

Reflection 6
Red - Green Futures?
The Trespass and the 2020s

My sixth reflection will be a very different essay from the previous five. Exploring the political resonances and meanings of the Mass Trespass in the 2020s – some ninety years after the event and in the context of a world engulfed by a Covid pandemic and a global climate emergency – calls for more than just another cycle through the seven Mass Trespass motifs. Those motifs may no longer suffice as an adequate framework for making sense of the shifting meanings of the Trespass in a more volatile, complex and increasingly contested social and political order. This final reflection is more exploratory, more provisional; its later sections provide possible pointers to future ways in which the Trespass may resonate and issues which may become clearer and more salient by the time of the 100th Anniversary in 2032.

The sixth reflection is still being written and what I offer here is a short preliminary draft I outline of some areas and issues which will be explored in the course of the reflection. I briefly explain what I see as the focus for each of those areas / issues. At this stage the draft is a skeletal set of notes, comments, questions. For the most part, the flesh will be added to the bones in later drafts.

Reflection 6 is being written in the context of growing public awareness of, and debates about the Mass Trespass occasioned by the celebration of its 90th Anniversary in April 2022. My hope is that these wider awarenesses and debates will inform Reflection 6; what I write should take account of, and be shaped by the voices of those who will be taking forward the political legacy of the Mass Trespass.

The development of Reflection 6 will, therefore, be an iterative process over the course of a few months. It is likely to be summer 2022 before I have a final version which can stand as the endpoint of my reflective journey which began with the Diggers. Rather than keeping you in suspense until then, I will post here updated drafts of Reflection 6 at roughly monthly intervals.

JB (22/02/2022)

6.1 *Keeping the flame alive: histories, myths and meanings*

The website of the Hayfield Kinder Trespass Group¹ records many of the ways in which the memorial flame of the Mass Trespass has been lovingly tended over the last 20 – 30 years. From its standing as a largely forgotten folk memory by the mid-1970s, the Mass Trespass is now regularly celebrated in one form or another by leading national and regional figures in the outdoor movement, politicians, Peak District luminaries, community groups, film-makers, musicians, writers, rambles, climbers, trampers. It has become a routine focus for the outdoor access movement to re-assert and celebrate its histories and achievements generally and to re-affirm its commitment to continue with the 'unfinished business' . . .

A few instances and moments:

- 70th Anniversary and the Duke of Devonshire's intervention
- 75th Anniversary and star-studded cast of current and former Labour cabinet ministers, and outdoor movement grandees celebrating 'job done' in the light of the CRoW Act (see later)
- Sir Martin Doughty's omnipresence
- 80th Anniversary and the Rothman / Warrender histories
- The Spirit of Kinder and HKTG

Revisiting the myths, meanings and histories:

- The capacity and the limits of the mythology of the Trespass to encompass divergent meanings and speak to differing constituencies:

. . . continuities . . .

. . . absences . . .

. . . contradictions . . .

6.2 *Reconfiguring the Mass Trespass motifs*

This section will explore the extent to which the seven motifs of the Mass Trespass still serve as an adequate framework for exploring its political resonance as we move through the third decade of a new millenium. . .

a. Land and property

i Political economy dimensions:

- *The New Enclosures:*

Brett Christophers (2018) and the re-privatisation of formerly public land since 1979. The resurgence of private property in land had ramifications across rural and urban landscapes. Water privatisation, for instance, took considerable swathes of upland areas into private ownership. In urban areas, not only did this result in the loss of parks, open space, playing fields etc; it also led, through the processes of urban re-development, to extensive loss of urban public spaces. Christophers (2020) went on to explore the wider ramifications of the rentier capitalist economy highlighted by the processes of privatisation.

- *Dispossession:*

Linkages / parallels between re-enclosure of public land under neoliberalism and the global processes of dispossessing the rural poor of their lands during the same period.²

- *Structures of ownership:*

Brief comment on Shrubsole's (2019) analysis³ in relation to the continued restriction of land ownership to 'the few' in the face of the landless 'many'; some political ramifications.⁴

ii Identity, belonging and cultural dimensions

What is new by the 2020s in the broad land and property arena is the strengthening linkage between the political economy dimensions of land politics and the cultural and identity dimensions of landscape / countryside politics.

