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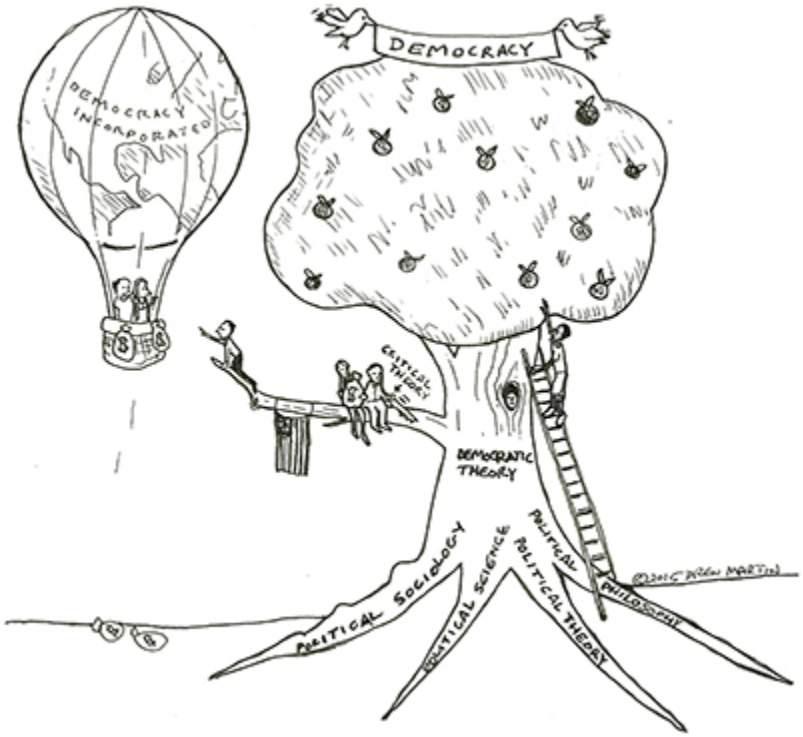

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# Economic Crisis and the Crisis in Economic Thought A Progressive-Iconoclastic Perspective Inspired by Sartre

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Since 2007, we have been bombarded with nothing but public speeches and articles on what has been referred to as the “financial crisis.” In Europe, within a few months, this was transformed into an “economic crisis” (affecting the entire world) and subsequently into a “great crisis” (a reduced GDP, and a massive increase in unemployment), then by a curious turnaround, into a public debt crisis, and finally into a “social crisis” (with less job security and more poverty). The numbers alone reflect its significance. In fact, this discourse on the “crisis” itself is actually a component of it–the performativity of the science of economics[1] – and thus structures the situation in which it must be considered.

Public interventions in the current “crisis” all say basically the same thing. A financial system, freed from all regulations and prudence rules, has become crazy, to the extent that the only way to restore order is for an external body to impose a code of conduct, which it is clearly unable to adopt on its own. In fact, this control, whatever its extent, falls within the realm of state public powers which the states have granted themselves, or those of international organizations (such as the IMF), and now assumes the form of more or less close cooperation, with varying degrees of intervention, at the national and international level. This clearly signals a massive change leading to a startling, new and abrupt legitimization of the “politics” and of public intervention, after more than twenty years of “happy” globalization and of a neoliberal veneer on all forms of public regulation developed since the Second World War. The return to favor of Keynesianism was certainly short-lived, and was mostly a matter of lip-service; this was subsequently marginalized by the “public debt crisis,” especially in Europe, thanks to which neoliberal and monetarist orthodoxy succeeded in regaining control of the situation with dramatic austerity cures, making the victims, rather than the guilty parties, pay. This has since been well recognized, especially in the useful contribution of heterodox economists (G. Stiglitz, P. Krugman, JK Galbraith, M. Aglietta, and S. Kean, amongst others). Nonetheless, the liberal world is breaking apart, its “ideological” hegemony vigorously contested. Again, we must trace the limits of such a dispute.

### The same naturalist matrix

This agreement on the diagnosis (in fact, the remedies to apply) closely resembles that of those who have long denounced the illusion of the self-regulated market, and who are-temporarily, they hope—forced to recognize that it is barely functional. Despite their political opposition,

representatives of both the left and the right actually share the same presupposition that we would term “ontological.” Based on the development of Sartrean economic philosophy,[2] we would characterize it as situating the economy outside of society, this exteriority being a necessary condition for the technization of political debates and the objectification of “economic questions,” which obscures the fact that this exteriority actually consists of a *placing* in exteriority, through the magic of discourse which we would readily term ideological, an *externalization* of the whole, a whole which we would view as natural, that is as a self-sufficient and self-organized whole through the implementation of natural laws, in other words, of a strict determinism.

To better assess the analytical impact of this proposition, we propose to return to the “point of departure” of the “crisis.” This “financial crisis” is said to be that of *subprime mortgages*. A *prime mortgage*, in American terms, is a building loan given to a borrower who appears to be quite capable of repaying it. The credit referred to as *subprime* is, therefore, offered to a borrower likely to default on the payments. *Subprime mortgages* are nothing less than speculation  on poverty, this poverty, which unbridled finance-dominated capitalism has produced in dismantling the “Fordist” salary status[3] and increasing inequality –in the United States, much more than in other advanced capitalist nations, such as in Europe. This practice reveals that the basis of a system of financial speculation is not at all its organization in a supposedly self-regulated market,[4] but rather its propensity to make of any situation an occasion for speculation. As in Aristotle’s uncontrolled “Chrematistim,” everything is a powerful object of speculation, including poverty.

