

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Democracy Realized: The Progressive Alternative*

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MICHAEL RUSTIN

A PRACTICAL UTOPIANISM?

'A Work in Constructive Theory' was the subtitle of Roberto Mangabeira Unger's massive three-volume treatise, *Politics*, first published in 1987. It offered not only a theory of social organization in the first volume, *Social Theory: Its Situation and Task*, and a sweeping historical panorama that embraced agrarian empires from the Han to the Mughals, in the third, *Plasticity into Power*. It also proposed—in the 680-page centrepiece, *False Necessity*—an alternative account of the rise of the main institutional features of mass society, a theory of subjectivity and a programme for radical political, economic and micro-cultural change. This was, by any standards, a substantial body of work. The scion of a famous political family from Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia, Unger has taught critical legal theory at Harvard Law School since 1979. His contributions in this field are closely connected to his social theory and political prognostications. His 1986 *The Critical Legal Studies Movement*—a succinct text of only 128 pages—anticipates to a striking extent many of the themes and arguments of *Politics*.

Grand projects such as Unger's are always vulnerable to historical events. Appearing at a time when a third of the world was governed by Communist regimes, the *Politics* trilogy aimed to formulate a theory and programme of radical social change that would be an alternative both to mass-industrial capitalism and to state-socialist and social-democratic models. After the end of the Cold War, and with the neoliberal model now in crisis in his native Latin America, how has Unger's thought weathered the upheavals of the past decades? *Democracy Realized*, published in 1998 and recently reissued, opens with a strikingly optimistic appeal for 'alternative institutional forms

of economic, social and political pluralism'—accompanied by a sober recognition that:

Everywhere in the world, there is today an experience of exhaustion and perplexity in the formulation of credible alternatives to the neoliberal programme and to its defining belief in convergence toward a single system of democratic and market institutions. Having abandoned statist commitments and witnessed the collapse of communist regimes, progressives look in vain for a direction more affirmative than the rearguard defence of social democracy.

Even in the United States, the world's hegemonic power and richest nation, 'ordinary working citizens are likely to feel themselves angry outsiders, part of a fragmented and marginalized majority, powerless to reshape the collective basis of the collective problems they face'. At the same time, the American political intelligentsia derides large-scale projects of institutional reform and popular political mobilization as romantic and impractical, insisting instead upon technical policy analysis and 'problem-solving by experts'. Yet, Unger argues,

This programmatically empty and de-energized politics fails to solve the practical problems for whose sake it renounced larger ambitions. It . . . allows itself to degenerate into short-term and episodic factional deals, struck against a background of institutions and assumptions that remain unchallenged and even unseen.

Instead, the most apparent grounds for hope lie in the 'vigorous underground experimentalism' that is making itself felt in new working practices and educational methods, where 'co-operation and competition combine' and 'permanent innovation becomes the touchstone of success'. At present, this imaginative boundary-pushing within the miniaturized worlds of firm or school ends up hitting the 'limits imposed by the untransformed public world'. Nevertheless, for Unger such processes are the seedbed for a new political practice: 'democratic experimentalism', the core idea of *Democracy Realized*, and defined here as a 'motivated, sustained and cumulative tinkering with the arrangements of society'.

The book's structure is as ambitious and unconventional as Unger's earlier works, if on a smaller (300-page) scale. Proposals for the transformation of the productive process in the advanced capitalist economies are followed by strategic agendas for three major countries in the developing and post-Communist world (Russia, China, Brazil); a thorough-going programmatic 'alternative to neoliberalism', ranging from tax and pension reforms and emancipatory schooling to new kinds of investment and productive practice; and finally, a Manifesto, summarizing these proposals in thirteen major theses. Responding in part to criticisms—some made in the pages of this

journal: see Perry Anderson's 1989 essay, 'Roberto Unger and the Politics of Empowerment', NLR 1/173—of the abstractness, or 'dream-like' quality of his work, Unger here makes a sustained and vigorous attempt to give his ideas direct political effect. The concept of democratic experimentalism is posited upon an overlap between the conditions necessary for 'practical progress'—that is, for the economic growth which 'lifts from human life the burden of drudgery and infirmity. We cannot be free when we are weak'—and those necessary for individual emancipation. Both material and subjective forms of progress, it is argued, depend on the capacity to transform social effort into a process of 'collective learning', undeterred by deference towards any pre-established social divisions or roles; a Freire-esque formulation which draws on themes that have long been central to Unger's work.