- *Landscape / Space / Place*

In Reflection 5 I introduced Doreen Massey's 1974 study of the political economy of land (Reflection 5). One of her later projects articulated the issues of land and ownership in terms of the cultural politics of belonging and identity:

Feeling you belong to a place in no way necessarily entails that it belongs to you. And the latter sense of belonging poses the bigger political question. . . . Ask not 'do you belong to this landscape?' but 'does this landscape belong to you?'.⁵

This approach to the land / property / ownership nexus has a resonance amongst contemporary land justice campaigns. Take *Land in our Names*, whose concerns are articulated, not in terms of enclosure and Locke, but more comprehensively:

We reimagine dynamics of land stewardship and are committed to a deep healing of the colonial-rooted trauma that separates us from the land.

We understand land rights as the basis for revolution and sovereignty in our communities.

We are working to transform the narrative around land in Britain in how it relates to intersections of race, gender and class for systemic change.⁶

- *Countryside*

Re-visit Howkins (2003) notion of the 'Death of the Countryside' two decades on. For example, Vron Ware (2022) builds on Massey's analysis of countryside belonging and explores many of the contemporary contradictions associated with 'countryside'

See also sub-section 3 below.

b. Access

- *Right to Roam and the 2000 CROW Act*

Revisit Shoard's universalist and partialist analyses of the concept of *Right to Roam*.^{7 8}

Evaluate the sleight of hand of New Labour's CROW Act in the light of Shoard's analysis, highlighting its achievements in relation to upland access [Bryce at last. Hurrah!] and its pervasive weaknesses in relation to lowland access [Boo!] As a friend living in Totnes put it: 'I can run anywhere I please on Dartmoor. But I can't run along the banks of the River Dart to get there.'

- *Trespassing and land justice*

Note on trespassing in the 2020s. Nick Hayes and Right to Roam campaigns.⁹ Re-positioning and re-articulation of 'access movement' e.g. Landscapes of Freedom and 2021 South Downs Mass Trespass.¹⁰

Note the latest shop in Buxton to sell gear for camping, hiking and travel! Trespass in a post-modern, ironic age!



<https://www.trespass.com/>

- *Extending the scope and meaning of 'access'*

From the 1990s onwards the long-standing definition of access in terms of recreational walking, hiking, tramping and climbing came to be merely one dimension of a much broader and more complex set of access to land issues.

Even in the recreational sphere, the rights of those accessing land on foot had to contend with the growing demands of newer sports requiring land access. Mountain biking, for instance, came to be highly contentious,¹¹ along with the growth of extreme outdoor sports generally. What about the emergence of Zip Wires, Via Ferrata, SUVs rallying on open land and bridleways and, for that matter the growing use of long-distance paths for races and sponsored competitions.

More far-reaching were:

a) those involved in leisure-time access to the countryside cannot but become engaged in the debates and changes associated with the such developments as the growth of windfarms and the case for rewilding and generally re-ordering land use in the interests of biodiversity and sustainability. e.g. The fierce debates which raged around these issues in the Lake District, both in relation to sheepfarming and the arguments arising from the LD's acquisition of World Heritage Site status and the extent to which that 'unnaturally' preserves a landscape from change and presents an eternally 'artificial' landscape.¹²

b) *Access, identity and diversity*: the demands for access arising from the wider diversity movement and the challenges to those enabling / providing countryside access to make the countryside fully accessible to women and BAME communities.¹³ Such initiatives surface issues in relation to urban and rural identities; as Testament highlights in the preface to his play *Black Men Walking*:

*In these testing times we are I think required, collectively and individually, to face our complex relationship to a fractured national identity. Black Men Walking is an attempt to embrace the imprint we find here in the earth, hold it in tension and grow from it: to embrace our ancestors with all their richness of ingenuity, leadership, perseverance, courage, layers of complexity and contradictions of sorrow and hope.*¹⁴

c. *Re-casting the Leisure & Freedom / Nature & Walking / Urban and Rural Identities motifs*

The previous two sub-sections explored some continuities and changes in relation to the motifs of *Land & Property* and *Access*. This sub-section suggests that the three motifs mentioned above are no longer adequate in themselves for the task of tracking the political resonances of the Mass Trespass. All need to be re-positioned within the wider trends and expanded agenda set by changed and changing political contexts.

