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THE EVENT OF REVOLUTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Nathan Alan Eckstrand

December 2014

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Nathan Alan Eckstrand

2014

THE EVENT OF REVOLUTION

By

Nathan Alan Eckstrand

Approved September 24, 2014

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## ABSTRACT

### THE EVENT OF REVOLUTION

By

Nathan Alan Eckstrand

December 2014

Dissertation supervised by Professor Fred Evans

This dissertation studies the question of how to conceive of revolution without necessarily drawing any concepts from the state. When concepts, figures, or objects drawn from the state are assumed to exist following a revolution, the ability of revolution to radically change the state is constrained. This problem limits earlier theories of revolution, such as social contract theory and Marxism, both of which present certain parts of the state as unchangeable. Social contract theorists necessitate that certain elements like the sovereign and the nature of the contract be preserved, while Marxism maintains that the state must follow a trajectory that determines its evolution. A new theory of revolution (called Dynamic Anarchism) is drawn from theorists who theorize events (called ‘Evental thinkers’). It is claimed that revolutions should be seen as separate from the world, and thus are incommensurable, unpredictable, and indiscernible from the state. Outside the state revolutions are anomalies, but they present themselves

within the state as catalytic change. Dynamic Anarchism adds to the discussion of events and revolutions by developing notions of complexity, interconnectivity, and interconnectivity to describe how revolutions function. The final chapter of the dissertation consists of an application of the theory of Dynamic Anarchism to the strategies and tactics used in the French and American Revolutions, by Guerrilla Warfare, and in 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Black Radicalism. Lessons about the practicality of Dynamic Anarchism are drawn from analyses and critiques of these revolutionary movements.

## DEDICATION

To my family: Stephen, Irene, Kristen, and Laurel. Without your support I never could have gotten this far, nor have felt so loved along the way.

To Fred Evans, whose care and guidance made this dissertation a piece of work I will forever be proud of.

And to the countless revolutionaries whose courage, militancy, and dedication is forever an inspiration to me. May your struggles for justice never be in vain.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work, like all works of its kind, is a collective endeavor. In addition to those to whom this work is dedicated, there are several other individuals or groups that deserve thanks for helping me to complete this work successfully. First, I want to thank the Duquesne University Philosophy Department (and in particular Joan Thompson), which has been my professional home for the past five years. The support I received from the entire faculty and staff has been of tremendous value to me as a scholar, and I will carry the many lessons I learned there throughout the rest of my life. Next, I would like to thank my readers – Dan Selcer, George Yancy, and James Bernauer – for the helpful suggestions they made as my project developed. Many of the avenues this dissertation explores would have gone unnoticed without those notes. Third, I would like to thank Spiritan University College in Ejisu, Ghana for providing me with the space and resources necessary to work on my dissertation while I was teaching there in 2013. It is hard to overemphasize how welcoming and accommodating they were while I was adjusting to my new surroundings. Finally, I would like to thank Chris Mountenay and Matt Valentine for their companionship during my time in Pittsburgh. Conversations that veer wildly from pop culture to politics to deep philosophical points while remaining engaging and funny are hard to find in this world. Ours will forever be a fond memory from my dissertation writing years.



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# Who's Afraid of Revolution?

## **The state *or* revolution: separating false friends**

Revolution begins trivially yet ends with great consequence. A solitary suicide,<sup>1</sup> perhaps the right word in the right place,<sup>2</sup> wake the masses from their slumber. Despair is replaced with a hope for a better world characterized by freedom, justice, and equality, and the isolated and depoliticized find a voice among people determined to act rather than be acted upon. A thousand conversations held in a thousand sites converge into a manifesto which inspires a thousand actions. The groundswell of discontent creates the potential for a new and better world, but can degrade into a nightmare. Either way, it produces a shift to which militants, counterrevolutionaries, and bystanders respond. 'Join the revolution and fight for your freedom', one side says. 'Oppose it for your own safety', says the other. 'But consider carefully', say both, 'for a wrong decision could be deadly.' Revolution is a tantalizing potential for the oppressed, a perpetual danger for the elites, and, save for the brief moments when it captures center stage, it hovers constantly at the margins of society.

Hope for transformation, breaking down the status quo, and building a new society from the ground up are the sentiments at the barricades of revolution. In 2011, as the desire for revolution entered the hearts of people worldwide, protestors declared their commitment to spontaneity,<sup>3</sup> "solidarity amongst the protesters,"<sup>4</sup> "rebuilding society,"<sup>5</sup> and the need for "no

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<sup>1</sup> I am thinking here of the Arab Spring and its beginning with the death of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi via self-immolation.

<sup>2</sup> Here I am thinking of how Occupy Wall Street began with a call to action in *Adbusters*

<sup>3</sup> "Headlines," hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, Jan 14, 2011, <http://www.democracynow.org/2011/1/14/headlines>

<sup>4</sup> "Live from Cairo: Democracy Now!'s Sharif Abdel Kouddous and Anjali Kamat on Egypt's 'Farewell Friday,'" hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, Feb 11, 2011, [http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/11/live\\_from\\_cairo\\_sharif\\_abdel\\_kouddous](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/11/live_from_cairo_sharif_abdel_kouddous)

<sup>5</sup> "'Occupy Wall Street': Thousands March in NYC Financial District, Set Up Protest Encampment," hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, Sept 19, 2011, [www.democracynow.org/2011/9/19/occupy\\_wall\\_street\\_thousands\\_march\\_in](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/19/occupy_wall_street_thousands_march_in)

more constraints.”<sup>6</sup> They made militant demands for “democracy,”<sup>7</sup> “civilian rule,”<sup>8</sup> “transparent government,”<sup>9</sup> and the obstruction of the “one percent.”<sup>10</sup> As the Arab Spring and Occupy flared around the globe, the institutions and individuals they targeted clung tightly to their traditions, lamenting the injustice of their circumstances and decrying the vitriol of the protestors. Elites condemned the “bad actors”<sup>11</sup> and speculated about what sinister reasons motivated the demonstrators to “vilify...success”<sup>12</sup>.

Justified or not, these movements raise a question: how does revolution transform the status quo? What transpired in Tahrir and Zucotti—before our very eyes yet still unseen—to bring about the greatest protests of a generation? Why did the “shot heard ‘round the world”<sup>13</sup> at Lexington and Concord catalyze a revolution when all the previously fired bullets did not? How is it that the deaths of several hundred protestors in Tehran became more significant to the Iranian people than the thousands killed in the decades leading up to Black Friday?

This dissertation arises from my realization that no theory conceives of revolution without relying on the state, broadly defined as a consistent arrangement of concepts, subjects, objects, and forces. Concepts of revolution have always been centered around concepts of the

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<sup>6</sup> “‘This is a Dream Come True’: Egyptians Celebrate in Cairo After Mubarak Resigns” hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, Feb 14, 2011, [http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/14/this\\_is\\_a\\_dream\\_come\\_true](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/14/this_is_a_dream_come_true)

<sup>7</sup> “Headlines,” hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, Jan 14, 2011, <http://www.democracynow.org/2011/1/14/headlines>

<sup>8</sup> “‘This is a Dream Come True’: Egyptians Celebrate in Cairo After Mubarak Resigns” hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, Feb 14, 2011, [http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/14/this\\_is\\_a\\_dream\\_come\\_true](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/14/this_is_a_dream_come_true)

<sup>9</sup> “‘Libya Has Reignited the Flame of Liberty in the Arab World’: Juan Cole, Khaled Mattawa on Uprising” Hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, August 22, 2011, [http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/22/libya\\_has\\_reignited\\_the\\_flame\\_of](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/8/22/libya_has_reignited_the_flame_of)

<sup>10</sup> “‘Inside Occupy Wall Street: A Tour of Activist Encampment at the Heart of Growing Protest’” hosted by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, September 30, 2011, [http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/30/inside\\_occupy\\_wall\\_st\\_a\\_tour](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/30/inside_occupy_wall_st_a_tour)

<sup>11</sup> Mitt Romney, quoted in “Romney Says Occupy Wall Street Protests Are the ‘Wrong Way to Go’” by Amy Mingham and Emily Friedman, *ABC News*, Oct 10, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/10/romney-says-occupy-wall-street-protests-are-the-wrong-way-to-go/>

<sup>12</sup> John Paulson, quoted in “Billionaire Tells Occupy Wall Street to Get Off His Lawn” by Shira Ovide, *The Wall Street Journal*, October 11, 2011, [http://blogs.wsj.com/deals/2011/10/11/billionaire-tells-occupy-wall-street-to-get-off-his-lawn/?mod=wsj\\_share\\_twitter](http://blogs.wsj.com/deals/2011/10/11/billionaire-tells-occupy-wall-street-to-get-off-his-lawn/?mod=wsj_share_twitter)

<sup>13</sup> Emerson, *Concord Hymn*, retrieved from <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175140> on February 2013

state, while in political theory the attempt to understand the state has always preceded the attempt to comprehend revolution. Using concepts, subjects, objects and forces that describe the state to define revolution renders the concept of revolution a product of the state. Until revolution is conceptually freed from that to which it is opposed, our attempts to use it to bring about transformative change will only reproduce the constraints of power under the guise of removing them. My goal is to separate revolution from the state—to study, analyze, and dissect radical change in order to understand its possibilities, its dangers, and its ability to inform our collective struggles.

A brief survey of the usual theories of revolution provides little in the way of satisfactory explanations for the events of 2011. The protestors were not traditional proletarians—many could even be classified as bourgeois—nor did they aspire to seize the means of production. They did not desire a social contract that would lead them out of their natural state and establish a sovereign. Their target was not a repressive regime of signs, concepts, and structures; their goal not the deconstruction of meaning for the freedom of indeterminacy. To this day, most analyses of the events focus on the motivations and strategies of the protestors.

A model that explains the what, why, and how of revolution remains a mystery. For every revolution in which a particular theory has currency there is another revolution which calls that same theory into question. Jeff Goodwin and Theda Skocpol point out that the conventional causes for the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions—the suffering produced by imperialism and the capitalist exploitation of resources—fail to explain why other countries experiencing similar or worse conditions did not revolt. They conclude “one need merely raise these questions in order to see that the ‘misery breeds revolt’ hypothesis does not explain very much.”<sup>14</sup> In his

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<sup>14</sup> Jeff Goodwin and Theda Skocpol. “Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World” in *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 260.

histiography of the French Revolution, Francois Furet vigorously denies that revolutionary events were primarily motivated by successive attempts to embody the ‘people’s will.’

Analyzing only how the ruling classes upheld or betrayed the legitimate interests of the common man ignores how revolution itself became its own telos. According to Furet,

That rationalization of the political dynamic of the French Revolution has one major flaw, for in reifying revolutionary symbolism and in reducing political motivation to social concerns, it makes ‘normal’ and obliterates what calls for explanation: the fact that Revolution placed that symbolic system at the centre of political action. And that it was that system rather than class interest, which, for a time at least, was decisive in the struggle for power.<sup>15</sup>

As Hannah Arendt notes, those reading the American Revolution as the product of social concerns and new technologies ignore the almost exclusive focus of the revolutionaries on the proper form of government.<sup>16</sup> Theories of revolution constantly struggle to find consistency in the number and variety of revolutionary events. They apply concepts developed by early modern political philosophers to communist revolutions, or read gender and racial uprisings through the lens of the dialectic. Their inability to unlock the state and revolution concurrently with a foundation that explains both has resulted in frustration. But as long as we hold that the state and revolution are intrinsically connected, we cannot abandon standard revolutionary theories without forfeiting the corresponding models of the states these theories are drawn from. If we do not want political thought to collapse like a house of cards, we must question whether a theory of revolution must rest upon a theory of the state. Perhaps a more fruitful avenue for exploration is to examine revolution from the perspective of revolution, so as to let revolution speak. The point of this project is to explore this possibility, and to see what utility it may offer.

Conventional theories of revolution are grounded in a specific understanding of the state.

When the state collapses, revolution arises parasitically, using what it can from the state’s

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<sup>15</sup> Francois Furet. *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 51.

<sup>16</sup> Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 58.

framework for its own existence. The state itself disappears, but its cadaver remains, animated by a revolutionary spirit until a new state forms to replace it. The revolutionary model described in Hobbes's *Leviathan* is simply the misuse of the structures with which a proper state is composed. To desire a Grecian or Roman democracy is as "the biting of a mad Dogge" and "wanteth nothing more than a strong monarch [yet] when they have him, they abhorre,"<sup>17</sup> while opposing the sovereign in an organized fashion is to "set up a *Supremacy* against the *Sovereignty*" which afflicts the commonwealth with inconsistent commands.<sup>18</sup> Hobbes argues any violation of sovereign power—including revolution—is an intolerable appropriation of the state. Likewise, Marx's communist revolution consists of "the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie"<sup>19</sup> and the "conquest of political power by the proletariat."<sup>20</sup> Reforms of extant institutions like private property, the power of the nation-state, and labor are only possible because the proletariat has acquired a new status as a "ruling class" in control of the same "conditions of production"<sup>21</sup> the bourgeoisie once managed. Marx's communist revolution is, at its heart, a simple exchange of leadership. The recognition of this danger leads Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to say the use of nationalism by activists is a "perverse trick" that offers up the revolution, "hands and feet bound, to the new bourgeoisie."<sup>22</sup> Foucault also recognizes this danger when, in his debate with Maoists, he states that "the forms of state apparatus which [revolutionaries] inherit from the bourgeois apparatus cannot in any way serve as a model for the new forms of organization" as they carry a danger of repeating "the domination of the

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<sup>17</sup> Hobbes. *Leviathan*, (Middlesex; Penguin, 1968) 370.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 370-71.

<sup>19</sup> Marx and Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 1978), 483.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>22</sup> Hardt and Negri. *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 133.

bourgeoisie.”<sup>23</sup> In sum, revolutions act in political models like surgical operations. The state is broken apart, modified, and sewn back together. The result is an alteration of what was, but every vital part of the model remains.

These conceptions of revolution misrepresent what revolution is capable of. If revolution is drawn from the state, then it has meaning only in reference to the state, and its scope is limited by the state. A government may be overthrown, or a set of laws or policies changed, but a state will persist if fidelity to a certain perspective or set of practices remains. Without a change in its foundation, the state will be reconstituted along similar lines over and over despite uprisings that put different people in control. Howard Zinn’s work on the Founding Fathers shows how the American Revolution, successful in defeating the British government, yet maintained the legitimacy of “a government to protect [the rich’s] property” in which “rebellions could be controlled.”<sup>24</sup> Economic and social arrangements such as agricultural wage labor and slavery were outside the purview of the American Revolution. The Founding Fathers intended for the socio-economic order of the colonies to persist throughout the revolution.

The co-option of the American Revolution’s is an example of how concepts, forces, and systems pulled from the state can reproduce oppression through successive governments. Believing that something must persist throughout a revolution—for example, a socio-economic system or a concept of human nature—hides the creative potential of revolution and replicates the same order. We learn to see the end of a revolution as merely an altered version of the state that was overthrown. The figure of the sovereign reappears (perhaps with a little less power and the crown on another’s head), or production resumes with the workers in control. In either case,

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<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault. “On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Pantheon Books: New York, 1980), 27.

<sup>24</sup> Howard Zinn, “The Spirit of Rebellion” in *the Zinn Reader* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997), 688. Appeared originally in the July 4, 1975 *Boston Globe* under the title “The Brooklyn Bridge and the Spirit of the Fourth.”

the oppressive foundation remains. Subjugating revolution to rules, ends, or concepts drawn from a state is to misunderstand the power of revolution, which is to rewrite the state from top to bottom so that nothing necessarily persists. To say otherwise is to see revolution as part of what is universal and eternal, as a function of the conceptual system which determines our world rather than as an opening to radically new possibilities. It is to treat revolution as though it were a tool wielded by an empowered sovereign and not a potential open to the disenfranchised many. It is, in short, to turn revolution into the state.

If we are to understand revolution, we must learn concepts particular to it, not ideas which force it into a predetermined or circumscribed shape. Revolution's radicality, fecundity, and creativity call for a particular thematization. To take the topic of revolutions seriously means articulating a changing, productive, destabilizing force which resists incorporation into any prescriptive framework. The theoretical and social importance of this analysis comes from its ability to comprehend the agency that revolutions impart to the world. This agency is non-subjectified as it is the product of the forces and processes that arise within revolution, and rather than being pure stems from the particular manner in which each state is organized. A new conception of revolution framed in this way will reveal new potentials for revolutionaries in both theory and practice.

### **The dangers of misusing a revolution**

Revolution, as a potential remedy to systems of exploitation and domination, lends itself to utopian visions of future societies. And yet to treat revolution as panacea is dangerous. It leads to flowery, romantic images of revolutions as festive,<sup>25</sup> omnipresent,<sup>26</sup> superhuman,<sup>27</sup> and

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<sup>25</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (Harper Perennial Modern Classics: New York, 1970) 353-372.



immortal<sup>28</sup>—as though revolution is a one-stop shop for a picture perfect life. Revolution’s job is not to produce utopia, for problems and issues will inevitably arise within the new states that revolution creates. The aftermaths of the French and Cuban revolutions show how revolutionary zeal can distract one from the vital work building a new society demands.<sup>29</sup> The Arab Spring’s success in overthrowing tyrants and Occupy’s victory in casting a harsh light on systems of inequality triggered new struggles against these forces. Utopian visions can manifest themselves through an obsession on previous triumphs and a desire to recreate the spirit of the past rather than act in the here and now—a trait Wendy Brown calls “left melancholy.”<sup>30</sup> As Rosalyn Deutsche notes, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq leftist protestors idolized the anti-war campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s to the point of “[foreclosing] possibilities of political change in the present.”<sup>31</sup> For its message to successfully pass from the streets into the homes and institutions of society, revolution must follow an arduous process of organization, demonstration, and advocacy.

Treating all revolutions as *a priori* evil is also flawed. By ignoring legitimate grievances and portraying protestors as “growing mobs” engaging in “dangerous...class warfare”<sup>32</sup> the empowered can isolate revolutions from people sympathetic with their goals. Those who use it

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<sup>26</sup> Yevgeny Zamyatin, “On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters” in *Soviet Heretic: Essays* trans. Mirra Ginsburg (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1974), 103-112.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (W.W. Norton and Co; New York, 1959), 57-74.

<sup>28</sup> Fred Hampton, from the speech “You can kill a revolutionary, but you can never kill the revolution” on the album *Power to the People - The Black Panther Speeches* (Fred Hampton, 2012)

<sup>29</sup> Both the French and Cuban revolutions fell far short of the goals revolutionaries espoused. Human Rights Watch claims that following Fidel Castro’s takeover he instituted a highly effective machinery of repression [*Cuba’s Repressive Machinery*, Human Rights Watch, 1999], while Amnesty International charges the Cuban government with carrying out 216 political executions between 1959 and 1987 [*When the State Kills: the death penalty v. human rights*, Amnesty International Publications, 1989] (other estimates place the number significantly higher). The French Revolution’s Reign of Terror led to the guillotining of at least 16,594 while another 40,000 were summarily executed or died awaiting trial [Hugh Gough. *The Terror in the French Revolution* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 77.].

<sup>30</sup> Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy” in *boundary 2* 26 no. 3 (1999): 20.

<sup>31</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, “Hiroshima After Iraq: A Study in Art and War” in *October*, no. 131 (2010): 3.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Canter and Mitt Romney in <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/10/romney-says-occupy-wall-street-protests-are-the-wrong-way-to-go/>

equate revolution with pandemonium, violence, and destruction, ignoring its ability to address serious issues. States embody order and stability, despite the fact that they are responsible for more pandemonium, violence, and destruction than any revolution has caused. Cuban and Russian revolutionaries garnered much support from their violent attacks upon the state while killing no more than several thousand enemy soldiers, while the nationalist fury of World War I and imperialist hunger of Vietnam together led to the deaths of at least 18 million and the decimation of the continents hosting them.<sup>33</sup> Revolutions are dangerous, but the violence and destruction associated with them does not necessarily inhibit, and in some cases advances, their positive goals. Viewing revolution as destructive or as a cure-all does not reduce revolutions to the state, but also does not provide it a rigorous philosophical articulation. As panacea or poison, revolution is oversimplified and its powers distorted. Calls for revolution and protestations against it, when poorly formulated, resemble romantic tales devoid of intellectual understanding.

Serious consequences come from circumscribing or oversimplifying the concept of revolution. Establishing a new state that reflects the old stifles revolutionary sentiment and exacerbates hostilities, as happened in the French Revolution when new rulers responded to the revolution's demands with another monarchical system. The numerous smaller rebellions that compose the French Revolution happened because attempts to return to a feudal system failed.<sup>34</sup> Even if revolutionary passion isn't further inflamed, assuming the return of a specific state can generate a brutal program of state-formation, as happened in post-revolution Russia. The

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<sup>33</sup>See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_wars\\_and\\_anthropogenic\\_disasters\\_by\\_death\\_toll](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wars_and_anthropogenic_disasters_by_death_toll); <http://www.war-memorial.net/Cuban-revolution-3.115>; and [http://www.emersonkent.com/wars\\_and\\_battles\\_in\\_history/russian\\_revolution\\_of\\_1917.htm](http://www.emersonkent.com/wars_and_battles_in_history/russian_revolution_of_1917.htm). It is important to note that the several thousands who died in the Russian Revolution of 1917 does not include those killed in the Russian Civil War following the revolution.

<sup>34</sup> John Markcoff makes this point in his work, saying, in one example, “[Seigneurial rights] were a continual bone of contention between rural communities who found the early enactments of the legislators to be thoroughly inadequate and legislators faced with continuing rural turbulence.” (John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords, and Legislators in the French Revolution*, Penn State University Press 1991, 3)

transition to communism theorized by Lenin begins with armed workers replacing capitalists and bureaucrats, but posits that many of the former state mechanisms should be available to the workers for the purpose of controlling society, labor, and consumption.<sup>35</sup> Taylorism, the study of how management can optimize the productive capacity of a workplace, was imported wholesale from the United States into Lenin's Soviet Union. Using Taylorist maxims of scientific management like "The work of every workman [must be] fully planned out by the management at least one day in advance," "maximum output, in place of restricted output," and "the development of each man to his greatest efficiency and prosperity,"<sup>36</sup> the Soviets (with Lenin's blessing) organized their factories and workers using the same techniques, practices, and means of production, as the capitalists they opposed.<sup>37</sup> Lenin's opposition to Taylorism was conditional; when it was attached to the capitalist system it stood for "man's enslavement by the machine,"<sup>38</sup> but when organized by the Soviets it was "a necessary feature of [the] state."<sup>39</sup> The Soviet appropriation of Taylorism is a prime example of how elements of a prior state remain after a revolution, as Soviets only altered, but did not abolish, the factory.<sup>40</sup> Lenin's theory forms the basis of Stalin's post-revolutionary program, which takes as dogma that the state will only wither away if violence and state power intensify for the purpose of crushing the 'dying classes.'<sup>41</sup> By using a theory that prescribes vicious actions as necessary to reach the post-

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<sup>35</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Foreign Language Press (Peking 1970), 116.

<sup>36</sup> The principles of Taylorism are laid out in Frederick Winslow Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management*..

<sup>37</sup> The appropriation of Taylor's system by the Soviets is detailed in Thomas Hughes, *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1989), 255-261.

<sup>38</sup> Lenin, "The Taylor System—Man's Enslavement by the Machine" in *Collected Works* (Progress Publishers, 1972, Moscow, Volume 20), 152-154. Trans. Bernard Isaacs and Joe Fineberg. Retrieved from Marxists Internet Archive July 11, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel A. Wren and Arthur G. Bedeian, "The Taylorization of Lenin: rhetoric or reality?" *International Journal of Social Economics* 31, no. 3 (2004): 287-288.

<sup>40</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 121.

<sup>41</sup> Stalin, Marxists.org, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1933/01/07.htm>

revolutionary world, Stalin's mass executions,<sup>42</sup> his brutal Gulag archipelago,<sup>43</sup> and his treatment of traitors and capitalists "with an iron hand"<sup>44</sup> became affirmations of success.

Analyzing revolution as internal to a state has serious implications for philosophy, as it invests revolution with necessity or a shape that restricts what revolution can achieve. Karl Marx's revolution is immanent to a specific material world and because of this follows a path to actualize a communist society. This interpretation is not speculative, but is a *real* movement which "results from the premises now in existence."<sup>45</sup> The new state is drawn from the old; revolution only acts as the intermediary, with its beginning, middle, and end already decided. Hannah Arendt, too, sees revolutions as immanent, but her revolutions are intrinsic to the world formed when people come together in a community. Revolutions result from action that "can be accomplished only by some joint effort"<sup>46</sup> and have as their end "the foundation of freedom."<sup>47</sup> Any revolution that alters the premise of human plurality obliterates the phenomenon that produces it. Revolution's purpose is determined by the world from which it comes. For Marx and Arendt, concepts of the state—conceived of here as a definite and immanent world—drive revolution, plotting its course and all the stops along the way. Revolution is only along for the ride.

What is needed in revolutionary theory is a model of exceptionality, inasmuch as revolution should be contrasted with the rule of law sponsored by the state. If the state always indicates an order and circumscribes change, then to theorize what is apart from it requires

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<sup>42</sup> Stalin executed nearly 700,000 people executed between 1937-1938. Barry McLoughlin "Mass Operations of the NKVD, 1937-1938: A Survey" in McLoughlin, Barry and McDermott, Kevin, ed. *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*. (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 141.

<sup>43</sup> The Gulag had a 14-hour workdays and overcrowded, overheated barracks. Excerpted from the memoirs of Jacques Rossi, found at gulaghistory.org.

<sup>44</sup> Stalin, Marxists.org, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01/ch11.htm#4>.

<sup>45</sup> Marx, "German Ideology", *Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 162.

<sup>46</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Classics, New York, 1963) 165.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

understanding the chaotic and disordered. Revolution must uncover what happens when the rules of the state cease to function. Understanding change as a difference between two stable forms or as movement governed by laws, forces, or predictable cycles must be replaced by a concept of unconditioned change whereby any limits to change can themselves be changed. Change must be an agent or a motive, not a result of interacting forces and beings. Several fields have formulated models of how change operates when a central buttress of traditional systems is removed. Set Theory demonstrates how systems fall into paradox without axioms that define what is part of a set.<sup>48</sup> Chaos Theory questions whether systems can predict the future without comprehending the present and studies the vastly different outcomes that can result from minor changes.<sup>49</sup> In other words, the utility of traditional systems is limited by their assumptions and the available data, leading contemporary theorists to study how manipulating assumptions or data alters how a system functions. Yet these new studies do not free change, but only swap one set of laws, forces, and predictable cycles for another. They provide a view of how change operates under specific conditions, not of change as a motive. A study of exceptionality must focus on understanding change without reintroducing limits. In philosophical terms, it is necessary to find the borders of fields like ontology and metaphysics, where states begin and end. This is different from seeking where one ontology replaces another or where one metaphysical system becomes another, as such exchanges happen only within the confines of another state. We must seek the frontier of all states and systems, for only at this point can we contemplate a truly independent revolution.

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<sup>48</sup> There are many explanations of set theory and the need for axioms, but for one, see Felix Nagel, *Set theory and topology*. [http://www.felixnagel.org/publications/nagel\\_set\\_theory\\_and\\_topology\\_part\\_i.pdf](http://www.felixnagel.org/publications/nagel_set_theory_and_topology_part_i.pdf) 9.

<sup>49</sup> For the basics of Chaos Theory, see the seminal paper published by Edward Lorenz in 1963: Edward Lorenz “Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow” in *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences* 20 (1963): 130.

## **Modeling Revolution 1: Deviating from the norm**

If we can encounter revolution without the state and without depicting revolution as universally good or evil, what concept of it appears? What are the potential and dangers of revolution? What relation can it have to the state? The answers require a bipartite model that sees revolution from several angles, relating it to the state without reducing it to the state. I call this model Dynamic Anarchism; “Dynamic” to emphasize that the model does not refer to a constant situation—a status quo—but to movement and creation, and “Anarchism” because the model purposefully avoids dependence upon the state.

To separate revolution from the state implies several things:

- revolution has no definitive arrangement, design, or organization
- revolution cannot be anticipated (no one can know of its coming)
- revolution cannot be determined (it is impossible to chart its path or manufacture its end)

Revolution is an *anomaly* in that it is entirely apart from the state, exempt from the status quo, and a deviation from the natural order. The state’s supposed consistency and ubiquity is inapplicable to revolution, for within a revolution the characteristics of the state we reflexively assume in our day to day lives move into a state of flux. Even to describe revolutions as pure potentiality, contingency, or creativity are inadequate as each carries a functional relationship to its opposite—potentiality to actuality, contingency to necessity, creativity to constancy—and in doing so brings with it an element of normalcy. Revolution abstracts itself from the oppositional terms potentiality/actuality, contingency/necessity, and creativity/constancy. To the degree that these characteristics are applicable to revolution, they must have a meaning different than the one they have in relation to the state. The exceptionality of revolution necessitates that even the category of Being cannot be applied to revolution. Since what counts as a Being is determined

by the state, then inasmuch as revolution escapes the state its ontology is unknowable. If we are to grasp revolution as more than a function of a political system, we must hold that *no* codes (e.g., revolution reverts back to the state of nature), *no* purposes (e.g., revolution overthrows the elites of the dominant class), and *no* methods (e.g., revolution undermines established meanings) belong to it.

As anomaly, revolution has three primary characteristics. First, because revolution cannot be arranged it is *incommensurable*—it does not fit with what is around it, temporally, spatially, or otherwise. No common measure exists between it and the state, and the state provides no tools with which to build one. There is no definite where, no exact when, no specific what to revolution, yet its very absence is its where, when, and what. From the perspective of the state, its precise spatial, temporal, and descriptive coordinates are *somewhere*, *some when*, and *something*. Its presence is its inarticulability, its incapability of being delineated. The state cannot structure, fix, or organize revolution, and any attempt to do so further inflames revolution or extinguishes it entirely. It is impossible for the state to be the vanguard of revolution, for it is the lack of the state, the indeterminacy of revolution's where, when, and what, that marks it.

Second, because revolution cannot be anticipated it is *unpredictable*. It follows no determinate path, no causal or dialectical chain, that tells us to expect its arrival or permits us to plot a course to the other side. Because it does not behave according to the laws of the non-revolutionary world, its appearance is erratic and its effects are unknowable in advance. Conditions that brought about a revolution at one place and time will not necessarily do so again, nor does producing another revolution guarantee the same outcome. Strategies and tactics used to understand or anticipate events in the state are destined to fail in comprehending revolution,

for the unpredictability of revolution applies not just to its presentation but to its comprehensibility.

Finally, because revolution cannot be determined it is *indiscernible*. Our very attempt to chart a path for it is an attempt to control it. Whatever understanding of revolution comes out of this project cannot reduce it to a handful of determinate steps or conceptualize it in such a way that its anomalistic character is erased. Revolution resists all attempts to synthesize it with the world we encounter, so it is impossible to be truly faithful to revolution. Fidelity requires being able to see some essence or promise within revolution that compels one to action. Similarly, developing a program for revolution implies the ability to chart a path between it and the state. Yet within the anomaly of revolution no such path or promise exists. The fidelity that is often claimed by revolutionaries is more accurately a fidelity to the appearance of revolution in the state. Although revolution must be held apart from the state to be truly revolutionary, it must be able to be made manifest for revolution's possibilities to come to fruition.

It is important to note that revolution does not form a binary opposition to the state. This preserves revolution's independence insofar as binaries carry a logic and an order from which revolution must exempt itself. Jacques Derrida describes this well, saying "an opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g. speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and order of subordination."<sup>50</sup> Signs, as Derrida demonstrates, do not have intrinsic meaning, nor do they receive it by allusion to an external referent. They gain their meaning through the play of differences between them and the signs surrounding them<sup>51</sup>—especially those with which they share a direct opposition.<sup>52</sup> However, this logic cannot apply to

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<sup>50</sup> Derrida, "Signature Event Context", in *Limited Inc.* (Northwestern University Press; Evanston, 1977), 21.

<sup>51</sup> Derrida, "Differance" in *Margins of Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1982), 10-11.

<sup>52</sup> As an example to explain this concept, which Derrida terms "Differance", Derrida chooses the opposition of "present" with "past" and "future" ("Differance", 13).



revolution, for unlike the hierarchical oppositions and networks of significations Derrida describes, revolution is not encountered on the same strata as the state. The relationship between revolution and the state is one of exception, not opposition. Revolution is beyond the state, but not necessarily against the state; it is non-state without being anti-state. Were the latter true, the path of revolution would be easier to chart because revolution would consist of a contradiction to the state. Revolution's coordinates would be *nowhere*, *no when*, and *nothing* rather *somewhere*, *some when*, and *some thing*. If it were anti-state, revolution would be the opposite of what is counted and measured within the state.

To avoid a dualism between the state and revolution, and the host of problems that would accompany such a division, it must be the case that the two do not have a stable, consistent relationship. Revolution cannot be in relationship to the state, even as a negation of the state, because its nature as exception extracts it from any bond; instead, their association is unclear, hazy, and ambiguous. Revolution appears to move away from the state in an endless number of directions, with no one direction being definitive. The purpose of revolution lacks definition because there are many possible ends without any particular one being more authentic. Because revolution removes itself from the logic of the state, it should be understood as lacking any definitive label or designation. The anomaly of revolution can be seen from the state only obliquely and indirectly.

## **Modeling Revolution 2: Changing the changes in the world**

The definition of revolution must include a discussion of revolution as it is encountered in the state. How is it that revolution is able to affect the state, causing changes that are rightly celebrated—or justly condemned—from the USA to China? Defining revolution as anomaly

captures its separation from the state, but it also appears in the world. In doing so revolution and the state become associated, though the connection is not one of mechanistic causality or teleological determination. Rather, revolution appears in the state as a *catalytic change*, a change that changes the changes within the world. Every variation of the state describes a range of means by which change is introduced in the world. Thomas Hobbes delineates a series of affects which alter both the moods of individuals and the orderliness of states. Michel Foucault describes how alterations in the power relations that create subjects lead to new practices for tracking mental health or discussing sexual behavior. The result of naming such changes is that the state is able to “reestablish ideologies of command and authority”<sup>53</sup> by hiding the possibility for other changes. It sets up a “transcendent power”<sup>54</sup> that colonizes the “plane of immanence.”<sup>55</sup>

As a *catalytic change* revolution undoes and redoes changes by modifying or removing them and in the process replacing them with others. It speeds up and slows down processes in the state, dissolving the old and producing new mechanisms for change. It restructures not just the things in the state but the state itself. Revolution is not just an intensification of existing forces or the quickening of the rate at which society’s possibilities are produced, for the changes of revolution are qualitatively different from the changes of the state. To say otherwise ignores the radical creativity of revolution.

Some of the traits unattributable to revolution (such as establishment of a legitimate sovereign) may appear to be true of revolution when seen from the perspective of the state. In applying itself to extant forces and values, revolution seems to operate with a program.

Nevertheless, revolution is not expressing a determinate character when it acts as catalytic

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<sup>53</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, 2000), 75.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

change. Rather, it is applying its destruction and creativity to the status quo. One way to conceive of this incursion of revolution into the state is to think of it as undoing the specific “world horizon” that is furnished to us by a state. According to Merleau-Ponty, a world horizon is a context or unity in which novel phenomena appear. This “horizon of all horizons”<sup>56</sup> is open, incomplete, and allows for many different appearances; at the same time, however, it emphasizes convergence instead of radical difference and sees all potential changes as latent possibilities within the horizon itself. Revolution does not operate with a world horizon itself, but is able, from the perspective of the state, to completely rewrite and add on to any extant world horizon. If the rewritten world horizon spreads enough that it becomes widely accepted as the norm, it will ultimately become a new state to replace the old. As catalytic change, revolution associates with the state, is of the state, but is not subjugated to the state. It maintains its independence and irreducible novelty.

This ultimately leads to a possibly contentious claim, but one supported by my analysis, which is that revolution can create *ex nihilo*. To grasp revolution’s potential implies that revolution does not simply rearrange the material within the state or produce new beings using the substance of old ones according to natural laws. It produces what was literally not a possibility prior to it, or what was inconceivable before its advent. This is different from saying that revolutions produce possibilities that were conceivable but not actualizable, or that they can bring about what before was only a dream. It means that they can bring about what was neither a logical possibility nor an actuality, they can create what was neither a dream nor a reality.

Revolution shifts the terrain of existence rather than redrawing its boundaries. In doing so, it creates new impossibilities and new dreams alongside new realities. This is not to say that God-like revolutions create entire worlds down to the smallest detail, but they do create the

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<sup>56</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge Classics; London and New York, 1958), 385.

outlines of worlds out of nothingness that in turn produce people, objects, and forces in fundamentally new ways. Revolution creates states *ex nihilo* using new methods for the articulation and arrangement of such things in the world, creating beings out of each state's unique framework. My claim is that outside the framework for a particular world there is nothing, or nonbeing, the nature of which we necessarily must grapple with. Beings are conditioned by their state, revolutions yield the particular conditions of a state, and outside of that there is nothingness.

Although it is possible to posit in simple terms the *ex nihilo* creation of revolution, a bipartite answer is needed to identify that to which *ex nihilo* creation is applied. One cannot say that revolution operates only on the state without bringing revolution back to the state—this time by limiting revolution to reorganizing what was already there. Yet it is also impossible to say revolution operates on nothing without raising the question of how revolution is able to affect the state. Revolution can connect to the state without limiting it to that domain if we draw a distinction between the operations of revolution qua anomaly and revolution qua catalytic change. As anomaly, revolution is defined by creativity, and not attached to the state in any necessary way. What it operates on is unclear and inexact, and any impact it has on the state is encountered indirectly. But as catalytic change revolution operates directly on the state, and possibly all the changes, forces, and systems within it. It creates *ex nihilo*, but that creation is only measurable from and in relation to the state it operates on. Revolution manipulates the state, but it also extends into a beyond that from the state's perspective is unclear and indefinite.

What at first glance seems to be lacking in this model is a place for thoughtful political action. It seems there is little to be done if revolution can rewrite the world from the outside in one, sweeping manner. But withdrawing revolution from the state does not mean radical change

is wholly beyond our control. Though such a view is perhaps a necessary consequence of situating revolution outside the state (where nothing can control or dominate it), revolutionaries can play a role in channeling the flow of radical change. The direct control revolutionaries have in other models of revolution is replaced in Dynamic Anarchism with an ability to shape the manner in which revolution occurs (even as they are shaped by it). One must be attentive to participate in revolution effectively, for by ignoring a revolution's currents and holding dogmatically to a prescription for change one becomes blind to the many possibilities revolution offers. This is why specific demands are anathema to revolution, for you cannot demand in advance what you are unaware of, and to create demands using concepts or institutions drawn from the prior state lays the ground for the return of that state after the revolution. The May 68 slogan of "Demand the Impossible!" better captures the openness found in revolution, though even that can be interpreted as a nebulous antipathy towards the state rather than as a call for constant attention, activity, and critique. Demands, if there are to be any, must be open to change without endangering the transformation sought within the state.

Revolutionary action takes place in a world of incomplete and inaccurate information, so while demands can (and often are) given prior to revolution, there is no guarantee that they will be relevant or useful following it. If, on the one hand, revolution cannot be controlled, yet, on the other, we are not destined to be like Hegel's Owl of Minerva, coming "always comes too late"<sup>57</sup> to do anything but describe what has already been, what can revolutionaries achieve? First, activism and protest spread revolution's message. And although revolution is not tethered to anything in the world nor motivated solely through subjective affectations, rebels play an important role in increasing or augmenting the scope and impact of revolution's catalytic changes. The broad range of tools within a revolutionary's belt affect how the revolution is seen

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<sup>57</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1991), 23.

and taken up, and whether revolution will renew itself or taper out. The most effective revolutions are those that cascade from place to place, revitalizing themselves each and every time they reaches a new population or area. Revolutions do not need leaders to form their message, but participants to sustain and extend their impact.

### **Discovering the outside of time**

The exceptionality of revolutions implies that there is no simple temporal or spatial description of revolution. A complete account of revolutions demands an account of how revolution—both as anomaly and catalytic change—relates to temporality and, to a lesser extent, spatiality. Some theories address this issue by portraying events as instantaneous. Events are not part of a situation but follow a logic of their own, and because they operate as an exception to the norm they are singular in nature. To characterize events as temporal is to include them within the situation, since temporal language drawn from the situation carries with it an ontology that events resist. But instantaneous events except themselves from a situation's temporality and retain their singular integrity. Events can prescribe a new understanding of time, yet they themselves lack a temporal structure. To avoid presenting events as part of a particular state of affairs, or undermining the deep-seated shift that events supposedly produce, theorists of events avoid describing events in the same terms as situations. Such a concern is entirely warranted, but nevertheless does not necessitate seeing events as instantaneous.

The bipartite model of revolution I propose exempts revolution, in the mode of anomaly, from a situation's temporality, but, in the mode of catalytic change, allows the revolution to be described—though not perfectly captured—using temporal terminology. Revolution's appearance in the world entails that it provisionally acquires a temporality, though there is no

guarantee that the temporality will hold. This does not mean that revolutions are eternal, for the same reason that exempting revolutions from the world does not make them nothing.

Designating revolutions as eternal implies normativity inasmuch as infinite time is logically opposed to sequential or unfolding time (compelling revolutions to obey the logic that accompanies binary oppositions). To claim events are eternal does not avoid their encapsulation in a world, it just avoids their encapsulation in *our* world by placing them in another. Events should be seen as a-temporal in the sense of having no designated temporality and thus being outside of time altogether. The encounter with the temporality of revolution is an encounter with the absence of time inasmuch as time, in such a context, is indeterminate and unnamable. Nevertheless, the encounter of revolution from inside the world takes place within a temporal structure, and as such it is possible to say that the experience of revolution is one which can be designated temporally.

The temporality of revolution as it is experienced has elements of both itself and the world it mixes with, but properly belongs to neither. It results partially from what revolution introduces into the world, and partially from what was already in the world. As anomalies revolutions are a-temporal, but seen from within the state they can be instantaneous or seemingly without end. Similarly, revolutions are not localized within the state, but can appear to be so. They do not originate from a specific place, and cannot be reduced to a set of spatial coordinates, as they exempt themselves from the state's spatiality. Specific settings may play a symbolic role in revolutions, but this does not mean that they limit, cause, or determine anything. Squares, parks, and streets are a vehicle for the expression of revolution. But like temporal designations, locations within the state can change, and any attempt to situate revolutions within the world will

not capture them perfectly either. It is only possible to conditionally localize revolutions in terms of their origin and effects on the state.

### **The pathway to a new theory of revolution**

The Dynamic Anarchism model of revolution takes its cue in part from contemporary theorists who have begun the process of thinking through the structure of events. The most salient question concerns the nature of an event—what is its fundamental being, how does it appear, and to what degree can we know or experience it? To answer these questions requires knowing how events relate to the world, and how they exempt themselves from its otherwise smooth functioning.

Before venturing into the contemporary discussion of events, it is necessary to demonstrate the importance of disconnecting revolution from the state by revealing how theories of revolution that fail to do so cannot capture the exceptionality of revolution. To that end, I will begin my investigation by critiquing two schools of thought that make this mistake, Social Contract theory and Marxism. Social Contract theory, the first unified school of thought to isolate revolution and treat it separately from war or civil unrest, believes that the rational study of politics reveals an how to build a government which obeys natural laws and respects individual rights. It sees the role of revolutions as the overthrow of unjust institutions. Social contract theory's strategy of measuring the state against ideals of freedom and justice provides an important tool for critiquing the state's existence. But, with the exception of concepts like sovereignty and the state, as well as John Locke's innovative uses of concepts like 'people' and 'power', it offers very little for a comprehensive analysis of revolution. Most social contract theorists spend little time discussing the stages of revolution, environments in which they occur,



specific tactics employed by revolutionaries, connections to economics or other fields, or figures that appear in it.

Marxism, the most well developed strain of thought in revolutionary theory, claims that the modern society inevitably develops in due course as the result of material processes working out the contradictions they form. Under Marx's historically driven understanding of society, revolution is a product of historical forces like poverty, alienation, property, and the desire for wealth. No longer is it just a corrective, for Marx says past revolutionary developments have led to negative as well as positive results. Ultimately, revolution will teleologically resolve all the contradictions in society, bringing humans back to their true species being and destroying society's artificial institutions. Marxism undermines many of Social Contract theory's illusions Social Contract, but does so through the development of a materialist state organized around permanent processes, actions, and needs. Some of Marx's faults are corrected by later iterations of Marxism, though none fully escapes the inscription of revolution into a predetermined world and subjugation of it to a telos or program. I will focus on three variations on Marxist thought: (1) the Communism of Lenin, Trotsky, and Mao, (2) Benjamin and the Critical Theorists, and (3) post-war French Marxism, which can be subdivided into the structuralism of Althusser and the humanism of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

My own theory will be revealed through a detailed comparison with important evental theories that specifies which concepts are adaptable to the study of revolution. Theorists like Badiou, Kuhn, Foucault, and Deleuze will be examined in light of their additions to both evental and revolutionary theory. Their transposing of transcendental structures into immanent ones helps us think about how states can be rewritten. In addition, they emphasize how figures, subjects, and objects are the result of accidents, pre-subjective processes, and discursive

formations. Particularly anathema to these thinkers are schematic expressions of revolutions which accentuate figures, stages, and agency in an attempt to prescribe a revolutionary formula. Instead, they emphasize differences, productive forces, multitudes, and powers. The resulting focus on newness leads them to examine revolution's creative potentials. Revolution plays an important role throughout the political philosophy of evental theorists, although thus far it has been connected to the methodologies with which these thinkers work.

After laying out the theory of Dynamic Anarchism, this investigation will shift from a study of the form of revolution to its practice in order to show the relationship of Dynamic Anarchism to the strategy of revolutionaries. I will concern myself primarily with writers who develop tactics and strategies for revolution. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis in both depth and breadth I will closely examine three considerably different schools of thought: the tactics of the French and American revolutions, guerrilla warfare, and black radicalism (particularly that of twentieth century America). Particular attention will be paid to canonical figures like Tom Paine, Maximilien de Robespierre, Che Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, W.E.B. DuBois, and Malcolm X. Such figures, while perhaps ascribing to a political doctrine, are more concerned with practical actions and organizing. Their chief concern is whether or not their tactics will be effective while still reducing harm. Because notions of human rights, justice, and equality motivate these thinkers they are not pure pragmatists who see no limits on what revolutionaries can justifiably do. But because of the practical nature of their beliefs their thought cannot be reduced to any of the earlier theories. Instead, they use theory as a tool—one among many—for the achievement of their goal.