Faced with such a situation, it is clear that the analyses and interpretations, not to mention forecasting, flooding national and international media, are far below the standards of the practical and intellectual stakes. Doubtless, this discourse serves to foster anxiety in our societies, even those which organized or allowed the development of this financial Prometheism, which is in a frenzy, leaving them in a vacuum. Let us leave aside liberals’ and social-liberals’ ridiculous sudden conversions to the virtues of “authentic” Keynesianism, sometimes exaggerated, but always uncertain, and turn to critical analysis. Despite its undeniable analytical merit, and the political sympathy it inspires in us, it is still inadequate in “ontological” terms. To say, as do heterodox economists, that this exuberant financialization of economies is essentially a strategy of economic elites initially intended to come back to the social gains of Keynesian-Fordian regimes, and now become a monster escaping from its creators, certainly serves to warn us. And, for the rest, formulating this in the present time is more likely to procure an audience than in the still quite recent past, when public intervention in these developments was sacrificed on the altar of the economic modernization of social models denounced as obsolete, and saw itself ridiculed as old-fashioned, and an obstacle to liberal modernization. Nonetheless, this view of the problem remains partial and does not allow us to respond to the essential question, which is to know how finally to escape this matrix, the performative efficacy of which structures the intellectual and political debate. Let us understand the matrix of the dualism of the “economy” and of “politics,”[5] naturalizing them both, seeing them as necessary and determinant, and condemning this to intervene only after the fact, within a very restricted “margin of maneuver.” Obviously, once this dualism is

imposed on the politics of intervening exclusively in a voluntaristic way, this dissociates choice from its source, liberty.

This is the lesson delivered by Sartre in his first major philosophical work:

> *But this is not all: the will, far from being the unique or at least the privileged manifestation of freedom, actually – like every event of the itself – must presuppose the foundation of an original freedom in order to be able to constitute itself as will. The will in fact is posited as a reflective decision in relation to certain ends. But it does not create these ends. It is rather a mode of being in relation to them: it decrees that the pursuit of these ends will be reflective and deliberative. Passion can posit the same ends. For example, if I am threatened, I can run away at top speed because of my fear of dying. This passional fact nevertheless posits implicitly as a supreme end the value of life. Another person in the same situation will, on the contrary, understand that he must remain at his post even if resistance at first appears more dangerous than flight; he 'will stand firm.' But his goal, although better understood and explicitly posited, remains the same as in the case of the emotional reaction. It is simply that the methods of attaining it are more clearly conceived; certain of them are rejected as dubious or inefficacious, others are more solidly organized. The difference here depends on the choice of means and on the degree of reflection and of making explicit, not on the end. Yet the one who flees is said to be 'passionate,' and we reserve the term 'voluntary' for the man who resists. Therefore the question is of a difference of subjective attitude in relation to a transcendent end.****[6]****

We first offer a comment to avoid any misinterpretation of this article. Sartre completely modifies the meaning and usage of "transcendence," which becomes the subject's own, then no longer turned towards himself, as in the framework of classical or Cartesian theory but, on the contrary, seen as projected outside of himself, into the world. Also, the transcendental ends become confused with "the temporalizing projection of our liberty." The transcendence the "subject" appropriated for himself is, thus, the other name for the subject's freedom: "Thus my freedom is perpetually in question in my being; it is not a quality added on or a *property* of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being (. . .)."[7] This characterizes liberty as constituting the subject broken away from that, therefore classic, according to which the subject possesses liberty; thus, it is reduced to the state of an instrument or tool to which the subject has free access, to his will. This liberty-instrument is that which liberal economic theory ascribes to *homo oeconomicus*.

The principle of voluntarism consists of erasing the secondary status of the will and according it that which it deserves, insists Sartre, along with liberty-transcendence. This reduced liberty of the will is then deprived of the capacity to set goals, so that it becomes urgent to situate such values in a transcendent order (this time in the classic sense of the term, that is external

to so-called liberty). This transcendence manages to be displayed “from the top down” (this order of values may then present itself as the expression of divine will), as well as “from the bottom up.” (Thus, orthodox economists claim this entire process is driven by natural laws—the central thesis of economism.) It is this order, divine or natural (it’s the same thing), which is responsible for providing the goals that liberty-will is powerless to promote. Also, let us understand that the essential act of such liberty is none other than to submit to such an order, since this is merely the immediate consequence of the impotence to which liberty has condemned itself in identifying with choice.

The dualism of the economy and politics, that we have mentioned above, perfectly illustrates what Sartre criticizes under the rubric of that which we name “voluntarism.” Economic reality, assimilated to a natural order (transcendence from the bottom up) provides the ends, indisputable since deemed necessary (for example, growth as the only way to have a healthy economy), that are the limited responsibility of the politics to realize in the best possible conditions and as quickly as possible. Politics assumes a kind of “stoicism of the poor.” We will attempt to convince you of this.