- *Leisure-time*

The continued expansion of mass leisure-time and countryside tourism has further transformed the basis on which the countryside is accessed and experienced. The

traditional recreational pursuits of rambling and rock climbing no longer reflect the socially dominant ways in which the countryside is visited and experienced. The commercialisation of the infrastructure of outdoor activities – from car parks to promoting Climbing Everest as an elite tourist attraction – has given rise to newer ways of engaging with 'the natural order' as a dimension of marketised consumption.

- *Nature*

Alongside – and in many respects in conflict with – mass / individualised leisure-time engagements with Nature, is the recasting more generally of urban - rural relationships in the face of the climate emergency. The specificities of English landscape histories / ideologies have been subsumed into a wider arena of debates about nature in terms of the consequences of the impact of the histories of a predominantly industrialised global north on the natural environments and ecologies generally, and of the global south in particular.

- *Urban - Rural Identity*

Alex Niven (2019) explores the increasingly problematic ideology of Englishness. He makes the case for a radical reconfiguration of the notion of the countryside and identity on the basis of regionalism as a way out of the all-pervasive domination of what Fisher (2009) deemed the Capitalist Realism of the neo-liberal era.

- *Walking and Climbing*

Recent elaborations – Rose (2020) Sethi (2021) and Fleming (2022) – locate the activities of walking (urban and rural) and climbing within wider contexts of belonging and identity.

d Common ownership / Direct Action

The two defining 'Red' political motifs from the Diggers through to the Mass Trespassers will need to be similarly re-appraised, given the changed political landscape of neo-liberalism. Insofar as there are significant political resonances of the Mass Trespass in the 2020s, they are more likely to be found in the broader politics of the Land Justice and Climate Justice Movements than in either the current political fragments of socialism / social democracy or the access-specific political campaigns and programmes of the classic organisations of the outdoor movement.

6.3 Seeking the Red in The Green?

The following notes and comments set out some key questions / prompts for a dialogue between the Red politics of the Mass Trespass and the Green politics of the climate emergency. This section will be developed out of that dialogue.

a. Common ownership?

The common ownership of land has been central to the political traditions in which the Mass Trespass positioned itself. Clearly common ownership can take many forms – from state nationalisation and large-scale collectivisation, through to small-scale community ownership.¹⁵

In what ways are the politics of the common ownership of land currently being pursued within the politics of the climate emergency? Is the Green movement still carrying forward the broad aspiration of the Diggers and Trespassers and asking Doreen Massey's questions about belonging and identity in the landscape?

Feeling you belong to a place in no way necessarily entails that it belongs to you. And the latter sense of belonging poses the bigger political question. . . . Ask not 'do you belong to this landscape?' but 'does this landscape belong to you?'.¹⁶

There are growing references in recent literature to a politics of 'The Commons'.¹⁷ What do we now understand by 'The Commons' and how is it related to the issue of common ownership? Are radical Georgeism and associated notions of land stewardship a) feasibly achievable and b) capable of constraining the Promethean global reach of neo-liberal property rights? (NB The extension of Lockean property rights to the moon and outer space is already being theorised!.¹⁸)

What is the relationship between issues of 'common ownership' in the politics of the global north and the preservation of ancient wisdoms of land use and occupation, particularly across the global south? The Diggers fight back?!

b. Dethroning capitalism?

It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. (Slavoj Žižek and/or Frederic Jameson)

Eco-Socialism or Eco-Barbarism? (Rosa Luxemburg [1919] modified by Julian Batsleer [2022])

In the midst of the current climate clamour, it is not easy to discern the extent to which the dethroning of capitalism is a commitment across the Green Movement. In some quarters, being 'non-political' or 'non-aligned' appear to be core values and commitments.

Is there a feasible balanced ecology which retains capitalism? If not some sort of socialism, what are the other ways of seeing off, on a global scale, the persistent presence of Locke's land and property regime and the atomised, sub-Hobbes, possessive individualism?