At the end of this theoretical trajectory, it will clear that revolutions themselves are in need of a revolution. Great strides have been made by studying how society experiences

revolution, developing tactics and strategies to master it, and avoiding the various pitfalls of revolutions can fall into. But over time the space set aside for revolution has been strewn with the detritus of other theories and leftovers from fetishists of revolution. To unlock the bonds holding revolution back we must find it a new ground. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we may be at the beginning of a seismic shift. Signs show that unless we fix the harms of human civilization, the natural world and the vengeance of the injured of the world will, quite simply, leave us without the ability to fix much of anything. The historically low levels of faith in government reveal how dissatisfied people are with minor reforms and demonstrate the need for a movement that can create a better society from top to bottom. Within that context, I submit this analysis of revolution as a step towards an understanding of the nature of revolution, within the larger path we must follow in the creation of a free and egalitarian world.

# Regulating Revolution: Nature, the Sovereign, and the Social Contract

## The dawning of revolution

In the heady days of the French Revolution, just prior to the Reign of Terror, Louis Saint-Just put words to what was becoming a common view at the time: “It is impossible to reign in innocence. The folly of that is all too evident. All Kings are rebels and usurpers.”<sup>58</sup> At Louis XVI’s trial the prosecution’s words were no less profane when Maximilian Robespierre declared “Regretfully I speak this fatal truth—Louis must die because the nation must live.”<sup>59</sup> And just slightly earlier the American revolutionary Tom Paine penned a similar truth, saying “Of more worth is one honest man to society, and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived.”<sup>60</sup> In Europe and the American colonies, a shift had happened. A previously impossible truth was becoming not just feasible, but necessary. The beliefs and methods of the revolutionaries were incompatible with old structures. The world of the divinely endowed monarch was dissolving even as it fought its last battles along the ramparts of its palaces, and in its place the ideas of social contract theory were achieving a foothold among the former subjects of the King, who were taking up the mantle of citizen and autonomous individual. Though there were many battles yet to be fought, many discussions yet to be had, many endeavors yet to be undertaken, ineluctably the passage of time was making more and more certain a new political reality—that no longer could the King be allowed to keep his head.

It had for centuries been taken as a fundamental truth that the sovereign ruler was endowed by God with the authority to rule, and that no other defense of the sovereign’s power was needed. The first intervention social contract theory makes into this strain of thought is to

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<sup>58</sup> M. J. Mavidal and M. E. Laurent, eds., *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, première série (1787 à 1799), 82 vols. (Paris: Dupont, 1879-1913), 53-56:390-93.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-56:324-26.

<sup>60</sup> Tom Paine, “Common Sense” in *Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1955), 20.

cast doubt upon that proposition by questioning the validity of justifying one's rule with God, advocating instead a turn to reason.<sup>61</sup> A politics that begins with reason discovers the natural ground of society as well as the appropriate distribution of rights and responsibilities. The right foundation prevents political collapse by indicating laws that regulate the political relationships in society,<sup>62</sup> preventing excess and channeling state resources. Within these laws numerous associations and policies are possible, and social contract theory remains neutral about them as long as they don't adversely affect individuals' rights or the sovereign's power. If and when revolution enters this world, it enters for the purposes of serving these larger goals, becoming a mechanism within a larger program of society building. It resets the system by bringing a deviant society back to its starting point. Yet because revolution can easily go awry social contract theorists place it in a world of rules that govern its impact. The appropriate limits of revolution, its function, and its goals, are supposed to be obvious from the dictates that are revealed when reason contemplates nature. But drawing revolution into the well-regulated world of the social contract opens the door for a crisis, for revolution inevitably destabilizes the political systems of social contract theorists by undermining the structures of the natural world and the state. This crisis compels many changes in the social contract as theorists try to resolve it, yet it is ultimately unsolvable as the problem comes from the ground of their political systems.

Social contract theory is based on the claim that human society is composed of separate individualities. It washes away genealogical hierarchies and the chains of command that identified earlier political systems, substituting instead a space characterized by isolated units arranged uniformly and identically along a flat and otherwise undifferentiated surface. Whether

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<sup>61</sup> Mintz, Samuel, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 34-35; and Israel, Jonathan, *Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), viii.

<sup>62</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. MacPherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 5.

the unit is the individual, family, or society, in the state of nature all start with the same faculties and remain relatively unchanged even after forming the social contract. Hobbes says “nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable”<sup>63</sup>. Rousseau is explicit: “Which people, then, is fit to receive laws?... [A] people without deep-rooted customs or superstitions.”<sup>64</sup> Social contract theory “[sweeps] away ecclesiastical power and privilege at the same time that it [curbs] sectarianism and religious dissension”<sup>65</sup> and refuses to posit “any particular branch of humanity [that possesses] a special gift or genius to enlighten and instruct others”.<sup>66</sup>

Contracts and rationality are, respectively, the proper mode and proper articulation of relationships within the social contract world. They demarcate the figures and forces found there. All relationships must aim towards a reciprocal exchange formed and maintained by two autonomous individualities, and measure up to the dictates of reason. When rationality and contracts arrange the disparate units within the world, they create normative values that sanction anyone or anything not properly standardized. The political systems of Hobbes and Locke are grounded according to the “general rules of reason”<sup>67</sup> or the dictates of “natural reason”<sup>68</sup>, on the one hand, and consensual agreements<sup>69</sup> or mutual transferring of right,<sup>70</sup> on the other. Reason funnels, channels, and puts to good use the affective and irrational elements of society by properly situating them so that they do not interfere with rational governance. It is universally

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (Middlesex; Penguin, 1968), 183.

<sup>64</sup> Rousseau, *The social contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London; Penguin, 1968), 95.

<sup>65</sup> Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> Israel, *Revolution of the Mind*, 205.

<sup>67</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 190.

<sup>68</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 192.

identified with progress and improvement,<sup>71</sup> though thinkers differ as to its ultimate goal. Spinoza believes the ultimate goal of reason—open to anybody—is liberty and equality, while Hobbes argues that rationality’s goal of stability is safer when stewarded by an elite few.<sup>72</sup> All believe reason can produce a rationally organized society, though the name and nature of that society differs from thinker to thinker. Hobbes refers to the “generation of a commonwealth”<sup>73</sup> through contracts, Locke to the creation of “political societies”<sup>74</sup>, and Grotius to entering “civil society.”<sup>75</sup> Requiring political relationships to fit the form of a contract pushes non-contractual relationships to the margins of the political world. Naturally existing relationships lack political significance unless preceded by a contract which orders power within society. Hobbes criticizes the familial relationship as incapable of grounding a well-functioning society<sup>76</sup>, but preserves it within his commonwealth because of its usefulness in raising children. Yet it is recast as a contractual relationship instead of one of natural right.<sup>77</sup> Locke says that “every man hath a right to punish...and be executioner” in the state of nature<sup>78</sup>, but upon entering the social contract that right passes to the executive power in order to secure the “peace, safety, and public good of the people.”<sup>79</sup> The irrational and non-contractual is put to work producing the egalitarian and rational society of which social contract theory dreams.

Social contract theory’s temporal order is defined by lack of change, for the same dilemmas, possibilities, and choices that confront the state today confronted every prior state.

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<sup>71</sup> Israel, *Revolution of the Mind*, 3-6.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2, 21.

<sup>73</sup> Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 33.

<sup>74</sup> James Tully, “Locke” in *Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, (University of Cambridge Press; Cambridge, 1991), 623.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Tuck, “Grotius and Selden” in *Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, (University of Cambridge Press; Cambridge, 1991), 519.

<sup>76</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 224.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-4.

<sup>78</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 10.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

Time is cyclical—as leaders pass and societies come and go, each individual is able to choose again from the same options that previous generations did. Locke believes history confirms this view of time, since by “looking back as far as records give us any account of peopling the world...we commonly find the *government* to be in one hand”<sup>80</sup> and that “all peaceful beginnings of *government* have been *laid in the consent of the people*.”<sup>81</sup> Though more open to change than Locke inasmuch as he rejects the idea that any law is eternal<sup>82</sup>, Rousseau sees a natural tendency in all governments to “pass from a greater number to a smaller number, that is, from democracy to aristocracy, or from aristocracy to royal government.”<sup>83</sup> For him the “principle of political life”—the sovereign authority expressed through executive and legislative powers—keeps all states functioning.<sup>84</sup> The social contract is ubiquitous. New adults always confront the question of joining or leaving the state, and new states must deal with the same threats that endangered previous ones. Social context may affect which answer is appropriate (Rousseau emphasizes how the particularity of nations alters how individual freedom is recognized)<sup>85</sup>, but the general outline of the social contract system applies to all humans universally. Paine sees all hereditary systems as bad<sup>86</sup>, Locke proclaims a universal “spiritual” equality<sup>87</sup>, and Spinoza believes that ceding one’s ‘natural right’ upon entering society is something that each person must do no matter the circumstances.<sup>88</sup> Time is measured by the repetition of patterns and the need to understand both the dangers and potentials of every alternative.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>82</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 134.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>85</sup> Israel, *Revolution of the Mind*, 62.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 92-3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 186.



## Perils of the Social Contract

Social contract theory's spatial, temporal, and relational boundaries regulate the world, but they cannot contain the destructive force of revolution. While necessitated by social contract theory's innovations, revolution is always at odds with the social contract system. Because sovereigns are no longer the origin of reason, public goodness, and nature, they do not found, but rather exemplify, justice and order. This means that citizens can petition the sovereign for redress of grievances where it has failed to meet the standard of fairness reason demands. In extreme cases, the sovereign can be overthrown. Hugo Grotius, as early as 1625, says Kings are liable for damages if they do "not use such Means, as they may and ought, to prevent Robberies and Piracy"<sup>89</sup>; and, as late as 1776, Tom Paine tells the British colonies that "a government of our own is our natural right."<sup>90</sup> The sovereign can embody reason, but cannot be reason; there is always a potential for a gap between the dictates of reason found in nature and its instantiation by the state. Because the goal of the social contract is a state that approximates the optimal framework discovered in studying nature, it is necessary to renew the connection between the sovereign and nature when they diverge. Sometimes the renewal comes from the sovereign, which may set up systems that monitor whether it has deviated from natural law, but it is not able—and often is not willing—to address every deviation. Revolution enters the social contract world as a force which can reestablish the sovereign's embodiment of rationality, and its fidelity to the social contract, on those occasions when the sovereign has failed to carry out the duties nature prescribes. When carried out correctly, it prevents corruption and maintains the longevity of the social contract.

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<sup>89</sup> Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace Book 2*, ed. Richard Tuck. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 191.

<sup>90</sup> Tom Paine, "Common Sense" in *Collected Writings* ed. Eric Foner (Citadel Press, New York, 1945), 30.

Hobbes is an exception to this, as he holds that revolution (or rebellion) is too unpredictable and too destructive to ever be countenanced.<sup>91</sup> Revolution violates the principle of reason that prevents us from doing anything destructive to our lives. In addition, though the sovereign is bound to not cause injury or injustice to their subjects<sup>92</sup>, this is not because they are party to a contract but the result of a social contract produced by the common agreement of all people within the commonwealth. Thus a tyrannical ruler cannot break the social contract as they never agreed to it; and while they may violate the rules governing their behavior, that situation is preferable to revolution.

The political and social conditions of Europe illuminate why social contract theorists began to rethink revolution. Political conflicts, enlightened rulers amenable to intellectual study, and new avenues for trade created the right conditions for new political ideas. Disagreements over who should rule inspired Grotius, Hobbes, and Locke, who each saw their texts as being useful for mediating conflicts like the Thirty Years War, English Civil War, and Glorious Revolution, respectively. And while Spinoza did not write in response to a political crisis, he lived during the Dutch Golden Age, an era characterized by technological, artistic, and scientific innovation as well as significant expansion in trade and communication. Given the advancements society was making independently of a divine monarch, it is no wonder that Spinoza was led to rethink old doctrines. If starting with the rational individual could yield profound philosophical insights, what novel political concepts could it yield? Even social contract theorists whose work was not brought about by a crisis were influenced by the development of a new intellectual culture. Rousseau was aided by the French philosophes, Locke relied on the newly developed intellectual infrastructure in Scotland, and Tom Paine

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<sup>91</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 205.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

found support in the ongoing exchange of ideas found in the colonies. The growth of civil society and its importance mirrors the increasing significance the populace has in social contract theory, just as the appearance of enlightened sovereigns exemplifies social contract theorists' models for what a virtuous sovereign should look like. In Hobbes' time Elizabeth was the model for an enlightened monarch, just as Grotius advocated for Louis XIII and Locke defended William III's claim to the throne. The historical appearance of new political and social conditions meant that a new ground for politics needed to be formulated, one which could accommodate the situations social contract theorists were seeing. Revolution, just like the idea that the sovereign's power derives from the people, needed to be addressed philosophically.

Social contract theorists lessen their unease at incorporating violent revolution into their political systems by monitoring it closely. Revolution creates the potential for a power that can act without regard for the sovereign, since if the population can justly act against a corrupt sovereign then it can embody reason in the sovereign's place. The populace that acts in revolution can become a sovereign power itself. It is paradoxical for there to be two sovereigns under the social contract (which was established for the purposes of uniting people "into one body [with] a common established law and judicature"<sup>93</sup> that is "not subject to another's Power."<sup>94</sup> Because revolution has the potential to undermine the social contract's basis, it only appears as an anti-sovereign. Revolution calls citizens to oppose the sovereign's laws when necessary, but does not itself create laws, and it acts independently of the sovereign only insofar as its actions resist sovereign power. To preserve the state, social contract theorists limit what grievances can be legitimately addressed by revolution. Small injustices (such as serving in the army) are beyond revolution as lawful expressions of a sovereign's authority, while massive

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<sup>93</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 47.

<sup>94</sup> Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace Book 1*, ed. Richard Tuck. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 94.

changes (such as the abolition of property) cannot be effected since they would contradict natural law. An inevitable result of combining revolution with the social contract is that revolution is incapable of acting upon the social contract in order for the integrity of that agreement to be maintained. Social contract theorists—Hobbes excepted—claim that revolution is only justified when the sovereign breaks the social contract. But does the inclusion of revolution within social contract theory lead to problems? What if revolution cannot rein in the sovereign's excesses working within the confines of social contract theory? What I intend to show is that social contract theory creates a paradox that puts the stated goal of revolution in conflict with social contract theory's descriptions of 'nature' and 'reason'.

I will begin by elaborating the boundaries of and variations within the social contract world. Because each one of social contract theory's subdivisions necessitates a different relationship to revolution, I will show how the relationship to revolution changes depending on how the state is described. The first subdivision comes from the two different ways thinkers discuss the beginnings of contracts, including the state of nature, the state of war, and general provisions recommended by each thinker.

Next, I will examine three ways social contract thinkers formulate civil society, including how they envision equality and the relationships between figures such as the sovereign, the people, and slaves. In the process of reviewing the different strands of social contract theory, I will point out the role revolution plays and how it ultimately authorizes but does not revise the state. I will examine the image of revolution that each theory returns, including any particular stages they give to it, any formulation it has, and any causes that commonly lead to it or effects that stem from it.

Third, I will discuss the problems that inevitably prevent social contract theory from producing a civil society governed by reason and equality.

Finally, I will show how these problems compel a new theory of revolution and thus pave the way for Marxism. This analysis will reveal the devices, the rules, and the dangers inherent within social contract theory with regards to the state and revolution.

### **Capturing our Natural Freedom**

The inevitable first step social contract theorists take to establish their doctrine is formulating a natural ground out of which the state will arise. All the artificial constructs of the state are pulled away and the essential human form is laid bare. Lacking laws, governmental institutions, and social conventions, humans are found to be in “a state of perfect freedom” (ST, 8) which “prohibits nothing but what no one desires or no one can do”<sup>95</sup> and where “the notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice have...no place.”<sup>96</sup> The absence of rules in this state of nature may at first seem advantageous, but the license it offers produces conflict and war. Even though social contract theorists do not all believe that license is absolute—only Hobbes believes everyone has the right to everything<sup>97</sup> while by contrast Locke believes that men do not have the right to harm others<sup>98</sup> and Rousseau questions slavery<sup>99</sup> and the principle of “might makes right”<sup>100</sup>—they all agree that the lack of a power that can enforce rules is a problem. This gives rise to an agreement amongst every person in the state of nature to forego their natural power, set down laws, and abide by the judgments of a sovereign power. As John Rawls notes,

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<sup>95</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2007), 197. As Spinoza later rejects social contract theory in his *Political Treatise*, my inclusion of Spinoza focuses on the social contract framework developed specifically within the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

<sup>96</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 188.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>98</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 9.

<sup>99</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 58.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

accompanying the institution of a sovereign power is the creation of an inviolable concept of justice which, rather than allowing that “the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many,” only institutes an injustice to “avoid an even greater injustice.”<sup>101</sup> Such a system of justice originates from “the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality”<sup>102</sup> and not from arbitrary or inequitable judgments. Rules of justice are developed to limit one’s freedom in return for security and order.

But do the limits on freedom only begin with the social contract, or are they latent within the very description of ‘natural humans’? People within the state of nature are defined very narrowly, using characteristics that obligate specific behaviors or actions. Most social contracts expect people in the state of nature to be governed primarily, if not exclusively, by their rational self-interest. People who engage in war do it for their own defense<sup>103</sup> or gain<sup>104</sup>, only forming alliances for the “advantage of both parties.”<sup>105</sup> Even raising children is calculated and not altruistic, for parents should expect children to return “respect, reverence, support, and compliance” in exchange for their “care, cost, and kindness.”<sup>106</sup> Rousseau is the one exception to this, as he sees familial interest as another principal motive. Though preserving oneself is both within man’s nature and “Man’s first law,” the care a father has for his children is another driving force preceding any organization of society<sup>107</sup>. Social contract theorists also know that one who is ‘free’ within nature will inevitably want to form a society. Hobbes says men “naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,” and so their “finall Cause” is “the foresight of

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<sup>101</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, 1971), 3-4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>103</sup> Grotius, *War and Peace I*, 65.

<sup>104</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 185.

<sup>105</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 203.

<sup>106</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 37.

<sup>107</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 50.

their own preservation, and of a more contented life”<sup>108</sup> in civil society. One may initially desire to live alone, but obstacles will build up until, according to Rousseau, “the human race will perish if it doesn’t change its mode of existence.”<sup>109</sup> Simple passions like desire, love, and grief lead to felicity, misery, and war<sup>110</sup>, just as a desire to “live in a...more agreeable Manner”<sup>111</sup> leads to seizing property and, ultimately, the social contract. Living freely within the state of nature means one desires preservation, glory, and wealth; that one is willing to go to war to preserve property; and that the only way to satisfy these desires, without risking death, is through a social contract.

The world is also restricted in the state of nature. The descriptions of nature provided by social contract theorists delineate a limited number of operations and forms the world can take. Arranging the world through disparate spatiality and cyclical time, and animating it through rationality and contracts, gives the world an eternal order it cannot surpass. This order is consonant with the defining characteristics of individuals found in the state of nature.

Humankind’s natural self-interest and desires are explicitly attached to the limits of the world. Rousseau says that man must “watch over his own preservation” and that “as soon as he reaches the age of reason...he becomes his own master.”<sup>112</sup> Spinoza connects men’s self-interest with their nature, saying “it is a universal law of human nature that no one neglects anything they deem good unless they hope for a greater good or fear a greater loss, and no one puts up with anything bad except to avoid something worse or because he hope for something better.”<sup>113</sup>

Spinoza concludes that “no one will promise without deception to give up his right to all things,

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<sup>108</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 223.

<sup>109</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 59.

<sup>110</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 118-130.

<sup>111</sup> Grotius, *War and Peace* 2, 20.

<sup>112</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 50.

<sup>113</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 198.

and absolutely no one will keep his promises except from fear of a greater ill or hope of a greater good.”<sup>114</sup> The character of a contract, which has force when it is in one’s interest and becomes void when it is not<sup>115</sup>, comes directly out of natural law. Grotius’ legitimate causes of war require a clash of interests between disparate individuals, such as when “Securities are demanded against a Person that has threatened an Injury” or “Punishment [must be] inflicted.”<sup>116</sup> The world produces an individuals’ natural environment and possible choices, while the actions of natural individuals maintain the features of the world. The two sides work synchronously to produce and regulate the entire state of nature. Everything that does not conform is marginalized or goes uncounted. The presentation of the state of nature as a space of freedom takes place within a grid that carefully screens what characteristics a free person can express and controls how the natural world appears. For the natural world to seem free, it must confine everything that is in it.

Social contract theory has two schools of thought regarding what is natural. One articulates nature primarily along lines of self-interested autonomy, and the other largely along lines of familial reciprocity. What is likely, what is possible, and what is justifiable within nature depend upon the degree to which some sort of natural organization of individuals can be posited. Grotius, Hobbes, and Spinoza fall into the first perspective—which I am naming the *isolate* perspective—that sees nature as lacking any concept of justice or virtue, where one acts primarily according to one’s self-interest. Locke, Rousseau, and Paine fall into the second—which I am naming the *relational* perspective—where there is a more natural organization to human society that conditions more generous actions and a normative framework.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>116</sup> Grotius, *War and Peace* 2, 8.



“Isolate” philosophers believe reason shows that the state of nature lacks any necessary human relationships, and that the dominant mode of relating to one another is in terms of one’s rational self-interest. Hugo Grotius says Natural Law comes out of the rational investigation of a thing’s essence and is enforced by God.<sup>117</sup> Natural Law is infinite, eternal, unchanging, immanent within the world, and evident to reasonable people with common sense.<sup>118</sup> It reveals that “man is by nature a mild creature.”<sup>119</sup> though the unsociable have “grown so by addicting themselves to Vice, contrary to the Rules of Nature.”<sup>120</sup> Instincts<sup>121</sup> and a predilection to protect one’s property ineluctably lead to war, which nature allows for the preservation of one’s belongings and natural condition. Warring over property is just inasmuch as property is a right of ownership<sup>122</sup> and war a dispute by force that repels violations of rights.<sup>123</sup> A state develops once free and autonomous individuals come together “to enjoy peaceably their Rights, and for their common Benefit.”<sup>124</sup> It establishes the legal framework which ensures the protection of one’s rights and limits one’s actions to protect others. A sovereign, unaccountable to any human, acts as lawmaker, magistrate, and judge in regards to “the making and repealing of Laws”<sup>125</sup> and affairs concerning “the publick Good.”<sup>126</sup>

Hobbes’ state of nature is more unpleasant, for in it men live a “nasty, brutish, and short” life where people are constantly propelled into quarrel because of competition, diffidence, and glory.<sup>127</sup> Because there is no concept of justice one has the right to do whatever is in one’s

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>127</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 185-6.

power<sup>128</sup>, resulting in a constant drift towards war (which is bolstered by humankind's inadequate reasoning powers<sup>129</sup> and the lack of any concept of property or privacy within the Natural world<sup>130</sup>). Reason recognizes this natural situation is untenable and forms Natural Laws that dictate the proper organization of society—laws compelling individuals to seek peace, renounce their claim to everyone and everything, and set up a sovereign who will ensure compliance.<sup>131</sup> Both Grotius and Hobbes emphasize the close proximity of nature to war and that protecting what one views as one's own is a major cause of war. They disagree about which considerations give rise to Natural Law. Grotius believes it comes from investigating the nature of things (or acts) while Hobbes believes it comes from the contemplating what is needed to preserve human life.<sup>132</sup> For both, the proper function of an object is given by the relations it forms with the rest of the world and how reason summons us to respond.

Spinoza does not start out far from Hobbes, for he puts forth an account of how in nature right and power are equal. As 'natural right' is equal to God's power (and because God is all-powerful), in nature one has the right to do whatever is in one's power.<sup>133</sup> Reason plays no necessary role in determining action or behavior at this point. This existence is tenuous, for one is in danger of losing one's property, family, or life. Reason enters Spinoza's considerations upon the formation of society, as reason naturally leads individuals to choose the protection of society over the "hostility, hatred, anger, and deceit"<sup>134</sup> of individual living. Spinoza is distinguished from Hobbes by his treatment of the problem given to reason in the state of nature. It is not only a matter of seeking peace by renouncing the power one possesses but also of

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>133</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 195-196.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 196.

preserving one's right to express their reason and thought freely. The purpose of the state is "to allow [peoples'] minds and bodies to develop in their own ways in security and enjoy the free use of reason, and not to participate in conflicts based on hatred, anger, or deceit..."<sup>135</sup> Instead of focusing on the war and misery of the natural state, Spinoza conceives of nature as a germ of enlightened discourse and reasonability which blossoms into a wholly different civil society than the ones Hobbes and Grotius envisioned.

"Relational" thinkers like Rousseau and Locke associate nature with the familial, arguing for a natural organization characterized by impartiality and cooperation that leaves one without a vehicle to express one's thought publicly and an effective means of protection. Locke insists that reason requires the establishment of a commons by compact, since food, drink, and other necessities for subsistence were given to all of mankind. It is only because of this commons that property, which originates by "taking any part of what is in common, and removing it out of the state nature leaves it in,"<sup>136</sup> can be manufactured. Rousseau claims there is a "natural bond" between parents and children that becomes an association of choice later.<sup>137</sup> Because war is "not a passionate and hasty, but a sedate settled design upon another man's life"<sup>138</sup> it will not happen for minor reasons. Locke epitomizes nature as a state of equality, where "all creatures of the same species and rank...should also be equal..."<sup>139</sup> but says there are various mechanisms that put individuals into unequal relationships. Paternal power or skill are natural forms of inequality<sup>140</sup>, while the election of a sovereign power is artificial (though it refers back to paternal rule).<sup>141</sup> Rousseau's state of nature is articulated in much the same way. Everyone

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>136</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 19.

<sup>137</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 50.

<sup>138</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 14.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 56.

starts their life tied to their father, lacking an immediate state of equality but with an equal potential for liberty. Equality is gained when children no longer need their parents for their preservation, at which point the bond is replaced with reciprocal freedom and equality.<sup>142</sup> In civil society everyone begins free and equal. They surrender their freedom when it is to their advantage so as to give the sovereign a paternal position.<sup>143</sup> There is some natural disparity, but those able to depend upon themselves are free and equal with respect to one another, entering into civil society by choice in order to benefit from its protection. Rousseau claims the family is the basis for the original social covenant<sup>144</sup>, and that civil society is natural inasmuch as it follows the family, but artificial when it moves beyond that. Locke sees a stronger difference between the two, for while both have a compact at their heart, it is only political society that wields the legislative power of life and death.<sup>145</sup> Thus while the first society was between a man and woman, new powers needed to be found to produce political society. Both believe reason advocates the development of civil society for comfort, safety, longevity, and peaceable living.<sup>146</sup>

Tom Paine is similar to Locke and Rousseau, for he argues that humans are created equal<sup>147</sup>, that special kinships are shared<sup>148</sup>, and that reason leads to forming societies that supply one's "natural wants" and satisfy one's "social affections."<sup>149</sup> Paine is unique among "relational" theorists for attributing kinship to the entirety of mankind. A natural community precedes and grounds the formation of civil society. Like all social contract theorists, Rousseau, Locke, and Paine point to reason as the origin of the rules structuring the natural world, but they

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<sup>142</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 50.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>145</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 46.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 52; Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 60.

<sup>147</sup> Tom Paine, "The Rights of Man" in *Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1955), 463.

<sup>148</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man 1*, 548.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 551-2.

each disagree about the degree to which individuals can be relied upon to reason correctly.

Locke and Rousseau argue that structural bulwarks must act as safeguards against natural biases and inclinations that pervert reason.<sup>150</sup> Paine argues that reason, wielded publically by a democratic government, is by far the finest way of protecting society from its possible ills.<sup>151</sup>

Both isolate and relational social contract theorists arrange the state of nature to contain embryonic states in the form of rational individuals, paternally controlled families, or natural communities. These groups, after they form the post-social contract civil society, are the same groups that wield the force of revolution and condition revolution's very existence. The power controlling revolution becomes the same power expressed in the state, as the state and revolution are formed by the same authority. The manner of control differs depending on how each theorist depicts nature. The isolate perspective discounts any relationship not defined by mutual exchange on the basis of self-interest, including natural groups (Hobbes holds that when it comes to the social contract familial relationships are irrelevant until after the institution of the commonwealth)<sup>152</sup>, but the relational perspective only disallows the development of unnatural groups not based on kinship. For Grotius and Hobbes, a subject who wants to disagree with the sovereign must have standing, which comes from having suffered a direct slight at the sovereign's hands. Hobbes' possible slights involve issues of "Debt, or of right of possession of lands or goods, or concerning any service required at [the sovereign's] hands, or concerning any penalty corporall, or pecuniary, grounded on a precedent Law."<sup>153</sup> Slight Locke recognizes include those accepted by Hobbes, but also a sovereign's violation of a society's right to

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<sup>150</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 8; Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 65.

<sup>151</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man 1*, 566.

<sup>152</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 285.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

property<sup>154</sup> or to provide for itself.<sup>155</sup> In these latter cases one's standing comes from mankind's inalienable rights, which a sovereign must respect. In other words, when thinking about the propriety of opposing the sovereign, one's reflections should stop at the limits of one's personal interest—for Grotius, Hobbes, and Spinoza—or one's communal interest—for Locke, Rousseau, and Paine. It is almost impossible to justify a revolution using isolate theory since only individual grievances can be brought before the sovereign. Spinoza differs from Hobbes and Grotius in that he does allow for free speech in his state provided one does not advocate rebellion, meaning subjects can disagree with a sovereign's policies even without having been slighted by them. However, Spinoza does not ground this freedom of speech in the rights of mankind, or in public welfare. It is an isolated individual who deserves this right by virtue of being a free thinking individual, not by being part of a larger community.<sup>156</sup> The shared discontent that frequently provokes revolution is recognized by relational theory, but only when it stems from a natural group like a family, commonwealth, or community. Both perspectives give no consideration to dissent originating from racial, gender, or class based offenses. Even sympathy with the plight of the suffering is excluded. Acting with reference to these alternative interests makes one irrational and incapable of forming contracts, someone whose very presence is excluded even from the state of nature. Rawls' original position excludes anyone who is envious or affectionate<sup>157</sup>, incapable of acting according to agreed upon principles<sup>158</sup>, interested in another's interests<sup>159</sup>, or possessed of "irrational" biases involving "pointless or arbitrary" traits like skin color or gender.<sup>160</sup> Only "general facts about human society"—political affairs,

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<sup>154</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 18, 111.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>156</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 258.

<sup>157</sup> Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 124-5.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

economic theory, psychological laws, etc.<sup>161</sup>—should be known when deciding what rules to follow, meaning that an appeal to solidarity based upon “arbitrary” or non-generic aspects of humanity is unacceptable. Rawls believes violations of the law—revolution included—are only justified when a society or government deviates from the reasonable standards of justice uncovered while contemplating a generic picture of humanity.<sup>162</sup> Rawls develops this concept of reasonableness in contrast to the idea of rational self-interest. Rationality concerns individuals calculating what is to their advantage and acting based on that determination. Reasonableness calls for individuals to act based upon fair rules for exchange—sometimes sacrificing what is to their direct advantage—as delineated by the considerations that take place within the original position.<sup>163</sup>

For social contract theory, any revolution which refers to an alternate logic besides that of rational self-interest (or, for Rawls, reasonableness), contracts, disparate individuality, or cyclical temporality, is *prima facie* indefensible.

### **The Covenant that Binds**

Leaving the state of nature is depicted as a major transformation, potentially the biggest one in the history of society. With the exception of Rousseau, for whom the covenant is a regretful necessity, social contract theorists portray the agreement binding society together as a significant accomplishment. It is the point where a new lifestyle, a new way of interacting, is created—one which will be sustainable rather than destructive. Locke describes this event as coming “out of a state of nature”<sup>164</sup> to “make one body politic under one government, put

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 309-310.

<sup>163</sup> Political Liberalism, 50-51.

<sup>164</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 53.

[oneself] under an obligation, to every one of that society, to submit to the determination of the majority.”<sup>165</sup> Hobbes calls it a transference of one’s natural right<sup>166</sup> through a contract which is enforced by the establishment of a common power other than nature.<sup>167</sup> Even with his ambivalence, Rousseau admits that the creation of the social contract amounts to a new “mode of existence.”<sup>168</sup> This focus on the momentousness of the contract hides how, despite these descriptions, one never leaves the state of nature. Passing into society does not erase nature, nor are the many feelings, desires, and interests of nature left behind. Rather, nature is channeled by society for the purposes of building an ordered world. Society attempts to make nature useful by identifying what within nature is applicable for the purpose of building a lasting state. The social contract does not pull humans out of nature—it authorizes a part of nature, both in the sense of legitimating it and reproducing it. Nature thus pervades and surrounds the state, and the state does not efface nature but consolidates it. Together, the state and nature produce a more comfortable place than the state of nature.

Social contract theory can be divided into three different schools when it comes to the state—radicalism, liberalism, and conservatism. The oldest of these three perspectives is the conservative vision of thinkers like Hugo Grotius and Thomas Hobbes, which proposes a hegemonic sovereign that leaves little room for engagement with the multitudes of people composing society. Liberal social contract thinkers like Locke and Rousseau take much from conservatism, but differ because they view humans as more accommodating and less in need of the sovereign’s protection. The liberal tradition depicts a society where the multitude has a greater role in governance and where the people are more independent of the sovereign. The

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>166</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 191.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>168</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 59.



closest one gets to a society of indispensable freedom is the radical social contract theories of Spinoza and Tom Paine. They argue for sweeping reform, fundamental liberty and equality, limits to sovereign power, and a naturalism that sees humans as parts of an organic whole rather than solitary stewards within the world.

It is interesting to note is how the societies each thinker lived in correlates with the school they fall into. Grotius and Hobbes lived in societies threatened by civil conflict, as Hobbes' England was torn apart by a civil war where it is estimated that hundreds of thousands died while Grotius' Dutch Republic (which was at the time controlled by the Holy Roman Empire and France) was torn apart by the Thirty Years War. In both societies, there were many powerful advocates for an absolute monarchy and not much in the way of empirical evidence about how a constitutional system would function. By contrast, Rousseau and Locke each lived when there was less civil strife, for even though the Glorious Revolution took place in Locke's lifetime there were comparatively few casualties (it is sometimes referred to as the bloodless revolution). In addition, constitutional governance had taken root in both of their societies to a limited extent, and so both had some direct experience with what it was like and how it worked. The difference between the two is that Locke's English government was more hospitable to Enlightenment ideas than Rousseau's France. It was the schools and intellectual societies in France which cultivated new ideas and scientific study in that country. Finally, both Spinoza and Paine lived in relatively free societies. At the time of Spinoza's life the Netherlands were a republic, while during Paine's lifetime the colonies became a representative democracy. While there were elites in both societies (mainly as a result of wealthy merchants or traders), politics was free from the restrictions that defined most early modern European nations. There was a lot of experimentation, exploration, and creativity to be found. As how much the sovereigns of each

thinkers' society intrudes upon daily life roughly maps onto the type of government they proposed, all three schools of thought can be seen as responses to the types of events, issues, and ideas at work during their lifetime.

Conservative thinkers emphasize a centralized power system, dominating structures that allow only for limited change, and a preference for monarchy or aristocracy. Grotius' discussion of sovereignty's nature emphasizes how important it is that sovereign power—the power to legislate, judge, and execute law—be unified, most plausibly under one man.<sup>169</sup> The implication that the sovereign could be anything other than one person is not found in Grotius at all, while Hobbes reluctantly allows that the sovereign could be a group of people as long as, within that group, sovereign power is still unified.<sup>170</sup> Any other form of government is subject to fracturing and eventual collapse.<sup>171</sup> The sovereign is above the rest of society to such a degree that it cannot be punished by society—only by God.<sup>172</sup> The authoritarianism of the sovereign in Grotius and Hobbes is best explained by the relatively small role of reason in nature, for while reason exists and drives individuals towards the social contract, the affectivity found within nature—the fear of attack, the stress of providing everything for oneself—often overwhelms it. The actions of irrational individuals, and their prominence in nature, indicate that no true unity of purpose can exist prior to the establishment of the sovereign, so for this reason the contract Grotius and Hobbes describe is not a pact with a society but a pact between individuals from which the sovereign emerges.<sup>173</sup> The unity that exists between people is subsumed into the will and judgment of the sovereign, which becomes the actor for every individual in the commonwealth. Government works best when the monarch acts with the community's interests

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<sup>169</sup> Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ed. Richard Tuck. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), pg. 259.

<sup>170</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 227.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 236; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 63.

<sup>173</sup> Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 276; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 231.

in mind, and any social reform must take place under the guidelines laid out by the sovereign, for it is always wrong to try to place society—or any common good—above the sovereign. To reference a power over the established monarch as a justification for one’s actions is a recipe for chaos and the inevitable collapse of society.

Liberalism argues for a freer and more representative society, undergirded by a moderate amount of restraints to prevent slipping back into the state of nature or war. Freedom and equality are tempered by artificial structures that mediate human excess. Because democracy assumes an equality between humans that cannot ever exist,<sup>174</sup> Rousseau’s just society requires that the general will be mediated and properly enacted by a legislator. As long as the government follows this will, the specific form of government can be determined by the people governed in view of their society’s context.<sup>175</sup> Rousseau’s general will is comparable to Rawls’ ‘reflective equilibrium’ that, as the consideration of the “shared fund of...basic ideas and principles,” provides the foundation for a comprehensive theory of justice.<sup>176</sup> Locke mitigates the democratic elements of his philosophy with references to the need for a legislative authority separate from the people. He is skeptical about locating power entirely in society’s hands, for there needs to be some sort of distance between the people and the ruler, and a sense of permanence to notions like justice and authority. All this is not to say that Locke and Rousseau express the same philosophy in different language. Rousseau has faith in the deliberations of educated citizens to reach the public good and believes that the actual laws of a state must be measured up against this general will. By contrast, Locke measures laws against their ability to protect natural rights like property, and defines the common good as the protection of these rights. Thus while the legislative power is sovereign in Locke, in Rousseau it is the body

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<sup>174</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 112-114.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>176</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia University Press; New York, 1993), 36.

politic.<sup>177</sup> Because the governments of liberal philosophies follow the general will (for Rousseau) or common good (for Locke) without their actions being dictated solely by it, there is a more egalitarian distribution of power than in conservatism while still maintaining a normative structure guaranteed by reason. Locke provides the people a role in governance<sup>178</sup>, but requires that they use the channels of legislating and governing designated by reason. He says “This legislative is not only the supreme power of the common-wealth, but sacred and unalterable in the hands where the community have once placed it.”<sup>179</sup> Rousseau’s typology of the various forms of governance exemplify normativity, for “the government under which...citizens increase and multiply most, is infallibly the best government,”<sup>180</sup> implying that there is a happy medium between the authoritarianism of monarchies and the strife characteristic of democracies.<sup>181</sup>

Finally, radicalism argues for a society organized not by legal buttresses against mob rule, but by the free expression of thought and the protection of man’s natural rights. Sovereign power begins when individuals transfer their rights and powers to society, and it is only by doing this that they are able to prevent the alienation of their natural rights.<sup>182</sup> The sovereign is obligated to work for the public interest, as reason dictates that the purpose of combining power is the collective welfare of the individuals comprising society. Because the sovereign forms by giving one’s rights and power to society, democracy is the ordinary form of government. It is the unmediated form of the commonwealth, a “united gathering of people which collectively has the sovereign right to do all that it has the power to do,”<sup>183</sup> and “society governing itself without

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<sup>177</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 69; Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 72-4; “Introduction” by Maurice Cranston in Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 36.

<sup>178</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 76.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>180</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 130.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>182</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 200; Paine, *Rights of Man I*, 551.

<sup>183</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 200.

the aid of secondary means.”<sup>184</sup> Every government must maintain fidelity to this fundamental equality or it violates the rational directives of nature. Spinoza says sovereign power may be exercised by one person or many, but needs to be grounded in democracy and free expression.<sup>185</sup> Paine agrees with grounding society in these values, but contra Spinoza claims that monarchy and aristocracy degenerate into ignorance and confusion, and only representation can adapt itself to the different ideas in society.<sup>186</sup> Radicalism frames freedom as total and separate from any possible remnants of tradition or history. Spinoza believes “it is impossible to deprive men of the liberty of saying what they think,”<sup>187</sup> while Paine says “men are born and always continue free, and equal in respect of their rights.”<sup>188</sup> Even those who exercise sovereign power are not raised to a higher class, for their status comes with the responsibility to act in the public interest (which for Spinoza’s means administering the state using reason,<sup>189</sup> and for Paine aligning the government’s policies with the interests of the people<sup>190</sup>). There is less a ruler can do unilaterally, and a greater capacity for participation in governance, in radical thought. Because Spinoza and Paine think citizens can be trusted to act rationally, they make reason indispensable for the continued success of the commonwealth.<sup>191</sup>

### **Authorizing Control**

The differences between the conservative, liberal, and radical traditions come from the part of nature that each chooses to authorize and expand to the whole of society. The conservative tradition maintains that a strong sovereign and a monarchical system of governance

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<sup>184</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man 1*, 567.

<sup>185</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 202.

<sup>186</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man 1*, 567.

<sup>187</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 258.

<sup>188</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man 1*, 506.

<sup>189</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 200.

<sup>190</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man 1*, 536.

<sup>191</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 220; *Ibid.*, 438.

create the best chance for an ordered community. Any division or opposition within the sovereign is liable to create civil unrest, and so the sovereign must be completely united.<sup>192</sup> The place of unity within the state of nature described by Grotius and Hobbes is the autonomous individual, who is the only being able to make decisions and enter agreements. The sovereign in the conservative tradition is an authorization of the natural, rational human; it is the individual writ large. Revolution is disliked by conservatives because it implies an unnatural equality between the interests of the sovereign and the people in the state when the peoples' interests should be subordinated to the sovereign (similar to how the autonomous individual may have numerous desires, but those desires are supposed to be subordinated to the rational self-interest of the individual). Though Grotius and Hobbes barely treat revolution, their brief mentions of it demonstrate how they believe it to be among the most inexcusable forms of insolence, and rebels themselves are but "insolent rebellious Slave[s]"<sup>193</sup> or irrational romantics<sup>194</sup> who deserve swift retribution. The closest Hobbes and Grotius get to accepting revolutionary sentiment is their listing of legitimate grievances that subjects may bring to the sovereign for redress.<sup>195</sup>

The philosophers of the liberal tradition recognize a larger collection of interests, but remain bound to a hierarchical social organization. Natural order stems from arrangements where people are generally equal but maintain different levels of power. Both Locke and Rousseau mention families as a natural hierarchy that contributes to political power. Mankind is composed of individuals with different skills and strengths, who grow up in different circumstances, all of which contribute to natural inequalities.<sup>196</sup> These natural differences are vital for the preservation of the state, and are the part of nature the liberal tradition authorizes.

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<sup>192</sup> Grotius, *War and Peace I*, 94-95; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 363-368.

<sup>193</sup> Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 504.

<sup>194</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 369.

<sup>195</sup> Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 894; *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>196</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 31; Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 52-53.

Some people are better at ruling, some at judging, and some at legislating; expertise should be recognized and empowered, but not at the expense of individuals having a say in governance. The relative equality of all men is tempered by natural human hierarchies to produce a state that is neither authoritarian nor disordered. Important to Locke's and Rousseau's thought is the recognition that, while hierarchy itself is permanent, the particular ordering of individuals within hierarchies is not. Children outgrow their parents' authority, and the unskilled can become more skilled with practice. Hierarchy remains, but who is dominant or submissive changes; because of this Locke and Rousseau see within the state a natural tendency towards change and renewal.

Liberals accommodate revolution more than conservatives because there is nothing inherently unnatural or indefensible about overturning a particular order as long as the overall organization of the state remains. Revolution is not just another form of conquest, Locke says, because revolution ends the government from within rather than through outside forces,<sup>197</sup> and unlike conquest it can be a healthy expression of people's discontent.<sup>198</sup> Locke explicitly justifies revolution by specifying which governments are legitimate under the social contract, for a legitimate government that becomes illegitimate loses the consent of the people and can be overthrown. The peoples' voice is not heard only at the founding of the social contract; it is a continual presence that the government must take into account.<sup>199</sup> Rousseau, like Locke, believes revolutions carry both good and bad possibilities; they are not to be universally inveighed against, but neither should they be completely welcomed. Revolutions carry a potential for great violence to which people react in horror<sup>200</sup>, but they can also return the state of

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<sup>197</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 114.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>200</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 89.

things to its natural order.<sup>201</sup> Because states have a tendency to degrade, forestalling the dangers of revolution requires constant affirmation of civil society in order to prevent corruption<sup>202</sup>, though if this fails to happen revolution may be the best option. Both liberal theorists argue that one must be attentive to ensure revolution is approached constructively, not destructively.<sup>203</sup>

Finally, the radical school of thought sees order located in the free interaction of the whole society. An individual is only autonomous in the context of other autonomous individuals, and hierarchies are a danger if not properly regulated by people who can critique the excesses of the rulers. What is natural are interactions between individuals in society who are motivated by diverse interests, purposes, and desires. It is this part of nature which the state authorizes by recognizing the inherent value of protecting the right to express oneself freely. Despite particular hierarchies, nature's best quality comes from preventing anyone's power from becoming too great, so a state that wants to preserve the interactions of a community must rein in the sovereign's influence by countering it with that of the numerous individuals who compose society.<sup>204</sup> The state, like nature, must develop laws and mechanisms to share power and prevent tyranny. There is a fundamental recognition of an individuals' ability to question the sovereign and its policies enshrined in Spinoza's and Paine's systems. Spinoza is reluctant to validate any calls to abolish the state,<sup>205</sup> yet Paine claims that revolution is justified if it is necessary to preserve the free expression of rational thought.<sup>206</sup> They both allow citizens to question the sovereign unconditionally, but while Spinoza is ambiguous about the possibility of revolution (he is silent on how the people should respond when the leaders fail to uphold their side of the

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>203</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 113; Ibid., 89.

<sup>204</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 200; Paine, *Rights of Man I*, 445.

<sup>205</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 258.