## The critique of voluntarism

Today, it seems that, on the occasion of the crisis, the voluntarist option has regained its relevance and vigor. Henceforth, the debate rests entirely on the question of knowing what greater or lesser margin of maneuver the voluntarist option allows. Voluntarism in its current form is made possible by the distinction, once again “ontological,” within economic “reality” between a solid core worth preserving (the “real” economy) and its malign excrescence (deregulated finance) to be eliminated. To assure its good health, it would suffice to protect the former against the contamination of the latter. At a minimum, this reflects a certain naiveté, with those believing in rehabilitating the managers of the “real economy” indignant about the “golden parachutes” and other “excessive” remuneration. Let us clean up capitalism: it’s the law and the prophets! they say to save the economic-financial and political-media elites, and all will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds! However, the dichotomy between perverse financiers and healthy bosses-entrepreneurs is not very convincing and, if we simply remain at the empirical level, the least that one can say is that current events regularly offer overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Faced with the abyss, more impressive by the day, it seems at a minimum to be short-lived. If we borrow from heterodox economic analysis (whether Keynesian or Marxist, regardless of the level of analysis), we must remember that in a capitalist regime, finance belongs to the “real economy” (in the sense of the actual site of the production-distribution-consumption of resources) and that, as a result, financial speculation is, after all, but an exaggerated application of the capitalist valorization which reigns over the entire economy. Hoping only for a faster and greater profit, financial speculation is not foreign to the fundamentally predatory reasoning of the “real economy,” in as much as this remains, for the most part, an economy dominated by the capitalist mode of production.

Michel Henry imparts this as Marx’s first lesson. The exchange value, feeding the process of valorization, is produced in the same movement as that which produces the use-value in the

course of the real process dominated by capital. This was

> *in sucking the blood out of living labor like a vampire [ . . . ] that the valorization of capital and, thus, capital itself, was possible. The same way that the production of use-values only occurs in the crucible of production, there where living labor embraces, deforms, burns, twists in the flames, disintegrates, liquefies materials to restructure them, reorganizes them, reinforms them, and rescuscitates them amongst the dead. In short this is the same way that the new configuration which will make them use-values is imprinted on them, in the same way and as the result of which this fire burning from living labor creates use-values, the exchange value of those produced at the same time as them, and also results from this burning kiss of life from which it counts and displays the marks—being nothing less than their representation.**[8]***

Let us repeat this: this logic of capitalist promotion could be partially contained during the period of "prosperity" (according to the same norms of classic economic science), the so-called "Glorious Thirty," especially through the development of the welfare state and the consolidation of the salary condition, which contributed to a "decommodification" of the world,[9] without which its principle would never have been modified.

### Changing the critique: The Sartrean reorientation

To remove the traps from the economy/society dualism, the task inherent in any social critique, which would be, under the impetus and from the Sartrean perspective, frankly antinaturalist, we first aim to describe the effects of the immanent process of capitalist valorization on the whole of society, as well as the way in which the different spheres under its jurisdiction, making it one world, are consistent. Nonetheless, inhuman as it might seem to us in many respects, this is still a human world. It seems inhuman because it is based on an alienation of most human capacities, yet this world is a human production. In capitalist societies, one human activity amongst others, the economic activity of capital enhancement, has become the main source of value (tending to exclusivity, or at least, claiming to be the norm), as the commodification of the world increases. More precisely, the norm, which structures the system of values of these societies, is provided through the accounting logic which rules capitalist economic activity and solicits each as a calculating subject having to draw upon his instrumental rationality (or even his liberty-choice). This is one reason why the economy seems to be organizing itself as an autonomous sphere, obeying "natural" laws, with which political action can only agree, using this ex post facto rationalization which we call the "margin of maneuver."

This autonomization of the economic sphere, largely endorsed by the economic decision-makers and experts, and mostly adopted in political discourse, forces it to take refuge in voluntarism. Political will manages the means which the economy allows it, supposedly autonomous and, as such, a supplier of goals, and values; it organizes the means with an eye to

achieving the already defined ends, in this world in which the economy performs and to which, as subjects subjugated by the merely instrumental solicitation that calls to us and abandoned to its exercise, we consent, each at our level, in more or less bad faith.

This being said, we are aware of the "moral" indecency of our proposal, which seems to place on the same level two types of "economic" subject, he who consents to the system although he suffers (from unemployment, poverty, and job insecurity) and he who consents to the system while binging on the proceeds (excessive remuneration, ostentatious consumption, arrogance and social cynicism). This distinction, which in our daily battles as involved citizens we make very willingly, presents something of an epistemological obstacle on an ontological level, where we are situated. This obstacle impedes the very comprehension of the ins and outs of the oppression which we condemn, but which we do not manage to ever understand if we would go no further than this condemnation. To understand it, we must risk this paradox of the equal liberty of the oppressed and the oppressor, and reject the voluntarist option, speaking out against the injustice which affects us above all. In other words, objectivizing domination (and the "dominated"), and laying claim to political voluntarism, is no less than accepting that the political realm is powerless.