A particular feature of *Democracy Realized* is its combination of core and periphery agendas. It proceeds via a discussion of the economic and social 'vanguards' and 'rearguards' in the current world division of labour, which clearly draws on the Brazilian experience of polarization between a highly unionized, minoritarian industrial proletariat and a far larger, informal working-class sector, yet remains universal in its application. The question posed is whether the defence of group interests here must necessarily remain 'conservative and exclusive', preserving established privilege; or whether it could become what Unger calls 'transformative and solidaristic'—unionized workers finding common cause with casual labourers in supporting schemes for decentralized access to venture capital, for example.

Unger here opposes his progressive alternative not just to neoliberal orthodoxy but to Keynesian welfarist doctrines and statist developmentalism. Import substitution and the creation of a protected industrial sector have served only to divide the working population between a privileged minority and an excluded majority. Attempts to sustain this economy by government spending have inevitably resulted in inflationary crises and, eventually, catastrophic exposure to market-led restructuring. To avoid these cyclical outcomes, Unger recommends a 'productivist' strategy that would change the balance between the innovative, capital- and skill-rich, vanguard segments of the economy, and its routine, low-skill, subordinate rearguard branches. New capital-allocating agencies, in themselves part of a democratization of property rights, should invest in vanguard forms of production in order to expand the sphere of fulfilling and creative work, in contrast to the routinized and authoritarian conditions of rearguard labour.

The case for democratic productivism is an interesting one; it was pre-figured in miniature in the Greater London Council's alternative to 'passive welfarism' in the late 1970s. In the context of Latin America, the productivist argument makes sense as a response to the specific weakness of economies that have hitherto been dominated by 'peripheral Fordism' and the export

of raw materials, and have lacked the high-tech, high-skill components of metropolitan centres of production. Unger advocates increased levels of savings and investment, and—following the example of Japan and the East Asian tigers—the creation of ‘leading sectors’ of the economy, as a way of escaping from dependency. In the us context, by contrast, the productivist strategy is aimed not at increased productivity but rather towards the goals of social equality and democratization of the labour process.

Unger describes the theses of *Democracy Realized* as compatible with the ‘family of views’ he explored in his earlier work. What were their determining features? *False Necessity*, the keystone of the *Politics* trilogy, sought to construct a radical alternative to two major ideological adversaries: ‘positivist, empiricist or conventional social science’, and Marxism. The first was most critically represented as the discipline of neo-classical economics, but Unger also attacked positivist social science more generally, for seeing ‘social life as an interminable series of episodes of interest-accommodation and problem-solving’. It denied the contrast between the shaping context and the shaped routine, ‘weakening our ability to see a whole institutional and imaginative ordering of social life as something connected, distinctive and replaceable’.

But it was the second adversary, Marxism—which, unlike social-science orthodoxy, shared Unger’s commitment to a transformation of the ruling order—that was the principal object of his critique of ‘necessitarian’ social theory, the ‘false necessity’ of his title. Unger argued against deep-structure theories that stressed the determining effects of underlying frameworks or social forces. He rejected the idea of indivisible, repeatable types of social organization, realized historically ‘on the basis of law-like tendencies and deep-seated economic, organizational or social constraints.’ He denied that such laws could be valid, that there was ‘a finite list of possible types of organization or a small number of trajectories of social evolution’, necessary ‘stages of development’, or particular class formations defined by their relation to the means of production. Where positivist social science had been condemned for making too little of social constraints, deep-structure theory was criticized for making too much of them. One result of this was to see political agency as a transformative force *created* by social and political action: Unger holds that a political party or movement constructs its following, rather than functioning as its expression or reflection. As he had already observed in *The Critical Legal Studies Movement*, his own counter-programme ‘seems to require an extreme and almost paradoxical voluntarism’; but this was justified on the grounds that it only ‘takes the preconceptions of liberal legal and political theory seriously and pushes them to their conclusion’.