<sup>206</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man I*, 513.



contract, implying that only in such instances it may be justifiable for others to seize control<sup>207</sup>), Paine argues that when such measures do not produce change in accord with universal principles of justice, then revolution is allowable.<sup>208</sup>

These three ways of organizing the state each lead to a different relationship to revolution, but the similar assumptions they begin with ultimately produce the same two paradoxes for all of them. The first paradox occurs at the moment when the state has deviated so far from its professed goal that a revolution becomes necessary. Ostensibly, when a revolution overthrows a sovereign, it does so for the purpose of undoing a state that has become corrupt and broken its contract. Revolution finishes this task by returning everyone to where they were prior to the state, allowing them to begin anew. Locke says that revolutions “*introduce a state of war*, which is that of force without authority,”<sup>209</sup> where there is no social contract and some individuals have designs upon the lives of others. Rousseau says that revolutions return things to their natural order.<sup>210</sup> Yet as revolutions undo the state, they end up reinforcing the very power structure that the state rests upon. When a sovereign becomes corrupt, revolution’s role is not just to undo the sovereign, but also to return people back to the natural framework that will produce a proper state. Revolution is the expression of a peoples’ right to question the legitimacy of a government that has broken the social contract.<sup>211</sup> Once the contract is void, the people in the state are returned to nature, and, from there, speak through revolution to call forth a state that can protect the peoples’ rights, property, and liberties.<sup>212</sup> To complete its task, revolution becomes an expression of the state as it should be, one which is not opposed to the

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<sup>207</sup> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 200 & 258.

<sup>208</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man 1*, 443-5.

<sup>209</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 114.

<sup>210</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 136.

<sup>211</sup> Tom Paine “Rights of Man” in *The Complete Writings of Tom Paine* (Citidel Press, New York, 1945), 341-2.

<sup>212</sup> Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 34; Israel, *Revolution of the Mind*, 90-91.

natural order. Revolution ends up in tension, for while it is meant to herald the downfall of the state, it ends up actually becoming the voice of the state. It must support state power even as it opposes it, and is never able to speak with an independent voice. In the social contract, revolution is always already captured by the voice of the state.

Another paradox that forms when revolution is put into a necessarily reciprocal relationship with the state (while also being grounded in a natural world) is that the ostensible beginning and end of the state are put in tension with one another. Upon adding revolution to the world, the state is no longer an absolute force. The state is the result of the people and the contract they form, but at the same time the state acts upon the people through the laws and rules that it puts in place. The citizen of the social contract state is both the author of and subject to the state—she or he plays a dual role of both standing in judgment of, while also showing fealty to, the state.<sup>213</sup> These two roles are always in tension with one another, for the citizen must place oneself within the state to act according to rules, yet beyond the state's control to legitimately assume the ability to critique it. In addition, as a subject of the state, the citizen is prohibited from violating certain rights and liberties that of necessity are inalienable parts of each individual. However, it is the citizen, as author of the state and through his or her reflection on nature, that designates the rights and liberties that are off limits, as well as how the state oversees the protection of them.<sup>214</sup> The specifics of policy are decided and implemented by individuals representing the commonwealth,<sup>215</sup> who aim such laws at citizens<sup>216</sup>, yet the authority of any legislative power inevitably rests with the citizens who originally constituted the body politic.<sup>217</sup> Citizens holds dual roles of subject and author that forbid them from altering, yet put them in

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<sup>213</sup> Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 34; Israel, *Revolution of the Mind* 63-5.

<sup>214</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 69-70.

<sup>215</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 234.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-4.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 227, 272.

control of, how rights and liberties are handled by the state. They must be able to undo everything they are forbidden from in order for both of their roles to be actualized, yet the impossibility of this puts citizens in the delicate position of navigating their dual roles as judiciously as possible, and never be able to reconcile them. In sum, the foundation of the state is divided against itself inasmuch as the state is meant to affect the very thing that creates it. This paradox is the result of withdrawing the attribute of infallibility from the state and thereby creating the possibility for individuals to question, modify, and in certain cases, overthrow the sovereign.

These paradoxes are not completely unrecognized by social contract theorists. At times they mention the inconsistency of saying that individuals create the sovereign but can have only a small effect upon its policies, and the futility of a revolution that only sets up another restrictive government of the type that was overthrown. Yet they place the origin of these paradoxes in the idea that nature has not yet been properly described, or that the origins of the state are inadequately understood.<sup>218</sup> The history of social contract theory shows a continued attempt to re-describe these topics in such a way that gives revolution more leeway without overturning the world of the social contract itself. By the time Paine writes, the people have much more control over governance, and the criteria that must be met to legitimize a revolution has diminished substantially. Rationales justifying revolution are much stronger than at any previous point. Nevertheless, revolution is always limited to the role of speaking for the social contract world, as the state and revolution are in every instance tied together through their joint origin in a fixed nature. Revolution is always prohibited by social contract theorists when it is seen to transgress the boundary between order and chaos, in the process becoming a disruptive presence that

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<sup>218</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 50-51; Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 6-7.

unsettles the sustainability society works to produce.<sup>219</sup> This can be seen as part of the larger Enlightenment task of eliminating difference and irrationality by binding experiences together into one consistent system.<sup>220</sup> Fred Evans, in *The Multivoiced Body*, mentions this, saying that the West has traditionally adopted a “fearful...attitude towards chaos.”<sup>221</sup> Nature and revolution are not independent of one another; rather, nature always limits revolution, and because of this, the paradoxes of the social contract remain.

### **The Voice from Outside the Social Contract**

Though revolution can lead to moments of chaos as one sovereign is replaced by another, ultimately it speaks for order. As framed by social contract theory, it is produced by the same natural context that leads to the state. The idea of the social contract was developed in response to a series of political crises in the Western world for the purposes of answering the questions of when and how rule is justified. But in developing this idea and those that accompany it, were other important ideas forgotten? Who or what is outside of social contract theory? The answers to these questions require analysis of the regulations of the social contract, which purposefully eliminates references to groups, temporalities, relationships, rationalities, and juridical frameworks that do not properly legitimize the sovereign.

In their haste to eradicate the stratification of society prevalent in Medieval political theory, social contract theorists push to the margins categories of individuals who are counted as non-people, beasts, or property. The supposedly non-stratified world of social contract theory becomes, in practice, a highly stratified world in its process of othering what cannot fit into the meticulously spaced zones of individuality that define citizenship. Such biases manifest clearly

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<sup>219</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man* 2, 342-344.

<sup>220</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, Princeton University Press, 2009, 22-23.

<sup>221</sup> Fred Evans, *Multivoiced Body* (Columbia University Press; New York, 2008), 24.

within the state of nature, where (with the exception of Hobbes, for whom the distinction between man and animal comes from the way matter combines itself to form different motions in humans than in animals<sup>222</sup>) every thinker articulates a clear ontological line that separates humans from beasts and material objects—or that which is worthy of consideration from that which is not. Beginning with *Political Liberalism*, Rawls welcomes pluralism as “a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy”<sup>223</sup> while admitting that anyone part of a democratic plurality must possess “common human reason” and “similar powers of thought and judgment.”<sup>224</sup> He excludes from the public sphere anyone incapable of thinking in conformity with the rationality he recognizes as belonging to all persons, such as those who make judgments based on irrational characteristics like class, race, or gender. Fred Evans, in *The Multivoiced Body*, makes this point by demonstrating how Rawls’ account of political liberalism becomes a universal doctrine since it must be privileged when it conflicts with the family or private realm. He concludes that Rawls, to be consistent, would have to “proclaim that his doctrine is universal and founded on reasons binding for everyone,” a position Rawls would presumably not want to take.<sup>225</sup> Since by definition it is impossible to have a contract with that which is incapable of rational thought, establishing ontological norms is a necessary part of the social contract world. Charles Mills reveals how a historical and epistemological Racial Contract sets up spaces that exclude non-whites, saying

The supposedly abstract but actually white social contract characterizes (European) space basically as presociopolitical (“the state of nature”) and postsociopolitical (the locus of “civil society”)...This space is *our* space, a space in which we (we white people) are at home, a cozy domestic space...By contrast, in the social contract’s application to non-Europe, where it becomes the Racial Contract, both space and its inhabitants are alien.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 118-130.

<sup>223</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 36.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>225</sup> Evans, *Multivoiced Body*, 252-253.

<sup>226</sup> Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 43.

The homologous spaces that found the social contract, and the natural world in which those zones are first related one to the other, form an exclusionary world; a world that, by making reason the price of admission, turn the ability to create contracts into a racial privilege.

Non-whites are not the only ones excluded from the social contract. In Carole Pateman's examination of contract theory and sexuality, she notes that:

The original pact is a sexual as well as a social contract; it is sexual in the sense of patriarchal—that is, the contract establishes men's political right over women—and also sexual in the sense of establishing orderly access by men to women's bodies. The original contract creates what I shall call, following Adrienne Rich, 'the law of male sex-right'. Contract is far from being opposed to patriarchy; contract is the means through which modern patriarchy is constituted.<sup>227</sup>

Mill and Pateman point out that excluding groups that don't fit the criteria of people is a danger internal to social contract theory. It is a reflexive function of founding a world on disparate and homologous individualities, and this is why both Mill and Pateman emphasize the coextensive nature of the social contract with the Racial and Sexual Contracts.<sup>228</sup> Though Mill is writing an account of a contract that is a historical actuality while Pateman is trying to map out the internal dynamic of an implied contract<sup>229</sup>, this aspect of the social contract holds for both. Yet exclusion from the social contract is not simply the result of drawing lines that categorize—it comes from deeply isolating certain groups by predetermining them to not meet the criteria for consideration, as social contract theorists have done to blacks, Native Americans, and women. Blacks are systematically portrayed as incapable of engaging in the rational exchanges demanded by the social contract as a result of their race.<sup>230</sup> Native Americans are forever caught in the 'brutish' state of nature by both Hobbes and Locke, their culture insufficiently developed to be classified a

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<sup>227</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>228</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 72; *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>229</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 6.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

civil society.<sup>231</sup> Women, by virtue of their differences from the ideal citizen, are marked as unable to even make the leap from nature to society while retaining their sovereignty.<sup>232</sup> Social contract theorists describe marriage as a situation where “the rule...naturally falls to the man’s share,”<sup>233</sup> and men as natural rulers since “the head of state bears the image of the father.”<sup>234</sup> The social contract does not just bring together the community of the “free” and the “equal,” it segregates at the margins of society the “non-social” to prevent the contamination of the social contract world by the irrational, infantile, and dangerous. For these unfortunate individuals, the social contract becomes the hegemony, the commonwealth the despised elites, and the ontological line an invisible barricade that can never be crossed.

The cyclical temporality of the social contract only reinforces this divide. Because the same choices present themselves over and over, it becomes necessary to reproduce the exclusions of the social contract continuously. There is no possibility for change in the vital structures that compose the world, which is why, as Pateman points out, “Locke takes it for granted that a woman will, through the marriage contract, always agree to place herself in subordination to her husband.”<sup>235</sup> While the passing of time may bring new struggles for democratic liberalism, Pateman points out that for contract theorists such struggles will always exclude women’s liberation since “the subordination of wives to their husbands [is] seen as natural.”<sup>236</sup> (Hobbes again must be excepted from this generalization. He sees no good reason for the subordination of women to man, saying “whereas some have attributed the Dominion to the Men only, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misreckon in it,”<sup>237</sup> claiming that

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<sup>231</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 187; Locke, *Second Treatise*, 13.

<sup>232</sup> Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 120.

<sup>233</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 44.

<sup>234</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 50.

<sup>235</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1989), 213.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>237</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 253.

historical contingencies have been the primary reason why men are dominant over women.) The repetition of exclusions is vital to the survival and perpetuation of society, so the social contract must constantly maintain its exclusionary measures. Depending on the level of the threat and the means at one's disposal, certain measures may at times be preferred over others, but the existence of such measures is a constant. Mills claims "the police, the penal system, the army," are necessary to "maintain the racial order and detect and destroy challenges to it," concluding that "one has to recognize [the long bloody history of brutality against blacks] not as excesses by individual racists but as an organic part of this political enterprise."<sup>238</sup> Similarly, Pateman argues that the systematic subordination of women to men indicates that "the past and present *content* of the marriage contract reveals the underlying assumption that women are *not* free and equal."<sup>239</sup> The passing of time presents only limited possibilities for change as the essential components of politics always remain.

Rationality works with the spatiality and temporality of the social contract world to exclude. Those outside the social contract are assumed to be resistant to traditional logic. Attempts to engage them rationally are doomed to fail, as the semiotics produced by social contract theory are incomprehensible to those incapable of being categorized as a disparate and rational individuality. Beyond the social contract, one is not simply different, but subject to "a basic *inequality*...in the capacity of different human groups to know and to detect natural law,"<sup>240</sup> "lacking in essential rationality,"<sup>241</sup> "[excluded] from the original pact,"<sup>242</sup> and "[excluded] from the status of 'individual' in the natural condition."<sup>243</sup> Once barred from reason,

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<sup>238</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 84-5.

<sup>239</sup> Pateman, *Disorder of Women*, 74.

<sup>240</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 59.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>242</sup> Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 50.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



contracts, and individuality—and thus unintelligible to the social contract—one can be legitimately attacked or enslaved. Those incapable of rationality are by definition absurd, and thus foolish, evil, or (inasmuch as their interests are always at odds with the public's) rebellious. The rational response to such 'barbarity' is ownership, destruction, or enslavement—acts that represent taming or incorporation of marginalized people into the social contract world. Slavery is not an alternate contract, but the employment of the excluded. A slave is a captive kept in chains<sup>244</sup>, left in a perpetual state of war<sup>245</sup>, who is not governed by any covenant. When slavery doesn't work or is found to be unjustified<sup>246</sup>, the only alternative is the destruction of all potential enemies to civil society.<sup>247</sup> Carole Pateman analyzes the logic of enslavement, saying

...slavery came about because an example of subordination and 'otherness' had already developed. ..Men must have observed that women easily became socially marginal if they were deprived of the protection of their kinsmen or were no longer required for sexual use, and so men 'learned that differences can be used to separate and divide one group of humans from another'<sup>248</sup>

The Sexual Contract contains within it an implicit recognition that women are different enough from men that the social contract does not apply to them, demanding the enslavement (primarily) of women. Social contract theory constantly attempts to mobilize the marginalized as it spreads its doctrine of universal equality and freedom. When an entity is not rational enough to be incorporable as a citizen, it gets incorporated as property, as a slave, or as an enemy, and forever barred from participation in society.

Pateman's analysis of women and slavery within the social contract is exemplary, but she fails to take into account that, when it comes to women who are hostile to civil society, the Sexual Contract treats such women as enemies and seeks to destroy rather than enslave them.

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<sup>244</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 255.

<sup>245</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise*, 17.

<sup>246</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 58.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>248</sup> Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 65.

Such treatment is only an exacerbation of the traditional attitude as in both there is a mutual feeling of enmity, and both are employed as needed by the sovereign. Emma Goldman is an example of this. Her antagonistic relationship to the US government and the male establishment led to her condemnation as “dangerous” and a person of “undue harm.”<sup>249</sup> Instead of being enslaved, she was ostracized, imprisoned, and deported.

While the crucible set up by the rationality of the social contract justifies the oppression and subjugation of women and minorities, the contract governs the relationships made with such supposedly ‘non-humans’ after the creation of the civil state. Even though women and minorities are not conceived of as autonomous individuals, and thus unable to make contracts, social contract theory governs the relationships formed with them. Signatories of the social contract uphold its clauses by developing strategies that protect them from ostracized groups like blacks or women. If the group being discriminated against is portrayed as a threat, then the sovereign can deploy the power of war or slavery, while if the group being discriminated against is portrayed as infantile, the sovereign can deploy Locke’s paternal power. The contract is a vehicle for the systematic and methodical victimization of groups of individuals within society. It relies on the justification of rationality but operates independently, as unlike rationality it deals with the actual exchange of goods or services and the production of actions. Multiple actions are legitimated and encouraged, everything from the reasoned and mutually beneficial relationships that organize the arrangement of property in Locke to dictatorial relationships governing how and in what manner the sovereign can enslave or kill others. For blacks, contracts promote enslavement and violence, ostensibly for purposes of justice and harmony but in actuality for the purpose of regulating their place within the larger civil society. Charles Mills’ says “[Violent] acts have to be seen not as arbitrary, not as the product of individual sadism...but as the

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<sup>249</sup> Dinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman*, 215.

appropriate moral and political response—prescribed by the Racial Contract—to a threat to a system predicated on nonwhite subpersonhood.”<sup>250</sup> The systematic program of discrimination against blacks is conditioned by a contract that legitimates coercion for the defense of society. It is an exchange between citizens to form institutions such as the police, prisons, and army, that guard against and use as needed the black population (in the case of war-making power or enslavement), or alternatively to care for them given their inability to care for themselves (in the case of paternal power).

In many ways the Sexual Contract is similar, in that the marriage contract has traditionally aimed to encourage a type of fidelity and slavery from women<sup>251</sup>, though the forms of domination expressed in the Sexual Contract are more about exclusion and cultural manipulation than overt violence. Contracts are for the most part unchangeable, as they are based on reason’s reflection on the status of individuals, groups, and objects, and are not alterable through the predilections and peccadilloes of others. Pateman’s discussion of marriage emphasizes this:

A married couple cannot contract to change the ‘essentials’ of marriage, which are seen as ‘the husband’s duty to support his wife, and the wife’s duty to serve her husband’. The relation of protection and obedience cannot be legally altered, so that, for example, a married couple cannot contract for the wife to be paid by her husband for her work as a housewife.<sup>252</sup>

Contracts, for the social contract theorist, articulate what is necessary for a reliable and well-balanced society. Change is only allowed in those situations in which it does not disrupt the fabric of society. For those too irrational, foolish, or emotional to be autonomous individuals, a systematic hierarchy must be established over or against them—not because they agreed to such treatment, but because such treatment is implied by their very being.

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<sup>250</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 85.

<sup>251</sup> Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 159.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

The outside of the social contract is irreconcilably opposed to the inside, and the measures that exclude one from the other are wholly a part of the system rather than incidental additions. The tension produced by the regulations of the social contract create a world that must maintain its egalitarian and ordered character by denying equality and order to whatever does not fit. And, just as the paradoxes inside the social contract produce attempts at reform, so too does this outside call for change. The voice of the excluded and marginalized can become a voice for revolution—one which questions the legitimacy of the social contract. The revolution recognized by the social contract does not capture the entire potential of revolution; outside the boundaries of that contract, the anarchic revolution that social contract theorists fear still waits.

### **Spilling over the edges of the world: why revolution and nature cannot be regulated**

Social contract theory's engagement with revolution ultimately fails, but it is not without value. As the first political tradition to take revolution seriously as a possibility, it grapples with what revolution is and how it can be justified. It does not take the established order of society for granted, thereby opening a new space to think about how people can engage one another beyond the confines of sovereign power and creating the possibility of a two-way relationship between sovereign and subject. The separation of the people from the state brings forth revolution, which requires new concepts (e.g. limits on sovereign power to justifications for dissent) to deal with the potentials and dangers that follow. Social contract theory provides the basis of a particular theory of revolution.

The failure of social contract theory with regard to revolution comes from its attempt to regulate what is incapable of being regulated. Revolution is situated alongside, but opposed to, the state. Both are drawn from nature, which limits revolution while creating paradoxes in the

state. These paradoxes lead to more calls for change and further attempts to separate the state from revolution. At the same time, revolution can originate from outside the social contract, meaning that the limited place provided for revolution within the social contract fails to fully exhaust the capacity of revolution. Revolution destabilizes the social contract world from within while undermining it from without. Social contract theory fails to anticipate that regulation of revolution and nature is doomed to fail. It tries to capture the essence of nature, of humans, and of the state while allowing for degrees of variation, but it does not account for the possibility of radical change. Nature develops and shifts beyond the limits of social contract theory's natural laws, and when it does so people, the world, and society change as well. Social contract theory describes only one possible world, and its regulations are easily rendered irrelevant upon the alteration of human relationships, the development of new technologies, or any one of a whole host of other potential changes. When it comes to the regulations of the social contract, revolution is just as easily an expression of nature's ability to surpass these regulations as it is of citizens' discontent with the sovereign. Social contract theory is premised upon an untenable assumption that nature has static laws (or, in Rawls' recasting of social contract theory, a view of justice as a regulative idea). Placing revolution in this world inevitably leads the social contract's theory of revolution into a dead end. The attempt to regulate nature grounds one form of power to the exclusion of all others, and revolution becomes just another expression of the same power found in the state. Revolution is irrevocably bound to the state, with the voice of the people yet to be heard.

To solve this problem, philosophy must develop a new treatment of revolution. This treatment must not regulate nature, but recognize its ability to change and develop. Revolution is an expression of this change and development, and the natural world must be seen as a part of a

larger system. This is where Marxism enters, providing an alternative articulation of revolutions that responds, in part, to the lacuna found within social contract theory. Marxism provides a more sustained engagement with revolutions, including them directly within the process by which governments form, rather than as a stop-gap when governments go awry. From this point on, while social contract theory loses its monopoly on theories of revolution, some of its concepts are incorporated into other projects. It is an ironic legacy of social contract theory that, while its theorists were most concerned with legitimating sovereign rule, one of its most enduring contributions is beginning the discussion on how that rule can be put to an end.

# The Trajectory of Marxism: Streamlining the Revolutionary Program

## The Assimilation of Revolution

The zealots and foes of Marxism are legion. Its powerful friends and formidable enemies have each experienced inspiring victories and crushing defeats. The label of Communist that in some contexts raises individuals to the status of the elite will in others expose them to brutal punishment. To be the target of Marxists is potentially terrifying, for they do not see revolution as an inclusive and measured transition that only regenerates extant avenues of power. Revolution is inevitable and necessary to create the communist society to come. It is jarring, visceral, and always looming until the moment it breaks. Because the repressive “institutions, mores, and traditions” of European countries are so entrenched, “the lever of [the worker’s] revolution” must not be nonviolence, but “force.”<sup>253</sup> There is an urgency to Marxism that stems from its calls to create meaningful progress through concrete praxis and constant engagement. A better society must be collectively built, not entrusted to abstract philosophical reflection. To enter the world of Marxism is to enter a battleground composed of actual relationships and conscious thoughts, where historical and scientific analyses are animated with a “revolutionary fervor and desire for change.”<sup>254</sup> Marxism provides no space for dispassionate observation, no means for excepting oneself from the oncoming conflict between capitalist accumulation and communist equality. When revolution comes, everyone will be swept up. Should they make it to the other side, they will find not the utopian worlds of abstract thinkers but the real community of which they have always been a part.

Marx worked for the liberation of the working class by studying the material realm. He sought to use his discoveries to undermine capitalism’s harsh conditions. The ideals of justice

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<sup>253</sup> Marx, “The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution” in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 523.

<sup>254</sup> David McLellan. *Marxism after Marx* (New York; Harper & Row, 1979), 3.

and equality alone are incapable of bringing about this end, because it is one's actual conditions that truly stimulate change. A real account of politics must return to the material world and study the conditions that gave rise to each age of humankind. Authenticity is found in the concrete relations expressed within one's material situation (e.g. classes, needs, abilities, and means of production), not formal identities (e.g. nationality or religion).<sup>255</sup> Ideological concepts such as those found in social contract theory or capitalist economics reproduce oppressive systems despite their ostensible devotion to principles of freedom and justice. Recognizing this fact reveals strategies for overturning such oppressive systems. The magnitude of this realization presents the world anew as fundamentally inequitable, and as the fantasies dissolve in front of us it becomes clear that only radical change will set everything right again. Only revolution has the capacity to overthrow the ruling class and its supporting ideologies, and only revolution will bring humanity to its next stage of development. When freed from its ideological bonds, revolution can go beyond just fixing the problems with the state, it can move the world forward along its inevitable trajectory. Marx sees each stage of existence as part of a sequence, and no government or economic system is fully intelligible until viewed as part of a larger, historically unfolding progression.<sup>256</sup> Failed social orders did not simply lack the right prescription—they needed to fail for us to evolve. As a vehicle for numerous historical changes, revolution must play a central role in this theory. Whereas the social contract keeps revolution at the margins as a potential, Marx presents revolution as an integral part of human development.<sup>257</sup> A sovereign cannot prevent radical change by keeping to the social contract, for it is sovereignty itself—and the fixed system it heads—that attracts the potency of revolution.

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<sup>255</sup> Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 41-42; Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" in *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 570.

<sup>256</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 160-161; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 495-497.

<sup>257</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 66.



Marxism has a specific target in the creation of an egalitarian world and describes a definite path to get there. It is primarily because society is not organized in a manner that allows for the full expression of our nature that previous social systems led to oppression, poverty, and suffering. Revolution's goal is the overthrow of the pernicious capitalist order and the institution of a society that both recognizes the material needs of every human and provides for their fulfillment. "[F]rom each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"<sup>258</sup>—that is the maxim a liberated society must follow. Where social contract theory portrays revolution as a fix to a system in crisis, Marxism wholly absorbs revolution into its workings. Revolution is given a more prominent and active role, but at the same time it is overwhelmed with the meanings the Marxist project prescribes. The attempt to salvage revolution by giving it a more prominent role only further draws it into the state, for the revolution Marx describes speaks for Marx's ontology and metaphysics. Ultimately, Marx's revolution confirms the trajectory of his world, and proves that the relationship between the material and the ideological is exactly as he described. Even the different interpretations of Marx's thought, with all the innovations they bring, cling to the basic outlines of the Marxist world and the trajectory it entails. While revolution remains incorporated into Marxism, it is incapable of speaking with its own voice.

As many individuals have noted<sup>259</sup>, defining Marxism has grown more difficult over time as it is constantly reinterpreted. This chapter does not seek to solve this problem, but as I want to be clear what is at stake at different parts of the chapter, I will use the following terminology: "Marxism" will be used to refer to the set of Marx-inspired philosophies genealogically related to one another (such as those I will be dealing with later in the chapter), "Classical Marxism"

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<sup>258</sup> Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 615.

<sup>259</sup> For one example, see Terry Eagleton, "Introduction Part 1" in *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* [Blackwell Publishers; Cambridge, 1996], 1.

will be used to refer to Marx's own philosophy, and "Historical Marxism" will be used to refer to the political ideology of Marxism and its specific history.

### **Making politics friendly to revolution**

Marx undermines the social contract by framing his theory around a concept of nature that is sensuous, non-ideological, and objective.<sup>260</sup> Nature is not static, but an external world that affects humankind just as humankind affects it. Because no natural essence grounds living creatures Marx's discussion of nature begins at the first concrete encounter between humans and nature, neither having been theorized in advance.<sup>261</sup> Humans are not formulaically free and equal individuals<sup>262</sup> who can be conceived apart from nature<sup>263</sup> as simple abstractions<sup>264</sup>; rather, understanding them requires understanding the physical reality in which they live.<sup>265</sup> Humans are defined by "the totality of the actions whereby they reproduce their own material existence."<sup>266</sup> Starting in the most primitive human societies the differences between men and women grow, "by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g., physical strength), needs, accidents, etc.," into a division of labor.<sup>267</sup> This first division becomes the blueprint for other divisions, and as new tasks are apportioned to segments of the populace a hierarchical class system forms.<sup>268</sup> Marx views space as highly stratified, for human civilization has throughout its history has been composed of conflicting groups in dominant-submissive relationships. "The history of all

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<sup>260</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 155 and 167.

<sup>261</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 49-50.

<sup>262</sup> Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question", in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 45-46.

<sup>263</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 75.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-151.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 75 and 155.

<sup>266</sup> Leszak Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution; Volume 1: The Founders*, trans. P.S. Falla (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978), 156.

<sup>267</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 50.

<sup>268</sup> See Karl Marx, "Capital, Volume Three" in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 439-442 for discussion of classes that informs this.

hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,”<sup>269</sup> Marx and Engels notoriously proclaim. Human consciousness has yet to reflect upon a world not riven by the clashes of hostile groups.

The groups that compose society are the products of material conditions. When material conditions change, old classes pass away as new ones take their place. No particular division of humans is permanent, for the factors producing social groups constantly change. The causes motivating change vary, but are always rooted in objective and non-ideological conditions. The influx of colonial resources into European countries during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, combined with increased demand for new products, created the industrial era’s division of labor (boss vs. factory worker) as well as new tools like looms, ships, and levers.<sup>270</sup> Massive amounts of natural resources and industrial machinery erased national identities, religions, and traditional moralities in order to “[create] everywhere the same relations between the classes of society.”<sup>271</sup> Changes in geographic location, technology, and availability of material wealth, produced the capitalist classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat which replaced the feudal divisions of lords, vassals, knights, plebeians, and slaves.<sup>272</sup> The capitalist doctrine and modern concept of human were developed to justify these transformations of society, just as new ideologies are developed in response to every significant change in the material world. Such ideologies present the world as a given, not as a product of industry, society, and the activity of previous generations.<sup>273</sup> Ideologies disguise the world by developing artificial concepts, hiding the forces that developed the predominant worldview, and presenting themselves as irrefutable truths. As Peter Osbourne

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<sup>269</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 209.

<sup>270</sup> Karl Marx, “Society and Economy in History” in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 138-9.

<sup>271</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 82.

<sup>272</sup> Marx, “Communist Manifesto”, 209.

<sup>273</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 45.

says, “Ideologies are systems of ideas that misrepresent society...For Marx at this time, German philosophy was the German ideology because it was the primary means through which German culture (mis)represented the world to itself...”<sup>274</sup> Each new ordering of human society is accompanied by new ideas as humans continually try to come to terms with the actuality of nature and the human condition. Ideologies motivate human actions that, in turn, produce the world (for example, estrangement from our nature erases animal needs and produces a need for work<sup>275</sup>), but they also result from the material world. The dialogical relationship between ideology and the material means it operates in constant connection with physical objects, not apart from them. It is a grave error to see ideological changes as unrelated to social organization; the two fields are intrinsically linked.

Marx rejects definitions of humanity that see individuals as “*egoistic*” and “in [their] *true* nature only in the form of the *abstract citizen*.”<sup>276</sup> Humans must be conceived of materially as a “*corporeal, living, real, sensuous objective being[s] full of natural vigour*.”<sup>277</sup> Marx’s materialism focuses on concrete subjective action through a study of the context that provides the actions with their meaning or significance. Marx examines actions within their social situation, looking at how human activities and human relationships reciprocally form each other. *Capital* shows that human labor—and the commodities it produces—are only valuable inasmuch as they are appreciated by society<sup>278</sup>, yet only through the process of producing commodities for exchange is society put in a position to apply value to them.<sup>279</sup> Such trends are identifiable because they occur on a massive scale, and as a result constitute a predictable process. As Eric

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<sup>274</sup> Peter Osbourne, *How to Read Marx* (WW Norton and Co; New York, 2005), 44.

<sup>275</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 117-118.

<sup>276</sup> Marx, “Jewish Question”, 46.

<sup>277</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 154.

<sup>278</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume One* (London: Penguin Classics, 1976), 138.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

Fromm puts it, “Change is due to the contradiction between the productive forces (and other objectively given conditions) and the existing social organization. When a mode of production or social organization hampers, rather than furthers, the given productive forces, a society, if it is not to collapse, will choose such forms of production as fit the new set of productive forces and develop them.”<sup>280</sup> Historical trends can be anticipated by studying the contradictions between production and society, then extrapolating what will be needed to solve them. The material realm is a realm of actions and relationships. As their product, thought is generated by this realm and represents a relationship one takes towards oneself or society.<sup>281</sup> These actions and relationships produce the world and its contents. They act as homogenizing forces, for each set of actions and relationships dictates a different arrangement of society, and when a new set is developed a new dictation is dispersed throughout. Productive forces, technologies, and practices carry a compulsion to conform, which occurs both on an individual and societal level. The development of industrial machines transformed workers into machines themselves, nurturing their “helpless dependence upon the factory as a whole”<sup>282</sup> and transforming society from one characterized by manufacture to one characterized by industry.<sup>283</sup>

New homogenizing forces, like those that produced the factory, create bonds and rifts between individuals. Marx’s accounts describe both the contradictions and the similarities that develop in each era. In every situation, the relationships that exist are classifiable either in terms of association or of antagonism. The modern bourgeoisie are supported by the “executive of the modern State” in their fight against the proletariat, yet in the past the bourgeoisie shared with the

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<sup>280</sup> Eric Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man*, trans. T. Bottomore (Continuum; New York, 2004), 14.

<sup>281</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 59-60.

<sup>282</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 547.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 918.

serfs a common enemy in the nobility.<sup>284</sup> Peasants in the industrial world are not identifiable with the proletariat, yet their interests are the same and in the future the two will unite against the capitalist.<sup>285</sup> Such associations are overshadowed by the larger contradictions produced by conflicting classes, such as those between the lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, or capitalist and proletariat.<sup>286</sup> It is by understanding relations of association and antagonism that Marx predicts times of radical change. In non-revolutionary times, the relations are dynamic and flexible, and the conflicting groups have not yet been able to recognize their common interests in order to form a political program. Revolutions occur when the interests of competing classes become so divergent that sustainability is no longer possible even in the short term. At this point, the relations of antagonism and the relations of association both catalyze the revolution, as the former push each class towards militancy, while the latter encourage solidarity.

The ongoing alterations of the world reveal that, for Marx, temporality is the succession of systems. Individual systems often have their own unique means for measuring time stemming from material conditions, but the principal way of tracking the passage of time in Classical Marxism is through the replacement of one system by another. Particular arrangements of society do not present time objectively. The ways time is measured for the purposes of paying wages in Capitalism did not exist in feudal societies,<sup>287</sup> while Newtonian mechanics is connected with capitalism as a theoretical precondition for it.<sup>288</sup> Engels sees Kantian and Newtonian systems—including their concepts of time—as stages within a Hegelian-like system that

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<sup>284</sup> Marx, “Communist Manifesto”, 211.

<sup>285</sup> Marx, “After the Revolution: Marx Debates Bakunin” in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 543.

<sup>286</sup> Marx, “Communist Manifesto”, 210-211.

<sup>287</sup> See Karl Marx, *Capital Volume One* (London: Penguin Classics, 1976), 683-91; Karl Marx, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” in *Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 704-5; Marx, “Jewish Question”, 44-45; and Marx, “Communist Manifesto”, 213.

<sup>288</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 81.

privileges process.<sup>289</sup> Social systems measure time for their own interests, and each time one is overthrown a new standard for time develops. The only persistent concept of time Marx leaves us with presents time as a movement leading from one arrangement to another. For Marx, “history is nothing but the succession of...separate generations,” each of which “[continues] the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances” and “[modifies] the old circumstances with a completely changed activity.”<sup>290</sup> Because the specific ways time is tracked are social traditions and not objective measures, Classical Marxism follow the changing social systems that produce each particular schema. Social systems are arrangements of subjects, objects, and relationships, and as such are not monolithic. This is a necessary consequence of Marx’s rejection of abstraction, for consistency demands that Marx define history in terms of “material, empirically verifiable [acts]...which every individual furnishes” rather than “a mere abstract act on the part of...the world spirit.”<sup>291</sup> History, the only constant measure of time Marx provides, is neither abstract nor definable in terms of one single measure; it is plural, renewing, and revealed through the ongoing shifts in material relations.<sup>292</sup> As Kolakowski writes, “Strictly speaking...there is no such thing as time in itself but only relations of succession (before and after), 'time' being a secondary abstraction from these.”<sup>293</sup>

Marx’s framing of his system in terms of conflicting groups and successive systems is accompanied by motive forces that determine how and why things change. One essential aspect of Marx’s thought is the notion that subjects and objects follow a trajectory which terminates at a predetermined endpoint.<sup>294</sup> Society must be studied scientifically before any trajectories can be

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<sup>289</sup> Marx, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific”, in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 697.

<sup>290</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 58.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>293</sup> Kolakowski, *Main Currents: Founders*, 382.

<sup>294</sup> Marx, “Communist Manifesto”, 221-222.

determined<sup>295</sup>, but it is a fact that all objects in a particular context aim at a definable goal.<sup>296</sup> The end at which things aim does not come from essences or utopian ideals. It originates from the interactions between objects and subjects situated in the same world.<sup>297</sup> Nothing outside or behind one's everyday actions and material situation determines this sequence of events, yet given the state of society there is no other possible telos but the one Marx describes.<sup>298</sup> Marx's telos is produced from below rather than instituted from above, yet it is a defining principle of the world he creates. The capitalist world is ripe for revolution because "by driving hitherto isolated workers into mills and factories, modern industry had created the very conditions in which the proletariat could associate and combine into a dominant force."<sup>299</sup> Individuals may play different roles in realizing society's goal, but everyone is pulled along by the collective weight of history as if caught in a tidal wave, with no hope of changing a direction determined by forces far outside their control.<sup>300</sup> Revolution is no exception; it results from many interactions that each express a purpose and becomes part of the social context that gives others purpose. The purpose revolution expresses is always a reconciling of contradictions<sup>301</sup>, for it is a massive restructuring that only appears at moments of transition. It is produced not by a system, but by the contradictions a system creates.

Classical Marxism outlines a world more accommodating to change than social contract theory's. It is adaptive, interconnected, and self-motivated. Revolution is no longer used as a stop-gap, for the supersession of boundaries that the social contract is designed to prevent is an essential characteristic of Marx's world and something to be embraced. Marx's revolutions do

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<sup>295</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 104.

<sup>296</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 46.

<sup>297</sup> Marx, "Communist Manifesto", 239.

<sup>298</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 103.

<sup>299</sup> Francis Wheen. *Marx: A Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 119.

<sup>300</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 104-106.

<sup>301</sup> Marx, "Communist Manifesto", 211, 223-224.



not confine change within specific parameters, but direct it onto a productive path. They stem the tide of destructive forces, motivating new social arrangements when the current one becomes untenable. Though capable of massive shifts, revolutions have historically only led to incremental changes. In the introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*, Engels says previous revolutions have only "resulted in the displacement of one definite class rule by another;" any marginal advances were overshadowed by the fact that, because "the proletarian masses...were still absolutely in the dark as to the path to be taken," their initial zeal quickly degraded into "a revolution of feeling as soon as illusion evaporated and disappointment set in."<sup>302</sup> Only now, after the modifications of previous eras, can a true communist revolution (which will finally "bring [humankind's] 'existence' into harmony with their 'essence'"<sup>303</sup>) occur. Revolutions have a clear social function—they provide a new organization to society that resolves previous inconsistencies and errors. Even when unsuccessful they can have a profound effect by opening "fractures and fissures" in society while denouncing the "abyss" which awaits if no action is taken.<sup>304</sup> Revolutions "are the driving force of history"<sup>305</sup> which act like elemental powers conditioning Marx's world. The boundaries of the social contract are replaced in Classical Marxism with a trajectory, the endpoint of which revolution must ensure.

Classical Marxism avoids many of the problems of social contract theory by embracing a historically evolving model of human nature. But does it capture the full possibilities of revolution by grounding it in a material world and endowing it with a telos? Revolution may not be put to work enforcing the ideal state of social contract theorists, but nevertheless its role as a

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<sup>302</sup> Friedrich Engels, "The Tactics of Social Democracy" in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 560-561.

<sup>303</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 66.

<sup>304</sup> Marx, "Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper*" in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 577.

<sup>305</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 92.

motive force makes it speak for the forthcoming communist state. Because Marx's revolutions treat as unimportant anything not connected with the larger goals of the Marx's project, they limit other forms of emancipation by privileging their own. The state Marx describes—ineluctably aimed at creating a communist society—dominates the discourse of emancipation.

### **Guiding revolution from behind the scenes**

Marx reshapes the terms of political debate from a focus on justice to a focus on human existence. In so doing he casts liberal political theory—and its inauguration in the atomic individual possessed of rational thought and selfish desires—as ideological.<sup>306</sup> Political theory must capture the becoming of human existence, not rest on a set of regulative ideas.<sup>307</sup> Such ideas form enclosed systems of power around static concepts of humanity, yet in reality they are a piece of the larger movements of society. They must be understood within the context of the material environment that produced them. Revolution is centralized in Classical Marxism as it enables Marx to connect different social hierarchies into one schema that presents them as part of an ongoing progression. Because enclosed systems of power are really part of a larger unfolding order, their inadequacy and downfall must be part of this larger order too. Revolutions are not the system in moments of crisis, but the system working as it should. Rather than being driven by the social contract, revolutions are the counterpoint to non-communist societies and the classes that compose them, able to solve the inevitable problems that such societies intrinsically carry. The larger order that is ineluctably revealed in exigent moments narrows and focuses revolutionary possibilities. Overthrowing particular governments draws society closer to the point where it recognizes itself as it is, dissolves all classes, and creates a sustainable system for

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<sup>306</sup> Kolakowski, *Main Currents: Founders*, 409-410.

<sup>307</sup> Marx, "Jewish Question", 46.

all. Revolution is still stewarded by the state, but rather than authorizing the same government that preceded it, revolution now operates as part of the same program as the state. The processes by which the world develops lead to communism, and both revolution and the state are committed to that goal, even if they are unaware of this fact.

Marx believed that during his lifetime he saw instances of the coming worldwide revolution which would overthrow the capitalist order, and his understanding of revolution is in part informed by these events. Both the Paris Commune and the Revolutions of 1848 happened during his lifetime, and both reflect concerns similar to those he writes about. The Revolutions of 1848, while having little direct impact on governance, developed a consciousness among the lower classes that persisted long after the revolutions were put down. Similarly, the Paris Commune was one of the first attempts to create a truly socialist society, complete with elections, feminist initiatives, workers rights, and the separation of religion from governance. These revolutions were notable for the way they saw class and living conditions as important issues that revolutionaries should address. Demands should deal with concrete material conditions, not just formal aspects of governance. One also sees the concept of socialism developing, for despite the similarity in demands made by both revolutions the people running the Paris Commune had a better formulated idea of how society should function to be inclusive, democratic, and egalitarian. Finally, the harsh way in which each revolutions was put down indicates how hostile established states were to transformative change, and how dangerous they felt these new ideas to be. These concerns are all reflected in Marx's writings, for just like these revolutions Marx deals with material conditions, believes communism will develop over time, and is skeptical that will states reform themselves or accept revolutionary demands. The practice

of revolution undergoes a shift in Marx's lifetime that parallels how Marx's concept of revolution differs from earlier ones.

Marx sees revolutions as a cure for ideologies. Throughout his work he describes revolution as “the alteration of men on a mass scale,”<sup>308</sup> the abolition of “the political character of civil society” which “set[s] free the political spirit,”<sup>309</sup> and the result of “material elements” and “productive forces” rather than ideas.<sup>310</sup> Revolutions are both part of society's progression and moments of becoming that destabilize repressive ideologies. They occur when conditions are such that the ideology of the present is at odds with the extant material forces.<sup>311</sup> Though previous revolutions wound up producing new ideologies and class divisions, the coming communist revolution will abolish both.<sup>312</sup> Revolution is a moment of anti-ideology. It may lead to a new ideology, but its principle function is to undermine established ideologies. Yet Marx imbues revolution with an ideology itself by fixing its trajectory. His descriptions of revolutions contain both form and direction, as by Marx's account they must occur in a certain way and aim at the same telos. Marx insists that peasants must be turned into proletariats before any revolution will succeed in overturning capitalism<sup>313</sup>, that the next major revolution will be economic in nature<sup>314</sup>, and that the state by necessity will be supplanted by worker councils.<sup>315</sup> Marx overloads his revolution with excessive preconditions in order to ensure a seemingly natural transition to communism. As Bernard Yack writes, “[Marxist revolution] does not arise necessarily out of the social experience of workers; workers must view their experience from a

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<sup>308</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 60.

<sup>309</sup> Marx, “Jewish Question”, 45.

<sup>310</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 62.

<sup>311</sup> Marx, “The Coming Upheaval” in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 218-219.

<sup>312</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 86-88.

<sup>313</sup> Marx, “Marx Debates Bahunin”, 543.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 545-546.

particular philosophical perspective, they must have a particular understanding of man's humanity and the obstacles to its realization, before they will even long for a total revolution...let alone actually revolt."<sup>316</sup> Marx speaks prophetically of revolution. Communism is for him inevitable and imminent because "society can no longer live under [the] bourgeoisie [as] its existence is no longer compatible with society."<sup>317</sup> The same unalterable laws that determined why and when the bourgeoisie revolted against feudalism also determine the nature of the proletarian revolution. It is necessary that revolution follow these rules for Marx to make the case that it fits into his larger project. As Kolakowski writes "The future liberation on which [Marx's and Engels'] historical optimism was based was not merely a matter of abolishing poverty and satisfying elementary human needs, but of fulfilling man's destiny and ensuring his dignity and greatness by giving him the maximum control over nature and his own life."<sup>318</sup> The anti-ideological voice of revolution hides the ideological program that projects the creation of a classless, communal society onto every occurrence of revolution and portrays communists as the essential saviors of workers. The confines of the social contract are gone, but revolution is still dictated by the materialist framework that Marx places beneath the state.

Marx envisions revolution as predictable. For that to happen, revolution must follow certain knowable rules, necessitating that facets of the world remain outside revolution's reach. Such parts play a role in shaping how revolution occurs, keeping it on track within the program Marx describes. Revolution results from unsustainable material contradictions, such as when propertyless slaves are pitted against the property owners in communal societies, or when feudal towns must overcome resistance from the countryside to expand.<sup>319</sup> It is able to radically change

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<sup>316</sup> Bernard Yack. *The Longing for Total Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 286.

<sup>317</sup> Marx, "Communist Manifesto", 221.

<sup>318</sup> Kolakowski, *Main Currents: Founders*, 286.

<sup>319</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 38-43.

material conditions in response to contradictions, as happened when the increasing amount of trade between countries transformed society from a feudal hierarchy to the capitalist opposition between bourgeoisie and proletariats.<sup>320</sup> The material conditions that produce the productive forces which form particular social arrangements are, in times of revolution, radically altered to create a new normality. What does not change is the character of the material world, which from beginning to end is the realm where social arrangements, ideas, and states originate. This character functions as an axis around which the world moves, but is itself stable and independent from the shifts and reversals Marx describes. For example, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* define nature as man's "inorganic body" inasmuch as it is "his direct means of life" and "the instrument of his life activity."<sup>321</sup> Humans have real desires, emotions, and needs, though the illusory notions of wealth or status found in capitalist societies turn these authentic expressions of our humanity into "abstract conceits" and "imperfections."<sup>322</sup> The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* says ideas stem from man's material existence<sup>323</sup>, while *The German Ideology* provides 4 premises—that existence is dependent upon satisfying needs, that satisfying needs leads to new needs, that the perpetuation of one's existence leads to the development of families and social relationships, and that social relationships occur in certain modes or forms which determine the direction of history—which specify how to approach writing a materialist history free of "political or religious nonsense."<sup>324</sup>

Throughout Marx's works a fixed character is given to the material world. Certain aspects of individuals' relationships to themselves, or between humans and nature, always behave according to permanent rules. Revolution is enormously effective at reorganizing the

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<sup>320</sup> Marx, "Communist Manifesto", 211-212.

<sup>321</sup> Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 76.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-140.

<sup>323</sup> Marx, "Communist Manifesto", 229.