In this framework, when the social dimension of the "financial crisis" is taken into account, it is only as a "consequence," as collateral damage. We should consider for a moment the social arrogance that this seemingly innocuous, expression, "social consequences of the crisis," contains. This victimization of social actors has provided fodder for the media and experts who produce such a vision of the world. Its main effect and principal rationale is to exclude these actors . . . from political action! Since what we call the "crisis" is understood to be the fleeting deregulation of a system, it would not be a political matter except in terms of "putting out fires." This orchestrated depoliticization by a triumphant economism is, therefore, truly the indication of a much more profound crisis than the "financial crisis." Engaging in politics first presupposes categorizing as contingent that which is above all—incorrectly—considered necessary. Since economism is, in fact, a process of socialization (Marx taught us that capital is, first and foremost, a social relationship) which entrusts normativity to economic determinism, the struggles for supremacy can only be a reappropriation of the normative capacity of actors in these battles, refusing the victims' fate to which they are relegated. Since capitalism is not giving way, it can only be denounced in its entirety here and now.

## Communist perspectives

How? Caught up in a practical-inert situation, according to Sartrean vocabulary, in this practical-inert world of capitalist promotion, which reorganizes at the same time the identity of each and the being-together of all, each subjectivity remains no less a liberty. Let us stand firm, and cling staunchly to the Sartrean thesis. Abandoning oneself to a "destiny" as an economic subject remains and is only a certain choice, that of liberty in a situation, regardless of the power of the oppression to which one is subject. Now, it is precisely this gap between self (liberty) and self (subject) which makes possible the slogan of "another world," to paraphrase a famous expression of the antiglobalization movements, but there is no solid

evidence that they have appreciated the full significance of this expression. There is the foundation of all social utopias, by which the human being affirms himself, not as one who has been freed from oppression, here economic (but freed by whom? by what great Other?), but as one who can free himself. The figure of emancipation only partially breaks away from oppression to the extent that the liberator grants liberty to those whom he claims to emancipate; such liberty is therefore reduced to the diminished liberty of choice. Consequently, the emancipated figure has no say in the goal assigned by the liberator. In Marx's critical thought, the question of emancipation, better—in our view—the question of self-emancipation, was envisaged as stemming from the communist utopia.

Yet, the latter must be placed in context. Economic determinism is the reason, the issue, the source of proletarian struggles, and not at all their cause or their underlying principle. Such battles suspend, or attempt to suspend, the effectiveness of this "determinism," the vocation of which is mainly ideological, or performative.[10] The determinist ideology claims to fix the duality of being and of the duty to be whereas the struggle comes back to reappropriating for oneself this duality in order to redefine the terms and the relationship. This is an eminently political task since, in opening up the question of who should be, the very form of sociability is at play (and this claims to resolve "economical determinism" in a satisfying and definitive manner, for example, in calling on an "invisible hand"). At the same time, this raises the problem of passing from what is to what should be, *an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all*.[11] While the *free* development of each is the condition for the *free* development of all, this means that sociability could not be petrified in a structure and that it must be the central concern of any political decisions.

# The Questionable Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education: Du Bois' Iconoclastic Critique

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**Prologue**

The public education of African-American youth had been the most significant problem for African-American adults, outside of the issue of voting rights, since the end of the Civil War. From the 1860's through the 1940's, the problem stemmed from the paucity of resources dedicated toward their education and the indifference of the American public and its legislatures to it as well as to the supposed deficiency of the quality of public education obtained by African-American youth.

This state of affairs fueled racial segregation by design or *de jure* racial segregation in public education, since single race schools, consisting of black student populations in sheer preponderance, were public schools sanctioned under local ordinance. The legal approach of the law professor and dean of the School of Law at Howard University, Charles Hamilton Houston, successfully challenged in the courts the racial segregation that wrought the paucity, if not absence, of resources legislatively earmarked for the tertiary (collegiate, university, post-graduate), level of public education for young African Americans. Still public education for African-American youth at the primary and secondary levels remained subject to the aforementioned paucity and to the indifference racial segregation induced.

Nevertheless 90 years after the Civil War, a successful legal challenge in the Supreme Court against *de jure* racial segregation in public education was brought to bear. Thurgood Marshall, a protégé of Houston, followed in the footsteps of his mentor bringing the challenge. The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* had established as unconstitutional racial segregation by design in public schools and as harmful the *de facto* effects such segregation produced, which required remedy to address them "with all deliberate speed." Its decision led and has lead in the American public mind that the remedy not only addressed the harms of *de jure* racial segregation in the public schools, but also expanded into areas outside of public education tackling the harms such segregation manufactured there.

W.E.B. Du Bois, however, expressed skepticism over the Supreme Court decision. Single race schools, consisting exclusively of black student populations, were deemed by the Supreme Court's decision to be the harm resulting from racial segregation by design and allegedly engendering inadequate education and low self-esteem as a consequence. The remedy

therefore was racial integration in the schools. Du Bois' skepticism to the Court's remedy has led many to believe he was *unconditionally* for single race schools and *unconditionally against* racial integration therein. In what follows, I give a different picture of Du Bois' views to show how he was quite prescient concerning *Brown's* impact and how his views are strongly pertinent to the current scene regarding the public education of African-American youth.