What sense are we to make of the varying political orientations / choices of the De-growth -v- Green New Deal debates?¹⁹

. . . . Or indeed, are these no longer relevant or appropriate ways of framing the political strategies which exercise the land and climate justice movements? (See *A few afterthoughts* below.)

c. Walking, Nature and Countryside – Landscape, Space and Belonging?

In my reflections I have explored aspects of the cultural politics of engaging with those abiding ideological constructs *THE COUNTRYSIDE* and *NATURE*. For the most part I have framed that engagement largely in terms of the relationship between rural and urban identities.

I am conscious that those who approach the engagement with Countryside from the starting-point of the politics and identities of landscape, space and belonging (as per Doreen Massey and Vron Ware) will generate new perspectives on the issues of Nature. Indeed, in relation to the human activity of walking, they also highlight some pervasive commonalities between the experience of urban and rural landscapes.

Given the centrality of Nature and Landscape within the land and climate justice movements, I am interested to explore whether insights derived from the specificity of walking are capable of being scaled up / generalised into a newer set of organising principles for a Green politics. How are the cultural politics of landscape to be taken forward?

d. *Building / Co-creating Common Cause?*

As Davis put it in 2010 in an NLR article on the climate emergency, "Who will build the ark?"²⁰

The Diggers sought to build a movement of biblically-based Christian communities in the midst of the conflicts of the English Revolution. The Mass Trespassers' day on Kinder Scout was an integral part of a wider process of building a socialist movement in the 1930s and developing a political constituency (in their case the working class) capable of taking forward the social, economic, cultural and political changes which they sought.

On the face of it, I do not have a very clear sense of the movement / constituency which broadly-defined Green campaigning groups are seeking to build. I see a lot of pronouncements about 'newer politics', galvanising civil society, progressive alliances, community networks, citizens assemblies . . .

In terms of issues of collectivity and mutuality explored in Reflections 4 and 5, what form does the 'common ground' take within the politics of the Green campaigns, given the still prevalent ideology of "mass individualism" in an age of what Mark Fisher termed Capitalist Realism?

I accept that the vanguard parties of old were a bad thing, but I have difficulty in recognising some sort of collective movement or a sense of a process of co-creating common cause across the current networked political landscape – locally and globally.

e. *Direct Action?*

Both the Diggers and the Mass Trespassers engaged in the politics of Direct Action. Both entered into a situation in which they could reasonably have expected, and were in fact confronted by physical force opposition.

The Mass Trespass reflected a political strategy of a prefigurative 'seizing the Winter Palace / commanding heights of the moorland landscape!'; a stand-off with some gamekeepers was built into the choreography and over-arching political narrative of the event.

The issue of violence and non-violence in relation to the practice of transformative / prefigurative Direct Action and its political efficacy is complex, especially in struggles with a global reach and/or against a manifestly immediate civilisational threat.²¹

How is the practice of Direct Action currently perceived and undertaken across the Green movement – beyond the current headlines of Extinction Rebellion?

I recently came across the writings of Andreas Malm. Why is his analysis of green Direct Action and practice widely rejected? It strikes me that a bit of Neo-Ludditism would not come amiss and actually help to keep the carbon in the ground.

f. The Legacy of the Mass Trespass in 2032?

The 50th Anniversary celebrations of the Mass Trespass laid the basis for the enduring mythologies of the event, both politically and within the outdoor movement. In many ways, those mythologies have lost some of their purchase and resonance over the subsequent years of the neoliberal ascendancy. 90th Anniversary celebrations are always somewhat provisional; one has an eye on the agenda for the 100th anniversary.

In the light of these Red-Green discussions, what are the possible accounts of the political legacy of the Mass Trespass which we may hear and/or hope to hear in 2032?

A few afterthoughts . . .

My reflective essays have been generated from the political specificity and meanings of the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass in the 1930s. It was a political event explicitly grounded within the then predominantly western / northern traditions of marxism, socialism and communism, theoretically and practically, and their overwhelming orientation towards a state-based politics of transformation driven from an industrial / urban base.

That choice of an over-arching context on my part, means that some other perspectives have not been followed through systematically in my reflections. I note here a few of those perspectives which may have greater salience in relation to our understanding of the political resonance – and inspiration, even – of the Trespass over the next 10 – 20 years.

a. A recovery of the traditions of the utopian and ethical 'ruralist socialists'?