<sup>324</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 47-49.

material world to produce new technologies<sup>325</sup>, governments<sup>326</sup>, and products<sup>327</sup> but it is incapable of altering the basic facts of this world. As long as humans exist they will have wants that must be fulfilled. Ideas are always a product of materiality. Social orders will develop via the same processes that produced those preceding them. The material world is torn in two. One part is unchangeable and furnishes the material laws Marx describes; the other part contains the entities, forces, and relationships present in any particular social arrangement, and is where revolution operates. In a similar vein, Bernard Yack claims Marx's project relies on a dichotomy between "human powers and material forces" that sees the latter as indifferent to human purposes and the former as capable of being consciously directed.<sup>328</sup> This division of the material realm has a critical impact on revolution. Marx describes revolution as though it is produced by and produces all the entities and relationships found in the material realm. Yet a whole host of indispensable, permanent entities mark off parts of the material world as inaccessible to revolution. Marx's revolution operates only on parts of the material world (such as social arrangements and political systems), which allows the other parts (such as human nature and the relationship between the material and ideal) to maintain the consistency of the material realm. By wielding revolution as a scalpel, Classical Marxism radically alters some things and perpetually keeps others the same. The positioning of revolution in this way makes revolution operative for Marx's larger program by only subjecting some parts of the world to revolutionary ire.

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<sup>325</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 544.

<sup>326</sup> Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 606.

<sup>327</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 590-591.

<sup>328</sup> Yack, *Total Revolution*, 298.

So sure are Marx, Engels, and the early Marxists that they know the path revolution will take<sup>329</sup> they are dismissive of revolutionary projects incompatible with their communist vision. These ideological undertones have unfortunately so pervaded the communist movement that for many it is an expression of their devotion to undertake dangerous actions, including some which Marx would no doubt reject, to bring about Marx's communist state. These claims have been put forth on many occasions. For instance, some feminists criticize Marxism as patriarchal, while others have tried to revive Marxism as a tool for feminism.<sup>330</sup> Similar critiques have been leveled at Marxism by race and queer activists.<sup>331</sup> Meanwhile, Humans Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both criticized Cuba's ostensibly communist government for repressing the population, imprisoning dissidents, and executing political prisoners.<sup>332</sup> Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*<sup>333</sup> documents numerous abuses of Stalin's nominally communist state.

Putting revolution in service of the communist project, while excluding from discussion political or ethical concerns attached to illusory ideologies, creates the perilous potential for sanctioning brutal actions. No moral codes can justly restrain revolution if it can fundamentally alter the material conditions out of which ethics arises, and concerns over proper treatment of those here and now seem quaint when measured against the ultimate end of all history. The attempt to think

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<sup>329</sup> See Karl Marx, *The Letters of Karl Marx* trans Saul Padover (Engewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1979) 68-9, 128; Friedrich Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 717; Georg Lukacs, "Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemboug's 'Critique of the Russian Revolution'" in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: The Merlin Press Ltd, 1971), 281-283; and Antonio Gramsci, "The Soviet Union on the Path to Communism" in *Pre-Prison Writings* trans. Virginia Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 303-304.

<sup>330</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America* [Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989], 135-7.

<sup>331</sup> Tim Wise, "F.A.Qs" timwise.org; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* [New York: Routledge, 1990] 196

<sup>332</sup> "When the State Kills: the death penalty v. human rights", Amnesty International Publications, 1989; "Cuba's repressive machinery". Human Rights Watch. 1999.

<sup>333</sup> Solzhenitsyn *Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973)



revolution through becoming—rather than capture its being—deftly avoids the problems of the social contract, but the mechanisms Marx uses to do so result in new dangers.

### **Rearranging the Marxist Trajectory, Part 1: Science vs. Organizing Principle**

The revolution Marx envisioned did not happen as quickly as he predicted, and while his faith never wavered, as Marx grew older he accepted the likely necessity of a long struggle.<sup>334</sup> His philosophical progeny spread throughout the world, bringing the message of working-class liberation and communal ownership. Along the way, paradoxes, inconsistencies, and biases compelled a retooling of some basic principles, while new philosophical and scientific discoveries called for attempts at synthesis. Since Marx's death, his disciples have reformulated his project many times, adapting it strategically while trying to preserve its basic message. To see the effects of these alterations on the Marxist vision of revolution, and to check whether they escape its contradictions, I will trace the development of Marxism through the party-centered conceptions of it by V.I Lenin and Mao Tse-Tung, the phenomenological variations of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Louis Althusser's structuralist interpretation, and the critical articulations given it by the Frankfurt School. Rather than recounting their philosophies wholesale, I will focus on the modifications each thinker makes to Marxism's foundations.

There are two principal ways in which the Marxist project is modified. First, the laws guiding its operation are adjusted. This includes the functioning of the dialectic, the manner in which ideology and materialism operate, and the method for producing a communist society. Second, the structure of Marxism is revised. This includes the overall shape of the world, relationships between established parts of the Marxist world (such as between the dialectic and individuals), and the specific places forces like production and exchange are located. In the

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<sup>334</sup> Wheen, *Marx: A Life*, 362.

former, it is the process of Marxism that is engaged, while in the latter, it is its form. In regards to process, Lenin, Mao, and Althusser treat Marxism as a science, while Sartre, Mealeau-Ponty, and the Critical Theorists treat it as a universal organizing principle. In regards to form, each thinker locates Marxism within a world substantially different than the world Marx himself describes. However, the degree to which the world is definite and determinate, and what about the world can be known, differs from theorist to theorist. The version of Marxism each thinker returns is ultimately located in a different world than Marx and Engels described. Though this results in new characterizations and roles for revolution by each thinker, in no theory does revolution fully escape the trajectory Marx prescribes. The nature of the state to which revolution is attached varies; but that it is attached to a Marxist state endures.

Those that emphasize Marxism's scientific character focus on how it works as a system to provide substantive knowledge about the social realm. Vladimir Lenin's interpretation of Marxism formalizes many of the disparate elements of Marx's writings, codifying them into a doctrine and expanding on a number of topics Marx left undeveloped. What is of importance to Lenin is distinguishing the exact path needed to get to communism and rejecting any formulation of Marxism that turns it into a policy or general approach to politics.<sup>335</sup> Marxism, as treated by Lenin, is a prescription, arrived at scientifically, that accurately recalls the movements of history in order to foretell the future. The "withering away of the state" that Marx and Engels refer to is necessarily "impossible without a violent revolution."<sup>336</sup> Any sort of strategic alliance or commonality with the bourgeoisie is a fundamental illusion, as the overthrow of the bourgeoisie "can be accomplished only by the proletariat."<sup>337</sup> Similarly, Mao Tse-Tung claims that the revolution will only succeed upon firmly uniting "all the nationalities, democratic classes,

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<sup>335</sup> V.I. Lenin. *State and Revolution*. (New York, International Publishers, 1932), 7.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

democratic parties, people's organizations, and patriotic democrats" around the Communist Party's "fundamental law—the Common Programme."<sup>338</sup> This view of Marxism has been verified, Mao says, "not only because it was so considered when it was scientifically formulated by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin but because it has been verified in the subsequent practice of revolutionary class struggle."<sup>339</sup>

Marxism, for both Lenin and Mao, is demonstrably true as an objective and impartial description of the state of society. It exists independently of any form of constructivism, and its prescriptions have a scientific validity that has been achieved through the application of the basic principles that motivate humanity. Žižek discusses how Lenin thought that "while ordinary individuals are caught in historical events which surpass them, blinded to their true meaning, so that their consciousness is 'false,' a revolutionary cadre has access to the true ('objective') meaning of events, that is, his consciousness is the direct self-consciousness of historical necessity itself."<sup>340</sup> This manifests itself most clearly in the doctrinaire way in which they understand the dialectic, for both Lenin and Mao believe the dialectic is an observable phenomenon which operates in a determinate manner. When incorporated into the study of history, Lenin says, the dialectic produces a field as accurate as any of the natural sciences.<sup>341</sup> Mao goes one step further, emphasizing that every instance of motion results from a dialectical progression between the internal contradictions that make up every object.<sup>342</sup> Contradictions are universal—their particularity comes from the fact that they exist differently in particular

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<sup>338</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "Be a Revolutionary" in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Vol 5* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 39.

<sup>339</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "On Practice" in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Vol 1* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 305.

<sup>340</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (Verso; New York, 2008), 230. It is notable that Žižek criticises Lenin for his claim to objective knowledge, saying "what this position overlooks is how this 'objective' meaning is already subjectively mediated" (230).

<sup>341</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 26-28.

<sup>342</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "On Contradiction" in *Selected works of Mao Tse-Tung Vol 1*, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 313.

objects<sup>343</sup> and that within each situation there is always one primary contradiction surrounded by numerous secondary ones.<sup>344</sup> Because the dialectic operates according to formal rules, Lenin and Mao emphasize teleology and the ability of the Marxist project to provide a definite understanding of the past, the present, and the future. Lenin predicts the necessity of two stages of communism (one where differences of wealth exist without exploitation<sup>345</sup> and a later one where the state is gone and freedom reigns<sup>346</sup>), while Mao is certain that communism is the only way that human civilization will survive.<sup>347</sup> Lenin and Mao interpret Marxism as a discipline that describes in absolute terms how society operates, and which conclusively determines society's trajectory. There is one revolutionary project that leads to communism, and any other paths will result in failure.

Though Marx sounds many of the same notes as Lenin and Mao, it is important to recognize that Marx himself was far less programmatic than either Lenin or Mao, and on numerous occasions puts in qualifications to his predictions and methods. For example, he admits that sometimes revolutions may be accomplished peacefully<sup>348</sup>, that future events will occur differently in different countries, that communists should partner with groups that do not have the same aims<sup>349</sup>, and that different countries require different tactics.<sup>350</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Marx's ideal vision of communism was much less violent towards the bourgeoisie than Lenin's or Mao's projects.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 319-320.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 332-333.

<sup>345</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 77.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>347</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *On New Democracy* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1940) 41.

<sup>348</sup> Marx, "Non-Violent Revolution", 523.

<sup>349</sup> Marx, "Communist Manifesto", 500.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 490.

<sup>351</sup> See Marx's thoughts on the Paris Commune [Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France", in *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 635-636]

Similarly, Louis Althusser claims that Marxism functions as a “science of history”<sup>352</sup> which subjects social formations to a systematic and rigorous analysis. But while Lenin, Mao, and Althusser each say that Marxism is a science<sup>353</sup>, they differ in their understanding of how that order is arrived at and its relationship to the external world. Whereas Lenin and Mao argue that the external world obeys laws and that Marxism avoids ideology by studying the material world, Althusser argues that because it is impossible to ever truly grasp the external world or to practice science without a motivating ideology, Marxism must be constantly critical of any received doctrine.<sup>354</sup> Science means something very specific for Althusser, as he does not conceive of it as an empirical exercise but as a multi-leveled process of abstraction whereby different types of generality get transformed from ‘facts’ into ‘theory’.<sup>355</sup> Everything that a scientist works with is generalized to some degree, including immediate sensations, for even they are only comprehensible once they have been articulated through words.<sup>356</sup> The work of a scientist is to transform the ‘facts’ that comprise the most basic level of generality into concepts and theories that have explanatory power. Marx’s scientific project is not to describe the real qua one’s sensations, but to operate on several levels and through several stages of generality to construct a knowledge about the social world.<sup>357</sup> Importantly, Althusser avoids rooting Marxism in any concept of what it means to be human, claiming that Marx gave up any such notion after 1845.<sup>358</sup> The scientific approach that Althusser sees in Marx’s work necessitates a critique of any received doctrine, including those that come with a static or essential concept of human

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<sup>352</sup> Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Penguin Press, 1969), 13.

<sup>353</sup> For Althusser, see *For Marx*, 28-30 and 193. Lenin discusses Marxism’s scientific approach to the external world in Lenin, “Karl Marx” in *Collected Works, Vol. 21* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960) 52-53. Mao discusses Marxism’s scientific approach in Mao, “On Practice”, 296-7.

<sup>354</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 170.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-4.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

nature. For him, all such ideas are ideological in nature.<sup>359</sup> The true starting point in Marx's science is materialist praxis, and its purpose an ongoing critique of ideological assumptions of all kinds.

Other Marxists claim that viewing Marxism as a science is too superficial, and that Marx's doctrine acts as an organizing principle. For those who hold this view, Marxism is not just an approach or a method that uncovers or systematizes how the world functions—it *is* the process by which the world becomes consistent. When conceived as an organizing principle, Marxism is not something that distills and formalizes reality, but the mechanism by which the reality we experience forms. French existentialists Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre reject the Leninist, Maoist, and Althusserian approaches by questioning the possibility that the world can be given an objective form in the manner that Lenin and Mao believe, or that Marxism can constitute the subject in the way Althusser claims. Sartre argues that things in the world are in themselves meaningless as they are capable of an infinite number of different appearances, and so the transcendental ego is necessary to provide them with any value.<sup>360</sup> Similarly, Merleau-Ponty states that any quality can only be apprehended within “a whole perceptual context”<sup>361</sup> which affects how it is perceived, and that meaning in sensation must be understood as “a process of integration in which the text of the external world is not so much copied, as composed.”<sup>362</sup> For both, the subject is an integral part of any experience of the world, and no knowledge can be developed without it. Thus there is no possibility of neutrally observing the external world, or studying it scientifically without at the same time constituting it. Marx's system can only be saved by changing it from a means of studying the world to a means of

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>360</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 5.

<sup>361</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 1968), 9.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 10.

producing the world. As the principle by which the world is created, Sartre claims Marxism incorporates everything, including human consciousness and the dialectic, into its theory.<sup>363</sup> As Merleau-Ponty shows, the failure to do this inevitably places knowing outside dialectics (and thus outside the Marxist system), giving it an absolute character and placing Marxism in tension with itself.<sup>364</sup> Dialectics must be able to explain its own development as well. For Sartre, this means that it needs to be able to justify itself without referring to anything outside it.<sup>365</sup> To refer to external forces implies a separate order beyond dialectics, one which works according to an old model of motion that sees movement as an accidental occurrence. Dialectics provides the only explanation for motion that conceives of it as an internal principle<sup>366</sup>, and only by justifying itself will dialectics not end up invoking an absolute foundation that precedes it. Sartre's dialectics is not a science, as unlike science it cannot refer to principles or beings outside itself; instead, dialectics is the only principle that must be determined a priori and without relation to anything else.<sup>367</sup>

Merleau-Ponty agrees with Sartre in his criticism of materialist dialectics qua science, but diverges in part on the role dialectics plays within the world. For Merleau-Ponty, dialectics is an organizing principle of the world, but not *the* organizing principle of the world. According to Martin Jay, Merleau-Ponty denies that there is any “normative totality which could be used as the critical vantage point from which the present might be judged.”<sup>368</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, Marxism is “essentially descriptive” and “used to make sense of what was,” but whose task is

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<sup>363</sup> Sartre, Jean Paul. *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (New York: Verso, 2004) 36-7.

<sup>364</sup> Merleau-Ponty. *Adventures in the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 60.

<sup>365</sup> Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 31.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>368</sup> Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: Adventures of a Concept from Lucács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 375.

infinite in nature.<sup>369</sup> Materialist dialectics appears at the intersection of subjects in the world, as a principle by which a field of experience is formed and by which objects and subjects are always opening themselves to others.<sup>370</sup> Unlike Sartre, Merleau-Ponty does not think dialectics is totalizing, and in fact argues that the dialectic itself is dialectical inasmuch as it goes through stages<sup>371</sup> without ever reaching a final totality.<sup>372</sup> Though the dialectic is constituted, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that the relationship between the external world and the subject does not leave the outcome of history radically open. History is ambiguous and yields no definite meaning, yet it has a vague trajectory that is revealed in moments of crisis. This trajectory does not determine, but rather guides, society, while at the same time human actions affect the course of history. The movements of history and the significance of human action are so interwoven that at a certain point they become indistinguishable. It is for this reason that we can neither lose the dialectic—and the idea that it has a telos—nor the idea that humans are free to their own destiny.<sup>373</sup> Even though no totalizing ever occurs, the dialectic encourages or motivates history in a vague direction while being open to a modification of the ultimate goal.

The critical theory of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer is comparable to the works of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty inasmuch as they all resist seeing Marxism as a science *of* the world by emphasizing the dialectic's ability to call into question the coherence of the world. But unlike Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Adorno and Horkheimer do not ground the dialectic in the constituting capacity of subjects. Instead, they see dialectics as an inherent, real, and necessary process grounded in the nature of the world. As Adorno writes in the introduction to *Negative*

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<sup>369</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 380-381.

<sup>370</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures*, 203-4.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-5.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-7.

<sup>373</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 198-200.



*Dialectics*, dialectics is not programmatic or rule based, but real and existent,<sup>374</sup> so it should not be reduced to a set number of steps or to an operation. Dialectics is becoming—not just in the sense that things are constantly moving from place to place or gaining and losing qualities, but that things are constantly not what they are.<sup>375</sup> Dialectics is a process by which newness enters the world, and through it any identity is open to radical change. As Adorno puts it, dialectics is the manner in which “all concepts, even the philosophical ones, refer to nonconceptualities.”<sup>376</sup> Yet this is only half the process, for dialectics continually traps the nonconceptual in the conceptual since any attempt to point to something outside the conceptual inevitably requires a concept to complete itself.<sup>377</sup> Dialectics cannot follow a program, a rule, or any conceptual model without limiting itself, thus negating its very purpose. Because of dialectic’s openness, Adorno questions the need for a predetermined end in communism<sup>378</sup> and, like Althusser, posits instead a need for constant critique in order to keep all concepts dynamic.<sup>379</sup> As Martin Jay writes, “Adorno...seems not to have hoped for the complete overcoming of reification, that special bugbear of Hegelian Marxism. Yet in much of his writing, he used reification as a term of opprobrium, contending, for example, that ‘dialectics means intransigence towards all reification’.”<sup>380</sup> There is no positive content to dialectics that can be permanently delineated, as the nature of dialectics is to sublimate anything of that type. Adorno radicalizes Marx’s dialectic by removing it from the traditional Marxist program. Dialectic becomes a principle in itself. This perspective on dialectics, while reminiscent of other Marxist philosophers, ultimately separates Adorno from all of them. In his description of scientific Marxism, Althusser only talks

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<sup>374</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 6.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>380</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 267.

about the different levels of generality that come out of an encounter with the world. Dialectic is one such abstraction, and it constitutes a theoretical practice. By contrast, Adorno talks about dialectic not just as a theory, but as a force which mediates between the conceptual and nonconceptual. Similarly, at first glance there seem to be a number of similarities between Merleau-Ponty and Adorno with regard to their descriptions of the dialectic's openness, inclusion of the nonconceptual, and application of critique to the dialectic itself. Martin Jay writes that both Merleau-Ponty and Adorno "proposed an essentially negative dialectic without the likelihood of any positive resolution"<sup>381</sup> and felt that the idea of a harmonious end to history was a idealization of death.<sup>382</sup> A.T. Nuyem argues that both Adorno and Merleau-Ponty claim the nonconceptual (or non-reflective) make reflection and thought possible.<sup>383</sup> The primary differences between the two thinkers are twofold. First, Merleau-Ponty grounds his dialectic in a constituting intersubjectivity and life-world (which, according to Herbert Reid, is why Merleau-Ponty can give a more convincing account of social change)<sup>384</sup> while Adorno denies the dialectic is constituted by subjects at all (he says the dialectic precedes subjectivity and is part of the how the world operates).<sup>385</sup> Second, Merleau-Ponty believes that the dialectic furnishes us with a vague, incomplete, yet somewhat positive trajectory while for Adorno that trajectory is always only towards negativity and nonidentity.<sup>386</sup>

## **Rearranging the Marxist Trajectory Part 2: What is the World?**

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>383</sup> "Adorno and the French Post-Structuralists on the Other of Reason" in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 4, no 4 (1990): 316.

<sup>384</sup> "Critical Phenomenology and the Dialectical Foundations of Social Change" in *Dialectical Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1977): 117.

<sup>385</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 137-140.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 149.

The debate over how Marxism operates is connected with the question of the world's being. Each Marxist thinker mentioned above modifies the form the world takes as a part of their attempt to update Marx's theory, and while they each retain a large majority of Marx's insights in regards to how the world is experienced, their descriptions of the world in itself differ radically. The fundamental character of the world goes from being law-driven and determinate to unknowable and contingent as one moves through the different Marxists.

First, Lenin's analyses are grounded in a belief that the world obeys specific laws, that it can be described accurately without bias, and that a study of these descriptions and laws will reveal the right (and the only realistic) revolutionary project. Lenin underscores this in stating "there is no trace of Utopianism in Marx" since "[Marx] takes the actual experience of a mass proletarian movement [the Paris Commune] and tries to draw practical lessons from it"<sup>387</sup>—in particular the requirement of armed revolt against the state. The laws that the world necessarily follows are described by Marx. No room for variation exists in this program, for to open the program to different ideas is to bring about "eclecticism and absence of principle," resulting in a lack of revolutionary theory without which "there can be no revolutionary movement."<sup>388</sup>

Althusser describes Lenin's faithfulness to Marxist thought in a couple essays, claiming that Lenin saw the materialist dialectic as the "one thing in the world which is absolute"<sup>389</sup> and was "profoundly convinced" that every philosophical worldview "represents the class struggle" Marx laid out.<sup>390</sup> The foundations of Marxism were for Lenin an unquestionable truth. Mao's Marxism is also grounded in a determinate world. For him, dialectical materialism is an

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<sup>387</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 42.

<sup>388</sup> Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (International Publishers, New York, 1929) 28.

<sup>389</sup> Althusser, "Lenin Before Hegel" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971) 123.

<sup>390</sup> Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971), 65.

objective rule operating in the world in predictable and determinate ways. As he says, “The fact is that the unity of identity of opposites in objective things is not dead or rigid, but is living, conditional, mobile, temporary and relative...Reflected in man’s thinking, this becomes the Marxist world outlook of materialist dialectics.”<sup>391</sup> For both Lenin and Mao, neither the objectivity of the world nor the idea that the laws it follows can be clearly delineated are open for question. The world, as we observe it, is what is.

The determinacy of Lenin’s and Mao’s world is questioned by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty as it fails to account for the role of the subject in producing its experience. Perception, consciousness, intentions, and other factors play a role in creating the world as it is encountered, including creating the Marxist schematic that explains phenomena like alienation, property, and capital. Marxism does not exist independently of this constituting project but is an intrinsic part of it, as the dialectic is necessarily a part of what is generated. So while the world itself is not determinate like Marx imagined, the world as it is experienced is Marxist in nature. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty reconcile Marxism with phenomenology by stating that while there is no world without a constituting subjectivity<sup>392</sup>, and while meaning comes out of an interactive process between the subject and the phenomenon within a particular situation, it is still the case that the manner in which the world is created follows particular processes. It is not possible for the world to appear in whatever way a subject chooses it to, as while the subject plays a constitutive role in composing the world they are also thrown into it and composed by it in turn.<sup>393</sup> An interaction of opposing material forces—the Marxist dialectic—is a prerequisite for the appearance of the world. For Sartre, this is true because the knowledge of the world is only

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<sup>391</sup> Mao, “On Contradiction”, 340.

<sup>392</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, lvii; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxii.

<sup>393</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xiv.

possible through a dialectical relationship<sup>394</sup> between the unknowable external world<sup>395</sup> and the subject (similar to Merleau-Ponty's view that the development of history comes from an encounter between the ambiguous trajectory of history and the constituting power of individuals<sup>396</sup>). Such knowledge is not ordered and structured, but totalizing and synthetic. In other words, there is no possibility for objective knowledge—that is, knowledge not constituted by a subject and which definitively captures the external world—since every subject is of the world they want to understand, but can only develop objective knowledge by holding the world and themselves apart. The subject and the external world are in constant dialogue, which is why Sartre claims that the encounter with the world, from a phenomenological perspective, inevitably implies the Marxist dialectic.<sup>397</sup> The dialectic does not work in a realm that can be scientifically observed from afar, for it sweeps up everything in its path. Though coming from a similar perspective, Merleau-Ponty rejects this view as it negates alternative possibilities in its constant push to capture everything. For Sartre, the dialectic, and as a result all beings and all knowledge, aim at drawing together and incorporating everything into one cohesive whole<sup>398</sup>; it is a constant process of unification. Merleau-Ponty's dialectic is as much an opening onto new differences as it is a bringing together of differences into a coherent unity. What Sartre claims is an inexorable push for unity is for Merleau-Ponty a vehicle for bringing separate entities into dialogue with one another, the result of which is the possibility of new meanings, significations, and contexts.<sup>399</sup> The dialectic is necessary for a unified field of experience inasmuch as such a field can only be formed by differentiating one element from another, yet any meaning resulting from the field is

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<sup>394</sup> Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 25-26.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>396</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 198-200.

<sup>397</sup> Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 57.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>399</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures*, 204.

only temporary. The same is true for knowledge of the dialectic, which is constantly being superseded.<sup>400</sup> Merleau-Ponty opposes any systematization or institutionalization of the dialectic, as doing so would reduce the dialectic to what it establishes—a field of knowledge.<sup>401</sup> Dialectic cannot be enshrined within the proletariat nor terminate at the end of history without becoming flat and lifeless—in a word, nondialectical. Whereas for Sartre the dialectic is the only process by which the world develops, for Merleau-Ponty it is a necessary, but not the sole, means by which the world becomes cohesive.

Relative to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the constituting subject plays no role in the world Althusser creates. Rather than look into subjectivity for a new grounding of Marxism, Althusser tries to establish the conditions that must be necessary for the world to operate as described by Marx. This means foregoing experience and beginning with the world as a complex whole, made up of many smaller relationships and contradictions.<sup>402</sup> It is, as Martin Jay says, a whole which has “neither a genetic point of origin nor a teleological point of arrival.”<sup>403</sup> Althusser claims it is impossible to delve beyond this complex whole, or even to elaborate it further, for the world is given as a complex, structured unity and not as an original, simple unity.<sup>404</sup> The lack of simple unities means there are no essences and no concepts from which particular instances of things are drawn; rather, instances are at the base of any abstraction or generality developed. As the complex whole of the world is impossible to experience without concepts, Althusser posits ideology as an irreducible part of the world.<sup>405</sup> Althusser claims ideology is an artifact of culture, meaning that it acts as a lived relation between man and the world, and not a function of

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 204-5.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 205-6.

<sup>402</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 100 and 201-2.

<sup>403</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 406.

<sup>404</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 198-199.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 232.

consciousness.<sup>406</sup> Humans require ideology to engage the world, and so their experience of reality is nothing other than social relations, which get their meaning from real and concrete interactions within the complex whole of the world.<sup>407</sup> It is impossible to approach the real with no concepts, for while the real is what exists apart from human knowledge, it can only be defined with human knowledge.<sup>408</sup>

In addition, Althusser says ideology turns individuals into subjects and allows them to recognize themselves as such. It is through ideology that we learn how to function in society, as it constantly “hails” us to engage with others by taking on certain roles.<sup>409</sup> In our engagements with friends, teachers, police officers, and other members of society, our behavior begins to conform to the expectations of society as we are rewarded or chastised for our actions. Ideology is thus the mechanism by which we recognize that we are subjects, and that certain things are demanded of us. Althusser reverses the Sartrean and Merleau-Pontean subject-ideology relationship, as ideology constitutes the subject rather than vice versa. Yet he agrees with them that there is no possibility of objective knowledge, insisting that there is no getting outside ideology. Ideology constantly surrounds us and conditions our knowledge and actions, so much so that even saying one has escaped ideology is a function of it.<sup>410</sup> Because ideology lets us recognize the existing state of affairs it is a vital part of our social existence<sup>411</sup>, not something that can be gotten rid of. The point of Marxism is not to begin with abstract ideas and search for their confirmation, but to forge new concepts in your encounters with real objects.<sup>412</sup> And because human knowledge is pulled so much from culture and society, rather than being

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 243-4.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 246-7.

<sup>409</sup> Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* 173-4.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>412</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 245.

determined by intentions, perception, and consciousness, the influence an individual has over how the world is presented is, according to Althusser, much less than Sartre and Merleau-Ponty claim. To be truly faithful to the relationship to knowledge and the approach to praxis of Marx's project, we must return to the conceptual architecture of Marxism itself.

The Critical Theorists continue the trend of questioning the possibility of objective knowledge, though their critique does not rest on an examination of the subject or the ideological lens through which the world is seen. Of all the post-Marxist thinkers, they say the least about the world, refusing to posit it even as a dialectically constituted phenomenal realm or a complex whole composed of contradictions. Any description of the world—even the minimal ones given by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Althusser—would, if taken as foundational and necessary, become incapable of being superseded by the dialectic. A contradiction would appear, for this necessary foundation would both be held apart from the world inasmuch as it is not subject to dialectical sublimation, yet be a part of the world inasmuch as it is the only essential piece of it. Horkheimer corrects for this by claiming the world has no necessary meaning which can be objectively found. All ideas are socially determined,<sup>413</sup> and no model is excluded from these influences. The world can only be grasped from a socially conditioned perspective, as no theory can exist apart from the mediating influences of culture and history.<sup>414</sup> Though an external world can be posited, the role it plays in composing the world we experience is unknowable since any theory dealing with that topic would be prejudiced by history and culture. As Jay writes, Horkheimer “always acknowledged the existence of a natural object irreducible to the objectification of a creator subject and resistant to all attempts to master it conceptually.”<sup>415</sup> This

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<sup>413</sup> Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory” in *Essential Readings of Critical Theory* ed. David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1992), 241-2.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>415</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 214.



view separates Horkheimer from the view held by Merleau-Ponty. Horkheimer believes our knowledge of external objects is only negative whereas Merleau-Ponty claims an ambiguous positive knowledge. And while Merleau-Ponty claims that the horizons that disclose the world to us have an irreducible social element,<sup>416</sup> Horkheimer says that it is theory (as a product of society and culture), rather than our experiential dialogue with the world at the bodily level<sup>417</sup>, which primarily forms the world. For Merleau-Ponty, the world we experience is constituted when we are called by the external world to complete it, and in doing so to form a complete Gestalt. This is possible because in its most basic form the subject and object—the perceiver and the external world—are not independent but completely inseparable.<sup>418</sup> Horkheimer rejects this approach, as for him it is impossible to know absolutely the relationship between the subject and object, including whether the two are intricately linked. Because our knowledge of subjects and objects are always affected by society and culture<sup>419</sup>, and because there is no way to excise the influence of society and culture from knowledge, Horkheimer does not believe it is possible to say what the primary relationship between subjects and objects is.<sup>420</sup> The phenomenological foundation that Merleau-Ponty wants to give for our experience does not for him arise from society and culture, and the knowledge that the body is “a general medium for having a world”<sup>421</sup> is not a socially conditioned concept (even though for Merleau-Ponty the body is, ontologically, irreducibly connected with the other bodies in society). By contrast, Horkheimer does not believe any theory of the subject, object, and their relationship can ever found knowledge or experience, as each one is conditioned by society and culture. Because all claims to a

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<sup>416</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 419.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>419</sup> Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical”, 246-7.

<sup>420</sup> Max Horkheimer. “Materialism and Metaphysics” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans., Matthew O’Connell (Continuum: New York, 2002), 27-28.

<sup>421</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 169.

fundamental ontology, even a thoroughly social one such as Merleau-Ponty's, are so conditioned, there is an "irreducible tension between concept and object"<sup>422</sup> that makes any theory of beginnings suspect.

Yet Horkheimer is not advocating a pure and absolute relativism such that any idea about the world can be applicable at any time. Such a claim reduces the view of the world to a function of subjective reason (the type of reason which makes rational actions possible through deduction, inference, and classification<sup>423</sup>), and leads to fascism inasmuch as all views—even those which are hegemonic or intolerant—are allowed in.<sup>424</sup> This is because subjective reason is individualized, able to operate within any particular world without being beholden to it. To prevent the fascism that could come from an approach that privileges personal or group interests over the principle of social cohesion, Horkheimer argues that the world should be kept a function of objective reason, which aims at denoting the structures inherent in reality.<sup>425</sup> Both subjective and objective reason are socially constituted and contingent, but only objective reason works to understand the composition of the world. Horkheimer believes that by keeping the world within the sphere of objective reason it is possible to preserve a notion of a world that is common to all. In other words, the idea that the world has absolute meaning should be retained, just not any particular idea of what that meaning is.<sup>426</sup> To some degree, an 'anything goes' approach remains inasmuch as what can be true is unconstrained by external influences, yet it does not come at the expense of, but rather enhances, community. This, again, contrasts with views held by individuals like Merleau-Ponty, or, in the world of science, David Bloor, who both posit different

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<sup>422</sup> Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics", 28.

<sup>423</sup> Max Horkheimer, "Means and Ends" in *Essential Readings of Critical Theory*, ed. David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1992), 35.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41&45.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

mechanisms to prevent absolute relativism. As mentioned above, Merleau-Ponty says our beliefs and experiences are conditioned in part by the world just as we condition the world, while for Horkheimer such a claim cannot be known. Similarly, Bloor would oppose the relativism of Horkheimer with the claim that there is an unknown yet ordered external world—or a “common core of people, objects, and natural processes”—that calls into question any claims that we can ever know something absolutely or completely.<sup>427</sup> Horkheimer does not think we should abandon a ‘common core’, but unlike Bloor he does not think there is only one ‘common core’ against which our knowledge is continually measured.

The world is not something that can ever be satisfactorily defined, but the attempt to define of the world cannot be given up without a completely relative world resulting. This is different from Althusser, who, while admitting that knowledge about the world is ideological and never truly captures the real, nevertheless believes that certain concepts are more accurate than others. His advocacy for a scientific approach leads him to advocate for concepts that are “practical” and forged when “you are face to face with your real object.”<sup>428</sup> Such concepts developed are not eternally valid, but as products of a “science in development”<sup>429</sup> are subject to change. Yet for a period of time they are more accurate than abstract or utopian concepts developed apart from the real. Critical Theory, unlike Althusser, does not claim that a methodological devotion to the real determines which ideas are dominant, as such a claim assumes an outside world against which your ideas can be measured, and which is not the product of cultural prejudice. Ideas may be more or less accurate at a point in time, but it is due to historical circumstances, rather than epistemological superiority, that they become so.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (Routledge Direct; London, 1976) 36.

<sup>428</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 245.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>430</sup> Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical”, 241.

Apart from any contingent meanings we invent, the only things that can be said about the world are that it is not separate from thought and theory<sup>431</sup>, and that it is not static but is changing.<sup>432</sup> Unlike the subjects or contradictions that compose the other post-Marxists' austere worlds, these two characteristics do not form a theory of the world, but act as critical operations that call into question any such theory. Apart from the movement of the dialectic the world is unknown, and our necessary attempts to try to know it will inevitably fail.

### **Rearranging the Marxist Trajectory Part 3: New Revolutions**

Each thinker responds to the possibilities and challenges their theory raises with new revolutionary strategies. As both Lenin and Mao believed themselves to be updating Marx's program for their particular situation (respectively, imperialist Russia and colonialist China), they each adjusted Marx's vision for revolution and the particular role the communist party plays in it. Lenin's belief that the revolution requires a vanguard party to succeed is drawn from Marx's writings, but plays a more centralized and programmatic role in Lenin's vision than Marx ever intended. As Lenin says, "A small, compact, core, consisting of reliable, experienced and hardened workers, with responsible agents in the principle districts and connected by all the rules of strict secrecy with the organisations of revolutionists, can...perform all the functions of a trade-union organization."<sup>433</sup> Professional revolutionaries are necessary<sup>434</sup> to bring together the variety of people, jobs, locations, and interests in society and unite them behind a common purpose. Power should be centralized, but with connections throughout society. Unlike Lenin, Mao does not view the Party as sacrosanct. Dedicated revolutionaries are needed to bring about

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 244-5.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>433</sup> Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, 112.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 114.

the transition to communism, but Mao's ultimate goal is to institute a "New Democracy" where all people are encouraged to participate in politics regardless of party affiliation.<sup>435</sup> Mao's well-known saying that one should look to the communist party to find bourgeoisie<sup>436</sup> implies that communists should continually go to the peasants and workers in society to reinvigorate their revolutionary fervor and commitment to democracy. A successful revolution must undergo a transition towards socialism, which necessitates a renewal from outside to prevent the bourgeoisie from undermining it.<sup>437</sup> Were the revolution to become controlled by the Communist Party, it would lead to another bourgeoisie, and not to a recognition of the dynamic contradictions inherent in the materialist world. Another difference between Lenin and Mao is that while Lenin believes communism requires an immediate and unwavering opposition to the bourgeoisie, Mao believes that for the revolutionary program to succeed in China the bourgeoisie and peasants must first unite to throw off their colonizers. Left mostly untouched by Lenin and Mao are the materialist, dialectical, and ideological components of Marxism, as they focus primarily on developing and formalizing the revolutionary program.

The possibility of developing such a revolutionary program is endangered by the philosophies of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Writing in response to the events of the USSR and the doctrinaire way the Soviets applied Marxism, their claim that knowledge and the knowing subject undergo dialectical progression<sup>438</sup> means that a revolutionary program is not easily predicted, systematized, and localized. Merleau-Ponty believes Marxism is torn between two views of revolution, one which sees it as an incidental expense of historical development (i.e. as

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<sup>435</sup> Mao, *On New Democracy*, 24-5.

<sup>436</sup> Ed Pluth, *Alain Badiou* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 20.

<sup>437</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "Win the Masses in their Millions" in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Vol 1* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 290.

<sup>438</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures*, 60; Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 23.

progress) and one which sees it as a permanent overturning (i.e. as rupture).<sup>439</sup> Inasmuch as Marxism wants revolution to escape the situation it comes from yet tries to make it obey another situation, revolution is put in tension as both pro and anti situation. Its very nature means that it is both necessarily correct about what needs to be done yet possibly wrong at the same time.<sup>440</sup> This leads to a revolutionary antinomy whereby the Marxist revolution, which is created to resist power<sup>441</sup>, produces revolutionaries—completely convinced of the justness of their cause<sup>442</sup>—who work to create a recognized and ordered power structure. Thus the revolutionaries in the USSR ended up using revolution to justify a governing body that was completely unrevolutionary.<sup>443</sup> What is needed, according to Merleau-Ponty, and what will be truly revolutionary, is a non-communist left that resists the problems of both capitalism and communism. This left should not follow a plan dictated in advance, for to be true to the nature of the world the ambiguity and plurality inherent in our experience must be incorporated into the revolutionary program. If Marxism is to be revolutionary, it must be open to reinterpretation. Just as Merleau-Ponty claims the meaning of paintings must remain open, Marxism must be recognized as an “advent” that leaves itself open to “a future man not even outlined in our present life”<sup>444</sup> (that is, to the possibility of new things to come not predictable by the present). Like Merleau-Ponty’s hyperdialectic—the ‘good dialectic which does not resolve everything or follow a set path, but embraces ambiguity and partial synthesis while admitting the possibility that “progresses” can be made<sup>445</sup>—Marxism should not contain absolutes or be formulaic, but be willing to surpass itself.

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<sup>439</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures*, 209.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-223.

<sup>444</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” in *Signs* trans. Richard McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 70.

<sup>445</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 94-5.

Similarly, Sartre demands that resistance occur not via a vanguard party or doctrinaire program, but a revolutionary praxis that transforms collectives into revolutionaries.<sup>446</sup> Sartre's philosophy is a philosophy of action that demands the development of a praxis to bring about a different situation, in part through the development of new group identities.<sup>447</sup> Sartre and Merleau-Ponty both separate Marxism from its programmatic elements, and as a result try to reconceive of revolution as something without a particular doctrine, but which follows from such a doctrine's absence or undoing. Revolution is not a formula, it is an event in the world that exceeds any formal system.

The high degree of skepticism Critical Theory proposes in order to be faithful to the constantly changing world means no revolutionary program is wholly endorsed. Many of the Critical Theorists were themselves witnesses of revolutionary activities,<sup>448</sup> and held a sympathy for revolutions, but were skeptical of dogmatic programs of revolution.<sup>449</sup> Their experience with the Nazis had shown them the danger of fascism that arises from dogmatic adherence to a political program. Critical Theory was presented by Horkheimer as a revolutionary tool in the sense that critique, when properly formulated and inserted into society, can be the catalyst for change.<sup>450</sup> Small, incremental progress being unsatisfactory for the achievement of a better world, a revolution must move beyond the schema at work in the present, a task which critique can help to begin. Yet the danger of fascism that follows from a complete openness means that to some extent there must always be some schema at work in revolution, even if the schema itself is problematic. The insight of Critical Theory is the identification of the antinomies—between chaos and dogmatism, between critique and fidelity, and between totality and otherness—at the

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<sup>446</sup> Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 349.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 549.

<sup>448</sup> Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 14 and 28.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>450</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 218.

heart of the Marxist project of revolution. The practice that Critical Theory recommends is to stay in between the bounds of the antinomies to avoid the dangers that come from embracing one side or the other. Revolution is a constant, ongoing exercise, in need of regular criticism and renewal.

Althusser's comments on revolution were made as a response to the French Communist Party's dilution of Marxism into a liberal humanism. Althusser believes Marxism is a scientific theory capable of transforming the structure of society, not a ideology aimed at determining what policies best fit the constitution of the subject. Part of Althusser's concept of revolution is his emphasis on how it is vital to ensure the theory of Marxism is correct, for theory is a potent weapon in the promulgation of communism.<sup>451</sup> The other place Althusser discusses revolution is in "Contradiction and Overdetermination," where Althusser uses the example of the Russian Revolution to discuss how revolutionary conditions originate. The key point he makes is that revolution is not the result of a general and hegemonic contradiction imposing itself on society, but rather the "fusing" of many disparate "circumstances" and "currents" into one "ruptural unity."<sup>452</sup> The general contradiction (such as that between the proletariats and bourgeoisie) can perhaps define the revolutionary situation, but it cannot bring it about. A revolution is enacted from below, as the surging, shifting masses of people begin to reflect similar contradictions throughout. As more and more of the relationships within society become defined by the same contradictory characteristics, the opposing groups become unified, merging together until a revolution becomes inevitable. Althusser is careful to claim that these relationships are not pure phenomena, but, as Marx would say, derived from the relations of production and conditions of

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<sup>451</sup> Louis Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 13.

<sup>452</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 99.



existence in society.<sup>453</sup> Althusser uses the term “overdetermination” to emphasize how the contradiction that brings about a revolution, even as it determines society, is itself determined by the various instances within the social body. It is “overdetermined in principle.”<sup>454</sup> The Russian Revolution, Althusser claims, was the first industrial nation to undergo a communist revolution because of how prevalent, overwhelming, and thus exacerbated the contradictions between the elites and the workers were.<sup>455</sup>

Althusser’s other relevant discussion in regards to the question of revolution is his recommendation about how radicals can use ideology productively. Because ideology and practice are intimately intertwined, even a slight misunderstanding of a concept can significantly affect the outcome of an event. A successful revolution is one that has a well developed theory that underlies it, while a revolution lacking a strong articulation is easily subverted or undermined. Words and concepts are for Althusser sites of struggle—the way they are used represent continual battles between the bourgeoisie and proletarian masses. Althusser’s revolution is one that operates not only in the streets, but in the textbooks and classrooms of the university. It carefully constructs ideas and concepts as weapons that can be used to undermine oppressive systems. The Marxist revolution will only succeed “on condition that it fights both about very 'scholarly' words (concept, theory, dialectic, alienation, etc.) and about very simple words (man, masses, people, class struggle).<sup>456</sup>

## **Beyond the Marxist Revolution**

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>456</sup> Althusser, “Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon”, 22.

The astute diagnosis by these Marxists of the paradoxes and contradictions in Marx's program yields important revelations about the nature of revolution. But can revolution be saved simply by varying the character of the Marxist world? Addressing the problems coincident with an overly doctrinaire revolutionary program or a mechanistic view of history gives revolution some independence to explore different possibilities, but as long as the Marxist trajectory remains is revolution truly free? Or is it possible that the variations of Marxism free up new possibilities only by placing others beyond the bounds of revolution?

An interesting feature of these variations on Marxism is their increasing engagement with contingency and nothingness. Whereas Marx's accounts in *The Communist Manifesto*, *The German Ideology*, and *Grundrisse* are histories of necessity, their retelling by Lenin, Mao, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, Adorno, and Horkheimer increasingly presents Marx's discoveries as outgrowths of his time which now must be rethought. Not just that, but as illustrated by Sartre's claim that negation conditions the possibility of individuals becoming socially engaged<sup>457</sup> and Adorno's claim that philosophy draws its legitimacy from the negative<sup>458</sup>, the role of nothingness is of increasing concern to Marxists as a condition for the possibility of their projects. Nothingness, as portrayed by these thinkers, is what keeps Marxism—and philosophy as a whole—going, as it represents the irreducibility of the material world to any program or doctrine. To varying degrees, every Marxist thinker mentioned attempts to prevent the solidification of Marxism into an orthodoxy by preserving the dynamism of its structural elements like ideology, revolution, and dialectic. Lenin and Mao update the description of how the communist revolution will occur, taking into account contexts (such as the continued existence of peasants in some industrial societies and the worldwide scope of the

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<sup>457</sup> Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 86.

<sup>458</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 52.

European imperial system) that Marx himself was unaware of. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty apply the dialectic to the very constitution of objectivity and the knowledge of it that humans have. Althusser presents a world that is unknowable aside from its being a whole composed of contradictions. And Adorno removes any sense of identity between the material and the conceptual, presenting the dialectic as an ongoing encounter between the two. Each theorist seeks to maintain Marxism's ability to speak substantively of social and political systems while beginning from foundations often vastly different from the one Marx did. In order to take into account all the potential contingencies of history and philosophy, the certainties of Marxism has become increasingly minimalist while its method extends beyond the limits of knowledge to the point where nothingness is encountered.

Yet as a foundation for revolution, even these revised theories fall short. Revolution still follows a dialectical pattern, and is conditioned by a stable, if mostly unknown, world. As dialectical, revolution is always a harmonizing force, bringing together the polar opposites of a dichotomy even as it creates new ones. Marx says the reconciling of the feudal classes leads to capitalism and the opposition between the worker and the bourgeoisie<sup>459</sup>; Lenin believes that overthrowing capitalism will at first lead to a contradictory form of communism where everyone is treated equally rather than according to their ability and need<sup>460</sup>; and Sartre believes reconciling an individual with their history ultimately requires the development of new structures that oppose the individual to their group membership.<sup>461</sup> Revolution's transformational and creative power is limited by the nature of the dichotomy itself, and the potential changes that can occur upon the dichotomy's supersession. The revolutions conceived of by Marxists, because they are motivated by class conflict, are circumscribed by the nature of class such that other

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<sup>459</sup> Marx, *German Ideology*, 74-77.

<sup>460</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 110-111.