The Marxist modes of thought rejected here are characterized in rather general terms within the main text of *False Necessity*. Most of Unger’s detailed

argument with these positions is consigned to an appendix of bibliographical notes. Here he acknowledges that a debate with 'necessitarianism' has taken place within the Marxist tradition, for instance in the polemic between Edward Thompson and Louis Althusser; but argues that the outcomes of this debate resolved none of the innate problems. Since these and other efforts at revision have failed, it is time to construct a new theoretical model. This decision appears somewhat over-determined, since it is not clear that what he brings off could not have been achieved as a variant of, or in dialogue with, Marxist ways of thinking just as well as by their rejection. There seems something recognizably postmodern in Unger's critique of necessitarian models—grand narratives, in another terminology—as well as in his 'extreme and paradoxical' voluntarism. Could this insistence on historical contingency, on the role of action and will in political development, owe something to Unger's own Latin American formation, as it has done perhaps in the work of Ernesto Laclau (Argentinian by origin) or, in a different context, that of Nicos Mouzelis, from Greece? In societies where the powers of state, junta and ideology (e.g. populism) might seem to have trumped the evolving hegemony of social classes, deterministic historical models may appear irrelevant—as for the Bolsheviks in 1917, when it came to the point.

Indeed, Unger's work brings to mind another substantial tradition of social science, distinct from and antagonistic to Marxism: academic sociology. As Göran Therborn argued in his 1976 *Science, Class and Society*, the modern founders of sociology deliberately set out to create a third path of scientific explanation, critique and reform between the individualism of economics and empiricist philosophy, and Marxist collectivism and revolutionism. This was most clearly manifest in Weber's work, which sought to revise Marx's theories of the origins of capitalism, class and state. But the commitment of the emergent discipline to the primacy of 'the social' (against the economic and the psychological), and of 'social solidarity' (against the ubiquity of conflict), revealed its ambition to correct the destabilizing tendencies within capitalism by means of scientifically informed understanding, put at the disposal of public bureaucracies. Close links were established at various points between academic sociology and social-democratic policies—in the construction of the British and Swedish welfare states, for example, and the New Deal in the United States.

Unger's opposition to deep-structure theories may be seen as analogous to the rejection of 'general theories' in favour of 'theories of the middle range', of the kind promulgated by Robert Merton and earlier developed in Weber's work. Unger rejects the idea that capitalism is a unitary phenomenon, a mode of production with systemic consequences for different levels of the social order and its own laws of development. Instead, he points to its

plasticity and historical variations—contrasting East Asian, North American and European forms.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to generate a unifying description of the contemporary social order, as Unger does, without deploying generalizing concepts of some kind. Where do these come from in his work? Weber argued that sociological explanations begin with problems that are based on the values of those who investigate them. Once a problem has been formulated, however, analysis must proceed on an objective basis, seeking to establish the truth regardless of its implications for the moral position that defined the problem in the first instance. This seems to be the essence of Unger's procedure. The shaping problem of his work—flowing from his conception of human potential—is that the subordination of individuals to social roles and institutions ('entrenchment') leads to the denial of their autonomy and choice. This conception has affinities with the Marxist idea of reification and, as Anderson has pointed out, with the 'practico-inert' of Sartre, whom Unger acknowledges as a philosophical influence. The social transformation that he seeks—the essence of his radical vision—is from a society in which such structures are fixed and permanent, forming the experience of its members, towards one in which roles and institutions are continually renegotiated and reshaped through free individual interaction and choice. Unger describes this as 'negative capability', borrowing the term from Keats; though where the poet implied by it a form of mental receptivity that would permit interior imaginative creativity, Unger intends a conception of public action, within a context of reflexivity and transparency. (The psycho-social dimension to this argument is set out in his 1984 book, *Passion: an Essay on Personality*.)

Unger's primary concern, therefore, is to understand the social processes that obstruct or facilitate 'disentrenchment'—and the negative capability this permits. He deploys several 'middle-range' theories to this end, in a form of analysis that owes something to Weber's ideal types. What interests Unger in particular is the tendency of societies to return to a state of 'closure' or 'entrenchment', in the face of efforts to open them up and create free spaces for choice within them. He explores both the cyclical patterns of conflict endemic to agrarian empires and ancient city-states—an 'oscillating equilibrium' between central power and peripheral magnates—and the reform cycles of modern democracies, in which reforming governments encounter sanctions by power-holders (e. g., capital strike or flight) that force them to retreat, to avoid destabilization and consequent electoral defeat. Unger perceptively applies the centre-periphery model of conflict to twentieth-century communist societies: post-revolutionary Russia, the Cultural Revolution, workers' self-management in Yugoslavia. The dynamic, whereby each element in the various configurations—agrarian empires,

city-states, capitalist democracies and communist powers—retains a capacity to influence the others, relates to an underlying model of social power embodied in the patron–client bond.