## Brown v. Board of Education

*Brown v. Board of Education* (Brown) is usually regarded as the most important Supreme Court decision regarding racial desegregation, educational opportunity, and so-called race relations. It is divided into two parts: *Brown I* (1954) and *Brown II* (1955). Most believe that *Brown I* regarded *de jure* racial segregation in the schools as unconstitutional and that *Brown II* supplied the remedy to what was regarded as unconstitutional in *Brown I* by eliminating all single race schools. But the *Brown I* decision has both its supporters and its critics. This divergence in opinion affects how *Brown I* is to be read and how *Brown II* is to be read as a consequence of *Brown I*. Most supporters extol *Brown I* for removing *de jure* racial segregation in the schools and for making it possible to engender equal opportunity for all people. Critics usually support *Brown I's* intentions, but challenge the cogency of its legal reasoning and oppose the philosophy on which it stands. Critics also regard *Brown I* as wrong because it deemed that all black schools necessarily triggered inferiority and low self-esteem in black children. The deeper question for the critics remains: is what has been deemed harmful (all single-race black schools) an outcome of *de jure* (i.e., intentionally coerced) or *de facto* (i.e., unintentional) segregation of the races? Furthermore, critics dispute the assumption on which the Court is entitled to mandate a remedy using race (*Brown II*) to address *de jure* racial segregation.

The issue around *Brown II*'s validity speaks to the unclear and hazy character of what is deemed unconstitutional in *Brown I*. There are various interpretations of *Brown I* among its supporters. Some supporters of *Brown I* embrace the view that the Constitution is color-blind. Individuals are to be judged by their words, deeds, and character, not by so-called dubious qualities such as race. The Constitution is used to end *de jure* racial segregation in the schools, but cannot use race to remedy past harm or its effects triggered by segregation. *Brown II* is hence invalid. This is a position that is taken, for example, by Chief Justice John Roberts. A second group of supporters of *Brown I* argues that *de jure* racial segregation is unconstitutional and agree that the remedy for the harm triggered by such segregation is constitutional, regardless of whether inferior education is an outcome for any racial group. (Race may or may not be legally relevant in the remedy. The remedy extends beyond educational institutions.) This view was held by Thurgood Marshall. Other supporters of *Brown I* agree to the remedy for the harm triggered by *de jure* racial segregation, but only if the remedy supports better educational measures. (Race may or may not be legally relevant in the remedy. The remedy is restricted to and within educational institutions.) Justice Sonia Sotomayor holds this view. Finally, a fourth group of supporters of *Brown I* agree that both *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation are unlawful in both educational and other public institutions. (In this case, the remedy extends beyond educational institutions for both forms of

racial segregation.) Clearly the gist and ambit of *Brown I* and *Brown II* cannot be squared away, given the myriad interpretations of them stemming from the ambiguity of *Brown I*. Do Du Bois' views regarding *Brown I* and *Brown II* fall within this landscape? I argue that he takes a different position.

To understand both the reasoning in *Brown I* and Du Bois' view on black education, a single question has to be kept in mind: Does the affirmation that *de jure* racial segregation in schools is unconstitutional signify that all single race schools are unlawful, unjust, unjustifiable? How does the Court address this question? How does Du Bois address it? The Court addresses it legally, answering 'yes.' Du Bois does so historically, answering 'no.'

*Legal Reasoning in Brown I on the Education of Black Children*

The Court's reasoning in *Brown I* seems to take the following syllogistic form: 1) On the authority of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution, the court reasoned, all citizens regardless of race should be granted equal protection under the law and due process. 2) Legally *de jure* racial segregation of school children is a breach of the 14th Amendement. Consequently, 3), legally *de jure* racial segregation of school children is unconstitutional. But the Court's reasoning did not take this form. The Court could not rely on the validity of the claim that the racial segregation of school children is a breach of the 14th Amendment without making recourse to experience. The validity of that premise had to be in accord with past legal precedents, especially with *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and supported by empirical research. *Brown I* never gainsaid the doctrine of "separate, but equal" established by *Plessy*. It declared rather that educational institutions were special, because of their mission and task to shape the minds and character of youth and to protect youths' intellectual and emotional growth from harm. *Brown I* never legally dismantled and invalidated *Plessy*. Further, the legal reasoning in *Brown I* entailed a silent, fundamental yet disparaging presumption, namely, that blacks were incapacitated in esteem and in intellect due to enslavement and racial discrimination. In *Brown I*, this presumption was operative by virtue of the Court's appeal to a body of empirically psychological research affirming, first, the damaging mental/emotional effects of racial segregation and isolation and, second, purporting to show that black school children have low self-esteem as a result of their racial isolation in racially segregated schools.

Even on the hypothesis that two racially segregated schools, one black and one white, with educationally identical resources and services, were in play, only black children would be debilitated by this racial isolation, never white children. Hence, in *Brown I*, ruling out *de jure* racial segregation in the schools was equivalent to outlawing all or predominantly single race educational institutions. This was because they were seen as harmful to black children in generating sentiments of inferiority and, ultimately, as impractical, since they were not and would not be earmarked for public funds. Yet, in *Brown I*, ruling out *de jure* racial segregation in the schools was not equivalent to ruling out or outlawing all single-race institutions in non-educational settings. *Brown I* failed to claim that ruling out *de jure* racial segregation in the schools was right, because such segregation directly violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, even if disavowing the protection did not precipitate sentiments of inferiority

among black children in single-race educational settings.