<sup>461</sup> Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 52.

concerns become secondary or ignored. Few Marxists have theorized issues of race, gender, or nationality except inasmuch as they can be attached to the Marxist critique of capital, nor articulated a vision of revolution that does not position the working class as the primary architect and beneficiary. Systematic disparities or programs of injustice unrelated to class are unimportant, as they will ostensibly be solved upon the reconciliation of class disparities, once humans are returned to their actual lives and the conditions of their existence. Even among contemporary Marxists who substantively diverge from Marx on the question of telos and the program of revolution, this difference between the ideological and actual remains, and revolution is always portrayed as an attempt at harmonizing these two realms. Social or political concerns that do not primarily deal with the relationship between these two realms are irrelevant to Marxism, while revolutions that occur in relation to such concerns do not even qualify within Marxism as revolutions. Instead, the natures of the ideological and actual operate as a given to condition what counts as a revolution. And a truly transformative revolution, which could radically change the rules governing the ideological and actual, is impossible.

Revolution is always put in service of Marxism's larger program, whether that is the overcoming of class inequality or the continued attempt to find an objective meaning in the world. Marxism, unlike social contract theory, does not attempt to capture revolution in a predetermined world, but it does attempt to describe a normative operation—the dialectic—by which revolution always functions. This operation can greatly affect the overall shape of the world, but is itself never affected by any changes in the world despite its location there. Though Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies claim the dialectic affects itself, and that the form of the dialectic is not formulaic, this only varies the specific shape of the operation, but does not overturn it. The dialectic itself, in its most generic form as the contestation between and

reconciliation of two opposing forces, persists. Revolution is embraced by Marxism and presented as a function of the world. It is synchronized with the world's basic structure such that revolution reaffirms a dialectical and materialist outlook even when it opposes itself to specific shapes that society takes. But in making revolution conform to the Marxist project, it becomes bound to the goal of Marxism to return the ideological to the actual. New things can be created in the process of achieving this goal, but radical change is still only a means to an end. It is not the boundaries of the world, but its trajectory, to which revolution is put in service. Revolution remains chained to the state.

The failure of Marxism implies that to incorporate revolutions into definite systems, even if there is no definite world to which it is yoked, is still problematic. The rules of the systems become constraining, leading to the privilege of certain concerns and the ossification of processes governing change. Recovering revolution requires excepting it from the world and finding a description that does not subsume it under a larger project. Spaces wholly removed from the world, from its processes, and from its movements must be uncovered. The profound impact Marxism has had on history and theory has maintained many of the chains of the state even as it worked to remove them. Only beyond Marxism, once the notion of trajectory has been left behind, will we be able to begin thinking about how to remove these bonds.

## From out of Oblivion: Evental Thought and the Liberated Revolution

### **Breaking with the state**

The desire for radical change has found expression many times, and in many ways, throughout the generations. Revolutionaries have advocated for complete liberty and equality, an egalitarian distribution of resources and power, and an end to corporate greed and political malfeasance. Yet the actual results brought about by radical groups often differ, sometimes substantially, from their rhetorical visions. The frustrating, fascinating curiosity of revolution lies in its inability to be predicted, irreducibility to normative rules, and impossibility to manufacture. Iconic tomes of revolutionary thought have been unable to yield much in the way of a consistent and foreseeable program of revolution, while the tactics that once worked well yield vastly different results when applied in another time and place. Revolutionaries are constantly returning to the beginning and heading out in a new direction. A dogmatic and unthinking revolution peters out into disconnected, inconsistent actions that lack a firm message, and is easily appropriated by the state it opposes. Finding a transformative revolution will require a new approach to the subject.

Thus far this investigation has yielded several points: 1) the liberation of revolution requires separating it from all states, 2) separating revolution from the state entails conceiving of change as an agent or motive, and 3) this agent or motive of change cannot use revolution either as a means to any particular end or by putting it in service of any one thing. The strain of thought most helpful for this project consists of theories that attempt to disconnect events from a necessary ontology or epistemology, and which see events as producing massive changes within the state. I call this “evental theory.” What sets evental theory apart from other theories of

revolution is that it portrays radical transformations as restructurings of the rules determining what exists, not as reorganizations of what is into new groups. According to evental thought, dangerous and unjustifiable states arise from essentializing the relationship between the state and its conceptual ground rather than from having an inauthentic relationship to that ground. If politics has an intrinsic ground, the states built on top of it will always be remarkably similar. To be capable of producing massive transformations, revolutions must be beyond the order that defines the state. Consequently, and in order for radical change to be possible, the state—understood as an order that defines both what takes on political significance and the manner in which it does—is wholly contingent. No entities, relationships, or ideas inevitably remain in it forever. Though the state persists, no part of it will out of necessity do so. Looking at the ways evental thought makes this case will provide clues about how to liberate revolution.

There is a difficulty that all evental theories must deal with. As citizens, we live within the boundaries of the state; we are only citizens inasmuch as we do so. Our understanding of politics is constituted by the character of the state in which we live (even a Communist living in a capitalist state organizes their actions, policies, and political knowledge as a response to the state in which they live). If revolution is defined by its novelty, and founded on a ground that is not the state, how is it possible for us to encounter it such that it can play a meaningful role in our society? As the Althusser-inspired political tradition would put it, how is it possible to “think the new”?<sup>462</sup> This problem is composed of several, interrelated issues which must be addressed before a complete answer is possible:

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<sup>462</sup> Althusser writes that one of the innovations of Marx’s philosophy is the development of new forms with which to “think the new object” [See Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Penguin Press, 1969), 85]. Numerous Althusser inspired political philosophers have since taken up this project, such as Jacques Rancière, Antonio Negri, and Étienne Balibar [see Rancière’s *Only in the Form of Rupture*, Negri’s *Commonwealth*, and Balibar’s *Masses, Classes, Idea*]

- 1) What grounds the possibility of evental thought? Why is it possible to claim that events have this massive transformative power?
- 2) What is the nature of an event? What characteristics does it have, and what language is appropriate for describing it?
- 3) What is the state? What logic defines it?
- 4) What relationship does the event have to the state? How is it possible to trigger such a massive and transformative action, and what are the effects of that action?

Despite the similar approaches evental thinkers take to understanding revolutions, there are multiple disagreements within the corpus of evental thought that ultimately yield different political visions. Before describing Dynamic Anarchism's theory of revolution in the next chapter, I will recount the framework of evental thought, drawing out the disparities between each thinker, by posing to it these four questions. This will provide a basis for comprehending Dynamic Anarchism and how it diverges from extant evental theories. To make my explanations of evental theory clear, I will be framing my answers to these questions around Alain Badiou's philosophy, bringing in other theorists to draw out the conflicts within evental thought. The thinkers I reference are not unified by adherence to any particular political tradition, and at times strongly disagree with one another. I draw on them because they each have a theory of radical change that can be categorized as evental (though they do not comprise the entirety of that list), and because a discussion of their theories will best situate the eventual introduction of my own.

Finally, a couple of terminological notes. First, in previous chapters, I have used the words "state" and "world" fairly interchangeably. This is in part the result of my attempt to tailor my language to those whom I am quoting from, and in part to emphasize the pervasiveness of the state as a totalizing entity that determines both the space in which and the nature of how



politics occurs. However, for the sake of consistency and clarity, in this chapter and the next I will revert to using “state” rather than “world,” and will endeavor to make my summaries of other authors reflect this change. It must be kept in mind that the term “state” refers to the order which politics takes as such, and not just a juridical framework or set of people inhabiting a commonwealth. This should be differentiated from the sphere of politics and the apparatus of politics. Next, while I emphasize contingency (both here and in the next chapter), this does not mean that any combination of things is possible at any point. What is contingent is the defining order and operation of the state, but this does not mean that any composition of the state is possible at any time. The theorists I cite below hold similar views of contingency (that is, what is contingent is the characterizing form the state takes, not the entirety of its composition). When I explain my theory in the next chapter, I will further elaborate upon both of these concepts.

### **Question 1: Grounding Radical Change**

Answering the first question about the grounding of events requires looking beyond appearances, as the theories of evental thought present a radically changeable state. Very little is absolute or universal. New objects and ideas produced by radical shifts remake the state and its contents in fundamentally new ways. Foucault studies how madmen that were seen as vehicles for lyrical truth before the 17<sup>th</sup> century become patients to be locked up and studied in order to uncover psychiatric truths.<sup>463</sup> Said delineates how the Orient transformed from an object of study to a danger to be controlled because of changes in commerce and politics throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>464</sup> Beings, subjects, institutions, practices, ideas, and meanings all undergo radical alterations due to events. Badiou begins his argument for radical shifts with the claim that the

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<sup>463</sup> Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006) 47-48.

<sup>464</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 222-224.

attributes, characteristics, and parts of a thing are encountered prior to the idea that there is a being in which they inhere. He describes his insight by saying “what *presents* itself is essentially multiple; *what* presents itself is essentially one,” concluding that if being is naturally one and multiplicity a fiction we end up with the contradiction that we are able to engage with a being beyond what appears. Yet because it is not contradictory to hold that being is essentially multiple and the unification of being only what we declare it to be, we must hold that “the one *is not*.”<sup>465</sup> Everything we encounter as a single being has only been declared such, and is not actually so. To put it another way, unity is a function of appearing and not a natural part of being. This is why, in his later work *The Logic of Worlds*, Badiou claims that what counts as a unity is the result of a transcendental which is neither subjective nor constitutive, but rather a special logical machinery which can account for “the intra-worldly cohesion of appearing” (i.e. the appearance of ones)<sup>466</sup>. Because our knowledge of a being’s attributes is conditioned by the decision to count it as a being, it is possible that any particular understanding of the state (defined by Badiou as a set in which all the parts are counted as one and the structure of the set is counted as one) is radically alterable were we to follow a different set of rules in determining what counts as a being. Badiou grounds radical transformations on the premise that any organization of the state depends upon a changeable set of rules that determine how to cut up, divide, and categorize multiplicity. Multiplicity should not be understood as a meaningful realm, as the nature of multiplicity prohibits comprehending it as a single thing. Badiou says “The multiplicity from which ontology makes up its situation is composed solely of multiplicities...In other words, every multiple is a multiple of multiples.”<sup>467</sup> As Oliver Marchart explains, for Badiou definitions “do not refer to any empirically given ‘object’ outside the processes of

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<sup>465</sup> Alain Badiou, trans. Oliver Feltham, *Being and Event* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 23.

<sup>466</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Continuum; New York, 2009), 122.

<sup>467</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 29.

thinking.”<sup>468</sup> The ontological primacy of multiplicity removes the need to think about what meanings being possesses as such, and opens being to many possibilities.

Other evental thinkers replace the transcendental rules that determine what counts as a being with the notion of difference. Derrida claims that meanings originate from interactions between and differences with others, so it is impossible to develop a discourse about a being (or to have any knowledge about it whatsoever) without looking at how it relates to what surrounds it. In addition, the potential meanings of a word, gesture, or sign of any kind are open and always “to-come”. We can only ever make a meaning present by referring to its fundamental absence.<sup>469</sup> Because there is no central locus of meaning everything becomes “a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.”<sup>470</sup> The implications of this are that there are no essences to be discovered. Evental theorists emphasize that one cannot approach the world with the assumption that there are constants to what constitutes a subject, society, or state. Historical events and objects have no meaning, no essence, and no form apart from the context from which they arose; our ability to see meaning, essence and form in them is conditioned upon the possibility of them to be different. As Foucault explains, “So many things can be changed, being as fragile as they are, tied more to contingencies than to necessities, more to what is arbitrary than to what is rationally established, more to complex but transitory historical contingencies than to inevitable

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<sup>468</sup> Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, and Laclau* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 114.

<sup>469</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 70. Also Jacques Derrida, “Differance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (The Harvester Press; Brighton, 1982), 9-11.

<sup>470</sup> Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Routledge; London, 1978), 354.

anthropological constants.”<sup>471</sup> Though similar in their understanding of meaning, Foucault and Derrida differ with regard to the strategies they use to investigate the production of meaning and from the fields to which they apply their investigations. Foucault looks at how changes in discursive formations and power-regimes transform concepts like subjectivity, punishment, and sexuality. Derrida studies how discussions of philosophical theories invoke a whole “metaphysics of presence” and impose privileged binaries. Applying his Deconstructive method to questions of democracy, linguistics, and death, he overturns the privileged binaries within them by demonstrating how what is present or privileged is conditional on the absent and subordinated, and that fundamentally different orders are necessarily possible. Radical transformations are possible because that which conditions meaning leaves open the possibility for the new.

All eventual thinkers conceive of their systems as transhistorical, inasmuch as each system operates both within yet persists apart from any particular socio-historical context. This means that while Badiou’s rules governing what counts as one, Foucault’s power relations, and Derrida’s play of signs change moderately in response to their context, they do not change as radically as the beings they produce. Despite the ways they appear, their basic function and mode of operation persist. Power is a constant in Foucault’s analyses from his genealogical period onward, but his analyses show it functioning in diverse ways throughout history, from the physical tortures affected on the body<sup>472</sup> to the bureaucratic procedures that regulate society and impose state racism.<sup>473</sup> Similarly, for Deleuze and Guattari the plane of consistency and strata

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<sup>471</sup> Foucault “So is it important to think?” in *Power: Essential Works Vol 3*, ed. James Faubion (The New Press; New York, 2001), 548.

<sup>472</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books; New York, 1995), 47.

<sup>473</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Allesandro Fontana. Trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), 243-256.

appear differently in biology than in linguistics but they always perform the same task.<sup>474</sup>

Hannah Arendt explains this phenomenon by pointing to how the actions that produce the world also spend their time in the world.<sup>475</sup> Labor, work, and action—for her the “fundamental human activities” of the *vita activa*<sup>476</sup>—enter the state because one encounters other humans performing them. She also points to how we respond to the activities that produce the state by adopting ideas about them, and says that the ideas we adopt can change how they function within society (for example, Plato and Aristotle turned action into a means to an end, overturning the original conception of it as an end in itself<sup>477</sup>). That the forces creating the state are open and plural in their appearance explains why they are never fully theorized. For instance, Foucault says that he is giving an analytics of power rather than a theory of it<sup>478</sup>, and Derrida claims deconstruction is not a theory in itself, but the recognition of the fiction of origin (or the “trace”) that appears whenever a theory is put forth.<sup>479</sup> Evental theorists must examine productive forces anew at the beginning of each new state.

Evental theorists ground the possibility for the event by developing methods that can only be described in terms of how they affect the state. They use forces that can appear within the state in numerous ways to emphasize that there are no subjects, objects, concepts, or institutions that condition the state. Showing the contingency of all potential grounds is the first step in

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<sup>474</sup> Deleuze and Guattari refer to “matter” as the plane of consistency and the “organic” as an example of strata when talking about biology (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi [University of Minnesota Press; Minneapolis, 1987], 41, 45), and indirect discourse as the plane of consistency and grammar as a strata when talking about linguistics (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 75-77)

<sup>475</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1998), 9.

<sup>476</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7. It is worth noting Arendt describes thinking and willing as the fundamental activities of the contemplative life (Arendt, *Life of the Mind* [New York: Harcourt, 1978], 6-70)

<sup>477</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 228-230.

<sup>478</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Vintage Books; New York, 1978), 82.

<sup>479</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Johns Hopkins University Press; Baltimore, 1974), 61.

finding a way to decouple revolution from the state, for it clears the foundation of the state of specific forms that could be used to resist transformative change.

## **Question 2: The Potential of the Event**

With regard to question two, all evental theorists agree that true events are separate from everyday occurrences. Many happenings transpire constantly which do not rise to the level of event. This is because events shake up the foundations of the everyday and prescribe new foundations in their wake. They are a rupture with the previous circumstances, and yield new ideas, practices, and institutions that become the state's foundation going forward. Alain Badiou's *Being and Event* describes the event as "a *singular multiple*"<sup>480</sup> irreducible to any situation and about which "ontology has nothing to say."<sup>481</sup> It is a "radical transformational action" that "originates in a point" known as an "evental site."<sup>482</sup> Evental sites are obscured and singular places within the state, and what counts as an evental site is contingent upon the state itself such that there are no permanent evental sites. It is also worth noting that events will at times take on the state of the situation rather than the situation as such. The difference between the situation and the state has to do with what is presented (the situation) versus what is represented (the state). For Badiou, events are incomprehensible until an "interpretive intervention"<sup>483</sup> arrives. This theory stays largely consistent throughout Badiou's corpus. There are some differences in terminology (e.g. Badiou does not use the term "interpretive intervention" in *Logic of Worlds*, but says the event "sets off the stepwise recasting of the

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<sup>480</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 181.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

transcendental of the world<sup>484</sup>), and new ideas that complement those in *Being and Event* (e.g. Badiou's typology of subjects), but in general this explanation of event does not change.

Interpretative interventions declare the event to be part of a new state by re-describing the rules determining what exists. The insight that leads Badiou to describe events in this manner is the fact of multiplicity, or the idea that there exist no ones or unities within the world.<sup>485</sup> There are only the unities that we declare. Yet as any declared unity is incapable of capturing the totality of things (since no totality exists to be captured), there is always a remainder—what Badiou calls the void—which escapes our declaration of something as a unified being.<sup>486</sup> Events occur when a multiple within the state is not fully presented, or when there are parts of it outside the state. The inability of the state to explain this partially presented multiple means that the state must be changed to fully present this multiple within the state. At that point, something may happen that reveals a need to develop new rules about what exists (i.e. what can be declared as a “one”). Events come from people within the state considering and reacting to the void revealed by this partially-presented multiple. Standing in between the state and the void, events demonstrate the need for an original or radically transformed state to be developed which follows a new logic incompatible with the old one. Those who recognize the need for a new logic, by remaining faithful to this need and disseminating the new logic, actively work against the extant state. As Badiou says, “one can again think fidelity as a counter-state: what it does is organize, *within* the situation, another legitimacy of inclusions. It builds...a kind of *other* situation, obtained by the division in two of the primitive situation.”<sup>487</sup> The event is a caesura that originates from a particular place without conforming to it, and prescribes a new logic that

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<sup>484</sup> Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 577.

<sup>485</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 23.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

through the actions of militants leads to a new state with new beings and practices. As Oliver Marchart writes, “A political organization of militants (i.e. the subject in the field of politics) is nothing but the collective product of a process of fidelity towards an event...A truth is produced by the decision of a subject to remain faithful to an event.”<sup>488</sup> Within the field of evental thought it is the ideas of caesura and incompatibility, more than any other, that are used to describe revolutions.

Like Badiou, other evental theorists emphasize the disconnect events produce and the incommensurability of the preceding and subsequent states. Michel Foucault says of revolutions that they both “belong to history” but also “escape from it,”<sup>489</sup> while in *On Revolution* Hannah Arendt describes them as new beginnings that interrupt preconceived notions of continuity.<sup>490</sup> But whereas Badiou is concerned with the declaration of the event, Foucault tries to understand events through a study of their effects. Foucault sees a difficulty in trying to unravel events, as they do not come in the form of a single break but as a contemporaneous collection of several transformations which may take centuries to unfold.<sup>491</sup> For example, Foucault says that the French Revolution acts as a “complex, articulated, describable group of transformations that left a number of positivities intact, fixed for a number of others rules that are still with us, and also established positivities that have recently disappeared or are still disappearing before our eyes.”<sup>492</sup> While it is a difficult task to pinpoint an event in space and time, it can be tracked through its effects on society in the form of the discursive formations and regimes of power that grow out of it. No matter what happened at the time of the event, it is possible, by studying texts

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<sup>488</sup> Marchart, *Post-Foundational Thought*, 123-124.

<sup>489</sup> Michel Foucault. “Useless to Revolt” in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault Volume 3: Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2001), 449.

<sup>490</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 18-19.

<sup>491</sup> Michel Foucault. *Archeology of Knowledge* trans. (Routledge; New York, 2002), 193.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.



written before and after it, to see how the event changed the state. Notable events develop new and incommensurable *dispositifs*, or frameworks for knowledge<sup>493</sup>, that present us with entirely different orders.<sup>494</sup> Because the statements, ideas, and objects found within these orders obtain meaning from their differences with others, in a new framework the same statement will not necessarily mean the same thing it meant in the old. There is no common measure that allows us to judge one framework right or wrong, but progress is possible when a new framework can explain what were before considered anomalies without erasing the explanatory power of earlier viewpoints.<sup>495</sup> Thomas Kuhn takes a similar position about radical shifts in science. He describes shifts as “reconstructions of the field from new fundamentals”<sup>496</sup> that occur in periods where there are significant anomalies unexplainable by science’s theoretical assumptions. Like Foucault and Badiou, Kuhn claims every new paradigm is incommensurable with earlier ones, for models and statements do not mean the same thing in one paradigm as they do in another.<sup>497</sup> Fred Evans explains the notion of incommensurable paradigm by saying “We could possibly translate the Newtonian’s idea of the conservation of mass into Einstein’s language about the conversion of mass into energy ( $e=mc^2$ ). But we could not do so without considerable distortion of the translated position.”<sup>498</sup> Like Foucault, Kuhn does believe paradigms can be preferred over others by their ability to solve more problems than earlier ones.<sup>499</sup>

These thinkers differ in the degree to which they conceive of the event as unified. Badiou provides it with the greatest sense of unity, saying it is a recognized multiple that prescribes a new set of operations for a new state. For him, the event is very clearly delineated

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 111-2.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 168-8.

<sup>496</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 85.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>498</sup> Fred Evans, *Multivoiced Body*, 186.

<sup>499</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 169.

from the situation that came before. Kuhn sees events as more ambiguous, as the anomalies produced by the failure of a paradigm are not readily separated from that old paradigm. It takes time to develop a conceptual and perceptual system that allows events to be seen. There needs to be a process that brings about the event.<sup>500</sup> Foucault says the unity of the event is a function of the contemporaneity of numerous transformations, which over a period of time aggregate to produce a massive effect. Any unity the event has is contingent. Badiou recognizes the event more easily, as for him it occurs all at once in the form of a new multiple (that is, a being whose parts have never been recognized previously as all belonging to the same entity). It is wrestling with the effects of that multiple, and how to be faithful to it, that take time. By contrast, the events Foucault describes take years, if not centuries, to be realized. Kuhn thinks they can be relatively quick or excessively long to develop, depending on how quickly a new paradigm can be developed and spread throughout society.<sup>501</sup> As Ian Hacking writes, Kuhn became “lukewarm about [the notion of] discontinuity, holding, plausibly enough, that even if some revolutions occur in a trice, many others do not...The new-world problem is not about working in a new world after a moment or a week of illumination and transformation.”<sup>502</sup>

The event is an important tool for thinking revolution as it erases the idea that there are necessary meanings or figures that constitute the state. Instead, the state comes from processes that draw connections, create relationships, and narrate themes in many different ways. When these connections, relationships, and themes are shown to be significantly inadequate, events create new ones. Events present the foundations of social contract theory and Marxism as functions of these processes, and thus alterable given the right circumstances.

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>502</sup> Ian Hacking, “Working in a New World” in *World Changes: Thomas Kuhn and the Nature of Science*, ed. Paul Horwich (Cambridge; MIT Press, 1993), 276.

### Question 3: The Origin of Order

Just as evental authors use different methods to describe events, they approach the question of the state's constitution in several ways. The state is understood by Badiou as the operations which determine how entities are categorized and counted, or the establishment of transcendental rules by which things can happen and beings can function.<sup>503</sup> As Badiou writes, "The State is in fact the measureless enslavement of the parts of the situation, an enslavement whose secret is precisely the errancy of superpower, its absence of measure."<sup>504</sup> This is the political version of what Badiou refers to in *Logic of Worlds* as a "transcendental of a world,"<sup>505</sup> or what in *Being and Event* he calls the "state of the situation."<sup>506</sup> It consists of the formal rules by which things are included or excluded from presentation, or appearance. Using his set theory inspired ontology, Badiou shows that the State is not concerned with individual people, but with the organization that those individuals take. The state does not look at people as unique members of society, but rather the class they belong to, their designated gender, their occupation, etc. As Badiou says, "The State is simply the necessary metastructure of every historico-social situation, which is to say the law that guarantees that there is Oneness, not in the immediacy of society...but among the set of its subsets."<sup>507</sup> The state arises from the socio-historico situation that determines what is and is not visible, but yet is separate from it.<sup>508</sup> And inasmuch as it determines how things are categorized within society in a top-down fashion, its function is wholly repressive. Politics and revolution cannot be incorporated into the state, as that would

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<sup>503</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (Verso; New York, 2005), 144.

<sup>504</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 145.

<sup>505</sup> Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 596.

<sup>506</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 522.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

turn them into forms of domination. To be liberatory and free they must be opposed to the state, not functions of it.<sup>509</sup> For Badiou, politics and revolution are instrumental in revealing the workings of the state. As Adrian Johnston puts it, "...a genuine political event causes the previously mysterious, spectral, and (most importantly) immeasurable excess of state power suddenly to become something with a precise and known measure."<sup>510</sup> Or, to put it another way, "Politics, thus, is the art of making the impossible possible..."<sup>511</sup>

While Badiou talks about the state as a categorizing operation, other evental thinkers talk about it as a logic that intervenes to allow or disallow certain incidents, behaviors, or beings (and thus, unlike Badiou's state, it does deal with individual beings by controlling their formation). Thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze, Kuhn, and Arendt depict the state as a vehicle for organizing society in a specific way. In doing so it has repression as one of its primary functions (though, contra Badiou, not its only function). It is only via an outside force that the contingency of the state can be shown and the authority of the state resisted. Hannah Arendt mentions many dangerous forms government can take throughout her work. She describes tyranny as belonging "strictly among the egalitarian forms of government; the tyrant is the ruler who rules as one against all, and the "all" he oppresses are all equal, namely equally powerless"<sup>512</sup>. Alternatively, totalitarianism creates "a deceptive facade of normality" that deceives the outside while convincing its members "to believe that their convictions differ only in degree from those of other people, so that they need never be aware of the abyss which separates their own world from that which actually surrounds it."<sup>513</sup> Similar critiques are made in *The Human Condition* with regard to bureaucracy, consumerism, and the nation-state (which she sees as inherently

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<sup>509</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 145.

<sup>510</sup> Johnston, *Badiou, Zizek, and Political Transformations*, (Northwestern University Press; Evanston, 2009), 39.

<sup>511</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, (Duke University Press; Durham, 2011), 236.

<sup>512</sup> Arendt, "What is Authority" in *Between Past and Future* (Viking Press; New York, 1961), 99.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

monarchical).<sup>514</sup> Against these contingent forms of governance (her concept of which roughly approximates my idea of the state) she opposes the potential for political action that arises when people come together. The collective action of subjects is the ground that conditions opposition to repressive governance. As Arendt says, the world we encounter (including any repressive or dangerous systems) “would not exist without the human activity which produced it, as in the case of fabricated things; which takes care of it, as in the case of cultivated land; or which established it through organization, as in the case of the body politic.”<sup>515</sup>

Finally, Foucault’s state is the formation of discursive practices and power relations immanent to the world. As he says, “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth”<sup>516</sup>. The state is best understood within Foucauldian terminology as a particular codification of power, or a specific episteme, that produces subjects, institutions, and a society that cohere with its rules. For example, the monarchical power that defined punishment in the seventeenth century produced a state with an absolute and infallible ruler<sup>517</sup>, while the bio-power that appeared starting in the nineteenth century operates through a multiplicity of institutions that invisibly disperse their power throughout society.<sup>518</sup> The state, as a particular ordering of power and knowledge within society<sup>519</sup>, is set up to allow certain practices and statements within society while disallowing others. In this manner it is inherently repressive. At the same time, because power always operates with resistance, it is always possible to oppose a particular ordering of the state by contesting the processes that produced it (opposing power with

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<sup>514</sup> For her critique of bureaucracy as a form of tyrant-less tyranny, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 40. For her critique of consumerism, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 126-135. For her reference to the nation state as being monarchical, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 44.

<sup>515</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 22.

<sup>516</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 194.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-9.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-7.

power, or knowledge with knowledge). It is structurally possible, by referencing the outside, to oppose the repressive power of the state.

An important corollary of each thinkers' definition of the state is that its presence is irreducible. To abolish the state is to abolish all political structure. The state is necessary, but not any form of it, and eventual thinkers are generally hesitant about prescribing an ideal form the state should take. Arendt is the strongest advocate for the state to take a specific form, as she calls for a republic based around the model of Ancient Rome. Badiou, by contrast, proposes an abstract vision of communism that leaves much open to be decided. Foucault is the most reticent about prescriptions, and refuses to endorse any form. Instead, Foucault will often suggest possibilities, with the caveat that they must be critiqued. None of these thinkers say the state is simply a political remnant of earlier philosophies that can be cast away. Despite the state's repression, it is only via participation in it that actions, ideas, or institutions are possible. Butler describes this problem by saying that democratic politics are constituted through exclusions that prescribe who can appear in the polity.<sup>520</sup> Žižek agrees, saying that it must be clear that universals are unavoidable.<sup>521</sup> One cannot forego the state without becoming completely incapable of relating to others or to oneself. Yet these thinkers disagree when it comes to the amount of human agency involved in the formation of the state. While individual actions are intimately involved in the production of the state, such actions are not entirely controlled by the subject. Foucault relates actions back to discursive formations and power structures, claiming that subjects are constrained by historical and social forces that restrict every action they perform. Arendt's statement that the state begins with the coming together of individuals provides subjects with a modicum of greater control, as for her the ability of history and social

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<sup>520</sup> Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, (Verso; New York, 2000), 11.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

forces to prevent the founding of a new state is not as great. Yet human political actions are restricted to those of the *vita activa*, or “active life”. In both cases creating a new state is not an easy task, for a revolution will only come from a movement that effectively utilizes the political tools described by evental thought.

The evental concept of the state is important for a study of revolution by virtue of its lack of permanent foundations. Evental thought shows how all of the state’s institutions, ideas, and practices are open to structural change. The theoretical models that evental theorists use to build the state reject the idea that any meanings or policies are intrinsic. There is a radical openness to this approach that encourages the development of new models rather than constantly demanding revolution return to the old. By thinking the state through these concepts, we are one step closer towards escaping the rigid boundaries of the state.

#### **Question 4: Connecting Order and Change**

The fourth question about how the event and state interact boils down to a question of the nature of change. What process or situation generates radical change, and how does such change appear to those who live through it? Badiou draws out the nature of evental change by contrasting it with three other types of change: modifications, facts, and weak singularities.<sup>522</sup> Modifications are “the rule-governed appearing of intensive variations which a transcendental authorizes in the world”<sup>523</sup> and are akin, in the realm of politics, to the passing of a law. Such changes are fully expected to happen, and occur as part of the normal routine. Yet other changes fall outside the normal routine, and cannot be understood by referencing only the facts, ideas, and beings that are already recognized. These extraordinary changes alter the normal routine.

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<sup>522</sup> Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 374.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

Depending on how drastic the alterations are, they can be called facts, weak singularities, or events (with facts having the smallest impact and events the greatest). Events have an enormous impact because they “make exist within [the state] the proper inexistent of the object-site”<sup>524</sup> by changing the rules governing what appears as a being. The Paris Commune of 1871 was an event because it made the French government recognize the working class as a significant group. Previously unrecognized by the state, the working class (as organized through the Commune’s Central Committee) became a massive political force capable of transforming the Parisian political landscape. For all intents and purposes, the episode of the Paris Commune made this formerly inexistent group exist.<sup>525</sup> From the perspective of the state, events provide a glimpse of what Badiou calls the void. When an event occurs we see how our worldview is inadequate for the task of capturing being, as something presents itself which cannot be explained. As Bosteels puts it, “the inexistent serves as an index of the strict contingency of everything that appears,”<sup>526</sup> meaning that our seeing into the void logically demonstrates the contingency of all that appears to us. New explanations must be developed to give the inexplicable phenomenon a place. Because explanations circumscribe multiplicity to create a coherent narrative, and thus all explanations contain a similar ‘remainder,’ there is no complete explanation to be sought. Reactions to seeing the void differ: some follow the event to its conclusion, some reject it, and others deny its existence.<sup>527</sup> Yet no matter the choice one takes, society is left to wrestle with the “phantom of inconsistency”<sup>528</sup> the event reveals for a long time to come.

Kuhn’s notions of “normal science” and “paradigm shift” closely resemble Badiou’s differentiation between “modifications” and “events”. Kuhn describes normal science (what I

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>526</sup> Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 244.

<sup>527</sup> Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 50-60.

<sup>528</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 53.



would term the state) as a set of models that provide the foundation for a scientific tradition, like Newtonian dynamics or wave optics.<sup>529</sup> When a paradigm shift occurs new models are substituted for old ones and a new state is revealed. Kuhn emphasizes that paradigm shifts do more than just rename objects, as new beings are revealed that were previously unseeable. Speaking of astronomy, Kuhn writes “Can it conceivably be an accident, for example, that Western astronomers first saw change in the previously immutable heavens during the half century after Copernicus’ new paradigm was first proposed? The Chinese, whose cosmological beliefs did not preclude celestial change, had recorded the appearance of many new stars in the heavens at a much earlier date.”<sup>530</sup> Kuhn’s focus in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* on how paradigms allow one to see new things is supplemented in his later work by a study of how linguistic change occurs. According to Paul Hoyningen-Huene, “In the first case, it is perception that grounds the connection with the world; to encounter the world is to see it... In the second case, by contrast, the connection with the world is a product of language; to encounter the world is to capture it linguistically.”<sup>531</sup> Kuhn and Badiou emphasize that we should not think about rule changes and paradigm shifts as simply psychological operations, as they have an effect on perception, experience, and being as well. They are more than conceptual heuristics, as they affect any and all engagements we have with what is outside us. Badiou and Kuhn differ on several points. Unlike Badiou, Kuhn believes a well-defined material realm exists outside paradigms<sup>532</sup>, though he implies that the nature of that material world is impossible to get at.<sup>533</sup> Outside rules, Badiou is only willing to posit “multiples of multiples.”<sup>534</sup> Additionally, Kuhn

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<sup>529</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 10.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>531</sup> Paul Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing Scientific Revolutions: Thomas Kuhn’s Philosophy of Science* trans. Alexander Levine (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1993), 100-101.

<sup>532</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 11, 126.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>534</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 29.

does not distinguish degrees of change as Badiou does. There are no equivalents in Kuhn to Badiou's notions of "fact" and "weak singularity," though inasmuch as they all affect the foundations of a normal situation, it is likely Kuhn would categorize them as paradigm shifts of a different quality.

The inconsistencies of being that for Badiou give way to change are described by Kuhn as anomalies which "[violate] the paradigm-induced expectations."<sup>535</sup> Kuhn's anomalies reveal the limits of a theoretical model just as Badiou's events expose the threshold of knowledge. The primary difference is that Badiou's events are instantaneous and lack ontological standing, while Kuhn's anomalies are "extended episodes" that appear as "novelties of fact" which can be reproduced and examined.<sup>536</sup> In *Logic of Worlds* Badiou says the event is that which "makes what did not exist in a world appear within it"<sup>537</sup> and later on, when describing the event of the French Revolution, says "the unknowns of the Central Committee, politically inexistent in the world of the eve of the insurrection, exist absolutely on the very day of their appearance."<sup>538</sup> For Badiou, events are instantaneous, even though our wrestling with them and their implications may take a long time. No such distinction is present in Kuhn. Yet for both the abnormality disappears upon its incorporation into a new theoretical model. Neither Kuhn nor Badiou believe that one model will account for everything, and they consider it important to continue to develop new models to account for any inconsistencies the old revealed. For Kuhn, people react to anomalies by forming different schools of thought that inform different research programs.<sup>539</sup> The research program that takes hold is the one which incorporates the anomalies most effectively. And while Badiou identifies three types of reactions to the event, Kuhn (perhaps

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<sup>535</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 52-3.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-3.

<sup>537</sup> Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 376.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>539</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 82-83.

because he refers to the field of science rather than politics or history) claims that all reactions attempt to incorporate the event in some form. This state of confusion, trial, and error is excellently translated into the field of politics by Deleuze and Guattari, who in *A Thousand Plateaus* describe how groups within states often have “fringes or minorities” which produce a furor against the state’s sovereignty and lead to an epoch of revolution. As they say, “there are always periods when the state as organism has problems with its collective bodies, when these bodies, claiming certain privileges, are forced in spite of themselves to open onto something that exceeds them, a short revolutionary instant, an experimental surge.”<sup>540</sup> The revolution is “confused” and causes the state to analyze the surge and shift itself to reinscribe its order back over the revolution.<sup>541</sup> Yet just as Badiou and Kuhn emphasize the productivity of events, so do Deleuze and Guattari conclude that revolutions are not defined simply by hostility to the state’s authority, saying “[revolutions] can make war only on the condition that they simultaneously create something else.”<sup>542</sup>

The transformative understanding of change detailed by evental thought is useful for a study of revolution because it shows how change can be triggered without referring to doctrines. It inscribes radical change into the structure of the state, but resists attempts to plan out that change in advance. Change will happen when there is a need for something new, and such needs are indispensable. The confusion, debate, and uncertainty that surround events are a positive attribute to be embraced by revolutionaries. It is in the opening this disorder creates that the building of a new state unshackled by the old is possible.

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<sup>540</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press; Minneapolis, 1987) 366-367.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 367-8.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

## **Breaking up the state, but holding on to the pieces**

Evental thought is a way to think beyond the limits of the present. The seemingly intractable confines of Being are broken apart so that its infinite possibilities can be approached. Evental thought has much to offer revolutionaries, for it is able to reveal the limits of any state without at the same time prescribing a definite form for the state. As understood by evental thought, revolutions are not stained with meaning, forced to perpetuate a particular state, or made to advocate for a future society. The radical politics of evental thought advocates freedom and openness, not just with regard to specific policies but also to what populates the state. Programs, doctrines, and well-defined goals are excised from revolution as such. The state is not gone, but while events remain its ability to oppress is always threatened. When interpreted by evental thought, both Marxism and social contract theory become tools for building the state after an event rather than descriptions of the only justifiable state. Arendt's rereading of the legacy of social contract theory illustrates this, as her claim is that the contract is about coming together to create a space where politics can occur, and not any particular doctrine or program. Similarly, Badiou ascribes to communist thought, though he reinterprets the materialist dialectic as a carrying forth of a truth that can create a new world. Deleuze and Guattari makes a similar point in *What is Philosophy*, saying that Marxism is a way of reterritorializing things.<sup>543</sup> Though the danger of turning the non-foundationalist, flexible, and constantly changing ideas of evental thought into dogma must be guarded against, they are nevertheless valuable tools that allow for the rethinking of dangerous ideas.

But if events are to be wholly separate from states, evental thought, as it has been construed so far, is still problematic. Even though evental theorists do not posit rules or ends

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<sup>543</sup> See Arendt, *On Revolution*, 214-215; Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans David Macey and Steve Corcoran (Verso; London, 2010), 230-235; and Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (Columbia University Press; New York, 1994), 68.

that circumscribe revolution, they still use the state for their descriptions of the forces that produce events. In order for multiplicity, difference, and openness to theorize revolution's ability to transform the state, it is necessary that they each be separate from the state. Yet as part of the state, eventual theorists can only encounter and describe those ideas inasmuch as those ideas are also a part of the state. Because there is no possibility of thinking beyond the state, or of perceiving the world in a manner unaffected by the state, it must be the case that these forces and operations can be perceived within the confines of the state. The answer that eventual theory provides for how it can view what is beyond the state from the state is that the operations it describes are held within the interstices of states. They are not present as things, but as relations or as processes which states must follow in order for our experience of states to be consistent. Yet these operations that construct states and hold them together are not just found behind states, they are found behind revolution too. Revolutions are produced through the same operations, processes, and forces that produce the state. This creates a dilemma for eventual theory, for its theories are only tenable if the operations, processes, and forces are perceivable from within the state, yet revolutions are not free as long as revolutions are conceived of as their product. Thus, despite their best efforts to escape the state, eventual thought ultimately reproduces the equivalent of proto-states. A proto-state is a formal, transcendental architecture responsible for forming beings, subjects, and all other appearances found within the state. It consists of consistent forces or process that condition both the state and revolution. These proto-states are less determinate than the states of social contract theory and Marxism, but nevertheless bind revolution to an abstract order.

Because the projects of Badiou, Kuhn, Foucault, Arendt, Deleuze, and Derrida are so varied, engaging their projects will be an effective means of illustrating the different possible

manifestations of a proto-state. By examining how their proto-states still control revolution we will see what still needs to be done for revolution to escape the state. As I will show, eventual thought determines the process of revolution by promoting proto-states that create change in a specific way. A longer argument is forthcoming in the next chapter, but for the moment let's consider how change is conditioned within the work of Badiou and Foucault. First, Badiou's theory of revolution relies heavily on the declaration. As Badiou says, "By the declaration of the belonging of the event to the situation it bars the void's interruption. But this is only in order to force the situation itself to confess its own void, and to thereby let forth, from inconsistent being and the interrupted count, the incandescent non-being of an existence."<sup>544</sup> Badiou's revolutions must be attached to a truth procedure, for there is no radical change unless a new set is declared and the truth of that set propagated.<sup>545</sup> But is it not possible for there to be revolutionary change that goes unrecognized in language or thought, or for such change to occur in the relationships between extant beings rather than through the creation of a new set? The American and French Revolutions have had unexpected effects on society throughout history up to and including today, even though by Badiou's logic the multiples they constitute were declared long ago. Politicians, military leaders, and social movements have been inspired by them in ways those involved with the revolutions never imagined, and the messages inherited from the revolutions have been revised numerous times. Badiou's reliance on the logic of multiplicities, and in particular on the fact that transcendental rules determine which multiplicities are recognized as ones<sup>546</sup>, sets up a state that determines how events occur.

Foucault's notions of power and discourse return a substantially different concept of events. Unlike Badiou's truth-procedures, Foucauldian power and discourse are located within

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<sup>544</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 183.

<sup>545</sup> Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 69.

<sup>546</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 145; Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, 596; and Badiou, *Being and Event*, 522.

the social realm.<sup>547</sup> Creating an event is not about the reworking of a set's logic but rather the organizing of points of resistance in order to deploy new power relations throughout society. The rule of immanence that Foucault follows in his study of events means that contestation and strategy are irreducible parts of power, and that as a result power can be both seen and manipulated. As Foucault writes, "Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, [my project] consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies."<sup>548</sup> Events for Foucault involve radical reversals in power dynamics, the production of new behaviors, and the reworking of old habits to make them more amenable. They are like "games" that involve a "complicated interplay" between power and freedom.<sup>549</sup> Yet Foucault's attempt to see the system of differences at the heart of power relations<sup>550</sup> means that it is difficult for him to appreciate revolutionary militancy. There may be a shared vision of a future to come that inspires a revolution, as Foucault believed was present during the Iranian revolution<sup>551</sup>, but danger of misusing power means that such a vision cannot be safely codified. Any program or strategy needs to be subjected to critique, and so Foucault's ideal revolutionaries are those who experiment instead of rigidly following a program. Foucault points to the dichotomy between the creative, intrepid revolutionary life and the militant programs of revolutionary parties in his lecture series *The Courage of Truth*, saying that it would be interesting to study "how the idea of a cynicism of the revolutionary life as scandal of an unacceptable truth clashed with the definition of a conformity of existence as the condition of militantism in the so-called

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<sup>547</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (Vintage Books; New York, 1990), 98

<sup>548</sup> Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in *Essential Works of Foucault: Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), 329.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>551</sup> Arfay and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 2005), 89.

revolutionary parties.”<sup>552</sup> As these examples show, the proto-states of evental theorists determine the state and how revolution should function in relation to it. Movement is subordinated to the proto-state’s prescription of how it occurs.

A state of any kind acts to restrict change, and is as a result hostile to revolution. A revolutionary state is a contradiction in terms, for all states project a stagnancy before them that oppresses. A theory of revolution that escapes the state will need to find a way outside this dilemma. Perhaps an answer will be forthcoming if we begin by inverting the strategy that has been used so far. Political philosophy—including evental thought—explains the state by referring to its parts or the processes that compose it. This is what it means to search for foundations. But what if by delving deeper and deeper into the molecular constitution of the state we are prevented from finding the answers we need? What if, instead of explaining the state by referencing its parts, we begin with the notion that the parts must be explained by reference to the state? This question, and its implications for a theory of revolution, will be taken up in the next chapter.

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<sup>552</sup> Foucault, *Courage of Truth (Government of the Self and Others II): Lectures at the College de France 1983-1984*, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan; New York, 2011), 186. In this passage Foucault does not mean cynicism in the conventional sense of the term, but in relation to the set of philosophers collectively known as the Cynics.



# Dynamic Anarchism's Revolt: Turning the System Against Itself

## **Liberating revolution in 12 easy steps**

It is now time to lay out a new theory of revolution. To make it digestible, I will pose to this new theory the same four questions that I posed to eventual thought in the preceding chapter. But because this theory must avoid perpetuating any part of the state my claim is that nothing grounds the possibility of revolution other than the state itself. There are no beings, no pieces, no processes or forces that, in composing the state, also condition radical change. The description given to revolution must preserve the three traits, mentioned in chapter one, of incommensurability, unpredictability, and indiscernability. The state itself leads to radical change, just as radical change leads to the state. Thus to present my theory I will answer questions one and three at the same time, then move on to question two and, finally, question four. As I will show, by conceiving of the state as dynamic and generative it is possible to resist the pressure to hold a piece of the state apart from change or to theorize a proto-state.

By answering questions one and three together several problems arise which must be solved. First, a new concept of the state must be found. If even the proto-states of eventual theory are problematic, our new theory must present states as wholly dynamic and changeable, yet also primary rather than derivative. *In short, this theory must be able to explain change by referencing states themselves rather than their pieces.* This bears some similarity to Badiou's theory, but is also distinguishable from it on a couple of points. The first is that Badiou conditions his events upon the "void" (in *Being and Event*) or a "site" (in *Logic of Worlds*) whereby the contingency of a particular world can be made manifest. As I will show, I consider events to be endemic to the nature of states, or a part of how they function. It is how states operate as a whole, and not a part of them, that should be studied to see how events appear.

Second, Badiou's logic of multiplicity—which extends beyond any particular state or situation—conditions the fact that there is a void or site, and thus the possibility for the types of events Badiou describes. By contrast, I do not extend any such logic outside states. The next problem that needs to be addressed is why eventual thought is wrong to assume processes external to states (i.e. the proto-states referenced in the last chapter). Though such processes condition both the state and revolution, they are only a serious problem for revolution if they privilege the state by circumscribing the possibilities for change. A new theory must show why the creation of proto-states is unnecessary or dangerous for revolution. Third, this approach requires a new path to radical change. In order to adhere to the stipulations of problems one and two, we must find a way to theorize revolutionary change without making its existence conditional. Radical change cannot simply be the expected product of forces and beings coming together; it must have a character unique to itself which is not apparent by looking at the state's composition. As I will show, the key to solving these problems is to rehabilitate the notion of 'system.' By defining states in relation to systems it is possible to see how states, by themselves, can be wholly changeable without needing to posit a proto-state. This can work because systems, properly understood, do not come from a stable ground but are related only to themselves. Because this is the case any part of them is open to change. A new understanding of system developed along these lines not only will provide the concept of the state needed, but also the necessary context for a new theory of revolution.