Since any general theory of historical change has been excluded as illegitimate, it is not easy to see how escape from these oscillations—between openness and closure, entrenchment and disentanglement—can occur. Unger does see that ‘context-shaping’ action is possible for collective as well as individual actors: modernizing monarchs or governments, for example. But he does not recognize the possibility of any tendential historical logic, brought about by competitive advantages due to economic, technological or military innovation, for example. Yet it is surely tendential development that explains why such configurations of power have not only reproduced themselves in recurring cycles, but have sometimes given rise to more complete and disruptive transformations. Unger argues against ‘deep structure’ theories but it seems to me that his deployment of a cyclical model of social process, though anti-historicist, nevertheless relies on a specific form of deep structural theory.

One particular set of institutional structures is central to Unger’s analysis: the twentieth-century system of mass production and consumption that has been defined, following Gramsci, as Fordism. The linked power systems of the large capitalist corporation and bureaucratic state are seen here as the primary obstacle to the creation of a disentranced social order, in which all can share in the definition and shaping of their social context and culture. Consistent with his ‘anti-necessitarianism’, Unger argues that there are no over-riding reasons why this institutional complex should have become—or should now remain—dominant in modern society. Systems of mass production enjoy no *sui generis* advantages of technology or efficiency, but have acquired their privileged position through contingent political victories. A central plank of Unger’s argument is that the mode of petty-commodity production dominant in an earlier phase of capitalism need not have been defeated, so to speak, in its historic competition with mass-industrial forms. His political programme involves restoring the condition of dominance of this earlier system, though in a technologically up-to-date version. It is by this means that society can reap the benefits of market competition, innovation and enhanced productivity, while avoiding the disadvantages of entrenched inequality, enforced subordination and role-passivity. Unger holds that it is characteristic of modern mass-production systems that they confine ‘negative capability’—choice, autonomy, innovative activity—to the vanguard sectors of the economy, while condemning the majority to dull routine work. The building-block of Unger’s new democratic social order is to be the (preferably small) independent firm,

which obtains its capital through social licence rather than possessing it by unfettered and transferable property right.

There is a link between Unger's commitment to a form of production pre-dating the industrial corporation and the affinity of his ideas to those of academic sociology. As agents for their compromise social formation, the classical sociologists needed an intermediary class, placed between the emerging mass proletariat of industrial society and its elite captains and financiers. Durkheim's 'organic solidarity'—a complex division of labour and normative order that would facilitate innovation and individual freedom—seems a precursor of the 'disentrenched' and pluralist social forms advocated by Unger. Another pre-echo would be the social-insurance and welfare schemes of nineteenth-century Co-operative and Friendly Societies, self-governing institutions that were the creation of skilled handicraft workers—leading some to mourn the decline of the artisanal 'labour aristocracy' and its early hegemony over the working class movement. In this perspective, mass production created conditions in which the enlarged bureaucratic state came to be seen as the most effective defender of working-class interests, especially those of unskilled workers; and then overwhelmed rivals to its power.

In the era of globalization and 'risk society' that has dawned since Unger's *Politics* trilogy appeared, disentanglement seems a more problematic idea. Fordism and its accompanying welfare settlement is no longer the dominant model, but is in rapid process of dissolution and dispersal. Far from finding themselves 'entrenched' in excessively solid and impermeable institutions of employment, regulation and welfare, many—whether in First or Third worlds—now find themselves in situations of excessive competitive pressure and vulnerability. An unspoken assumption of Unger's critique of dominant social forms in the 1980s was that they offered, if anything, too much security, and too little freedom and choice. But from the perspective of 2004, that seems an underestimation of the value of dependable social arrangements, even if these come with a cost. The collapse of Communism has given these questions even more significance in the East. Many who opposed the oppressiveness and inertia of those societies in the 1980s would now place a different value on the relative security of their welfare provision and 'jobs for life'. In post-Communist countries as in European social democracies, the destructuring of previous forms of social containment combined with economic uncertainty has helped to mobilize antagonism towards outsiders and potential competitors. Both the 'war on terrorism' and current hostility towards refugees feed off these insecurities.

Deeper questions relate to whether Unger's ideal of human existence—a fully disentrenched, self-reflective and open-ended condition of context-shaping, rather than context-reproducing—is either desirable or possible.