*Du Bois' Views on the Education of Black Children*

As far as I can see, Du Bois never repudiated *Brown I* in wholesale fashion or on this point. His critique of *Brown I* appeared to be rather more allusive than pointed. Still black critics of *Brown I* are quite reliant on Du Bois' thesis that there was a need for racially segregated schools for black children and that such schools did not necessarily breed low self-esteem among black children. Rather such schools were established to insulate black children from it and raise self-esteem among them. This was a thesis Du Bois promulgated throughout his lifetime when he addressed the matter of education and black youth. His thesis was also reliant on social science research, but not psychology. Rather, it was reliant on history. So critics of *Brown I* claimed that the Court's reliance on research concerning the deteriorating impact of low self-esteem among black children in all black schools was both wrong on the social science and unnecessary to the argument that racially segregated schools violated the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment.

We should be mindful that Du Bois' thesis was a conditional one, not categorical. Ideally what black youth – at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels – needed, in his eyes, was quality education, period, regardless of whether it was carried out in segregated or integrated schools. But, as long as the "sort of public education, creating the intelligent basis of democracy, was lacking in America," Du Bois argued for the necessity of single-race schools for black children. This quote is taken from his essay "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" published in the *Journal of Negro Education* in 1935, nearly 20 years prior to *Brown I*. Although Du Bois was not explicit on this point, the "sort of public education" he had in mind operates on two different tracks, each with its own aim.

One track guides a black child toward being a citizen, instilling in her the character traits needed to endorse freely the good of her nation as her own, that is, to regard herself freely and fully as part of the national unity. Here the public school serves a political, in this case, democratic purpose and, ideally, would be integrated. In short, this track leads to producing a citizen, who enters the political world already formed. But, as already formed, a citizen brings with her beliefs, aspirations, and self-conceptions that are the results of long and complex learning processes undergone in her 'formative' years. It is this other educational track, so to speak, that Du Bois takes as the focus of his thesis, setting down his position regarding the importance of separate schools for black children, a position from which he never wavered.

Du Bois' thesis attends to the striving for esteem in schools, wherein the esteem striven for can be had only comparatively, i.e., only in relation to the esteem bestowed on one by others and measured only through the eyes and opinions of others. There is nothing wrong with this *per se*. But, aligned with segregation, the bestowal of esteem on black children would entail a malignant propensity to fuel with passionate intensity the incentive for forms of inequality, even with political support, since the esteem sought in relation to others would be measured by those taking themselves as superior or indifferent to black children.

Outside of single-race schools, most black children at the time would, Du Bois states, receive an education "worse than pitiable" or would be "crucified rather than educated." The estimations they receive there for achievements or competences would not be deemed valuable or worthy, would not be defined in relation to the worthiness accorded others, and would not be worthy in the eyes/judgments of others. In short, schools outside of single-race ones would deny or mitigate a black child's esteem by not relying on actual matters as the basis for deserving, at least, commensurate esteem from others. Separate schools for black children would have the opposite and, hence, beneficial effect. In this vein, Du Bois is also critical of the NAACP in his 1935 essay for its stance against separate single-race schools for black children. He claims that its stance would lead to legal decisions that would be unable to distinguish "blatant and impudent" racial segregation against Negro education from separate black schools that were conditionally necessary for safeguarding the esteem of black children from such segregation. How prescient was Du Bois?

20 years after his 1935 essay, Du Bois delivered a speech entitled "Two Hundred Years of Segregation," in which he broadly laid out a history of public education as racially segregated, despite brief and infrequent periods of integration. Although he lightly touches on the history of the public educational track discussed in "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?", Du Bois' emphasis in this speech is on the history of the public schools in their numerous attempts to serve a democratic purpose in the context of racial segregation. I believe this is why he holds out hope for Negro education in the incremental advance of the black vote, securing gradual increase in the curbing of segregation by race in public schools, rather than in safeguarding the esteem of black children in Negro schools from it. Finally Du Bois' 1957 article "What is the Meaning of 'All Deliberate Speed'?" again is broadly a history, but not a history of the phrase's meaning. Rather, it is a history of the times and context in which the phrase was used. The phrase signifies the governmental promise to remedy the harms black people have undergone from state-approved racial segregation. And, for black people, the history refers to the repetition of the promise rather than to the implementation of the remedy.

Du Bois interprets *Brown II* as falling within the history of repeated promises to legislate against racial segregation since, according to Du Bois, the promises to legislate against said offense and to enforce such legislation have been neutralized by the customs and sentiments of segregation's perpetrators. In effect, outlawing *de jure* racial segregation in the schools – because such segregation directly violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment and harmed black youth – was insufficient for generating the political and social will necessary to end legally racial segregation in the school. So *Brown II* was needed, promised and, eventually, ignored. If *Brown I* were correct, *Brown II* would, in effect, be saying, given Du Bois' article, that black children would have to continue experiencing sub-standard education and sentiments of inferiority until an avenue could be fashioned that would eliminate these problems without jeopardizing white students. Some 60 years later, we still await the remedy.

## Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the points I have laid out. The first is that *Brown I* compels us to attend to the meaning of racial equality and equal educational opportunity. Read through Du Bois' critique, it challenges us to come to grips with the value of both striving and esteem for our identities in a pluralistic society. Further, *Brown I* ought not be read as granting legal authority to bring about racial integration. It should be read as merely prohibiting compulsory racial segregation in public schools. With respect to this point, Du Bois can be taken as being critical of *Brown I*, but never as repudiating it, since he read it in terms of prohibiting compulsory racial segregation in public schools. Du Bois' thesis does not commit him to the view that single-race schools should be wittingly and willingly created and embraced. It does commit him to that view *only if* other schools violate rights and single-race schools do not. Moreover, Du Bois vehemently disagreed with the thesis that black children developed sentiments of inferiority in all black schools. Finally, Du Bois neither provided a comprehensive account nor a detailed analysis of the issue surrounding sentiments of inferiority in black children in terms of striving and esteem. Rather he gave a capacious description of it in a number of his writings, a description of the experience of those exposed to the estimation of others when engaged in the quest for esteem. Human beings engage in this quest from a young age, which involves an ineliminable comparison with others. The comparison is unavoidable. It is not just that the estimation can be inegalitarian, but that it can also be inflamed and inflated or deflated. Du Bois knew, however, that fostering an egalitarian form of the sentiment in black children – that is, by educating black children to conceive of themselves as equal in moral standing to all others while seeking excellence and the concomitant esteem that comes in achieving it – could come, during his long life, from a black school without succumbing to *de jure* racial segregation.

## Epilogue

The social movement "Black Lives Matter" has gained major attention in this current setting. The attention to it has been justified, because it brings to the forefront the following curious position. If "all lives matter" can be widely and automatically presumed, then the routine killing of black men and women at the hands of the police under the color of law and the administration of justice would have to fall outside of or be irrelevant to the scope of that presumption. As a consequence, black lives either would not matter or it could be safely presumed that they do not matter. This peculiar stance is what that social movement rightly counters and protests against. "Black Lives Matter" is a movement whose daily rounds journalists ought to cover.

Despite *Brown*, the problem of the education of African-American youth has now been with us for at least 150 years. The parental pushback against "Common Core" and the local school boards' dampening of curricula with creationism or sanitized versions of American history still dominate the daily rounds which journalism covers. But they are not as longstanding as the problem Du Bois addressed and which only history can report. The nature and impact of *de jure* racial segregation have changed since Du Bois' time. But the *de facto* racial segregation of public schools and the inadequate education received by African-American youth therein remain dependent on the ability of local residential arrangements to sustain a prosperous

(rather than a meager) tax base for a school's resources. Economically thriving residential arrangements do not abound in African-American neighborhoods where *de facto* single race black schools exist. Concomitant with that appears to be the presumption that the quality of education for African-American youth does not matter, despite the need for such education to fuel American democracy. This is the point that Du Bois tried to hammer home, recognizing *Brown's* limits.

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# What Is a “Woman” Anyway?

By | 2015: vol. 14, nos. 2-3

I do not identify as trans*. I do not identify as a man. However, I am often identified as one or the other.

Most of the time, in the world of everyday, people at the grocery store, gas station, coffee shop, airport, and so on, identify me as a man: Can I help you, sir? Thank you, sir. Checking a bag today, sir? Handing them identification or a credit card with the name ‘Paula’ on it does nothing to interrupt or shake their confidence that I am indeed a “sir.”[1] This is the world of short hair, height, broad shoulders, and “masculine clothing” means “sir”. It just does. What matters in these brief interludes with strangers is not how I might identify; rather what matters is how I am identified. My intentions, my hopes, my beliefs about what I am communicating in my appearance are immaterial. I am not special in this regard. I don’t create social meaning all alone anymore than anyone else does. The meanings, the symbols, are out there, not in my head.

In more gender aware spaces, that of lesbians, gays, progressive academics, my “gender expression,” in the lingua franca of the times, makes me a man too. It’s just that a lot of these people can recognize that I was born female; hence, they see me as a trans man. Or they just straight up ask me “how do you identify?” The latter attempts to be ever sensitive, in the know, on the right side of progress. When I get that blunt question, in my mind I say, “well, I am definitely on the leftist side, radical about most things, especially feminism, vegetarian, atheist, dog-lover, philosopher, lesbian…” as if I am writing my personal ad. In reality, I often stare into space and then offer up, “well, I am a woman, if that is what you are asking.”

Trans-identified women and men and I have a similar problem: our sex and our gender are misaligned from the dominant point of view. Trans women and I share an especially acute problem: we both want our gender to be seen as a way of being a woman, a legitimate woman, a REAL woman—that is, a woman who doesn’t have to offer up her bona fides to the world anytime someone is confused, perplexed or unsettled when they perceive our gender and sex as incongruous or ambiguous.

And here we have arrived at the triple intersection of the metaphysical with the ontological with the political question: What makes a woman a REAL woman? What does it mean to BE a woman?

Although these questions may appear to be the central questions at stake, if feminism has taught me anything, it is not to stop with the obvious. To take this up from a critical point of view surely calls for asking whose interests it serves to police this line between the real and the

“unreal” where “who is a woman” is concerned. Hold onto that thought as I return to the rarefied air of metaphysics and ontology for a moment.