Before developing a solution to problem one, some time must be spent articulating the concept of 'system'. As I use the term, systems are radically interconnected networks composed of creators of change, objects that are changed, and mechanisms for change in such a way that

each and every member is composed of and reflected within the others.<sup>553</sup> All systems are dynamic such that all parts are in motion and constantly changing their relationship to, their effect upon, and their role within the system. As I will show in my elaboration of this definition and what it entails, unpredictable movement is a necessary and natural part of systems.

This description of system leads to an important question: what holds the pieces of the system together? This resolves into two questions, which I will answer in turn. First, why is it incorrect to see the world as composed of atomized, individual beings, or to use a non-system based ontology? The reason why the idea of systematicity must be brought in is because the only way of explaining dynamism without it is to resort to a proto-state. The rationale for a system's motion—and for the motion of every piece of a system—must be explained, but without creating a transcendental architecture that generates it. The only answer is to see the motion as an intrinsic part of the system, and not as the product of eternally present processes. There must be a system, as without it the goal of liberating revolution is impossible. Second, what keeps the pieces of the system from going their separate way? While this is a potential outcome of a revolution, it is true that most systems do not break apart easily. They have a tendency to stay connected. The reason for this is that the system is responsible for constituting its parts, just as the parts constitute the system. Connections exist not just between the different agents and objects of the system, but between these elements and the project of the system at any particular point in time. Though in the right circumstances a being will leave a system, it is this relationship that tends to keep the system bound together.

Also integral to this theory is that while every particular system has agents of change, objects of change, and means of change, none of them necessarily persist. These features can

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<sup>553</sup> Jay Forrester describes systems as “a grouping of parts that operate together for a common purpose” (*Principles of Systems*, 1968, Wright Allen Press, 1-1)

always be overthrown. In describing what a system itself is it is impossible to say any more than that it is interconnected and dynamic. Even to say that systems contain an agents, objects, and means of change is partly inaccurate, for by treating these elements as separate the indivisibility of the system is hidden. Though the system is not a simple unity, neither does it easily differentiate into rigid and atomic parts. Either choice presents the system, or a piece of it, as firm and unchangeable. Rather, the system is a complex whole of continually differentiating and merging parts, the movement of which can be helpfully understood through the four elements above. It is both dynamic (understood as constantly changing in all aspects) and emergent (understood as the ability to develop novelty as a result of such change). Fred Evans makes a similar point in reference to society, which he says is a “multivoiced body” that operates as a “unity composed of difference.”<sup>554</sup> The voices of society are always “in motion” and “exist as responses to one another,” and while it is possible to identify the individual voices, every “voice is shot through and partially constituted by the other voices of the community.”<sup>555</sup> The same principle Evans points to with regard to societal voices applies to systems, for just as societal voices are always drawing from and reflecting each other, so too is each part of a system a reaction to and product of the rest. A system is not a rigid and hegemonic unity, but one comprised of many ingredients that both constitute and are constituted by change and whose character and function is not set in advance. As I will show below, it is the radical interconnectedness and interdependency of these ingredients which allow me to make this claim. There is both sameness and difference—both unity and plurality—in the system, but what constitutes each is in flux.

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<sup>554</sup> Fred Evans, *Multivoiced Body*, 8.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

At this point it is necessary to introduce the concept of *elaboration*. Elaboration occurs as a system operates, for as the various parts interact they develop and grow in complexity. A nascent political state inevitably encounters problems and challenges that require new solutions, and which lead it to create new laws, organizations, or structures. The United States' Constitution only alludes to the President's ability to appoint a Cabinet, and the first time one was formed there were only four positions (Secretary of State, War, Treasury, and Attorney General). As the government developed the Cabinet grew in complexity to the point where it now has fifteen positions (and another twenty Cabinet positions have been proposed to address lacuna in federal government oversight). These new positions do not contradict, oppose, or otherwise immediately undermine the political organization of the United States; rather, they are conceived of as helping to grow and preserve the country's ability to meet its constitutional requirements. As a system operates, it naturally develops layers of complexity.

Before going further, let us compare the way systems have traditionally been discussed with the concept of system I am developing. Though the diversity of philosophical systems makes generalizations difficult, it is possible to find ways in which great systems thinkers of the past have impeded or formalized the dynamism of systems. Kant, for instance, describes how external input is ordered through time, space, and the categories of pure reason. Because these categories are conceived to be unchangeable, there is no possibility of his system developing. Hegel, according to one reading of his system, formalizes the manner in which knowledge can be reached. When he says "knowledge is only actual, and can only be expounded, as Science or as *system*"<sup>556</sup> one interpretation of this claim is that he believes a systematic examination of knowledge predicts the dialectical movement of "externalizing...the Notion"<sup>557</sup> and subsequently

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<sup>556</sup> GWF Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press; Oxford, 1976), 13.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

reincorporating the externalized concepts into a “[philosophically] comprehended organization.”<sup>558</sup> Because Hegel knows the rules of the dialectic, he can foresee the trajectory of knowledge—not just in the sense of reaching its telos in absolute knowing, but in the sense of predicting its constant externalizing motion. Reflecting on this project, or on systems thinking in general, some have said that it reduces becoming to a mere formula. Michel Foucault describes his project as trying to flee Hegel<sup>559</sup>, and criticizes the dialectic for guaranteeing that difference will always be recaptured.<sup>560</sup> In broader terms, Nietzsche criticizes systematicity as such as showing “a lack of integrity.”<sup>561</sup> Even those who reject this, arguing that Hegel is much less deterministic than such a reading would imply<sup>562</sup>, maintain that change, movement, and truth always come from a conflict of opposites<sup>563</sup>—claiming in essence that dynamism is produced in a necessary way even if becoming itself cannot be reduced to a formulaic piece of knowledge.

Though past systems thinkers have a restrictive understanding of systems, anti-systems thinkers do not escape systems thinking. Many contemporary philosophers identify systems with form, order, and the normal way of doing things. Systems must be fought to get change. Instead of capturing the definitive nature of the state, systems take what is irreducible to thought and turn it into something determinate. In portraying certain elements as stable, and all change as the result of fixed causes, systems miss how nonidentity, dialectical sublation, and difference undermine all determinations. Adorno writes that “The pedantries of all systems, down to the architectonic complexities...are the marks of an a priori inescapable failure,” concluding that the

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 493.

<sup>559</sup> Foucault “The Discourse on Language” in *Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language*, trans. AM Sheridan Smith (Pantheon Books; New York, 1972), 235.

<sup>560</sup> Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” in *Aesthetics, Method, Epistemology: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, ed. James Faubion (The New Press; New York, 1998), 358.

<sup>561</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 2005) 159.

<sup>562</sup> Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, (Verso; London, 2012), 195, 199.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 201.

necessary outgrowths of all systems reveal “the untruth, the mania, of the systems themselves.”<sup>564</sup> Similarly, Foucault asserts that systems of knowledge have led to enslavement and domination<sup>565</sup>, while Derrida claims that the goal of his project is “to seek new concepts and models, an *economy* escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions.”<sup>566</sup> Anti-system philosophers claim all systems are incapable of doing what they set out to do. Yet we should question whether these thinkers really escape systems. The tools they develop to disrupt systems (such as the nonconceptual, power/resistance dynamics, and the idea that meaning is always “to-come”) only function because the tools have a presence within, or are a part of, the systems they are disrupting. Without this being the case it would be impossible for these tools to undermine any system. These tools are not beyond systems per se, but rather are presented as parts or attributes of all systems that previously went unseen. More importantly, these tools cause change—by subverting and creating new identity—in a specific way. In Foucault’s philosophy, for instance, power is always immanent but “[masks] a substantial part of itself,”<sup>567</sup> creating change through the tactical utilization of relationships for the purpose of instituting a new regime of order. The tools described by anti-systems thinkers operate as part of a determinate system that may be unfamiliar within the history of philosophy, but it is still a system. And as a system, every element of it is interconnected and interdependent. Changing one thing in the system can create a ripple effect that changes other pieces of it as well. If these tools are part of the system, they are just as subject to being changed by an alteration in the system as any subject or object within it. The tools of anti-systems thinkers cannot affect things within the system while remaining apart from the movement of the system. Anti-system thinkers may undermine rigid

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<sup>564</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (Routledge; London, 1973), 21-22

<sup>565</sup> Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault” in *Essential works of Foucault Vol 3: Power*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New Press; New York, 1998), 291.

<sup>566</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Routledge; London, 1978), 19.

<sup>567</sup> *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 86.

and determinate systems of earlier philosophers, but in doing so they create systems of their own. To an extent anti-systems thinkers admit this, as Foucault describes power as being able to change in how it functions, while Deleuze presents his ontology differently within different fields. Thus the tools of anti-systems thinkers are not monolithic. For now, my point is just to show how systems are still vital elements of anti-system thinkers' philosophies, and that the working of systems affects their tools even as the tools change systems.

This concludes my account of what constitutes a system. It is now time to consider what constitutes a state. Though as I will show a state is composed of all the elements of dynamic systems, it needs to be distinguished from dynamic systems as such. This difference is necessary because dynamic systems can be radically altered without disappearing or collapsing. Yet if this same condition is applied to the state, then we must incongruously conclude that no state can ever cease to exist. At some point, the definitions of dynamic system and state need to diverge. The primary difference between a system and a state comes from the fact that a state is characterized by an archetype. This archetype includes ideas about how things work, the nature of the environment, and what is to come in the future. It is both a representation of and a prescription for the order politics takes within a dynamic system. So unlike a dynamic system, a state consists only of those movements (especially those of elaboration) which develop, enhance, perpetuate, or preserve its archetype. In other words, a state is a dynamic system inasmuch as it consists of all the same elements as one, and inasmuch as it grows in complexity like one, *yet* anytime the system moves in a way that undermines the states' archetype, that movement cannot properly be included within the constitution of the state. In short, a state is the archetypal movements, beings, and interactions of a dynamic system.



There are two reasons why this definition of state differs from other theories. The first has to do with the placement of the archetype, which does not precede or determine the state. Archetypes emerge from dynamic systems as they settle into a sustainable routine. Yet they are not only representational, as once they emerge they can play an agential role in preserving the state. They become the measure against which actions are judged, or institutions are formed, and they prohibit those things which do not meet their guidelines (just as how in Hobbes' theory it is inappropriate to question the unitary authority of the sovereign).<sup>568</sup> Thus unlike the states of social contract theory, for which the order of states is determined in advance, the states of Dynamic Anarchism have no predetermined archetype. Nevertheless every archetype is still able to play a role in disciplining the system to act in a particular way, and in resisting radical change. The second reason the state of Dynamic Anarchism is different is because it is not static. While it does follow a certain order, the movements that form and the complexity of that order is always evolving. The particular processes that form the order at one point may be swapped out for others later on without any discernible change in the archetype itself, assuming the product of each set of processes is the same. This means that Dynamic Anarchism would reject the Marxist claim that economic relationships always determine the form the state takes. It also entails the rejection of the Marxist base-superstructure theory, for the order of the state is not inherently hierarchical, nor does the archetype define a separate realm from the processes and movements of the state (as the base and superstructure do in Marxist theory). States are mobile, and as such cannot be modeled simply as a 'universal' or 'one'.<sup>569</sup> Any account of them must be able to illustrate both what is allowed to change and what is required to stay the same. As long as states

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<sup>568</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 206-7.

<sup>569</sup> Buckminster Fuller's *Synergetics* states that any model of the world cannot be portrayed except as plural, as to see it as a 'one' is to miss its movement (Fuller, *Synergetics ; explorations in the geometry of thinking*, [Macmillan Pub. Co., 1975], 87).

contribute to the perpetuation of a certain political arrangement, there is no necessary way or domain through which they form that order.

This new model of the state contradicts Badiou's and Žižek's ideas of universality and one-ness. Because the state is an adaptable system all notions of stability and normativity come from within a system, not from without. Deleuze makes this point by saying "Representation is a transcendental illusion"<sup>570</sup> and that to liberate difference we must no longer subordinate it to the identity of the concept and the thinking subject, to the similar within perception, to the negative, and to the analogy of judgment.<sup>571</sup> It is for this reason that the notions of universality proposed by thinkers like Žižek and Badiou are problematic, for when they oppose unity, or 'the one', to the radical openness of the 'real' or 'multiples of multiples' they assume a universal that is uniform and hegemonic, and whose notions of stability and normativity are transcendental conditions that come from beyond the universal itself. Badiou makes this point in discussing the need for a metastructure that structures all ones, saying "In order for the void to be prohibited from presentation, it is necessary that structure be structured, that the 'there is Oneness' be valid for the count-as-one."<sup>572</sup> The state, for Badiou, regardless of its historico-social situation, is always involved in the operation of guaranteeing "that there is Oneness...among the set of its subsets."<sup>573</sup> And Žižek claims that signifiers devoid of content still can have an effect as empty signifiers.<sup>574</sup> In other words, what constitutes the state is for them nonadaptive and formulaic. While it is true that a signifier or a form can remain without any content, I believe Žižek and Badiou miss the fact that signifiers and forms cannot remain without a context that allows them to operate as such. Signifiers do not exist independently but they depend upon a context that

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<sup>570</sup> Gilles Deleuze *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (Columbia University Press; New York, 1994), 265.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-269.

<sup>572</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 93.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>574</sup> *Contingency, Universality, Hegemony*, 110.

imbues them with the power to signify. Peter Hallward traces this deficiency in Badiou to his reliance on set theory, saying “Set theory obliges us to think that ‘there are only multiplicities, nothing else...’ Not only is relation thus conceived as little more than a variation on the elementary relation of order (greater-than or lesser-than), there is no clear sense that it can qualify, shape, or otherwise affect the objects related.”<sup>575</sup> What needs to be opposed to radical change is not something simply uniform and hegemonic in its emptiness, but something that is plural and variable at the same time that it is consistent.

The real need for a theory of revolution—one that escapes the notion of state entirely—is not just to question the determinacy of appearances and beings in the state, but to question determinacy itself. It is not enough to displace order from the things in the state to the processes that compose them; it must instead be shown that determinacy itself is not determinate. Systems, and all the pieces found within them, must be seen as evolving, emergent, and capable of developing novelty without reference to a proto-state. Building off of the idea of Merleau-Ponty’s hyperdialectic, we need to find a way to understand systems that is not simplistic and reductive, and which does not prescribe a form for systems but allows for their change and creativity. This openness to change must include the forces, operations, and processes that produce the state as well as the things within it. We need, in a word, hyper-systematicity.

### **How to trust the system as a revolutionary**

At this point we have begun to answer the first problem that arises from combining questions one and three together: a state is a dynamic system characterized by an archetype. We have covered what it means to be a system and an archetype, but we still need an account of dynamism, both what it is and how it works. From this account we will be able to see how this

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<sup>575</sup> Peter Hallward, “Order and Event”, in *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 115.

new understanding of the state makes proto-states irrelevant and puts us on the path to a new account of radical change (the second and third problems identified above).

An explanation of the dynamism of states begins with the means of change recognized by the state. As has already been mentioned, states encourage some types of change and disallow others. The conventional perspective is that participating in encouraged forms of change perpetuates the state while a massive violation of the state's laws brings forth revolution.<sup>576</sup> Many poststructuralists disagree, saying action maintains the state's hegemonic system by reinforcing the particular schema underlying that state, and that truly radical change requires advocating for an indeterminate ideal or political will.<sup>577</sup> Properly speaking, though, none of these name revolution but only the direction in which one moves in relation to the state. And no matter how hard one tries, moving in any of these directions is not guaranteed to bring about revolution. If revolution is to be truly unpredictable it cannot be the likely result of taking any particular relationship to the state. I say this not to disparage the important work that activists do in holding the state to account for its crimes, but to point out that advocating against the state is not a recipe for revolution any more than advocating for the state assures its preservation. Large movements for radical social change have failed to motivate revolution, while strong rulers have been unable to prevent dramatic shifts in the state. Even advocating for a state "to come" can continue ad infinitum without any revolutionary effect. The state, qua system, does not function in a predictive and restrictive manner. Claiming a particular relationship to the state will result in revolution ignores the ability of systems to transform, and, by doing so, to yield results that are unexpected by examining the system's components. Revolution can result no matter what

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<sup>576</sup> See, for example, Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 5*, "What is to be Done?" (Progress Publishers; Moscow, 1960), 384 and Chomsky, *Foucault-Chomsky Debate*, (The New Press; New York, 2006), 45.

<sup>577</sup> See Foucault "What are the Iranians Dreaming About" and "The Inventors of the State" in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2005), 206 and 208; or Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Routledge; New York, 1994), 115.

direction people take with regard to the state, as what defines revolution is its ability in the right context to create a catalytic change throughout the system that fundamentally rewrites the state's archetype.

The existence of radical change means we must supplement our account of systems to say that in addition to the changes the state recognizes there are also changes that are incommensurable, unpredictable, and indeterminate from the state's perspective. These latter changes are catalytic in nature and have the ability to revolutionize the state, but—and this is vital—*they result from nothing other than the state itself*. To explain why this is, let us return to the composition of the state itself as a dynamic mixture of agents, objects, and means for change all held together through an archetype. Because we are beginning with the state itself and not with the pieces it resolves into (i.e. a proto-state), there is a fundamental interconnectivity that defines the state. Disparate pieces do not come together to form states; rather the state is constantly dividing, allocating, merging, and transforming itself such that any time a separate piece is identifiable it is shot through and wholly dependent upon everything else in the state. Each piece of the state is so interwoven with the others that a small modification can catalyze a massive effect. The introduction of something new, or the ongoing recurrence of phenomena past what an environment can sustain, can create a sea change in how the system as a whole works. There are numerous illustrations of each type of change. In regards to the former, one example is the radical shift in city planning, culture, and lifestyle that occurred as a result of the introduction of the automobile, not to mention its impact on the environment, economics, and international relations.<sup>578</sup> In regards to the latter, the climate change crisis is an excellent example of how recurrence of phenomena can change a system. The environment is built to absorb carbon dioxide, but not at the level it is being released currently. Unless this stops,

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<sup>578</sup> For one analysis of the automobile's impact, see *Asphalt Nation* by Jane Holtz Kay

scientists predict a worldwide transformation of the climate that will exceed anything humans have ever experienced.<sup>579</sup> Being able to predict phenomena does not mean one is able to predict all their effects. The thoroughly interconnected nature of a system means that everything in the system acts both according to its own plan and in response to others' actions. The most elaborate schematics of systems cannot predict how these actions and reactions will affect the long term functioning of systems. The behavior of a system in motion is not reducible to the behavior its outline predicts.

One example will illustrate how this works. Marx's system projects a communist society will result from the ongoing dialectical relationship between material forms and human society. To reach this conclusion Marx relies on analyses of wealth creation, social order, and human need. His predictions thus rest on the assumption that politics, society, and the economy will progress logically based on rules discernible from his situation. Yet on numerous occasions small events have led to massive and illogical changes Marx's system was unprepared for. In the latter half of the twentieth century Marx's acolytes had to rework Marxist thought to explain the splintering of the international workers party that occurred as a result of developments in world affairs. The Marxist Nicos Poulantzas describes this as one of the two major "crises" of Marxism in the latter half of the twentieth century, saying that because of it "we came to the realization, among others, that we do not have an adequate Marxist explanation, based on serious theory and scientific evidence, for the situation which prevails in the countries of 'actually existing socialism.'"<sup>580</sup> Terry Eagleton claims that "it is no longer easy to say what counts as being a Marxist" given how many of the doctrines central tenets have been discounted.<sup>581</sup> Other

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<sup>579</sup> For more, see *The Global Warming Reader* edited by Bill McKibben

<sup>580</sup> Poulantzas "Is there a crisis in Marxism" in *The Poulantzas Reader* (Verso; London, 2008), 381.

<sup>581</sup> Eagleton, "Introduction Part 1" in *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (Blackwell Publishers; Cambridge, 1996), 3.

Marxists have questioned whether the analyses Marx gives in *Capital* still hold today given how much media, technology, and science have affected the world's development.<sup>582</sup> In both of these cases, the developments *did not* violate any rules of Marx's system (that is, the ongoing presence of world affairs and the development of new technologies was something Marx expected and allowed for), but still led to changes that required a substantial reworking of the Marxist system.

Additionally, consider the effect the introduction of Marx's system has had on the predictions Marx makes. Russians and Cubans attempted to create the conditions Marx says are necessary for revolt, while capitalists engaged in massive programs to seek out and punish any attempts at organizing workers. The former can be seen in Lenin's programmatic adherence to the idea of the vanguard party<sup>583</sup> and Castro's show trials<sup>584</sup>, both of which were identified with the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The latter is demonstrated by the fact that capitalists have funneled millions of dollars into third world militias and political movements to undermine Marxism.<sup>585</sup> In both cases people are responding not just to the natural conditions and historical developments Marx describes, but to his predictions as well. Since in all his writings Marx never theorizes the effect his thought will have on the population, it is a fair assumption that he felt it would have no appreciable effect and that economic forces would dominate history's movements. Though it is impossible to judge how different the last century would be without Marxist thought, can it really be said—given how much foreign, domestic, and economic policy was decided based on fear of or fidelity to Marxist doctrines—that it had no appreciable effect on

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<sup>582</sup> See Abbinett, *Marxism After Modernity: Politics, Technology, and Social Transformation* (Palgrave; New York, 2007), 3.

<sup>583</sup> For one example, see his claim that the socialist proletariat must be a "vanguard fighter for liberty" in "Appeal to Party by Delegates to Unity Congress" in Lenin, *Collected Works, Volume 10*, trans. Andrew Rothstein (Progress Publishers; Moscow, 1962), 315.

<sup>584</sup> See Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism*, (University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, 1988), 123.

<sup>585</sup> For some examples, see *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* by Greg Grandin

history? Economist John K. Galbraith argues for its profound impact, saying “If we agree that the Bible is a work of collective authorship, only Mohammed rivals Marx in the number of professed and devoted followers recruited by a single author. And the competition is not really very close. The followers of Marx far outnumber the sons of the Prophet.”<sup>586</sup> This is not to say that Marx’s system is worthless, incapable of making salient points about philosophy, economics, or history, but that it is significant that the Marxist system has had to be reworked many times in response to radical and unexpected changes catalyzed by entirely predictable alterations that *were not* external to Marxist thought. No matter how well designed systems are, when new phenomena are introduced, or when the system can no longer sustain certain ideas and behaviors, then the very assumptions on which the systems are based have the potential to change dramatically. The radical interconnectedness of systems means that they are volatile and de-centered even when they do not appear to be, and thus radical change is always possible in ways the system cannot predict.

The dynamism I describe here needs to be related back to the ongoing discussion within systems theory about open versus closed systems, for it may seem like I am claiming a system is either closed or dynamic, when what I am actually claiming is that all systems—whether closed or open—are dynamic. To start, let us define open systems as those “characterized by outputs that respond to inputs but where the outputs are isolated from and have no influence on the inputs,” and closed systems as those characterized by a “loop structure that brings results from past action of the system back to control future action.”<sup>587</sup> Open systems are those which receive inputs from outside the system, and closed systems are those which receive their own outputs as inputs (it is possible for a system to be mixed, and receive inputs both from beyond itself and

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<sup>586</sup> John K Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty* (Houghton-Mifflin; New York, 1977), 77.

<sup>587</sup> Jay Forrester, *Principles of Systems*, (Wright-Allen Press, Inc.; Cambridge, 1968), 1-5.



from itself). In both closed and open systems, as they were classically conceived, the inputs go through the same set of steps, or the same processes, as all previous inputs. While over time the output can yield drastically different results, the steps or processes that inputs undergo never change. What Dynamic Anarchism claims is that this classical conception of systems is inaccurate, and that all systems are actually dynamic such that the processes that define them are subject to fundamental change as well. Although it seems that some systems are determinate rather than dynamic, this is a function of the fact that some systems are not very complex or interconnected. Such simple systems generally operate formulaically, though over a long enough period of time they express dynamic attributes. Complex and highly interconnected systems are better examples of the issues under discussion here. Whether closed or open, it is not unusual when a system is highly complex, or if it is given enough time, for the processes defining it to shift, to reverse themselves, or, in rare occasions, to dissolve themselves entirely.

In making this claim, I am drawing from recent discoveries within complex systems biology that have demonstrated that it is possible for wholly determinate systems to yield phenomena that are fundamentally new within the context of the system. John Holland writes of such complex systems that “The interactions between the parts are nonlinear, so that the overall behavior *cannot* be obtained by summing the behaviors of the isolated components...In this sense, more comes out than was put in.”<sup>588</sup> The difference between rigid systems and the transformative systems Holland describes has to do with whether the order governing systems is formulated from beyond the systems themselves, or whether the order is part of the system. When the order comes from without it is impossible to change, yet when the order is generated by the system itself it can be completely rewritten. Although each individual system follows rules, when the right context comes along every one of those rules can be overthrown.

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<sup>588</sup> John Holland, *Emergence*, (Perseus Books; Cambridge, 1998), 225.

Nothing—no beings, rules, forces, or guidelines—defines systems as such except the fact that they are dynamic. This approach reveals how even the most determinate system will over time produce diversity and generate new structures, operations, and functions. Scott Page writes that if one begins with systems that are composed of “*diverse, interdependent, networked entities*”<sup>589</sup> capable of change then one sees that complexity and a rich array of new phenomena can emerge even from a relatively minimal number of parts. Page concludes that “*fundamental diversity* is not required for complexity. *Emergent diversity* is.”<sup>590</sup> Importantly, because these systems are dynamic rather than static they react not just to the rules governing them but to their products, the behaviors of the subjects and objects composing them, and the network of forces that allow them to function. Determinate systems thus often yield unpredictable effects because of what scientists have termed the “multiplier effect” and the “recycling effect,” whereby small accretions or deficits can over time accumulate to the point where they invalidate a theretofore intrinsic part of the system. Holland writes that the multiplier effect “jeopardizes long-range trends based on simple trends”<sup>591</sup> and says that the “overall effect [of the recycling effect] on a network with many cycles can be striking.”<sup>592</sup> Though these claims are made with reference to biology, studies have shown that these principles hold true for all complex systems<sup>593</sup>. Phenomena such as emergence, unpredictability, and dynamism are the result of complex interdependent networks, so this description is just as easily applicable to the field of politics as it is to biology.

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<sup>589</sup> Scott Page, *Diversity and Complexity*, (Princeton University Press; Princeton, 2011), 38.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>591</sup> John Holland, *Hidden Order*, (Helix Books; Reading, 1995), 25.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>593</sup> For one example, see Joshua Epstein’s work *Agent\_Zero: Toward Neurocognitive Foundations for Generative Social Science* (Princeton University Press; 2014), which looks at complex systems through the lens of social science, discovering similar principles at work.

The notion of complex and dynamic systems brings us to the crux of where my concept of state diverges from evental thought. What systems thinking does which makes it advantageous to evental thought is situate change in a fundamental and irreducible position. In order to demonstrate what I mean by this, it is necessary to review how change is positioned within evental thought. Ignoring for the moment the differences between evental projects, every evental thinker situates change as the expected product of the operation of regularly occurring processes. The same is true of revolutionary change. Foucault writes "...it is doubtless the strategic codification of...points of resistance that makes a revolution possible"<sup>594</sup> while Badiou claims that it is only through an "interpretive intervention" that an event like the French Revolution can be "presented in a situation."<sup>595</sup> While on the one hand making revolution conditional on these processes violates the principles, mentioned in chapter one, that revolution be unpredictable and incommensurable, the larger issue is that the nature of change is circumscribed. Foucault, for instance, locates the domain of power wholly within the social (saying "[power] is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society"<sup>596</sup>), thus privileging social apparatuses like institutions, micro-practices, and discourse as the primary vehicles through which change occurs. Foucault is right that power is the function of relations; that it is polyvalent, de-centered, mobile, and transitory; and that there is always an ongoing play between power and resistance.<sup>597</sup> But he limits the place from which revolution can occur while binding it wholly to the proper functioning of power. In his theory, revolution must come from the social realm, and not from anywhere else. Thus revolution is confined by the limits power has by virtue of locating it within the social realm. While

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<sup>594</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, 96.

<sup>595</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 181.

<sup>596</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, 93.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-96.

resistance is always incapable of undoing how power functions, Foucault gives no indication that it can affect where power functions. To be more specific, particular characteristics of a type of power (i.e. the words, gestures, and institutions that it operates through) can change. However, power always functions as a characteristic of the social realm, and as such is bound by the limits of that realm. Though Foucault has a very expansive notion of the social, the effects that non-discursive and non-social beings have on our politics or social order often goes un-theorized by Foucault. Similarly, Badiou restricts revolutions in terms of how they operate. He insists that events are instantaneous, as they are either included within the situation or they are not, and so there are no gradations or middle ground.<sup>598</sup> Badiou's events must begin from a vanguard which has declared a new set, and it is by winning over converts that the world becomes organized through this set's rules.<sup>599</sup> The processual, gradual, and relational character of revolutions is a secondary attribute of revolutions. Revolutions are principally defined by instantaneity and fidelity. Badiou is right that revolutions are irreducible to states, but he is wrong to make revolutions conditional on the act of declaration, as though the unique character of the state a revolution responds to plays no significant role in how that revolution appears.

Dynamic Anarchism, by contrast, does not build radical change into the system as the expected result of the proper functioning of determinate processes. *Radical change is an irreducible and foundational feature of systems, just as systems are an irreducible and foundational feature of radical change.* Inasmuch as states are systems characterized by an archetype, they are fully capable of yielding radical change that undermines the order their archetype prescribes. Revolutions occur when entirely expected and predictable changes in a system cause, by virtue of the complexity and interconnectivity of systems, unexpected and

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<sup>598</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 181.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

unpredictable changes that fundamentally alter how a system operates. Nothing operating behind revolution causes it; rather, revolutions are coincident with and as fundamental as the state. To return to my point about determinacy, the problem with evental thought is that it deconstructs the determinacy of objects, identities, and other beings by maintaining the determinacy of signifiers, gestures, words, and power. These tools used by evental thought have a coherent field in which they operate or a formal structure that defines how they work. But indeterminacy loses its significance if it depends upon determinate tools; rather it must have a basis of its own. A liberated theory of revolution must find a way to describe radical change, not as the product of various forces and operations, but as something synchronous with and yet irreducible to the state (inasmuch as it undermines the state's archetype).

This last point requires elaboration, for the theory of Dynamic Anarchism insists upon a new basis for understanding radical change. The fact that evental theorists elaborate processes that lead to radical change means that they see such change as the product of specific types of interactions and not as a condition of systematicity. The idea that revolutions are performed by acting in a certain way means that within these theories revolution is always generated by the same mechanism. That mechanism may manifest itself differently in different revolutions, but its basic character remains. Dynamic Anarchism proposes a different concept of radical change, positioning it not as the result of any mechanism, but of the nature of systems. It is part of the character of systems, given their complexity and interconnectivity, to at times yield radical change. Radical change is thus incapable of being described as a product, for the very condition in which things exist is what accounts for it, not any specific process. This is why even the non-mechanistic understanding of Hegelianism is unsatisfactory, for it still presents radical change as

something produced through interaction. Radical change can best be described as a system's irreducible tendency to escape its own being.

This means that all states are idiographic, and that there is no nomological basis for understanding each and every state. Revolutions, and the states that precede and follow them, can yield novelty because there are no rules that constrain how that novelty is produced or the form the state can take. Yet this does not mean that different states are so singular that there are no places where they overlap or display similar attributes. It is not the case that everything about the state changes in each revolution. Thus while on an absolute basis there are no similarities between states, from within the perspective of a state it is possible to conceive of laws that apply to more than one's own state, and to develop a nomological basis for discussing the state. And while this basis may hold through several states, ultimately the fact that each state emerges from a dynamic system means that no individual basis can become the ground for all states.

Now that a more complete analysis of systems and states has been given, I can return to the question of contingency raised in the last chapter, and in particular what states and the things within states are contingent upon. Things in the state are contingent upon the rest of the system—in particular the relations and movements that comprise and maintain it. The state itself is contingent upon the continuous reproduction of it by the system. And because the way in which systems are interconnected and dynamic is so open to change both states and the things within them are also open to significant change.

We now have a complete solution to the first problem identified above. The solutions to problems two and three (why proto-states are irrelevant and the path to a new account of radical change, respectively) are contained germinally in this account, yet before concluding this section, and my answers to questions one and three, I will explain these solutions more

explicitly. Let's begin with problem two. As I mentioned in my first critique of evental thought, proto-states act as a transcendental architecture within states. They do not determine what specific beings appear in the state any more than the gothic style of a cathedral determines which biblical scenes will appear on the walls. However, proto-states provide a space for and a form by which beings and meanings appear. The reason this is now unnecessary is because, by viewing states as dynamic and complex systems, we avoid the need to posit transcendental processes that act within yet exist separately from the state. As long as the system is not seen as coming from a stable ground, but is related only to itself, then any part of it is open to change. And as long as we remember that parts of states are interdependent and that states themselves are dynamic, then that change does not need to be produced externally but is an intrinsic characteristic of a state's existence. There is no longer any necessity to use proto-states to explain events, as states can now do that. When we properly conceptualize states as systems, then we can see that what motivates radical change is not a transcendental process like Deleuze's deterritorialization or a perpetual condition like Arendt's notion of human plurality. That which is wholly immanent, as long as it stays in motion, can produce radical change. As Holland writes, "perpetual novelty is still typical"<sup>600</sup> even in systems that are fully comprehended.

The label of transcendental, as I use it with regard to evental theorists, needs a little more explanation. While deterritorialization, power-resistance, human plurality, and other such processes are transhistorical, they do not exist apart from the state, and to that extent are not transcendent. What I claim is transcendental about these processes is the fact that they operate within a determinate domain and/or function in a formulaic manner. For example, in Deleuze deterritorialization comes from the interaction between the plane of consistency and plane of

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<sup>600</sup> Holland, *Emergence*, 45.

organization. What will find articulation (i.e. haecceities and modes of individuation<sup>601</sup> in the plane of consistency) in an event, and how it will be articulated (through content and expression) are predetermined and beyond change. Though on the whole a defining feature of Deleuze's project is openness to change, I believe Deleuze keeps certain traits about the world stable and predetermines how change will enter the state (i.e. from the outside, through a "flash" or "upsurge"<sup>602</sup>). Revolution seems to be separated from other changes by degree and by where it comes from, but not by the kind of change that is invoked. Similar considerations limit the processes of other evental thinkers (such as Foucault's placing of power in the social realm and Badiou's use of a formulaic means of change, discussed earlier). The systems of evental thinkers are transcendental in the same way Kant's categories are transcendent. Kant's categories cannot exist apart from the subject, but nevertheless limit what a person can know (while at the same time conditioning and grounding knowledge in an important way). Similarly, evental thinkers' systems, even as they ground radical change in a significant way, still end up placing boundaries around it.

One might say, in response to my account, that I am rejecting determinacy in states by giving a determinate account of states myself. What this objection misses is that the characteristics I give to states are only those necessary to preserve their movement and dynamism—in short, their indeterminacy and openness to change—while at the same time maintaining their existence. It is necessary to maintain that individual states preclude some changes while encouraging others (i.e. each individual state has an archetype), as without that the concept of "state" is lost. To cut up states any further leaves one with nothing but isolated and disparate parts incapable of interacting. One ends up with nothingness, as even the principle of

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<sup>601</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 507.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 353, 366-367.



motion does not arise until one has a system. Yet it is also necessary to maintain that states are diverse, transformative, and radically interconnected, as without these characteristics states become static and unchangeable. Only by viewing states in this manner can their diversity, dynamism, indeterminacy, and plurality be preserved without arresting their movement in advance.

The final problem to be solved, before moving on to question two, is the new path to radical change. One conventional theory says that it involves seeking out an eccentric point within the old state that, by referring to an unconditioned outside realm, can be used to build a new state. By appealing to the indeterminacy and multiplicity of this outside, or rather to the necessity of its existence but unknowable nature, one can always reach beyond the immediate world. It is ostensibly in these dark spaces that radical change waits. The problem is that, without the transcendental architecture of the proto-state, we lack an easy route to this outside. Indeed, as I will show, the idea of an outside is called into question. To get radical change without appealing to a proto-state we must instead study the changes of the state. The new path to radical change starts by studying how the changes that occur in the state relate themselves to the state, and how they can produce a radical change that is not limited by a particular domain or necessary form. Because these questions cannot be answered without first giving an account of the event, I will return to them at the end of answering question two.

### **How to escape the state without leaving it**

The answer to question two, just like that to questions one and three, can be split into several problems. First, we need to understand how events come about. If we reject the idea that revolutions can be explained by referencing the proto-state, we must either find another way of

contextualizing revolution or resign ourselves to being perpetually incapable of capturing their nature. Second, we need to understand what effect revolution has upon the state. Though I have been saying that it is a radically transformative power, a more explicit description should be found. Finally, we need to give a clear definition of revolution, one that not only escapes the problems of earlier definitions but which can be made useful for the practical purpose of revolution. If I am right that solving these problems requires looking to the motions and changes of the state, then it must be shown why there is a problem with seeking an outside. As an analysis of this issue will solve the first problem of this question, I will begin there.

The question of the outside has often haunted philosophy. Our inability to explain all we have evidence for, combined with the significant developments, shifts, and transformations observed in history, has led many philosophers to posit a fecund realm beyond human experience as the source of all these changes. Two oft-used models for this outside are the Kantian noumenal realm and the negative moment of the Hegelian dialectic. In the former, our experience and knowledge point to a realm where things exist in a manner that is incapable of being understood by humans. In the latter, our ability to describe something necessitates that something else remains to be described. Speaking schematically, the difference lies in whether the outside is underneath appearances or beyond them. In both cases the outside is the place where what exists resides in its most basic form. We do not encounter it directly, but its presence conditions all knowledge and experience. Evental thinkers, drawing from both models, use this concept liberally. Foucault says that knowledge, discourse, and power are dependent upon an absent being that constitutes their 'outside'. "Power is everywhere" such that we cannot escape it.<sup>603</sup> Because power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined and, together, 'invest'

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<sup>603</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, 94.

things with meaning (e.g. they invest the human body with a political significance<sup>604</sup>), we are forever incapable of knowing anything about what exists outside our knowledge and social situation. Yet, as he says in “The Thought of the Outside”, the very capability of knowing and saying anything point outside themselves to “a thought that, in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge, constitutes what in a phrase we might call ‘the thought of the outside’”.<sup>605</sup> Similarly, Deleuze posits the plane of consistency<sup>606</sup>; Badiou has the realm of pure multiplicity<sup>607</sup>; Kuhn claims there is a world beyond what our paradigm allows us to see<sup>608</sup>; and Arendt says we cannot encounter the world unmediated by the plurality of humans (the “basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man”<sup>609</sup>). In the philosophies of evental thought, these outside realms are manipulated by a proto-state to produce what appears. For Foucault power cuts up the outside world in different ways, while in Deleuze the territorialization of the plane of consistency produces new strata. The outside is not altered by engaging it, but by pulling it together in different ways it is possible to produce new beings, ideas, meanings, and signs. There are no limits to how this outside realm can be pulled together, as for all intents and purposes it is immeasurable and unbounded. This is why Derrida can speak of meaning as something “to come”<sup>610</sup> and Žižek can claim that there are multiple ways of instantiating the universal notion of a Master-signifier.<sup>611</sup>

The outside, as it is used by evental philosophy, is instrumental in explaining where meaning and order originate. Yet, as the outside does not create either on its own, the processes

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<sup>604</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28.

<sup>605</sup> Foucault, “Thought of the Outside” in *Essential Works: Aesthetics, Method, Epistemology*, (New Press; New York, 1998), 150.

<sup>606</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 506.

<sup>607</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 39.

<sup>608</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 112.

<sup>609</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

<sup>610</sup> Derrida, “Difference” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans Alan Bass (Harvester Press; Brighton, 1982), 21

<sup>611</sup> Žižek, *The Parallax View*, (MIT Press; Cambridge, 2005), 37.

constituting the proto-states are integral. Evental theory requires both an outside and a proto-state to function. By eschewing the proto-state we run into a serious problem, for we cannot reach the outside without it. As long as philosophers hold that there is an external realm they cannot reach, one which is the source of everything they know and experience, it is necessary to posit processes that can grasp it for us. Yet the result of them positing these transcendental processes (i.e. proto-states) is that they determine the domain or the form of revolution. Positing an outside from which our knowledge and experience originate thus compels us to once again bind revolution to a state (albeit a much different one than before). This can be demonstrated by looking at how the descriptions evental thinkers give to the outside circumscribe possibilities for change. Let's take Badiou's example of multiplicity. Badiou's description of the outside as a realm of pure multiplicity indicate that for him the outside is defined by infinite variety and number, for one-ness is always a function of the state. This description means that the outside is permanently characterized by disparity, as it is impossible to have variety and number without that. As a result, change in Badiou's system is permanently subordinated to the condition of disparity. One may object that this does not circumscribe change as it is impossible to have change without disparity. While this is true, change is just as much defined by what it brings together as what it divides. For Badiou, whatever is brought together (and declared a "one") is always properly multiple, for that is its original state. The work that change does in bringing things together is necessarily transitory and derivative, while by contrast divisions are eternal. This theory is valuable in that it preserves the possibility for every "one" to change. But Badiou's insistence that disparity remain permanent calls into question his later concern (discussed in *Conditions*, *The Communist Hypothesis*, and elsewhere) with political fidelity, for by his account there is no connection or common cause I can develop with others that is not

artificially created, whereas our differences are natural and permanent. Every unity is capable of breaking apart, but no difference will ever completely disappear (for even if we do not recognize it, it remains in the outside). Badiou's philosophy claims change can only create "simulated" unities while recognizing "real" differences.

In addition to conditioning the manner in which change can occur, and thus attaching revolution to a state, there is another reason why the concept of the outside fails to create a liberated revolution. Since the existence of the outside can be recognized, even if not directly engaged, it is clear that every person in the state has a mediated relationship with it. Within Foucault's system, I relate to the outside through my ability to resist the dominant forms of power in society; as a subject I always have the ability to cut up the world in new ways that oppose those held by academic, economic, and political institutions. Within Kuhn's, I can grasp anomalies by explaining them with a new paradigm which supplants that of 'normal science.' The fact that I can engage the outside, even in a mediated way, means that evental thought does not just posit relationships between the different parts of the state; it posits that each part of the state has a relationship with the outside as well. This has an important consequence, for it indicates that *the outside is part of the state as well*. Or, to be more specific, it means that evental thinkers—despite their claims otherwise—do not treat the outside as entirely external to the state, but as another level of the state. As they explain it, the outside is not wholly separate from the state but rather an unchanging and permanent part of the state—in short, it is like the permanent figures of the sovereign and history that I critiqued in my respective discussions of social contract theory and Marxism. To explain this in another way, the fact that a relationship exists between the beings of the state and the outside means that they comprise a system. And as a system necessarily presumes the interconnectedness of all the parts such that they are always

“‘in motion’” and “‘exist as responses to one another,’”<sup>612</sup> then the outside and the beings of the state must be capable of radically affecting and being affected by each other. The outside must be as open to radical change as every part of the state is. This can also be explained in Foucauldian language as follows: if we admit that a relationship of any sort exists between the parts of the state and the outside, then we must also admit that this relationship has both the attributes of power and resistance. That is, we should be able to resist any determinations given to the outside or the idea that there are any necessary processes (proto-states) that must be utilized to reach the outside. Yet if it is open to change in this manner then it is really not an ‘outside’ in any meaningful way—it certainly fails to meet the definition of outside given above. The only conclusion can be that the ‘outsides’ eventual thought conceives of are just other parts of their states.

There is one final point we must cover before moving one, which is whether or not anything replaces the ‘outside’ of eventual thought. Since we cannot posit anything completely external to a system in such a way as to make it consistent, rational, or even existent, ‘nothing’ replaces the outside. What is outside a system is completely unknown, and so as far as anyone can tell there is nothing. This is not just an epistemological nothingness, but an ontological and metaphysical nothingness as well. Yet no system is completely totalized, and so it is always possible for ‘something’ to appear in the system from that ‘nothing.’ I call these somethings that appear *nihils*, and they represent one of the two ways anomalies can appear in the state and create a catalytic change. The proper way to understand the appearance of *nihils* is to think of them as literally somethings created from nothing, and not as somethings originating from a extant place we have no access to or awareness of. Not only does the latter create an outside that is systematic and partially knowable, ultimately tethering it to a state and restricting radical

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<sup>612</sup> Evans, *Multivoiced Body*, 75.

change, but it misunderstands the phenomena of nihilism by implying that they will be forever mysterious unless a permanent origin and process for creating them can be found (i.e. an outside and proto-state). Though nihilisms originally appear from nothing, their anomalous nature can be erased by transforming the system to the point where they can be contextualized and explained. This claim begs the question of whether the necessity of incorporating nihilisms into the system is a limiting factor, given the order of the state. This is an important question as it reveals something about the challenges a revolution comes up against. Because the order of the state is constantly being produced again and again (rather than the state perpetually being characterized by a particular order), any part of the state is potentially open to change. As a result the order of the state isn't limiting in the sense of circumscribing change or presenting an impenetrable boundary. However, the order of the state can slow or hold back the speed at which change occurs, and in this sense can limit change (that is, it can limit the rate of change, not its possibilities). However, as history has shown, attempts by the state to limit change—because of their heavy-handedness—can end up accelerating change. One example of a nihilism is the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle colloquially dubbed the “Battle in Seattle.” In the lead-up to the protest, no one in the media, political, or economic circles was aware of the political potency of the anti-globalization movement. And while there was significant organizing done prior to the events, as well as a call to action that was distributed widely, even the event's organizers were surprised by the level of turnout received and the impact they had.<sup>613</sup> The events revealed the presence—previously unknown and outside the political order—of a new political movement with a great amount of power. Following the events, there was a scramble to understand and situate the anti-

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<sup>613</sup> David Solnit. “The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle” in *The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle* (AK Press; Edinburgh, 2009), 19, 24.

globalization movement, and to give it an explanation that would reveal its origin, motives, and goals.