Arguably, we have a greater innate need for 'givenness', continuities and the acceptance of dependency than Unger allows. Authentic relationships and experience are fashioned within cultures, traditions, institutions—or the interstices between them—in contexts of social density. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the unconscious is a necessary and unavoidable dimension of our mental process. It is the nature and severity of the inner conflicts that remain unconscious which give rise to problems of wellbeing and development, not the fact that reflexivity and self-transparency must be incomplete. The same is true of the 'cultural unconscious', that which remains implicit and taken for granted in any social arrangement. The search for greater autonomy, self-understanding and choice, both socially and individually—the aim of psychoanalysis, too—is not predicated on the understanding that a state of absolute freedom is either possible or desirable. The excessive valuation of self-determination was also a problem in Sartre's moral thinking. Social relatedness entails social constraints.

Unger's over-valuation of disentanglement emerges as a more practical issue in the institutional reform at the core of his programme, its most distinctive 'big idea'—dismantling the unqualified right to private capital ownership that Anglo-American society now confers, and replacing it with a system of 'rotating' entitlements to capital, decided through a process of democratic debate. Unger proposes two procedures for this: rationing, i.e., centralized distribution, and auction, or a form of competitive bidding. The goal is clearly desirable from a democratic and egalitarian point of view, and one sees the force of Unger's objection to earlier attempts at redistribution—that both state ownership and worker ownership merely gave rise to different forms of 'entrenchment' and domination. However, his proposal for constant democratic decision-making to determine the allocation of capital pays scant regard to who will be doing the allocating, and by what means; and none to the question of what the current owners of capital might be getting up to politically whilst this fate is prepared for them. Little attention is given to the practicalities of incessant deliberation and decision-making, or to the uncertainty over productive resources that would ensue.

Here as elsewhere, Unger perhaps pays insufficient heed to the benefits of continuity—indeed, to the human necessity for some measure of 'entrenchment'. A feature of the current individualist, neo-conservative epoch has been the reckless squandering of the assets of institutional tradition and membership, in what one might term, after Marcuse, a condition of 'repressive liberalization'. His schema places a heavy burden on democratic decision-makers' capacity to maintain 'an ideal speech situation', and neglects the risk that such powers would entrench and engorge themselves. A pluralistic equilibrium between separate institutional agencies, and the devolution of power to employees, clients and customers, would seem a

surer way to balance different claims to capital resources than to vest all decision-making in a single centre of democratic sovereignty. Unger's model could risk becoming a condition of 'permanent revolution', as every allocation of capital and power is laid open to continuous political combat. Unger may envisage this process taking place according to the measured tempo of a court of law. But it might also degenerate into neo-Jacobin excess as conflicts arise within the polity, especially given the violent counter-revolutionary reaction that such moments are liable to provoke. The programme would be more convincing if he showed a greater understanding of social anxiety and fear, and of the reliance on traditions and legitimate authorities to allay such states of mind.

Unger wishes to retain the innovative dynamism of a capitalist mode of production, whilst depriving it of its tendencies to concentrate and reify institutional power. He insufficiently recognizes, however, the degree to which the potential for innovation is rooted in continuity, as well as in the negation of existing forms of order. He proposes to deprive capitalist firms of one of the key instruments that they have used to reproduce themselves, namely the power to reinvest their profits as capital. This power is here defined not as a reward for competitive success, but as the outcome of an earlier political victory over the allocation of rights to social property. In fact, it has both of these aspects. Institutions would have no incentive to be innovative or efficient if they could not retain some of the resources that follow from competitive success. There is a difficult balance to be struck between creating incentives for performance and avoiding the entrenchment of advantage, but it has to be aimed at if the benefits of innovation and productivity are to be retained. 'The edge of chaos', formulated by complexity theorists as the zone where most innovation takes place, is located on the boundary between order and structure, not in conditions where no order exists.

Four well-established spheres of entitlement are delineated in Unger's work. If the first of these, *market rights*—currently, the unfettered entitlement to private property—is the primary target of Unger's reform programme, he also pays significant attention to the others. The second sphere is *immunity rights*, which safeguard individuals against oppression. These include both civil rights and welfare entitlements—to subsistence, nourishment, health, housing and education. Here Unger proposes a guaranteed minimum income for all, but is emphatic that this should not include the right to a particular job. The third sphere involves *destabilization rights*: the right to challenge institutions and organizations, including freedom of speech and information. Anti-trust legislation, grievance procedures in the workplace, and health and safety legislation come into this category. The fourth category Unger terms *solidarity rights*, those which define the obligations

of social relationships: the responsibilities of marriage partners, of parents towards children, of teachers, social workers, doctors, etc., towards their pupils, clients or patients. In this area, law clearly shades into custom, convention and ethical obligation. Unger argues that solidarity rights are more often enforced by mediation than by juridical practice. He is critical of the single-minded preoccupation of positivist social science and private law with 'interests', holding that relationships and shared goods are also important matters for ongoing regulation.

