutional base of this popularized modernism, it is also crucial to understand that (contrary to Shils) the modernist longing for more life was not merely a lust for the experience of sensation unencumbered by traditional restraints. Modernism was not only a reaction against tradition but a recoil from the effects of modernity itself—particularly the impact of secularization. It was not traditional Christianity but the complacent bourgeois cult of material progress that outraged Dostoevsky, William James, and a host of anonymous souls who shared the modernist passion for intense experience. At its most profound that passion can only be called religious. All the sanctions for struggle and self-sacrifice, for a life of transcendent significance, seemed to have evaporated in what Nietzsche called the weightless atmosphere of late nineteenth-century modern culture. For many, the tragic depths of life seemed shallower without the old supernatural cosmology.

It is no wonder, then, that so many modernists have sought a sacred stillness in the midst of modern chaos, no wonder they have revalued primitive art and ritual, myth and magic. Berman dismisses this antimodern modernism as a sign of bad faith; in actuality it is the one modernist strain that has resisted full incorporation into the dominant capitalist culture. In contrast, the modernism that rejects all meaning and merely gropes for formal novelty is easily made into a commodity by salesmen of chic. Nihilism sells.

Antimodern modernists, however entangled with doubt, have rejected nihilism. Their work is far too complex, various, and elusive to be plundered for “lessons.” Nevertheless it implies a powerful critique of Enlightenment progressivism which might help to ventilate stale thinking about contemporary politics and culture. Consider the common tendency of modern bureaucratic thinking to focus on immediate techniques rather than ultimate values and purposes. Berman celebrates this debased pragmatism (without irony) as the liberating

message of Mephistopheles: "Accept destructiveness as part of your share in divine creativity, and you can throw off your guilt and act freely. No longer should you be inhibited by the moral question *Should* I do it? Out on the open road to self-development, the only vital question is *How* to do it?" Melville, who knew better, created his own embodiment of Faustian pragmatism in Captain Ahab. "All my means are sane," says Ahab, "my ends alone are mad."

Melville's laconic comment on the madness of amoral pragmatism is hardly programmatic, but it does suggest a liberating critique of modern cant. The same is true of the Polish novelist Bruno Schulz, who posed the fantastic riches of his childhood haunts, the cinnamon shops, against the tawdry "pseudo-American" modernity of *The Street of Crocodiles*. And in the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Milan Kundera, antimodern modernism becomes pointedly political. Whatever their differences, both writers have sensitively explored the tendency of modernizing elites to erase cultural memory, severing human ties to the past in an effort to re-systemize the unattached self. As one of Kundera's characters observes, "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

Kundera has been celebrated in this country as an anticommunist, but his critique also applies to the American version of modernity. Remembering can be a subversive activity under capitalism as well. Democratic critics of the corporate system are wary of nostalgia because it seems faddish and easily commodified. But memory is not reducible to nostalgia. As Shils observes, the past can effectively be used to judge the present. That is one function of tradition, in cultural criticism and everyday life. Many ordinary people have continued to enact the antimodern modernist critique of Enlightened progressivism: they have remembered. The current preoccupation with "traditional values," despite its entanglement with militarism and its distortion by the media, is at bottom part of the struggle of memory against forgetting.

If would-be democrats listened more carefully to the popular *cri de coeur* against modernization, they might realize that political egalitarianism could still draw strength from cultural conservatism. It is in the interests of managerial elites that people suffer cultural amnesia, that they lack continuities with the past and loyalties outside the self, that their only abiding commitment is to their own personal growth. The cult of self-development helps to satisfy the corporate need for free floating units of "human capital." The point is not to abandon the liberal concern for individual freedom and minority rights, or to subsume it in some sentimental vision of preindustrial community, but to acknowledge that the modern faith in perfect autonomy is destructive and illusory. "The Enlightenment was a very great accomplishment and it has become part of our tradition," Shils writes. "It would be an exercise in the discriminating appreciation of traditions

to discern what is living and what is dead in the tradition of the Enlightenment.” The task is delicate and urgent. A failure to reconsider progressive platitudes might well mean that democratic thinkers would remain on the margins of public discourse, talking largely to each other, trapped in their own ghetto of illusion.