John Ruskin, Edward Carpenter and William Morris had lost out by the 1920s to the orthodox 'scientific marxism' of the CPGB and the pragmatic urban socialism / social democracy of a Fabian LP. (See Reflections 2 and 4) There remains much of critical value in those lost traditions of ethical and utopian socialism, who envisaged socialism as a quintessentially rural / landscape-shaped social order. We have lost sight of the extent of their sway before 1914.

There is, for instance, something compelling in Ruskin's vision of 'old communism': a private life of austere simplicity, within the framework of an over-riding moral economy of giving, and in the midst of the awesome beauty and richness of nature and a public / communal life of aesthetic opulence and splendour.²² . . . Maybe we can find signs of hope for the future by looking back to 'the losers' of earlier years.

b. A revolution in the relationships between work and leisure?

Something else we noted from Ruskin, was his assertion of the importance of achieving a suitable balance between 'work' and 'play'. (Reflection 3) Similarly it is often forgotten that what set the young Marx on his journey to communism was a recognition of the pervasive alienation and dehumanisation of the experience of work.²³ In one way or another, the transformation of the nature of work and its role in our lives is an inherent and major dimension of the social and economic changes enjoined by the climate emergency. Maybe things can be learnt from those who have explored the possible radical displacement of work in our lives in a post-industrial society – Gorz writing in a pre-Neoliberal context and Bastani writing in the climate emergency context.²⁴

c. *The politics of anarchism?*

The liberals, socialists and communists who have dominated my reflections were all agreed that, whatever their differences, they were not drawing on the traditions of political anarchism. At the same time as Thomas Spence, in the 1770s, set out his plan for system of parochial common ownership, the anarchist William Godwin was seeking to develop the language of an entirely new 'moral economy' based on mutual benefits. The anarchist line of political thought and practice, with its persistent commitment to non-state based politics and the notion of bottom-up co-creation of just (and communist) societies runs through Proudhon ('Property is Theft'), Kropotkin's Mutual Aid down to the oeuvre of the late-David Graeber.²⁵

Given the ostensible fragmentation of the current political milieu, perhaps more attention should be given to the anarchist lineage to provide us with a lens through which to explore – and discover – a creative and imaginative political legacy of the Red Mass Trespassers' day of Direct Action in the 1930s for the Green politics of the 2020s and beyond.

Endnotes

¹ <https://kindertrespass.org.uk/>

² Harvey (2004)

³ <https://whoownsengland.org/>

⁴ e.g. The Labour Party's 2019 policy paper, edited by Monbiot (2019)

⁵ Massey (2011) Landscape / Space / Place

⁶ <https://landinournames.community/who-we-are>

⁷ Shoard (1987 / 1997) See Reflection 5.

⁸ Shoard (1999)

⁹ Hayes (2020) and <https://www.righttoroam.org.uk/>

¹⁰ <https://landscapesoffreedom.wordpress.com/>

¹¹ Maloney (2020)

¹² King (2016) and the wider debates between James Rebanks and George Monbiot and the former's account – Rebanks (2020) – of the impact of changing Lake District pastoral agricultural practice over three generations of his family

¹³ see. e.g. Friend & Porter (2020); Shibli (2020);

¹⁴ Testament (2018)

¹⁵ Woodin et al (2010) provides a good overview of options

¹⁶ Massey (2011) Landscape / Space / Place

¹⁷ e.g. Standing (2019); Wall (2017) on Elinor Ostrom

¹⁸ See Lowe (2022)

¹⁹ See NLR articles in Bibliography, in particular Fraser (2021) *Climates of Capital*

²⁰ Davis (2010) *NLR*

²¹ One thinks, for instance of the relationship between Angela Davis, the CP in USA, the Black Panthers and the Civil Rights Movement. Or Nelson Mandela, the ANC and the CP of South Africa and the anti-apartheid struggle.

²² Ruskin 1871

²³ German Ideology. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. None of this was generally known before the 1960s.

²⁴ Gorz (1983) and Bastani (2019)

²⁵ Graeber (2011, 2014, 2021)