In mapping these different fields of entitlement, and by his thoroughgoing critique of the unrestricted right to private property, Unger seeks to identify spaces for constructive and transformative social action, as well as defining areas for critical legal practice. The dismantling of undifferentiated 'totalities', such as the idea of property and capital, into their constituent dimensions, makes it possible to imagine how such norms and institutions could in practice be deconstructed, in order to neutralize their oppressive and 'entrenching' power. This particularization of institutional spaces in our society as fields for contestation, challenge and local democratic advance is a valuable contribution to the contemporary radical agenda.

Unger sets out powerful intellectual and practical tools for such political work. Once again, this piecemeal, transformative approach—the sustained and motivated 'tinkering' or experimentalism of *Democracy Realized*—is counterposed to deep-structural models of political change. For Unger, these lead to a politics that is revolutionary in its rhetoric but fatalist in its practice, since it assumes that without total systemic change there can be no significant reform whatsoever.

I have described the affinities between Unger's antagonism to both positivist individualism and Marxism, and the alternative to both these systems of thought developed within classical sociology. Arguably, parallels might also be drawn with a contemporary sociological critique of Marxism: that of Anthony Giddens. Unger's distinction between context-reproducing and context-defining activities explores ground similar to Giddens's 'structuration theory', which sought to resolve the 'structure–agency' opposition by showing that structures have to be continuously reproduced in social action. Giddens also aimed to replace class-based and materialist social models by an account that gave greater weight to 'choice', exercised either by individuals through markets or through the micro-level democratic revitalization of institutions, for example through 'active welfare'. With Ulrich Beck and others, he has argued that globalization has involved a process of 'disembedding' individuals from traditional constraints, with subjective consequences. He has argued for a state of 'reflexivity' and transparency in relationships, positions not unrelated to Unger's calls for 'disentrenchment' and 'negative capability'.

Despite these kinship features, however, Unger's programme points elsewhere. Market rights, as seen by the Third Way, involve the encroachment of private ownership on the public domain; Unger's 'rotation of capital' is intended to extend public, democratic control over resources that are currently in private hands. Immunity rights have been reduced by Third Way governments in the name of labour flexibility and greater competitiveness in global markets. Destabilization rights are informally curtailed through the continuing extension of private monopoly control over the mass media; and formally, through the sanctions of the war against terror. Solidarity rights tend increasingly to be dissolved, within Anglo-American market societies, into separate individual entitlements, privileging forms of social connexion that can most easily be formulated as specific contracts, and marginalizing those that depend on mutual trust.

At one level, Unger's critique of 'conservative social democracy', cited above, may seem to resonate with Third Way attacks on the 'initiative-sapping' welfare state. But where New Labour and the New Democrats have become agents of neoliberalism, seeking to defeat traditional social democracy and win consent for further marketization, Unger sets out a manifestly alternative path. As he has written elsewhere (see the Boutwood lectures of 2002, available on the excellent website devoted to his work):

The Third Way is the first way—the supposed one and only road to freedom and prosperity—sweetened with the sugar of compensatory social policy . . . Their programme is the programme of their conservative adversaries, with a discount. They appear on the historical stage as the humanizers of the inevitable, unable to give more than trivial content to the idea of progressive social reconstruction today.

In *Democracy Realized*, too, Unger remains defiantly committed to finding a radical alternative in the spirit of a new Left. The roots of this aspirational spirit, a valuable counterweight to neoliberal hegemony, lie perhaps in both sides of Unger's political formation, the Brazilian and the North American—elsewhere, he has written in praise of 'the spirit of American possibility' and the us as a 'country of experimenters'. Another source of his transformative faith may be the radical wing of Latin American Catholicism and its practical, democratic ideas. The possible emergence of Brazil within the G20, as a site of resistance to North American dominance, could serve to bolster Unger's political confidence. As a global democratic movement against neoliberalism seems to be growing—sustained by the internet, on which virtually all of Unger's writings are now freely accessible—his moment as an inspirational social theorist may be about to arrive. Let us hope so.