The appearance of nihil often leads to shifts within a system, just like how in Kuhn's theory anomalies within science can lead to the creation of a new paradigm. Yet it is important to recognize that what is going on when that happens is not that we are finding their definitive place, but that we are reproducing them in way that aligns them with the system. This is similar in nature to the creative attributes of power that Foucault discusses, whereby a delinquent can be created where before there were only criminal acts.<sup>614</sup> The individual character of each nihil that arises from nothingness can, by altering the web of relationships, agents, objects and forces constructing every system, be given a place within the system. Giving it this place entails providing it with an identity, a metaphysics, an ontology, even perhaps a political or ethical status. And as the alteration of a system yields other changes down the line as different parts of the system adjust themselves to accommodate for the changes already made, we can see how it is possible for a nihil to produce a catalytic change. It should be noted that the introduction of a nihil is not guaranteed to bring about catalytic change; rather that is only one of its possible outcomes. At other times a system can accommodate a nihil without radically transforming itself. The determining factor is the nature of the system the nihil is introduced to, for depending on the reactions of the agents, objects, and relations found there a revolution may or may not occur.

The other way in which catalytic change can be started is from inside the state. Though we do not know whether anything surrounds the state, we do know that the state is dynamic. Revolution can come from the motion of the state, though this motion is of necessity not transcendentally grounded in an outside but is immanent to the state. Small and incremental

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<sup>614</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 249.



changes can, in the right context, create massive shifts that substantially change the state. This type of phenomena I call an *emergent property*. It occurs when, over time, unexpected outcomes result from fully determinate and understood states. To explain emergent properties—and by doing so complete the solution to the first problem of this question—let us observe how systems operate when we work with the assumption that every part of them responds to every other part. First, we see that the movement of states constantly affects how they operate, and so the state is continually open to the possibility of change. When subjects and objects interact they produce outcomes the state responds to. Sometimes these outcomes correspond to predictions about the state, but other times they deviate from them. These deviations are anomalous, but as they result from fully comprehended systems they are emergent properties rather than nihil. Only those properties which deviate from expected outcomes count as emergent phenomena, and they should be understood as qualitatively different from outcomes which are predictable. Shifts constantly occur in the state in response to these emergent properties. Some emergent properties produce small shifts (e.g. the presence of protesters leads states to add more police to the streets), but others cause massive disruptions (e.g. the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi led to the Arab Spring). When an emergent property results in the latter, there can be profound consequences for the state. Catalytic change results when, as a result of an emergent property, the state is mobilized against itself. This is why the image of the strong, aggressive revolutionary is not always accurate; sometimes militancy requires withdrawing oneself from the action and letting the state fight itself.

My claim is that a revolution begins in the dysfunction of a state, when the interconnected pieces cease to function as usual. Such dysfunction can result from the catalytic change created by either type of anomaly. It is important to keep in mind here the distinction I

made back in chapter one about the 2 aspects of revolution (anomaly and catalytic change), for by simply saying that catalytic change produces a revolution my argument sounds circular. To reiterate, anomalousness is how revolution appears inasmuch as it is unattached to the state, and captures its qualities of exemption from the status quo and deviation from the normal order. Catalytic change is how it appears from within the state, and captures the fact that revolution is a change that changes the changes within the world. Nihilis and emergent properties are the two types of phenomena a system can encounter which can set a revolution in motion. That is, in appearing they initiate the catalytic change and anomaly of revolution. Nihilis and emergent properties are distinguished from the two aspects of revolution because, while their appearance may be unexpected, they do not necessarily lead to revolution. It is possible for nihilis and emergent properties to end up intensifying the order of the state rather than undermining it.

The appearance of circularity within my argument only emerges if we ignore what the state is and attempt to trace revolution back to a source within the state that conditioned it, rather than look to the context of radical change. Another way to explain this is as follows: what conditions revolutions is not any figure, being, or force. What conditions them is not even systems qua networks of agents, objects, and rules. What conditions them is systems inasmuch as they are dynamic. What we are seeing with revolution is a type of movement that occurs in dynamic and complex systems which is not reducible to the makeup of the system. Dynamic and complex systems, by their very nature, include movements that are anomalous and which instigate catalytic change. The problem with saying catalytic change is produced by catalytic change is that it misses the larger context, which is that complex and dynamic systems contain catalytic change as an integral part of themselves. Catalytic change is not an accidental product of complex and dynamic systems, self-produced, nor the predictable result of any part of a

system. Catalytic change is an intrinsic and irreducible part of systems. It is the context of systematicity that keeps the argument for catalytic change from being circular.

Returning to the origin of revolution, the loss of usual function it brings about will not of necessity be the direct result of a deliberate act of resistance. While some revolutions do begin with an organized group coming together to resist, others begin through the overreach of the state or because of incidental factors. No one type of movement can be identified as the definitive cause of revolution, as any movement, given the right context, has the ability to throw a complex and interconnected system into chaos. But a revolution is more than the production of chaos, for as long as the archetype grounding a particular state remains then the most that has occurred is civil disorder. Just creating more dissidents, or switching sovereigns without changing the government, is not revolutionary; the ground of the system needs to be rewritten. What brings a revolution about, contrary to the Marxist tradition that looks for an accumulation of contradictions, is an increase in unexpected movements. When these movements become arranged in such a way that they catalyze a massive shift (the right way being unique for each particular state), they undermine the state's archetype. This seems to raise the question of whether movements or contradictions come first. It is not necessarily wrong to see movement as a product of contradictions, but doing so does require us to think through the lens of a state. By focusing on movements we ensure that we keep revolution liberated. After all, there are other models for movement that do not see it as the result of contradiction, and in each of these models movement plays a determinate role given to it by objects and how they interact. The aim of this project necessitates that revolution be approached from movement first.

China's revolution illustrates this. Throughout the early 1940's the communist ideology spread throughout villages as a result of a push by the communists to build their base in local

communities (helped by the factionalism that dominated pre-World War II China). In the late 1940's fighting broke out between the Communists and Nationalists, resulting in a civil war. The Nationalists were slowly undermined—in part because of their repressive policies, rampant famine, and excessive inflation—leading to a communist victory.<sup>615</sup> Put in other terms, as the communist deviation spread it undermined the traditional Chinese state until the rules governing the old system failed. This in itself was not transformative. The revolution truly took place when new rules were written, such as those governing how individuals are to be distributed. Whereas before 1949 people were distributed according to their faction and family, Mao's communist government introduced agrarian communes as a way of reorganizing society into collectives.<sup>616</sup> Similar changes were made in governance, economics, and culture. The undermining of the old state's rules created the possibility of producing fundamentally new rules, and thus of completing the revolution. Although the Communist movement collapsed shortly thereafter, this does not negate the fact that a revolution occurred. The collapse happened because the Communist state was not a sustainable system.

Emergent properties do not result from going outside the state, but from the state's motion producing something new and unexpected. And when that new and unexpected property leads to the collapse of the old archetype and the rise of a new, one has a revolution. Alternatively, nihilism does not come from an outside which we can say exists and about which we know only basic facts. They appear from nowhere, and as the system attempts to make them consistent radical change can arise. In response to the possible objection that I am treating nothingness like an outside, I argue that by not providing it with any positive content I avoid doing so. Nothingness does not condition or share any traits with the state, and so while we can

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<sup>615</sup> Pavel Osinsky, "Modernization Interrupted? Total War, State Breakdown, and the Communist Conquest of China" *The Sociological Quarterly* 51, no 4. (2010): 576-599.

<sup>616</sup> Subramanian Swamy, "Rural Communes in China" *Indian Economic Review* 3, no. 1, (1968): 49-55.

speculate about what might be there, the fact that these concerns are purely speculative indicates that it is not an outside in a metaphysical or ontological sense.

I want to avoid aligning this position with vitalism. Revolution does not create without constraint and is not detached from the state. The two are intimately connected, as it is the state's motion and interconnectedness which bring revolution into being. Fred Evans defends Deleuze and Guattari from charges of vitalism by saying "desire does not exist in abstraction from assemblages; it is thus 'tied' to reterritorialization and, hence, not vitalistic in the pejorative sense of a force that creates without constraint."<sup>617</sup> Similarly, revolution is a destabilizing motion that results from the movement and interaction of the pieces of the state. Deleuze and Guattari differ from me because they root the composition of desire within a proto-state and external 'plane of consistency', while I root the composition of revolution in the movement and interconnectedness of the system. Their notion of desire is formed molecularly (with reference to what composes the state), whereas my notion of revolution is formed laterally (with reference to the other pieces within the state).

With these dual concept of emergence and nihilism we can see how it is the state, and in particular the inherent changes it possesses as a dynamic and complex system, which ultimately contextualize revolution. This answers the first problem of question two. The last two problems require an account of how novelty functions once it appears. This is the problem I will take up in the last section of the chapter.

### **Whence comes the new?**

To begin an account of how an event creates change, let's examine the situation that follows the collapse of the state. Lacking a unified system that is well recognized and accepted,

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<sup>617</sup> Evans, *Multivoiced Body*, 291.

agents begin searching for a new order to replace it. The previously cohesive system breaks into many conflicting voices. Some attempt to quell any lingering unrest, and others plea for everyone come together as a community. Voices of continued militancy call for the criminals of the past to be judged, while remnants of the old regime try to limit any change. To make certain that the ideas they fought for stick, revolutionaries need to continue their work through writing, protest, and organizing. The political arena tends to be fecund after a revolution, with many new political parties forming, ideas being generated, and lifestyles attempted. Despite the creativity and openness to change that exists during this time, it is wrong to say that there is no order structuring how politics functions. As I indicated above, orders are a necessary part of systems, and so while a political arena is more open and fluid during the time following a revolution there are still rules grounding it at any particular time. Yet these rules, unlike those within an established state, are provisional rather than definitive. They are in part comprised by interim rulers, such as the national and state authorities established by the Patriots during and immediately after the American Revolution, or the Supreme Council of the Armed forces established by the Egyptian military following the events of 2011. Beyond the rulers, there are political forces being established throughout the population (such as the Jacobins and Girondists after the French Revolution). In some cases these other forces are not explicitly political entities but nevertheless play an important political role. Many have noted the importance Islam played in the Iranian Revolution, while race was similarly an important factor in the revolution that overthrew the apartheid regime in South Africa. The point is that the state following a revolution does not lack an archetype, but that the archetype it has is much more malleable. Because of this, everything within the state goes through a transition period whereby all of its parts—from one's identity to their relationships and status in society—are open to change. The entirety of

what constitutes the state goes through this process. This is the case because what held things relatively constant—the recognition and enforcement of a common archetype between all—is in the process of being reestablished. In short, during the period of transition following a revolution, there is just as much movement *between* rules as there is movement *within* rules.

The essential question is what reestablishes a more permanent archetype after a revolution. What slows the catalytic change of revolution to the point where the provisional orders established during the transition period are replaced by established orders of relatively stable states? While states can break apart because of revolutions, and the transitional period following a revolution can be excessively long, it is generally true that revolutions end in the creation of a new order. Revolutions are useful tools for creating much needed radical change, but they are poor at securing a newly obtained order from being harmed. With notable exceptions, agents, forces, and objects within a system lean towards the establishment of a new state if for no other purpose than their own protection and longevity. Systems thus exhibit a tendency towards creating a relatively stable and harmonious equilibrium following a massive shift (though, it must be noted, an inherent feature of this equilibrium is that it is always open to radical change). This equilibrium is not teleological in the sense of being the only or the primary goal towards which the system—or the different beings in the system—aim, but because peoples' desire for change is often accompanied by a pursuit for ways to preserve that change when it arrives, it is often the result. The catalytic change of revolutions is often brought to a halt by the very people and the very forces that brought it about. This is what was meant earlier when I said that revolution leads to the state just as the state leads to revolution. Only in this way will the goals of a revolution be preserved for a substantial length of time.

This provides us with the solution to the second problem of question two: novelty is followed by a period of provisional orders until the system itself reaches another point of equilibrium. If revolutionaries want to reach their goals, ensuring that this equilibrium is to their liking is as vital a task as instigating the revolution in the first place. The creation of lasting change requires that the equilibrium reached is not equivalent to the one preceding the revolution. This also enables us to solve problem three and provide a new definition of revolution that escapes the problems of others. In light of everything so far, I define revolution as “an unpredictable disruption of a state (understood as a complex, dynamic system) which instigates a catalytic change throughout capable of changing anything within and that, of necessity, rewrites the archetype of the state.”

We have now reached the fourth and final question: what is the relationship of revolution to the state? Because revolution does not come from outside the state and is not assembled upon permanent foundations, the answer must be that each revolution builds a unique relationship to the state. As I mentioned earlier, another way of putting this is the state-revolution relationship is idiographic (that is, related to or descriptive of single and unique facts and processes) and not rule-based. This seems to be a necessary outcome of saying revolutions are incommensurable, unpredictable, indiscernible, and expressions of radical change, as any formality given them would take away from these characteristics. Several people have noted that idiographic studies are valuable for providing explanatory knowledge and discovering independent variables, even if they do not have the same predictive power of nomological generated knowledge.<sup>618</sup> It is also important to note that idiographic explanations provide understandings of phenomena by investigating them in their uniqueness, and so are not just the handmaidens to nomological

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<sup>618</sup> For two examples, see Tsoukas, “The Validity of Idiographic Research Explanations” in *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no 4 (1989); and Barlow and Nock, “Why Can’t We be More Idiographic in our Research?” in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 4, no. 19 (2009).



knowledge. There is no one form that revolution has, for destabilization can occur in many ways. History displays great variety in the strategies, weapons, ideas, technologies, and programs revolutions have used to achieve their goals. For example, radicals have described their relationship to the state in many ways. Some say their movement will raze the entire state to the ground, some see themselves operating on the state as a surgeon operates on malignant growth, and some see their actions as the fulfillment of a promise the state made. The tactics used in revolutions are similarly variable. They range from spectacular shows of nonviolent resistance to hidden guerilla warfare. The specific path of each individual revolution is tailored to the precise nature of that state. No domain names the area within the state to which revolution applies, and no one model captures every relationship between revolution and the state. For those who emphasize the importance of revolutionary fidelity this discovery should bring pause, for it indicates that there is always an element of presumption that accompanies any revolutionary act (namely, that the alternative system they are proposing will be sustainable and consistent). Because this is impossible to know in advance, revolutionaries must be critical and thoughtful with regard to their propositions. An unthinking and dogmatic revolutionary can be as dangerous in the long term as an unthinking and dogmatic statist.

Revolutions can be described after they happen (though only from the perspective of the state, not absolutely), and the strategies that worked in one place might have currency in another, but no form holds forever. Understood through this lens, the eventual theories of Kuhn, Badiou, Foucault, and others are best thought of as strategies which help undermine states. They recast the state in a new light and produce projects that undermine the state's institutions of repression, but they cannot perpetually model how things work. This point is in part meant as a critique of Badiou's truth-procedures, which do a lot of work in justifying how the tactic of militancy can be

used to undermine the state. Inasmuch as revolutions often require a great deal of trust, faith, and organizing capacity among revolutionaries, Badiou's idea is an important conceptual tool. But the thing which Badiou claims is external to the state and which justifies his theory, the generic procedures that summon the void into being, are not external to the state but merely another level of the state (they are part of Badiou's proto-state). For this reason a transformation of the state has the potential to change the nature and effectiveness of Badiou's truth-procedure model. When a state changes the theories of evental theorists may not serve the same function. The pieces of the state that evental theorists posit should be seen as devices for the purpose of undermining the state rather than as ontological facts.

Some of the ways the state-revolution relationship has been modeled will be studied in Chapter 5, where I will discuss the practical value of Dynamic Anarchism by comparing it to several revolutionary movements. For now, it is enough to close question four, and this chapter, with the assertion that, by making the state wholly changeable and liberating revolution from it, we also ensure that the two have no definitive relationship. This being the case, it is important for revolutionaries to stay vigilant so as to prevent the state they are opposing from reasserting itself unexpectedly. It may be necessary for them to change their tactics in order to preserve their goals. Revolutionaries must think through the lens of dynamic systems so that they can see the ripple effects their own and other people's actions have, and respond in the most effective way. Militancy must be combined with an openness to change to achieve the best results. Perhaps by thinking about revolution in these terms, revolutionaries will be more cautious about holding too firmly to any particular ground, and less susceptible to repeating the state they just left behind.

# Changing the World, No Matter the Cost: The Practice of Revolution

## **The Wisdom of Revolt**

Common sense says nothing is more foolhardy than becoming a revolutionary. It is illegal, immoral, dangerous, and pointless. Moreover, it disrespects society, for why wouldn't someone who cares about its betterment not submit their suggestions for approval? What arrogance that unelected militants claim to know how to best organize others' lives. Every revolutionary, including those now internationally praised as freedom fighters, faces such accusations. The criteria separating a hero from a war criminal is not as stark as is pretended. States prosecute the same actions that created them, claiming that laudable actions can be distinguished from criminal by the campaign they support. But the liberated revolution does not accept the state's judgment regarding which causes are legitimate. No dictates determine its method, and no formulas can say when it is lawful to rebel. In exchange for its inability to provide a detailed revolutionary program the liberated revolution is capable of imagining many possibilities, though in order for this theory to be preferable to those built on a state we must solve two problems. First, how do we make Dynamic Anarchism useful for revolutionaries? Despite its intellectual value it is functionally useless outside the academy unless it can aid activists. Second, is it possible for Dynamic Anarchism to ward off dangerous revolutions? If Dynamic Anarchism cannot circumnavigate bloody revolutions that produce more disastrous states than the ones overthrown, it may be preferable—even if inauthentic—to stick with a theory of revolution tethered to a state. The purpose of this chapter is to answer these questions by showing that Dynamic Anarchism is not just a curiosity for the intellectual archive, but a

powerful weapon for the disenfranchised. Opposing the conventional wisdom, I intend to show that becoming revolutionary is one of the most meaningful actions a person can take.

My previous investigations of revolution focused on what a revolution is and its relationship to the state. But for people ‘on the ground’ the biggest question is not “what is revolution?” but “what should we do?” Now that we have an ontology of revolution, it will be instructive to see what it has to say about strategies and tactics, both in the sense of developing practical heuristics for activists and in the sense of engaging the corpus of what has already been said. For that reason, the final inquiry this project will take up is the question of how one should strategize for revolution. Which approaches are the most effective, and what signs indicate success? To the extent that this constitutes a separate field of study, I call it revolutionary pragmatics to indicate that it is focused on the practical side of revolution. As a way of drawing out the implications of Dynamic Anarchism for the practice of revolution, I will contrast it with three distinct schools of thought within revolutionary pragmatics: the manner of attack used in the American and French revolutions, guerrilla warfare, and American black radicalism. For each school of thought, I will cover some of its principal tactics, the different ways these tactics have been interpreted, and the contexts in which they have been applied. The term “strategy” will be used to indicate the larger plan or method being used to achieve the goal of revolution, and the term “tactic” will be used to indicate the specific practices or exercises employed by the strategy. With respect to the American and French Revolutions, I will discuss the revolutionaries’ usage of declarations, pamphlets, battlefields, and courtrooms. Next I will analyze guerrilla warfare’s emphasis on community support, isolated groups, spectacular displays, constant yet low-intensity engagement with the enemy, and propaganda. Finally, I will go into the different ways black radicals have advocated for the organizing of the black

population, the strategic (as opposed to wholesale) undermining of the system, and the practice of autobiography. Following my discussion of each school's tactics I will look at each school from the vantage of Dynamic Anarchism, pointing out lessons that can be drawn from each school and discussing any critiques that Dynamic Anarchism would make. The purpose of this is to develop a flexible yet useful approach to the issue of transforming states which can serve revolutionaries in a variety of contexts. My claim is that the fomenting of revolution requires a comprehensive and integrated approach to systems focused on pushing them to their limits, while the building of a new state requires thinking creatively about one's end goals while being mindful of how to intervene most effectively.

### **Declaring Freedom: Pamphlets, Armies, and the Uprooting of Monarchical Power**

As two of the first well-documented revolutions of the modern era, the American and French Revolutions represent two initial attempts to create radical change. The idea of overthrowing a monarch and establishing a new state being relatively new, the question of how to be successful was both profound and difficult to answer. Revolutionaries did not simply make use of the gun or guillotine, but developed semiotic, rhetorical, and judicial weapons as well. The French and American revolutions illustrate a number of important points about what it takes to carry out a successful revolution, not the least of which is how to catalyze radical change. Nevertheless, as I will show, the revolutionaries used their tactics programmatically and without a complete awareness of the potential of systems to transform.

Because this chapter is about tactics and strategies, the question of purpose is not intrinsic to its point. Still, it is useful to spend a moment on the grievances which sparked the American and French Revolutions since they influenced the tactics used. Both American and French

revolutionaries held that the sovereign violated the social contract by infringing on the natural liberties of citizens. They argued that the application of monarchical power was arbitrary, damaged the common good, and did not allow input from the people. In particular, Americans claimed that King George III “deprived [them]...of the benefits of trial by jury”, “dissolved representative houses repeatedly”, “obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers,” and instituted taxes that the colonists had no say in.<sup>619</sup> The French, in their *Cahiers* of 1789, called for freedom of the press, a uniform application of taxes that did not exempt anyone, and regular meetings of the Estates General to discuss important issues relating to the welfare of the nation.<sup>620</sup> Early on there was a demand for the abolition of feudalism, including the elimination of public titles and local differences in the law, so that everyone would appear equal under the law.<sup>621</sup> Revolutionaries wanted everyone who was counted as a subject by the law to have a say in the constitution and maintenance of the sovereign power.

Though popular images connected with both revolutions depict people rioting in streets and fighting in fields, each revolution began long before any shots were fired. Revolutionary fervor was first rallied through the dissemination of pamphlets outlining positions contra the monarch. Pamphlets spread the message of revolution by uniting people in disparate areas under a common ideology. The most well-known pamphlet from the American Revolution, Tom Paine’s *Common Sense*, has been lauded as “the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire revolutionary era,”<sup>622</sup> though it was supplemented by many others, including James Otis’

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<sup>619</sup> “Declaration of Independence” in *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution 1764-1788 and the Formation of the Federal Constitution*, ed. S.E. Morison (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1961), 158-9.

<sup>620</sup> James Robinson, “The Cahiers of 1789” in *Readings in European History, Volume 2*, ed. James Robinson, (Boston; Ginn and Company, 1906), 398-9.

<sup>621</sup> Feudalism was finally abolished by the National Assembly in August of 1789 (James Robinson, “The Decree Abolishing the Feudal System” in *Readings in European History, Volume 2*, 404)

<sup>622</sup> Wood, Gordon S. (2002), *The American Revolution: A History*, New York: Modern Library, 55.

*Rights of the British Colonies* and Stephen Johnson's *Some Important Observations*. These pamphlets all make similar claims about concepts like liberty and rights, but their significance comes from their being widely distributed and written with that fact in mind. They are not dispassionate academic exercises but rabble-rousing treatises. They contain rhetorical flourishes highlighting the populace's grievances and passages meant to kindle peoples' desire for revolt. Paine says that "the sun never shined on a cause of greater worth"<sup>623</sup> than the American Revolution, while James Otis inveighs that "if a man is not his *own assessor*" then "his liberty is gone or lays entirely at the mercy of others."<sup>624</sup> The French Revolution's pamphlets also transmitted revolutionary ideas throughout the country using rhetoric and persuasion. While some pamphlets, like the *Cahiers de Doléances*, did not call for revolution, they did help form the revolutionary agenda people organized around. Others, like Sieyes' *What is the Third Estate*, became the rallying cry for the revolution. The wide dissemination of pamphlets was key to their success, as it enabled the ideology of revolution to permeate society. It was just as important that the pamphlets' ideas be available everywhere as it was that they have a convincing message, as it gave the impression that the desire for revolution was not just the agitation of a few insurgents, but reflected the broad feeling of a majority of the population. Paine's pamphlet, which had an initial printing of 1,000 copies, eventually sold about 150,000 copies<sup>625</sup> throughout the colonies and later on made it to Europe and Latin America. Even for those who couldn't read the text, the ideas contained in it were passed along verbally.<sup>626</sup> This is important because it shows that the ideas of *Common Sense* were by themselves not what made

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<sup>623</sup> Tom Paine, *Common Sense*, <http://www.bartleby.com/133/3.html>

<sup>624</sup> James Otis "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved" in David Burg, *The American Revolution* (Facts on File: New York, 2007), 44.

<sup>625</sup> Eric Foner; *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* [New York; Oxford University Press, 1976], 79.

<sup>626</sup> Alfred Aldridge, *Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine* [London; The Cresset Press, 1959], 43..

the pamphlet important, as to some degree those ideas were already present in the colonies.<sup>627</sup> It was the way the pamphlet was able to spread. Similarly, many of the *Cahiers* in France were published in order to lend influence and credence to the demands they contained.<sup>628</sup> Through their rhetoric and their pervasiveness, these pamphlets persuaded people to renegotiate their relationship to the monarch, moving the populace in a more revolutionary direction.

Pamphlets from this time made great use of the declaration, which as a tactic is a powerful way of moving the state towards revolt. Both the American and French revolutionaries are known for candidly stating what powers the king possesses and which belong to the people, such as in the “Declaration of Independence” and the “Declaration of the Rights of Man”. By doing this revolutionary groups claim the right to represent the people, whom they say deserve a voice in policy discussions regarding taxation and the use of public resources. For instance, the National Assembly in France first ran afoul of King Louis XVI by issuing statements that abrogated to themselves duties traditionally handled by the monarch.<sup>629</sup> Louis allowed some but refused others, leading to a confrontation between the National Assembly and the monarchy. Similarly, the American Revolution was encouraged by pamphlets published in response to laws like the Stamp Act, Sugar Act, and Currency Act (which demanded that colonists pay for the protection of the colonies with extra taxes). Objections made by colonial politicians were circulated in pamphlets demanding the King respect the rights of the colonists. The “Declaration of Rights and Grievances,” published by the First Congress of the American Colonies in 1765, opposed the actions of the crown with a formal declaration that for all Englishmen, “no taxes should be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>628</sup> Shapiro and Markoff, *Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers de Doleances* [Stanford University Press; Stanford, 1998], 131.

<sup>629</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, trans. Elizabeth Moss Evanson (Routledge; London, 1962), 108.



representatives”<sup>630</sup> and that every man has the right to choose who represents them. Claims about what rights and responsibilities men possess are not argued for in these documents; rather, they act as the premises that ground conclusions about the actions or policies the populace should support (such as revolution or constitutional monarchy). The declaration, then, is not meant to convince people of the nature of man—it provides an alternative foundation for the state. Whereas the monarch claims that all agency within the state comes from her or him, the declaration provides a semiotic assault on this idea by claiming that agency derives from human nature. The declaration was a form of illocutionary attack preceding the physical violence that followed.

Both the American and French revolutions reached points where semantics and public posturing were not sufficient to express all the built up animus. Fury over the powers claimed by the sovereign or the liberties the masses exercised led to violent confrontations. Due to the centralization of power in France and the decentralization of it in the colonies, many of the physical conflicts of the American Revolution took place on battlefields and near remote garrisons while those of the French Revolution took place in city streets and royalist buildings (like the Bastille). In addition, the American Revolution was not as concerned with class divisions as the French. But both the monarch and loyalist forces fought against revolutionary groups, and the weapons included guns, cannons, rocks, and swords (though the French Revolution, unlike the American, did not have a maritime theatre). Revolutionaries did not hide their allegiance but publically identified the side they were on.<sup>631</sup> The targets were sites from where the monarch’s authority was exercised, as the goal was to inhibit the other side’s capacity for action. Only when this was accomplished would it be possible for a new government to

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<sup>630</sup> “Declaration of Rights and Grievances”, accessed at [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Declaration\\_of\\_Rights\\_and\\_Grievances](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Declaration_of_Rights_and_Grievances)

<sup>631</sup> With a few exceptions, such as the spies employed during the revolutions.

form. It is clear that causing carnage was not a major tactic of revolutionaries, as when someone was killed it was because they had become symbols of monarchical power. King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette did not die because of who they were, or because slaughter itself held any intrinsic benefit, but because of the position they occupied. They were living embodiments of monarchical power, and for this reason needed to be overthrown. As Robespierre wrote, the riot that deposed the king “was the entire people [exercising] its rights” as “friends of liberty,”<sup>632</sup> for the ideals of liberty and republicanism cannot coexist with that of royalty.<sup>633</sup> This idea of going after sites from where monarchical power is exercised is also why in both revolutions there were campaigns aimed at removing from power loyalists and those who sympathized with the monarch. In the American Revolution, loyalists were removed from places of power<sup>634</sup> and in some cases had their property confiscated.<sup>635</sup> And during the revolution, when loyalists formed militias that fought alongside the British, they were isolated from the social life of the colonies. Members of the French Revolution, once they had control of the state, used the courtroom as a device to excise loyalist elements from the population, sending approximately 2,600 people to jail or the guillotine during the Reign of Terror.<sup>636</sup> Though in many cases those who were ostracized or executed were not guilty of any crime, the claim was that sites from which monarchical power could reassert itself needed to be removed from society.

The tactics of the American and French revolutions illustrate several important points about conducting a successful revolution. As I mentioned in the last chapter, the point of a revolution is to use the movements of the state to create a massive change that calls into question

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<sup>632</sup> Robespierre, “An idealized view of the *journee* of 10 August: Robespierre’s account in *Le Defenseur du peuple*” in *The French Revolution Sourcebook*, ed. John Hardman (Arnold; London, 1981), 147.

<sup>633</sup> Robespierre, “Undated Memorandum of Robespierre, June 1793” in Hardman, 163.

<sup>634</sup> Wood, *The American Revolution*, 114.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>636</sup> Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, 237.

the state's archetype. Instead of referring to the outside of the state, you refer to the inherent instability of it, or its constant evolution and transformation. What the American and French revolutions did that was so effective was to build *fields* capable of changing the processes that produce the state. By *fields* I am referring to zones where new, disruptive operations can be performed. I use the term fields rather than "spaces" to indicate that these fields are always characterized by a process, operation, or idea and not just empty voids. They are fields because there is a locus that orients them which, if it countervails the state, can be revolutionary. Fields are not separate from the state, but they do represent a different level or separate segment of the state (though as all fields are contingent, they are not permanently separate). In these segments, movements that have traditionally reproduced the system are altered in such a way as to create the potential for a catalytic change. Fields take the processes of the state that authorize change and reinvent them. Doing so causes small shifts within the system that can build on each other, hopefully leading to a large enough movement that the archetype of the state becomes unsustainable. Put in colloquial terms, revolutionaries need to construct a space within the state where they can begin to conduct revolutionary actions. This is what Tom Paine, Sieyes, and other pamphleteers were doing by writing and distributing their work. They were altering networks and pathways within the state to make them more amenable to the idea of revolution, turning public places into radical spaces and certain ideas into forms of dissent. The spreading of the pamphlets led to the formation of new relationships, many discussions about revolution, and the modification of how the idea of revolution was viewed by colonists or the French people. At no point did they leave the state, but they did use its interconnectedness and systematicity to change how it functioned. The first step in many revolutions is the creation of these fields (which need not be physical—they can be ideological, emotional, or virtual as well), and the way

to do it is by finding a way to use the avenues already provided by the state to build dissent into the operation of the state.

The next aspect of revolutions that the American and French revolutions illuminate is the importance of using the state to create a *point of disruption*. While predicting the point of disruption is near impossible given all the factors that go into the state and the difficulty of modeling how they all interact, revolutionaries should push forth in trying to manufacture one. The point of disruption is the place and time where the changes that go into constructing a state are reversed, and become undermining instead. Given the diversity of revolutions, the point of disruption is not always a brief moment in time or a small physical location, as sometimes revolutions take place gradually over a long period of time and across great distances. The best way to produce this point is to create crises that put the state in conflict with itself. Since there is no way to think or act from beyond the state, the uprooting of the state must come from within. In both the American and French revolutions the justifiability of self-determination was put into conflict with the needs of the monarch. Prior to the revolutions, it was not that self-determination did not exist, but that it wasn't enshrined in the state's foundations. Both the British and French monarchs allowed their subjects a significant degree of autonomy; the only caveat was that the sovereign could, if they chose, intervene in a subject's life. While at times Kings George and Louis XVI made arbitrary and authoritarian decisions, for the most part the colonists and French people controlled their lives and business. The liberties that were being fought for in the revolutions were in many cases already respected in practice and were not of great concern to the King. The reason for the revolution was not to gain self-determination, but to inscribe it into the archetype of the state. Agitating for this goal led George and Louis XVI to expend greater amounts of energy to preserve their rule. The moment of crisis was brought

about by practices furnished by the state which forced the state to work harder for its goals until, between the agitation of the rebels and the overreach by the sovereign, the state as it was constituted became unsustainable.

The problem with both the American and French revolutions has to do with the programmatic way in which they pursued their ends. Though the revolutions made important strides forward in considering how to constitute the sovereign in a more natural and fluid way, they clung to practices taken from the state in conducting their revolution. Although it is impossible to avoid taking practices from the state, there is a danger when you arrange your revolution around those practices, rather than pushing them to their limits, that the possibilities of your revolution will be inhibited. The revolutionaries did not see courtrooms, declarations, centrally organized armies, and their other tactics as contingently useful for undermining the state, but as the proper program for conducting a revolution. Their revolutions were hamstrung by the fact that they conceived of certain forms (such as the sovereign, the law, and the public good) as being at the heart of proper governance. When their revolutions reached a place where new foundations could be produced, they ended up repeating a number of the authoritarian structures and elitisms that should have been undermined (the US continued slavery despite its hypocrisy, recognized by numerous people at the time, when contrasted with the statement “all men are created equal”). Their adherence to a programmatic revolution also meant that the system they returned re-calcified the networks and processes within the state. Revolutionaries on both sides of the Atlantic, because of the way they approached their revolutions, were incapable of seeing the importance of a transformative, evolvable, and sustainable system, meaning that the same hostility to change that the revolutionaries criticized George and Louis XVI for would be present within their own systems as well. French and American history bear witness to this fact,

as the French government has changed its constitution five times, while the Americans have been amending theirs for centuries. And in many cases, when such changes are proposed, they are strongly opposed by entrenched elites and representatives of the sovereign power. A successful revolution must avoid dogmatism yet stay militant to achieve its goal.

### **Invisible Fighters and the Spectacle of Violence**

The flexible strategy of guerrilla warfare stands in stark contrast to the programmatic revolutions in America and France. Guerrillas must be decentralized and mobile while still obeying a formal hierarchy. Rather than approach revolution with an idea of how it should occur, the texts of guerrilla warfare say resistance must be adaptable to particular conditions. Che Guevara's initial definition of the strategy in the treatise *Guerrilla Warfare* emphasizes that this manner of fighting has "diverse characteristics" and "different facets". While admitting that there are rules to which guerrilla warfare is beholden, Guevara emphasizes that "geographical and social conditions in each country determine the mode and particular forms that guerrilla warfare will take."<sup>637</sup> Revolutions that use guerrilla warfare are historically anticolonial struggles, and take place in countries that have been exploited to such an extent that the population is incapable of mustering an army that is in any way equivalent to the state's. While to some extent all revolutions are asymmetric (as no revolutionaries start out with all the privileges of the state), guerrilla warfare is used primarily when the inequality is so large that it cannot be adjusted for within the bounds of conventional warfare. Still, it is wrong to think of guerrilla revolutionaries as resourceless underdogs who win solely by grit, courage, and luck. Guerrilla revolutionaries cultivate other resources, and their tactics ultimately derive not from their lack of resources, but from the presence of unconventional resources. Guerrillas wage a

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<sup>637</sup> Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, ed. Loveman and Davies (SR Books; Wilmington, 1997), 51.

war of attrition, fighting slowly but continuously until the state can no longer hold the ground it once relied on. They insist that both flexibility and a vigorous militancy is required for success. Yet it is worth questioning whether their militancy is misplaced, and if their behavior at times harms the people they are trying to protect.

One of the resources that guerrillas have which makes them a potent force is the support of the local community. Because they don't wear identifying marks and operate at unusual hours, successful guerrillas are able to blend in with the population, and as long as the population believes in the guerrillas' cause they will supply the guerrillas with food, shelter, cover, weapons, and more. Nelson Mandela writes that the support of the community was vital for the work of the African National Congress (ANC)<sup>638</sup> and that, as a fugitive, he worked primarily in the night and slept in other peoples' flats.<sup>639</sup> Several times he escaped capture solely because a black policeman sympathetic with the cause of independence refused to bring him in. Mandela concludes "Black policemen have often been severely criticized during the struggle, but many have played covert roles that have been extremely valuable."<sup>640</sup> The state is aware of this resource, though from its perspective guerrillas are making deceitful and disingenuous appeals to the population. Major John Pustay of the United States Air Force says that guerrillas are able to harness nationalism, promote reform, organize the discontented by using "character assassination," "psychological warfare," the "covert sponsoring of parties in opposition," and the enlistment of "government officials to serve secretly the revolutionary movement."<sup>641</sup> Accordingly, one of the ways the state can respond is to resettle the population to areas uninhabited by guerrillas, thus "denying [the guerrillas] important sources of logistics and

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<sup>638</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, (Little, Brown, and Company; Boston, 1994), 147.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>641</sup> John Pustay *Counterinsurgency warfare*, (Free Press, New York, 1965), 57.

intelligence support.”<sup>642</sup> An excellent example of this is the USA’s Phoenix program instituted in South Vietnam between 1965 and 1972. Carried out by the CIA with the support of South Vietnam, the program aimed to destroy the political infrastructure of the Viet Cong through the “neutralization” of as many suspected Viet Cong as possible. Neutralization consisted of capture, interrogation, resettlement, and, in some cases, torture and killing. Though it is unknown how many Viet Cong were neutralized through Phoenix, estimates vary from 25,000 to 80,000 individuals.<sup>643</sup> This technique was also used in China in the 1930s and in the Philippines in the 1950s. David Petraeus recommends that the population of the colonizing country be mobilized early to support the army’s mission abroad, thus forestalling any significant anti-war protests.<sup>644</sup> In the theatre of guerrilla warfare, local communities are the first site of struggle.

Because of this community support guerrillas are able to use another one of their primary tactics: decentralized, disparate groups. When guerrillas can rely on the locals they do not need to worry as much about setting up defenses, developing supply lines, and protecting captured land. They can live hidden, their location protected, until it is time to strike. After the strike, they can just as easily disappear into the social milieu. Mao Zedong says a guerrilla force will fail “if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and their sympathy, co-operation, and assistance cannot be gained,”<sup>645</sup> while Carlos Marighella claims a guerrilla “must know how to live among the people, and he must be careful not to appear strange

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>643</sup> For two sources on the Phoenix program, see Colonel Andrew R. Finlayson, “A Retrospective on Counterinsurgency Operations” retrieved from [www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol51no2/a-retrospective-on-counterinsurgency-operations.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol51no2/a-retrospective-on-counterinsurgency-operations.html) on July 2014; and the CIA’s 1968 declassified document “Phoenix Fact Sheet,” retrieved from [nsarchive.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/phoenix.pdf](http://nsarchive.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/phoenix.pdf) on July 2014.

<sup>644</sup> David Petraeus, *The American Military and the Lessons of Vietnam: A Study of Military Influence and the Use of Force in the Post-Vietnam Era*, dissertation submitted to Princeton University, (UMI; Ann Arbor, 1987) 130.

<sup>645</sup> Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, “What is Guerrilla Warfare” [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On\\_Guerrilla\\_Warfare/What\\_Is\\_Guerrilla\\_Warfare%3F](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On_Guerrilla_Warfare/What_Is_Guerrilla_Warfare%3F).



and different.”<sup>646</sup> Because the forces guerrillas have traditionally fought are more privileged, making direct and open confrontation futile (i.e. the state’s control is so complete that it is impossible to rally any sort of collective resistance), the best approach is to organize groups so that they can carry out their work without having to consult a centralized planner for every action. Though the general goals of the resistance are known by all, groups are given independence within the borders of their area as to how to achieve those goals, and information about specific tactics and how to carry them out is shared. Hoang Van Thai’s manual for Vietnamese guerrillas claims that once peasants are recruited to the cause, they should not join an army but “stick to the people and to their locality, forming the core of the guerrilla forces in the villages.”<sup>647</sup> The goal is not to destroy the enemy quickly and thoroughly, but to “exhaust him on a large scale” by striving to “annihilate enemy forces in small operations.” This goal will only be achieved through “initiative of action,” “flexibility,” “secrecy,” and “surprise.”<sup>648</sup> Though this flexibility allows “the guerrilla fighter [to invent] his own tactics at every minute of the fight,”<sup>649</sup> the decentralization of guerrilla bands does not imply a lack of order. Guerrilla bands have strong hierarchies<sup>650</sup>, but the commands issued from the top are open enough to allow for innovation by the fighters.

Even though guerrillas prize obscurity for most of their actions, the public audience is an important part of their overall strategy. Guerrilla bands need anonymity so they can organize and move effectively, but because their purpose is fundamentally political they must at times attract attention with spectacles. This is important for countering the ubiquity of the state, which

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<sup>646</sup> Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, “How the Urban Guerrilla lives”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marighella-carlos/1969/06/minimanual-urban-guerrilla/ch03.htm>

<sup>647</sup> Hoang Van Thai, “Some Aspects of Guerrilla Warfare in Vietnam” in *Strategy for Conquest: Communist Documents on Guerrilla Warfare* ed. Jay Mallin (Coral Gables; University of Miami Press, 1970), 245.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>649</sup> Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 59-60.

<sup>650</sup> see *Ibid.*, 125-6 and Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (the chapter on organization of guerrilla fighters) for examples

through its various functionaries and institutions can give the impression that its power is absolute. One of guerrilla warfare's goals is to interrupt the solidity of the state with highly visible displays of violence, and to show the people and enemy soldiers that the state is not impervious to harm. These can involve sabotage, destruction of property, executions, even terrorism. Guerrilla fighters justify violence by saying that it is a reasonable response to the violence committed by the state. Yet they caution against its misuse, for attacking the wrong targets and endangering innocent lives jeopardizes the good will of the communities they rely on. Mandela narrates how the state's "ruthlessness and lawlessness" led him to advocate violence, concluding "for me, nonviolence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there is no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon."<sup>651</sup> But upon the organization of a militant wing of the ANC (the "Spear of the Nation"), it was decided that sabotage (of power plants, telephone lines, and transportation links) should be the principle tactic and loss of life should be strictly avoided.<sup>652</sup> Che Guevara claims that sabotage targets should be chosen for how effectively they paralyze society. For him, it is pointless to attack a soft-drink company because "a certain number of workers are put out of a job but nothing is done to modify the rhythm of industrial life," yet it's perfectly justified to attack a power plant because, though workers will be displaced, it leads to "the paralysis of the life of the region."<sup>653</sup> Guevara goes further than Mandela, claiming that loss of life is acceptable if "it is used to put to death some noted leader of the oppressing forces well known for his cruelty, his efficiency in repression, or other quality that makes his elimination useful."<sup>654</sup> While sabotage and executions are valuable for guerrilla warfare inasmuch as they destroy the enemy's capacities, they also instill fear in the elites being

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<sup>651</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk*, 136-7.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>653</sup> Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 61.

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

targeted<sup>655</sup>, and for this reason are not just military acts but messages to the population at large.<sup>656</sup> This game of ‘message sending’ is a hallmark of guerrilla warfare, for, as noted above, the population is an important point of struggle. However, the message being sent is not always positive. Intimidation is a much larger weapon in guerrilla warfare than it ever was in the conventional revolutions of the US and France, and not just for the guerrillas. Pustay’s counterinsurgency manual recommends the state “mete out stringent but legally appropriate punishment to villagers found to be harboring insurgents or supplying them with food or other contraband,”<sup>657</sup> while guerrillas—through military operations and psychological warfare—should be made to believe they face “inevitable defeat” and “that unless they surrender nothing awaits them but death.”<sup>658</sup> This is why, in so many of the US’s military interventions during the latter half of the twentieth century, a key tactical component has been to coerce the population with “displays of American military power”<sup>659</sup> that demonstrate the US’s willingness to use force to defend their interests. As Petraeus documents, this tactic was used in Korea in 1976<sup>660</sup>, Lebanon and Grenada in 1983<sup>661</sup>, and Nicaragua in 1986.<sup>662</sup>

The highly visible, punctuated violence of sabotage and terrorism must be contrasted with the other form of attack guerrilla’s employ: the constant engagement with the state’s forces. In addition to causing massive public displays of violence, guerrillas regularly attack enemy forces with guns to create a constant yet restrained stream of violence. The point of such

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>656</sup> Carlos Marighella, “From the ‘minimanual’” in *The Guerrilla Reader* (Temple University Press; Philadelphia, 1977), 227 and Alberto Bayo, “One Hundred Fifty Questions to a Guerrilla” in *Strategy for Conquest*, , 354-5.

<sup>657</sup> Pustay, *Counterinsurgency warfare*, 97.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>659</sup> Petraeus, *American Military*, 191.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.191, and 199.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid., 220.

exercises is not just to wear away at enemy forces, but to destroy morale.<sup>663</sup> Guerrillas “shoot and scoot,” attacking the enemy by surprise at potentially any moment of the day, inflicting maximal casualties, then fleeing before the enemy can mount an effective defense. Mao writes,

The movements of guerrilla troops must be secret and of supernatural rapidity; the enemy must be taken unaware, and the action entered speedily. There can be no procrastination in the execution of the plan; no assumption of a negative or passive defense; no great dispersion of forces in many local engagements. The basic method is the attack in a violent and deceptive form.<sup>664</sup>

Because guerrillas spend so much time running away, it is important for them to know the territory they are fighting in and to be able to move quickly over a variety of different terrains.<sup>665</sup> Fighters have to be innovative, accommodating, and capable of living for extensive periods of time with the bare necessities. Many guerrilla manuals emphasize the importance of being able to ‘live the militant life’; that is, being completely sure of the justness of your cause, willing to commit your body and soul to it, and prepared to sacrifice yourself for it. It may be necessary for you to give up your life to ensure that a bombing goes off as planned, or to slow the advance of the enemy so that the rest of the guerrillas get away, and guerrilla manuals emphasize that such fidelity is one way guerrillas can make up for the disadvantages they have compared to their enemy<sup>666</sup>. This sense of commitment, and of aligning your life with a higher purpose, is a resource that—like the support of the locals—can even out the disparity between the state and guerrillas. Like with the previous techniques, the state has recognized this resource and developed countermeasures to it. They recommend using small scale operations instead of large scale ones, and training troops to be adaptive and semi-autonomous.<sup>667</sup> However, because the

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<sup>663</sup> Bayo, “One Hundred Fifty”, 351.

<sup>664</sup> Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, “The Strategy Of Guerrilla Resistance Against Japan”, Wikisource

<sup>665</sup> Bayo, “One Hundred Fifty”, 347.

<sup>666</sup> See Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 56 and Vo Nguyen Giap “The Big Victory; The Great Task” in *Strategy for Conquest* 199.

<sup>667</sup> Pustay, *Counterinsurgency warfare*, 113-115.

state's army rarely consists of 'people taking a principled stance' but rather paid functionaries, they do not have an easy equivalent to the militant life.

Though all the actions of guerrillas carry messages for the enemy and the people, many of the tracts written about how to conduct guerrilla warfare emphasize the importance of setting up a propaganda industry. It is important that the message of the war—why it is occurring, what the guerrillas are doing to support it, and the benefits that already liberated areas have reaped—reach the population. In addition, the creation and dissemination of propaganda gives those lacking the constitution to fight yet sympathetic with the cause something to do.<sup>668</sup> Guerrillas are encouraged to use printing presses, radio towers, and even television stations to get their message out. The chief goal of propaganda is to convince the indifferent and confused of the virtue of the guerrilla's cause by raising awareness of the state's oppression. Guevara writes that “[Propaganda] ought to create a consciousness of the great national problems, besides offering sections of more lively interest for the reader.”<sup>669</sup> Guerrillas reject intentional dishonesty, but they do emphasize that the primary purpose of the news released by the propaganda machine is to promote the guerrilla's cause. The news gathering operation is to be controlled by the guerrilla band itself, without any firewall separating those involved with news gathering from those involved with advocacy.<sup>670</sup> And propagandists are encouraged to only report those facts which are sure to secure support for the cause or which are “directly related to the struggle for liberation.”<sup>671</sup> The implicit assumption is that propaganda must act as a countermeasure against the biased media of the state, which produces lies and distortions about the guerrilla band and their purpose (Pustay advocates the state create a “psychological-action program” for population

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<sup>668</sup> Bayo, “One Hundred Fifty”, 325.

<sup>669</sup> Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 121.

<sup>670</sup> Marighella, “Armed Propaganda” in the *Mini-manual*, see website above

<sup>671</sup> Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 121.

control, though he says it should be focused on “description of government achievements and future plans in socio-political reform and economic development”<sup>672</sup>). By making propaganda an integral part of their cause, the guerrillas are able to tie the dissemination of information into their militant lifestyles. Even those not actively involved in conflict can turn their everyday actions into weapons.

Just like the American and French revolutions, successful revolutions conducted via guerrilla warfare are able to create fields for dissident action and bring events to a point of disruption. But whereas the American and French revolutions were aimed at an immanent monarch (inasmuch as the revolutionaries identified with the same culture as the sovereign), guerrilla revolutions have been aimed either at an occupying foreign power or an oppressive government supported by one. Because of such differences guerrilla revolutions exemplify another important aspect of revolutionary praxis: the *radical*. A radical is an aberrant product of the state which acts as an agent in the production of disruptive effects. While not necessarily physical people (radicals can be ideas, groups, forces, etc), radicals always come out of a system that is becoming destabilized. This separates them from nihil and emergent properties (the two forms of anomaly referred to in chapter 4). Whereas anomalies like nihil and emergent properties can initiate the destabilization of a system, radicals are a product of such destabilizations which contribute—through aberrant behaviors—to the overthrow of the state. Radicals come from the catalytic change initiated by anomalies. States that are more dependent upon violence and oppressive practices (perhaps as a response to an anomalous uprising) are more likely to create radicals which, unless they are effectively removed from society (imprisoned, executed, or otherwise effectively eliminated), will act counter to the state’s interests. As products of the state, radicals are determined according to the projects of the state.

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<sup>672</sup> Pustay, *Counterinsurgency warfare*, 96-7.

What they are, and how they operate, is wholly a result of the state's output. Yet their output—that is, what they reflect back to the state, or how they take up and manipulate parts of the state—is antithetical to the reproduction of the state. This can be seen in the propaganda guerrillas advocate, which re-narrates events and facts to support revolution, and in their tactic of sabotage, which appropriates the state's transportation and energy infrastructure (among other things) and returns it as unusable. We can also see how the state's ideas become radical in Mao's treatment of the yin-yang and Mandela's deployment of the idea of democracy. In both cases, the ideas were originally used by the state as a way of ensuring its perpetuation, as the Kuomintang employed the yin-yang to encourage nationalist pride in China's Confucian tradition and South African elites utilized democracy to promote working within the legal system for political change. Yet Mao used the notion of yin and yang, and in particular its dialectical movement, to illustrate the importance of continual reform and revolution<sup>673</sup>, while at his 1959 trial Mandela suggested that civil disobedience could be used in the name of achieving democracy.<sup>674</sup> The militant life described by guerrillas should be read as their attempt to build radicality into their movement. By encouraging this lifestyle they can prevent radical behavior and thought from being stamped out or incorporated back into the processes that form the state.

The attempt by guerrillas to turn radicality into a movement brings up another aspect of revolution, which are the *ordering and disordering effects* that are present in every state. These effects are the products of the movement of the state, and in particular the interactions of the agents, objects, and processes found at any particular moment. *Ordering effects* are those which go towards the promotion of the state, while *disordering effects* are those which go towards its dissolution. Guerrilla manuals are full of ideas for how to create disordering effects, the most

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<sup>673</sup> Stuart Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung*, (University of Cambridge; Cambridge, 1989), 20.

<sup>674</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk*, 218.

important of which I have discussed above. Unlike the American and French revolutionaries, who adopted their revolutionary program wholesale from the state, guerrillas are encouraged to think creatively about how to disrupt the state and to be, in essence, bricoleurs of revolution. They are to use whatever means available, be it hillsides, nighttime, or abandoned weaponry, to push for the state's overthrow. They must be careful of the propensity for disordering effects to become an ordering effects (and vice versa), for any action can have either effect given the right context. Sabotage can end up promoting the state if it inconveniences too many people, while terrorism can repel sympathizers if it targets innocents in large numbers. Because every ordering and disordering effect is immanent to the state, the role they play is dependent upon the broader context of the state and its movements. Revolutionaries must be canny about deploying them even as they are militant in trying to bring the state to a moment of crisis.

It is this danger of hyper-militancy that has made guerrilla warfare risky, and at times harmful to the cause of revolution. Because it is conducted so much from the shadows, its methods are rarely subject to scrutiny. For instance, guerrilla groups in Laos who opposed the Communist forces of Southeast Asia trafficked in heroin, relying upon material support from the CIA.<sup>675</sup> Evidence of this, as well as numerous other crimes carried out by US supported militants, was hidden from the US Congress and the American people for years through manipulation of the news media.<sup>676</sup> And while revolutions never receive legitimacy or public approval prior to their existence (except, perhaps, in spirit), revolutionaries occasionally apply the exceptionality of their revolution to all their actions and, ultimately, to the government set up afterwards. Rather than making the principles of their revolution the foundation of the next state, these revolutionaries make themselves the foundation, becoming akin to a Hobbesian sovereign.

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<sup>675</sup> See Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, (Harper and Row; New York, 1972), 247-8.

<sup>676</sup> See Fred Branfman, "Presidential War in Laos, 1964-1970" in *Laos: War and Revolution* (Harper and Row; New York, 1970), 268.



In short, guerrilla warfare has a tendency to form a dogmatic or permanent vanguard. Such vanguards fail to take into account the interconnectedness and the movements of the system as a whole, focusing instead on their own band while protecting themselves with the claim that anything done in the name of the revolution is justified. Highly undemocratic and brutal policies are enacted by this self-appointed vanguard of the revolution, which often undermine the very principles of the revolution. Following his victory, Fidel Castro tasked Committees for the Defense of the Revolution with monitoring the population and reporting any signs of dissent, among other things. These committees have been responsible for numerous violations of human rights during their existence.<sup>677</sup> Similarly, Mao's Cultural Revolution led to the persecution of many dissidents and ethnic minorities in the name of preserving the legacy of the revolution.<sup>678</sup> Though such historical events are clearly not the result of one isolated factor, they could not have occurred without those in power claiming to be guarding the revolution and justifying their authoritarianism as an extension of the revolution's legacy. Such practices are a misuse of guerrilla warfare's tactics of invisibility and violence, which, while perhaps justified as a way of disordering the state and creating a point of disruption, cannot be justified as means of governance. Instead of being programmatic about its tactics (as the revolutionaries of the French and American revolutions were), guerrilla warfare is programmatic about how to be militant. It enshrines one specific approach towards the state as the paragon of revolution, and justifies its hold on power by claiming this approach is a necessary precondition to rule. Militancy for guerrilla warfare means being fixed, unchanging. It is not for them an evolving and fluid affair.

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<sup>677</sup> One good personal account that describes how these committees work can be found in Luis Garcia's *Child of the Revolution: Growing up in Castro's Cuba*, while Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been keeping track of the human rights violations committed in Cuba (see, for instance, HRW's "Cuba—A Way Forward")

<sup>678</sup> See *Mao's Last Revolution* by Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2005)

Guerrilla warriors who establish a vanguard in the state following their revolution end up conducting guerrilla warfare on their own population.

### **Solidarity, Autobiography, and the Protracted Revolution**

The third and final school of thought I will discuss is American black radicalism, which is itself composed of several different approaches. Like the approaches I have already discussed, Black radicalism has dealt with questions of dogmatic programs for revolution and the appropriate type of militancy to use. It has debated the efficacy of integration vs. separation, violence vs. nonviolence, and socialism vs. fundamentalism. What makes this debate important is that it strategizes how to achieve revolution against socio-cultural forces instead of particular governments. One reason there are so many different approaches advocated by black radicals is because their task is not as straightforward as toppling the elites running a particular political infrastructure and founding a new infrastructure afterwards. Because the problem stems from ingrained ideologies, dogmatic practices, and enormous yet sluggish institutions, it is not immediately clear which weapons to use and at whom to train them. Many of those standing in the way of progress are nevertheless people of good intent, while many of those you would hope to mobilize have been taught to see themselves as deserving of their subjugation. What makes black radicalism fall within the scope of this investigation, despite the fact that its primary goal is not the complete overthrow of a government, is that it calls for both the radical restructuring of the social and ideological order and for that change to be reflected in politics itself. Though there are strains of black thought that prescribe reform rather than revolution, I am focusing on those strains that insist that a massive change in the social order is needed. The shift demanded by black radicals within these latter strains is as substantial as that demanded by other schools of

revolutionary thought. So whereas other revolutionaries demand egalitarian policies, black radicals demand that egalitarian policies already in place be applied universally regardless of race. And while other revolutionaries target political or economic elites, black radicals target social or cultural elites and the racist forces that produce them. Because of this difference, the approach black radicals take is more malleable and adaptable than the tactics of the American and French Revolutions were and the tactics of guerrilla warfare are. This is necessarily the case because the forces they are fighting, which have real and brutal consequences, are more intangible, pervasive, and de-centered than are the enemies of those who have used these other strategies. Even though black radicalism is faced with this difficulty, several tactics are universally promoted throughout the corpus of black radical literature. I will go over each one individually, describing both the conventional features and goals of each tactic as well as their different interpretations. As I will show, black radicalism is significant because its singular obstacle has led it to develop unique ways of attacking the state.

Among the most pervasive tactics advocated by black radicals is that of solidarity. Though what that solidarity should consist of, and how it is to be brought about, is disputable, there is universal agreement that it is a precondition for black liberation. Blacks must communicate with each other and organize themselves into groups capable of responding effectively to threats. Such solidarity is more intimate than being added to an email listserve or joining the Rotary, as members of black radical groups often protect each other and encourage the development of personal connections within the black community, in some circumstances going so far as to operate with the same close-knit practices found in a military unit. At the end of his life Malcolm X emphasized the danger of factionalism, saying of black groups that “instead of them having any degree of coordination toward a common objective, usually they are

divided and spend a lot of time either being suspicious of each other,”<sup>679</sup> and highlighting the importance of blacks recognizing “their humanity, . . . their own worth, and . . . their heritage.”<sup>680</sup> The Black Panthers, in order to advance their agenda of—among other things—full education, security, and human rights for all blacks, organized themselves into the “Black Liberation Army,” complete with military titles, a weapons program, and mandatory education classes on first aid, politics, and revolutionary ideology.<sup>681</sup> The main point of contention when it comes to the question of solidarity refers to who to organize, as certain strands of black radical thought criticize the forming of alliances with whites or focusing on certain segments of the black population. In general, black thinkers fall into four camps: those who advocate a qualified unity with whites, those who focus on organizing blacks within the US, those who encourage unity among all blacks worldwide, and those who call for a flexible approach to coalition building. The reasons for these differences come from the possibilities and dangers that black radical thinkers see coming from the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups in the fight against racism.

Those who argue for a qualified support with whites argue that the best results will come when blacks and whites communicate with each other about the goals of society and take responsibility for enfranchising blacks. They do not want to reduce the difference between whites and blacks to nothing, but argue that independence requires whites and blacks to make common cause with each other. Booker T. Washington says as much in discussing how blacks can begin to show signs of civilization, saying “From every standpoint of interest it is the duty of the Negro himself, and the duty of the Southern white man as well as the white man in the North, to see that the Negro be helped forward as fast as possible towards the possession of these

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<sup>679</sup> Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks*, (Grove Press; New York, 1965) 206.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>681</sup> *An Introduction to the Black Panther Party*, accessed at <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/AmRad/introblackpanther.pdf> 21-23.

evidences of civilization.”<sup>682</sup> The early W.E.B Du Bois began his political program with the belief that whites were simply ignorant of their actions, and that by educating them it would be possible to get their support for policies improving the condition of blacks. Against the naiveté of whites Du Bois advocated “Truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color nor race determined the limits of a man’s capacity or desert,”<sup>683</sup> at which point it would be possible for both races to begin to address the problems afflicting blacks together. The call for racial harmony is criticized by black radicals of the other camps, who insist that nothing will be given blacks without a movement compelling whites to change, for it is not simply ignorance but prejudice, avarice, and privilege that entrench racial disparity. Frederick Douglass is well known for advocating such a struggle, saying “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”<sup>684</sup> Those who focus on the mobilization of blacks within the US believe that by militantly resisting the pressure to conform to white standards of behavior, blacks can overcome these other forces. Whites can be involved, but they cannot subordinate the interests of blacks to their own. While not opposed to working with those outside the US, those following this school of thought believe doing so is not as important as is organizing blacks directly affected by the ills of this country. The founding documents of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) have as their first aim the achievement of “full citizenship rights, equality, and the integration of the Negro in all aspects of American life,” and advocate focusing on organizing blacks in the south.<sup>685</sup> The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), though it identifies with “the African struggle as a concern for all mankind”, only organized

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<sup>682</sup> Booker T Washington, “The Negro and the Signs of Civilization” in *African American Political Thought: 1989-1930*, ed Cary Wintz (M.e. Sharpe, New York, 1996), 42.

<sup>683</sup> W.E.B Du Bois “My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom” in *What the Negro Wants*, ed. Rayford Logan (New York; Agathon Press, Inc, 1944), 49.

<sup>684</sup> ‘An address on West India Emancipation (3 August 1857), in *Frederick Douglass : Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip Foner (Lawrence Hill Books; Chicago, 1950) 367.

<sup>685</sup> “Constitution and Bylaws of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference” accessed at [http://www.crmvet.org/docs/sclc\\_const.pdf](http://www.crmvet.org/docs/sclc_const.pdf), 4-5.

students on campuses in the South and asked President Eisenhower to “lend the prestige of his office to the solution of the racial problem in this country.”<sup>686</sup> The implicit claim of this tactic is that it is simpler and more effective to control a local or nationally focused group than an international group. This is one reason why numerous individuals and organizations became upset when Martin Luther King Jr. began to speak out about the Vietnam War, as they felt that King, by engaging the problems of Southeast Asia, had diminished his utility to his cause.<sup>687</sup>

Opposing this argument is the claim that uniting blacks around the world actually increases one’s strength. Pan-Africanists like the later W.E.B. Du Bois, Back-to-Africa advocates like Marcus Garvey, and Black Power activists like the Black Panthers all call for the creation of an international body that can promote the interests of blacks. Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association “seeks to emancipate the Negro everywhere [as well as] a free and redeemed Africa,”<sup>688</sup> giving blacks safety and teaching them self-reliance.<sup>689</sup> Similarly, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, identify their movement with the building of a worldwide anti-colonial force<sup>690</sup>, and Fanon advocates for the unification of all colonized people to route colonial forces.<sup>691</sup> Given the significant numbers of blacks throughout the world, a unified struggle of all peoples of African descent is said to be more effective than fighting colonialism and racism independently in every country in which it exists. In addition, results will come quicker as more pressure can be brought

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<sup>686</sup> *Recommendations of the Finding and Recommendations Committee*, April, 1960. Youth Leadership Conference, Shaw College, Raleigh, NC. Accessed at [http://www.crmvet.org/docs/6004\\_shaw\\_recommendations.pdf](http://www.crmvet.org/docs/6004_shaw_recommendations.pdf). 2

<sup>687</sup> Washington Post editorial for “diminished” citation, Carl Rowan, “Martin Luther King’s Tragic Decision,” Reader’s Digest (September, 1967), 42 for ‘disloyal’ citation

<sup>688</sup> Marcus Garvey, “Address to the Second UNIA Convention, New York, August 31, 1921” in *African American Political Thought*, ed Cart Wintz (M.E. Sharpe; New York, 1996), 219.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>690</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (Vintage: New York, 1967), xi.

<sup>691</sup> Franz Fanon, “Letter to the Youth of Africa, in *Toward the African Revolution* trans. Haakon Chevalier (Monthly Review Press; New York, 1967), 118-119.

to bear with greater expediency.<sup>692</sup> Yet some claim even this tactic is limiting and dangerous. As any coalition excludes some and includes others, we must be careful about how we define our community. An overly rigid concept of blackness—even one which includes blacks worldwide—can entrench a certain concept of blackness while subordinating other concerns (such as gender and class discrimination) to this one conception. Without including a critique of black identity within the coalition building that one does, one risks perpetuating dangerous systems of power and alienating potential allies. For this reason, several contemporary black radicals emphasize an variable and plural approach to solidarity. Angela Davis says “it is important to recognize the various forms of agency with which identities can be and are constructed, in order not to get stuck in them,” concluding that “ideological affinity is not essential to coalition work” and that it is more important to work on issues and raise questions than focus on achieving purity within one’s coalition.<sup>693</sup> Manning Marable agrees, emphasizing that community itself is a site of struggle and that only through building partnerships across identities can we reach our goals.<sup>694</sup> This final approach concludes that the importance of solidarity comes more from the practice of it than who one unifies with. Because racism can change form, black radicals must vary their partners in order to respond to the new challenges it poses.

Another prominent tactic utilized by black radicals is planning a nuanced approach to the system of racist oppression. Lacking an obvious physical target and faced with a racism that pervades institutions, practices, and thoughts, black radicals expend great effort considering how to create a militant and effective resistance. What weak points within the system can be

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<sup>692</sup> LeRoi James, “The Last Days of the American Empire” in *Home: Social Essays*, (William Morrow and Co, Inc.; New York, 1966) 203.

<sup>693</sup> Angela Davis, “Coalition Building Among People of Color” in *The Angela Davis Reader* ed. Joy James (Blackwell Publishers; Malden, 1998) 300-301.

<sup>694</sup> Manning Marable, *Black Liberation in Conservative America* (South End Press; Boston, 1997), 9.

manipulated to cause a massive disruption? How can one avoid harming people of good faith who nevertheless act as stewards of the system? The three approaches generally prescribed by black radicals include directly engaging the system, building a separate system outside the current one, and using a mix of the first two (an inside-outside approach). The first approach, used by Washington, Du Bois, and the Civil Rights movement, can mean working within the avenues for change given by the state or it can mean applying force directly to the state. The former was one of Washington's chief tactics, and he was relentless in pushing for change using legal means. "If the law is disregarded when a Negro is concerned, it will soon be disregarded when a white man is concerned" he says, "and, besides, the rule of the mob destroys the friendly relations which should exist between the races..."<sup>695</sup> In addition to founding the Tuskegee Institute and encouraging black entrepreneurship, he also pressured Presidents Roosevelt and Taft to pass laws correcting unequal treatment of blacks.<sup>696</sup> Washington condemned all violations of the law, advocating that whites and blacks be tried and punished equally.<sup>697</sup> It is this last point that later black radicals advocating direct engagement with the system questioned. According to them, it is unjust to follow an unjust law, and if courts and politicians are unwilling to address the injustice then citizens have an obligation to disobey so as to bring attention to it. Much of this resistance was framed around the philosophy of nonviolence, especially in the period directly after World War II. Sit-ins compelled the desegregation of lunch counters, freedom rides drew attention to discrimination by bus lines, and freedom schools taught blacks skills neglected by the underfunded and racist educational system. For Bayard Rustin, nonviolence was vital as it was both "consistent with the ends [blacks] desire" and a "practical

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<sup>695</sup> Booker T Washington, "A Protest Against Lynching" in *African American Political Thought*, 53.

<sup>696</sup> See Booker T Washington, "Letter to President Theodore Roosevelt, December 26, 1904" and "Letter to William Howard Taft. June 4, 1908" in *African American Political Thought*, 58-9 and 64-6.

<sup>697</sup> Washington, "Protest against lynching", 53.



necessity”<sup>698</sup> given the forces arrayed against them. There is a trade-off inasmuch as nonviolence seems to take longer and open oneself to serious harm, but as Howard Zinn writes in his account of SNCC, “...to seek justice *at any cost* may result in bloodshed so great that its evil overshadows everything else and splatters the goal beyond all recognition. The problem is to weigh carefully the alternatives, so as to achieve the maximum of social progress with a minimum of pain.”<sup>699</sup> While some black radicals endorse violence in self-defense<sup>700</sup>, only rarely has it been advocated as a tactic with which to attack the system. Nat Turner’s 1831 rebellion is a notable exception to this, as is Jesse McDade’s defense of the ethics of revolution. As McDade says, “...if one moves against oppression he moves against other men. This is one of the antinomies of action, namely, that one cannot act for man without acting against men.”<sup>701</sup> Though she admits that it is preferable to avoid loss of life<sup>702</sup>, and that one’s means must be considered carefully<sup>703</sup>, violence and revolution are preferable to letting an unjust system stand.<sup>704</sup> The inviolable necessity of freedom, and the importance of having a system that recognizes it, justifies using violence in more than just self-defense.

For most of the twentieth century the primary alternative to direct engagement was the withdrawal approach, whereby blacks disengage entirely from the state and create their own. The principal line of argument in support of this is that blacks will never be able to achieve self-determination and freedom in a system constructed and run by whites. The oppressor never

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<sup>698</sup> Bayard Rustin, “The Negro and Nonviolence” in *The modern african american political thought reader*, ed. Angela Jones (Routledge; New York and London, 2013), 159.

<sup>699</sup> Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, (Beacon Press; Boston, 1964), 223.

<sup>700</sup> See for example Malcolm X, *By any Means Necessary* (Pathfinder Press; New York, 1970), 170 and Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 52-3. It should be noted that the definition of self-defense given by some with this stance is fairly broad, and includes not just being immediately under threat from someone holding a gun, but under threat from the police, court system, politicians, and more. Nevertheless, very few recommend physical violence unless their enemies use it first.

<sup>701</sup> Jesse McDade, “The Ethicality of Revolution”, in *Social Praxis* 1 (3) 1973, 295.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

willingly frees the oppressed, though at times the former may throw scraps towards the latter to assuage the ire. According to those advocating withdrawal, scraps is all working within the system gets you. True freedom will remain elusive until blacks take responsibility for their own security, their own community, and their own liberation. Only once that is achieved should blacks engage whites, at which point both sides can engage the other as equals. Marcus Garvey was one of the first to advocate this approach with his plan of getting all black Americans to return to Africa. From there, blacks can create a system they control, and are not dependent upon the good will of white elites.

Negroes, get busy building a nation of your own, for neither Europe nor America will tolerate us as competitors in another half century. Let's get busy now, and...fight for those ideals that are possible—not to ever see a black President, Cabinet Officer, or Mayor in the country or state where the white man forms the majority population, but of ourselves to build up Africa, where our race will have the opportunity to rise to the highest positions in society, industry, and government.<sup>705</sup>

Garvey, like others who hold this position, believes in the purity of the black race, prescribing tactics based on how that purity can be preserved.<sup>706</sup> What changes about the approach is where and how separation should occur, for after Garvey the idea of migrating to Africa is emphasized less. More suggest that the separation should occur through the creation of a black nation within the US nation. As a minister of the Nation of Islam Malcolm X advocated for a black homeland to be set aside within the US<sup>707</sup> while the Black Panthers called for a de-centralized collection of sovereign black communities and organizations spread throughout society.<sup>708</sup> Even whites with good intentions would be barred from participation, as their presence alone could perpetuate white supremacy. Only through 'doing it on their own' would blacks achieve "full participation

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<sup>705</sup> Garvey, "The Wonders of the White Man in Building America" in *African American Political Thought*, 231.

<sup>706</sup> Garvey writes in an editorial summarizing the UNIA's mission, "It believes in the purity of the Negro race and the purity of the white race" (Garvey, "What we Believe" in *African American Political Thought*, 234). This is similar to the Nation of Islam's Yakub myth (Malcolm X, *The End of White World Supremacy*, [Arcade Publishing; New York, 1971], 70-1) that put forth a pure beginning for the black race.

<sup>707</sup> Malcolm X, *End of White World Supremacy*, (Arcade Publishing; New York, 1971), 106-7.

<sup>708</sup> Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*, 46.

in the decision-making processes affecting the lives of black people” and “recognition of the virtues in themselves as black people.”<sup>709</sup> The full empowerment of blacks requires the least amount of conditioning by whites as possible.

The mixed inside-outside approach sees flaws in both approaches. It recognizes that spending all of one’s time engaging the system leaves one hamstrung by the system, with only gradual reforms ever resulting from one’s actions. Similarly, leaving the system makes one powerless and impotent. The greatest amount of change results from a combination of both approaches. Marable eloquently describes this approach, saying

We must build a powerful, multiracial coalition of labor, women, and other potential allies *inside* the progressive party-in-the-party. Yet we cannot transform the system by working on the inside alone. *Outside* challenges must raise the issues of racism, sexism, poverty, and powerlessness and must occur simultaneously with electoral work—teach-ins, demonstrations, neighborhood organizing, civil disobedience, and every form of nonelectoral protest.<sup>710</sup>

Holding too firmly to one tactic or the other, one risks losing the momentum that makes a movement successful. In addition, being too firmly inside or outside allows one’s enemies to co-opt one’s progress or render one mute within political discourse. The inside-outside approach is more nuanced and accommodating, allowing one to react to new developments and modify one’s tactics as needed. It allows for the recognition of new forms of racism, the partnering with other groups with similar causes, and the critique of dangerous forces within one’s revolutionary movement. People advocating the inside-outside approach have been more amenable to partnering with the labor movement and communist groups, and have also made important feminist critiques of black liberation movements. And they can respond more quickly and immediately to new forms of racism, such as how prisons are being used as a way of

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<sup>709</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>710</sup> Marable, “The Paradox of Black Reform” in *Speaking Truth to Power: Essays on Race, Resistance, and Radicalism*, (Westview Press; Boulder, 1996), 47.

disenfranchising blacks. It is towards this accommodating approach that Malcolm X was moving towards the end of his life, as he found that his philosophy of Black Nationalism was “alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation,”<sup>711</sup> saying that “I for one will join in with anyone, I don’t care what color you are, as long as you want to change the miserable condition that exists on this earth.”<sup>712</sup> Reflecting on the legacy of Malcolm, Angela Davis writes that the slogan ‘By Any Means Necessary’ needn’t just mean the tactics used to change the system, but also “the means necessary to rethink and reshape the contours of our political activism.”<sup>713</sup> An inside-outside approach that lacks a dogmatic method and centralized base of operations (either within the system or without) has the ability to adjust to the system without losing its ability to meaningfully affect the system.

The final tactic I will discuss with regard to black radicalism is autobiography. The telling of personal stories illustrative of the problems of racism conveys the harm of racism and its many intricacies far more powerfully than a purely abstract account would. By narrating their individual experiences of being excluded, degraded, objectified, or worse, black radicals are able to make the often unseen practices of racism tangible. Whites, often inoculated from encountering their own racism, are compelled to reexamine their own behavior, while blacks, by sharing such experiences, see the systemic qualities of racism. In effect, autobiography becomes a tactic of resistance by making racism real while building relationships of responsibility and solidarity which can be used to combat it. One of the most well known examples of autobiography by a black radical, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, began because, as Alex Haley recounts, Malcolm thought it would be a good way of “[helping] people to appreciate

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<sup>711</sup> Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, (Pathfinder; New York, 1970), 159.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>713</sup> Angela Davis, “Meditations on the Legacy of Malcolm X” in *Angela Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Blackwell Publishers; Malden, 1998), 287.

better how Mr. Muhammad [the leader of the Nation of Islam] salvages people”<sup>714</sup> While Malcolm may have primarily been interested in the effect the text would have on blacks, it is evident that its account of personal metamorphosis and steadfast commitment to revolutionary action has had a profound effect on whites as well.<sup>715</sup> Not only did it provide an inspiring example of an important figure, but it fleshed out the gaps in the public perception of Malcolm received from politicians and journalists. It gave Malcolm a chance to communicate more directly with his audience, in essence recapturing for himself a measure of agency lost when his voice was interpreted by the white state. This recapturing of agency, and reframing of commonly held ‘truths’, is something George Yancy speaks about in his discussion of Frederick Douglass’s autobiography, saying “through the process of narrating his ex-istence, Douglass challenged the racist assumption that Black people have no perspective on the world...[and] he defied and challenged the caricatured myths and normativity of whiteness.”<sup>716</sup> The presence of the black voice, and the importance of its story, comes across in a more clear and compelling manner when recited through autobiography. It comes as no surprise that so many black radicals have used this strategy<sup>717</sup>, for it rehabilitates a power racism has long denied them: the ability to decide who they are.

The question of who and how to organize resistance to racism demonstrates another vital aspect of revolutionary praxis—the importance of building *dynamic and reactive networks*. By this I mean something similar to what black radicals refer to when discussing coalitions and community: an arrangement of relationships capable of responding quickly to incidents. All the

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<sup>714</sup> Alex Haley, “Epilogue”, in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (Ballantine Books; New York, 1999), 393

<sup>715</sup> Attallah Shabazz, “Forward” in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (Ballantine Books; New York, 1999), xiii and xix-xxi.

<sup>716</sup> Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (Rowman and Littlefield; Lanham, 2008), 157.

<sup>717</sup> Many black radicals have used this technique. In addition to Malcolm X, they include Frederick Douglass, Le Roi James/AmiriBaraka, Booker T Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Shirley Chisholm, and bell hooks.

pieces of such revolutionary networks already exist in the state; the task of revolutionaries is create an awareness of the network among its parts. This act slightly alters the role the individual agents, and the network as a whole, play in the state, giving it a more revolutionary purpose. The network can be cemented by building new relationships between the parts while reinforcing those that already exist. The production of these fluid, militant, and—most important—conscious networks creates new agents within the state capable of more efficiently pushing a state to a moment of disruption. Revolutions stand or fail by how quickly allies can be mobilized and how firm the relationships within the network are. Networks that can react quickly to actions by the state (for example, the worldwide support Angela Davis received during her imprisonment and trial) or reproduce disruptive forms of behavior throughout the state (such as how civil disobedience spread all over the South during the civil rights era) are more effective at achieving their goals and more resilient to attack. The networks that black radicals tried to form were a way of resisting the state’s method of cutting up and isolating people to prevent effective opposition. Building connections across age groups, geographic locations, and even color lines provides more resources to draw upon in times of social upheaval and a greater degree of agency in producing a situation amenable to revolution. The question is how to frame your network so that it is flexible and resilient without being so lax that it cannot pull together when needed. The Organization of Afro-American Unity was so disorganized that, without the charismatic personality of Malcolm X to hold it together, it collapsed<sup>718</sup>, while, as Manning Marable points out, Marxists have never been able to build a strong coalition with people of color because of their authoritarian structure.<sup>719</sup> Every network must have a compelling center that keeps people organized and mobilized, but that center cannot be too

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<sup>718</sup> Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (Viking; New York, 2011), 462.

<sup>719</sup> Marable, “Remaking American Marxism” in *Speaking Truth to Power*, (Westview Press; Boulder, 1996), 267-8.

rigid—or the network too inflexible—without becoming elitist and alienating allies. The most effective network is one which is itself centered around an ideal or a goal, but in which no part of the network is itself the center. The network must be allowed to evolve, while the center itself must be reexamined and critiqued periodically to ensure that it is still represents the goal people are interested in pursuing. No network should see itself as permanently necessary, as there may come a time when circumstances and the good of the cause require a network to disband. This means of organizing revolutionary movements works well because it takes advantage of the inherent dynamism and complexity of systems. Rather than trying to create another static and determinate system to replace the current one, this method of organizing draws from one of the benefits revolutionaries always have on their side—that every system is by its nature dynamic. By using adaptive and reactive networks revolutionaries can maintain their presence even as the state changes in response to them, updating their allies and practices as needed to confront new challenges. Only in this way will a revolutionary network be both dynamic yet durable.

The final point I want to bring up with regard to black radicalism is their approach to changing the state. Whereas the other strategies for revolution I've discussed attack the state to achieve victory, black radicalism is more interested in short-circuiting it. Though black radicals often frame what they are doing as attacking the system<sup>720</sup>, very rarely do they advocate the formation of an army whose purpose is to attack white armies, depose white politicians, and seize control of the capital. The purpose of the tactics used by Washington, Du Bois, Garvey, SNCC, the Black Panthers, and others was to rewire parts of the state so that its normal circuitry became a problem. White society has long relied on blacks—for labor, for consumption of their products, for entertainment, and a variety of other purposes. In addition, white identity as

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<sup>720</sup> See Le Roi James, "What Does Nonviolence Mean?" in *Home and Other Essays*, 141-142; and Huey Newton, "In Defense of Self Defense" in *The Modern African American Political Thought Reader*, 285.

dominant depends upon black acceptance of their role as subservient. Instead of full scale revolt, black radicals attempt to undermine this system by blocking or altering the function of the forces pushing blacks to play these roles. Booker T Washington worked for the education of blacks so they would not reestablish old black stereotypes with their behavior and action. Blacks in the Civil Rights movement purposefully avoided 'black spaces' and 'black behaviors,' resisting constant attempts by police to send them back. The Black Panthers informed and armed themselves so that they could 'monitor the monitors' and care for their community. White society's need for blacks was put in direct confrontation with their racist antipathy. As I discussed above, the question of the most effective way to short circuit the state (from inside, outside, or both) is an important one, as it raises the issue of what is the most effective way to undermine the state's foundations. Yet as a strategy, short-circuiting is significantly different from guerrilla warfare and the American and French revolutions. It attempts to map out the state in advance, and tailors its tactics in response to specific circumstances. Because it is not as concerned with demolishing the state, but with creating a movement that will radically transform it, it is better prepared to respond to the destruction of the old state with ideas about constructing a new one. As a result, it is able to resist some of the bloody epilogues that have followed other revolutions.

Though at times black radicalism has employed overly programmatic tactics and been guilty of hyper-militancy, it has also developed solutions to those problems. The emphasis on community by so many black groups prevents too much reliance on one doctrine, instead operating with a more flexible, grassroots approach. Similarly, the focus on an inside-outside approach prevents excessive militancy. In fact, because black radicalism has been quite meticulous about critiquing itself, and because it represents a variety of viewpoints, there are



very few critiques to be made. Nevertheless, there are two criticisms that, while they have to some degree been picked up by black radicals already, bear repeating through the lens of dynamic anarchism. The first has to do with how black radicals position themselves in relationship to the state. As I have already shown, one strand of thought (which began in germinal form with Booker T Washington, then continued through Garvey, early Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panthers) advocates the tactic of separation from the state. Underlying this tactic is the claim that blacks represent an absolute Other, or a voice wholly precluded from the white world. Fanon illustrates this when he says “between the white man and me the connection was irrevocably one of transcendence.”<sup>721</sup> As I showed in the last chapter, if blacks were truly Other—that is, exiled to the outside—they would be completely invisible, to the point where they could have no interaction with the white world and the white world could have no interaction with them. Without diminishing the extent of anti-black discrimination and the suffering it has caused, it is inaccurate to portray blacks as separated from the state. Blacks have a presence within the state, though it is thoroughly unequal to whites and has a long history of oppression. It is more accurate to say that blacks and whites occupy different layers within the state, and that instead of excluding blacks from the world whites have attempted to control and speak for blacks. This is an important distinction because when blackness is portrayed as a voice from outside the world it effectively insulates itself from all critique and interconnection with other parts of the state. As the outside blackness is noumenal, and is able to critique the state without opening itself to criticism. Some race activists reject any criticism coming from whites (or any race other than theirs) as being irrelevant to their experience and thus capable of being disregarded. Many excellent race activists do not do this, but it is a tendency that needs to

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<sup>721</sup> Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans Charles Markmann (Grove Press; New York, 2008) 138. It may be the case that Fanon is claiming that whiteness treats blacks as transcendental, which would not contradict what I say here. What I am arguing against is ontologically locating of any race outside the state.

be avoided, especially as it tries to turn that race into a foundation of another state, in essence treating whiteness as whiteness has treated them. The interconnectivity of the world means that to critique the world is to open oneself to change too, for the system of white supremacy cannot be torn down without blackness being affected too. This does not mean that the tactics recommended by individuals and groups holding this perspective are wrong, but that how they work and what their goal is must be reframed.

Finally, Dynamic Anarchism suggests that black radicals must shift their perception of their enemy. As I have shown, the history of black radical thought is filled with reassessments of previous strategies and prescriptions for what to do in the future. In many of these reassessments, the reason why someone or something is considered to have failed is because ‘they didn’t understand the problem fully.’ W.E.B. Du Bois doesn’t get the importance of empowering blacks economically and politically, says Garvey.<sup>722</sup> The black middle class doesn’t grasp the necessity of fighting against the system, says Le Roi James.<sup>723</sup> Black women have a unique perspective on black liberation that must be considered, says Angela Davis.<sup>724</sup> Implied by many of these reassessments is that while racism does at times change how it manifests itself, it has a central core that defines it. Black radicals just need to find the right formula of resistance and it can be put to an end. It is more likely, given the behavior of systems, that racism is highly mobile, fluid, and resilient. Because it has no central core but only a variety of manifestations, there is no best strategy for solving it, nor does the fact that one strategy failed mean it was wrong. Racism evolves in response to resistance to it, and the best approach to combat it is to be open to the development of new tactics and unfazed when they fail. Nonviolence was not necessarily a misstep, as some say, but that does not mean it will be permanently effective.

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<sup>722</sup> “Motive of the NAACP Explained” in *African American Political Thought*, (M.e. Sharpe, New York, 1996), 226

<sup>723</sup> “What does Nonviolence Mean?” in *Home and Other essays*, 76.

<sup>724</sup> “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” in *The Angela Davis Reader*, 126-7.

Similarly, the militancy of the Black Power movement may have achieved important results in the 1970s, but this does not make its dissolution a disappointment. The perception of whiteness and racism must be de-centered—not because it doesn't have definable characteristics at certain points in time, but because those effects stem from a dispersed and interconnected system capable of significant transformations that perpetuate anti-black oppression in many ways. Echoing Marable's claim that community must be a site of struggle, I believe resistance itself is also such a site.

### **Revolutionary Cascades**

A way of summarizing all that has been said here is that Dynamic Anarchism provides a method for transforming moving systems without regarding those systems as permanently centered or ordered. Systems are in a state of flux and lack any definitive order; thus the project of resisting them cannot forever utilize the same strategy. To demonstrate this we can once again turn to Badiou, who claims that militancy “permanently affirms the existence of that which has no name”<sup>725</sup> and that the goal of radical politics is “to find another disposition between masses, classes, parties; another composition of the political field...”<sup>726</sup> If we apply this logic to the question of resistance, then we see how tactics of resistance must be constantly reassessed and developed anew. We may not be able to avoid drawing them from the state, but we can push them to their limits, combine them with others, deploy them in new contexts, or reverse their manner of application, among many other options. The best way to get to a point of disruption, to produce radicals, to utilize active and reactive networks, and to employ all the features of revolution discussed in this chapter will change depending upon the particularities of the state

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<sup>725</sup> Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants*, trans, Bruno Bosteels (Verso; Brooklyn, 2012), 76.

<sup>726</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

being opposed. Protests that work well in one context will fail in another, while nonviolence will be unable to accomplish the same goal everywhere it is used.

Dynamic Anarchism diverges from Badiou on the question of militancy when it comes to encouraging fidelity. For Badiou militancy is as simple as rigorously affirming the “fictions” (or truth-procedures) that bring about the politics you desire. The problem with politics, as Badiou sees it, “is the lack of a great fiction as support for a great belief. Thus, the final belief in generic truths, the final possibility of opposing the generic will to normal desires, this type of possibility and the belief in this sort of possibility, in generic truths, has to be our new fiction.”<sup>727</sup> The danger of doing that in a moving, interconnected system, however, is that you cannot be sure, when the new fiction is introduced into the present state, that it will bring about the state you want. Unseen contingencies could subvert one’s momentum, taking one’s “fiction” down a different path than the one expected. Marxist doctrines have been used in a whole host of ways that Marx himself would have found objectionable. And in the early 1960s, Malcolm X’s ideas aimed at empowering African Americans were picked up and supported by the Ku Klux Klan. Alternatively, it is always unclear, prior to the institution of the new state, that it will function as intended. As Foucault writes, new configurations of power-knowledge emerge from “substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals.”<sup>728</sup> Similarly, in dynamic systems such events happen over and over as their different pieces interact, making the process of transforming a state much more unpredictable than Badiou’s form of militancy would suggest. The fidelity Badiou advocates towards fictions is dangerous for the way in which those fictions can yield vastly different results depending on how the system they are interacting with moves. In contrast to Badiou, Dynamic Anarchism claims that what is needed is not new fictions

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<sup>727</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>728</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *The Foucault Reader*, trans. Paul Rabinow (Pantheon Books; New York, 1984), 86.

but new arrangements of subjects, objects, and forces. The formulaic and generic truths advocated by Badiou must be replaced with actual moving networks. The descriptions of how these systems work must not precede the systems (as Badiou's fictions precede the state they instantiate) but develop alongside them. These arrangements can, and should, be altered when and if a reversal occurs that jeopardizes the revolution's goals. There is still room for militancy inasmuch as these arrangements will ultimately be aimed at achieving ends desired by revolutionaries. But whereas Badiou's concept of fidelity fixes on an abstraction, Dynamic Anarchism fixes on how best to create a productive relationship between ends desired and the arrangements necessary to achieve them.

If there is something radical about the strategy I have outlined which separates it from others, it is that I hope to have put to rest the claim that revolution must proceed from outside the state. This trope—repeated endlessly throughout revolutionary literature—has led revolutionaries on an incessant journey to try to discover what is beyond the state and firmly plant themselves there. This is why it is common for revolutionaries to castigate other, disliked advocates for change for being “puppets” of the elites, lacking authentic radical credentials because they are too wedded to the dominant power structure. Real revolutionaries, they claim, fight power from the outside, not depending upon the state but only on others who act from the same place. One of the fundamental claims of Dynamic Anarchism is that this ‘journey’ is a fool's errand, as it is impossible to exist without some connection to the state. Radicals can attack the state from a vast number of places within the state, but not from the outside. Rather, as the “inside-outside” debate within black radicalism demonstrates, it is more productive for revolutionaries to hit the state from a variety of locations, using a mixture of tactics. It is harder for the state to isolate and marginalize a revolutionary movement that is embedded throughout

itself than it is a centrally located band of rebels. This is easily demonstrated by looking at revolutionary history, for even when small bands did much of the work of revolution, their success was dependent upon the support of the population. It is important that revolutionaries cease the futile endeavor to find the outside of the state and the oft divisive discourse about how those who remain within are “lackeys” or “pawns.” This does not mean revolutionaries should cease critique about the ways in which state power is being repeated through their actions, or how new strategies may be able to overcome previous impediments. What I am opposing is the manner of discourse which treats being ensconced within the state as a pejorative. A diversified, collaborative, yet militant approach, both with regard to where one acts from and the tactics one uses, has a greater chance of success. This does not mean that it will never be necessary to use small, well-armed groups to carry out objectives that are kept secret from the rest of the revolutionaries spread throughout the population. It does necessitate that the overall strategy of revolution should not be based primarily upon the actions of such groups to the exclusion of others.

There is much more to be said about the praxis of revolution than can be said here. Conducting a revolution is never a staid affair. It requires great insight, observation, and perseverance. Militancy must be combined with flexibility to prevent the state from assimilating a revolution’s movement into the forces that perpetuate it. This requires a firm grasp of the state’s system—including the agents and movements that compose it—as well as the acumen to apply pressure in just the right way. The weak points of each state will differ, but the features of revolution I have pointed to in this chapter should help make them visible. By seeking out fields and radicals and cultivating their destabilizing effects one begins using the processes of the state to undermine the state’s foundations, as the state must begin to transform itself to handle these

new and unexpected elements. As the state tries to regroup itself, revolutionaries can use the dynamic and reactive networks to broadcast their cause while manipulating the ordering and disordering effects to push the state further and further from its old ground. Eventually, the old foundations will become untenable, and the state will reach a point of disruption where the forces within it no longer go towards its formation but its dissolution. As important as getting to this point is for revolution, it is vital that revolutionaries keep abreast of the rapid changes that are occurring and respond to them to prevent a catastrophic outcome. This does not mean dominating the system and forcing it to comply with your will, but harmonizing with it and mediating it, keeping in mind the dual poles of militancy and flexibility. Build a sustainable, resilient state grounded in the foundations that will best allow society to flourish. This demands openness to change and movement, for rigid states easily crumble, but also respect for interdependency and the harms that a state which is too ungrounded can have. As Arendt says, the state must provide a “space where freedom can occur”<sup>729</sup> There is much left to be determined by each revolutionary within their own context, but this framework provides a starting point. It will not repeat the old state because, unlike other theories of revolution, the features of revolution designated in this chapter name movements which contribute to the dissolution of states. The only ontological commitment made is to the irreducibility of radical change present within all states. And the only program advocated is the exploitation of said movements for the purpose of creating revolution.

At the height of a revolution there comes an imperceptible point which carries the old state away as it passes. The system that was now isn't, and its former pieces topple from their position of authority like a cascading falls. Possibilities burst forth for consideration, though feelings of jubilation are inevitably accompanied by uncertainty about the future. Everyone must

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<sup>729</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, (Penguin Classics, New York, 1963) 116.

soon set about the work of statecraft, but for evermore they can reflect upon that moment of creation. The moment won't prevent the state from faltering in a multitude of ways as it changes and grows, but if the revolution has been successful it will have carved the proper foundations into the heart of the state. And as people look back, they can remember that moment proudly as the moment the impossible was achieved.



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