Oh, were it the case that biology would answer this question for us. Look to nature as she carves the world up at its joints and be done! The biological sciences save us from many a tragedy but not from the politics of the “woman” question.

Nature alone doesn’t provide the neat and tidy, the either/or. Anne Fausto-Sterling has beautifully shown, in *Sexing the Body*, that categorizing even a body as male or female often, even almost always, comes down to a social decision.[2] Intersexed persons, roughly 2 percent of the human population, illustrate that nature is often less concerned with binaries than society is. There is a continuum of human sex-types, and while XY and XX represent two of the largest clusters, they do not exhaust the ways of being human even on the biologically-born level.

Turns out doing the metaphysics of this, the ontology, calls for dirtying oneself in the social, the political, that layer of reality regarded as “other.” Luckily, this work has been done. Radical feminism has theorized “woman.” One of its more salient contributions for this context is showing that what it means to be a woman is not an absolute; it’s relative.

The category “woman” and the category “man,” the groups “women” and “men,” are relational. One does not socially exist without the other. For all the vexing about nature, social categorization is what is being dealt with here. Men without women don’t exist as socially defined. Women without men don’t exist as such either. The categories are equal in their relational existence. Unfortunately, such equality doesn’t extend to their social substance, although we are working on it.

Through consciousness-raising — the feminist method that brings to light the lived experiences of those typically assigned the status woman from birth — we know that femininity is socialization to subordination, enforced through violence, all too often sexualized violence. That this role is most frequently assigned on the basis of biology does not make it biological. To be a man, by contrast, is to occupy the space of “masculinity,” produced through socialization to dominance also majorly through sexuality. The brilliance of patriarchy has been to naturalize these categories ideologically as “man” and “woman” as if they are pre-existent biological facts. The brilliance of feminism has been to expose this lie.

Feminists and trans gender theorists, then, have at least this much in common: both believe that biology is not destiny, that one is made, not born woman, to quote Simone de Beauvoir. Thus the inspiration for this essay: increasingly, some self-identified radical feminists and trans women are engaged in a political battle over “woman.” This battle — and that is an apt term — is not new; it is decades long, only now becoming increasingly divisive and in some cases has included threats and violence against radical feminists and trans women.

Violence has to be condemned. Period. Full stop. Stop it.

At the core of the ideological battle, at least, is a policy adopted by some radical feminist groups of allowing only "womyn born womyn" at some conferences and, importantly, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.[3] Setting aside the awkwardness of enforcing this policy, assuming no one's genitals are going to be examined as a condition of entry, let's look at the rationale for the policy. In keeping with the analysis above, these radical feminists are committed to a non-essentialist understanding of gender: it is not simply biological sex. However, their position seems to be that under conditions of patriarchy, biological sex is used as a basis of assigning gender at birth, so those "born women" are socialized to "femininity" — to "womaness"– from birth in a way that gives rise to a unique relation to the category woman. In particular, a prominent element of that relation to the category of woman is, in their view, bodily—having a vagina, breasts, the sex organs upon which femininity is typically inscribed—that makes one a social woman and hence, for instance, subject to objectification and sexual violation on that basis. Further, the claim seems to be that such "women" constitute a unique and exclusive category for political organizing and activism. Moreover, it is claimed that while biological females have been socialized to femininity since birth, through puberty, and into adulthood, trans women have not, but were instead socialized to male privilege based on their biological sex, hence lack the requisite experience to qualify for the category "woman."[4]

This is the rubber/road moment: does having a vagina, breasts, etc., the sex organs upon which socialization to femininity is initiated at birth, serve either as basis for a unique kind of womanhood or a unique kind of political group? Is it requisite for being a woman in the politically relevant sense? Or is that requisite separable from the body as such, attaching instead to having femininity inscribed upon one's body, irrespective of the physical structures of a vagina and breasts, etc., so as to "authorize," say, sexualized aggression? If so, the basis for understanding women as a political group is social womanhood itself. This doesn't, of course, mean that everyone perceived as "socially feminine" is a social woman independent of his or her own self-identification.

No doubt women who have been socialized to femininity since birth on the basis of their sex organs do have a relationship to womanness that is in some important sense particular. But so, too, do white women, Black women, Latina women, Asian women, lesbian women, poor and working class women, differently abled women, even if it is not based exclusively on their sex organs. In other words, even if one commonality among all these groups is socialization to and subjection to femininity on the basis of sex organs at birth, that does not exhaust their relation to the category woman. Femininity varies along other hierarchies.  Sojourner Truth reminds of this in her "Ain't I a woman?"[5]

Moreover, gender nonconforming persons, whether trans identified or not, are typically confronted with the hierarchy of gender in often violent and torturous ways. Socialization to masculinity is itself about socially demonstrating one's ability to dominate. Fail at it, and what are you? A pussy. A fag. In short, a girl, a woman, someone who allows "them"selves to be penetrated, dominated. I have had fleeting experiences of male privilege myself, despite the fact that I am not a male, don't identify as a man, and sure wish others wouldn't identify me as

such either. Walking my dog at night in Chicago, during graduate school, knowing that certainly from a distance, I would be taken for a man made me relax a bit about being targeted for sexual assault. But it created another kind of fear; men are victims of male violence too. On two terrifying occasions, I was threatened to be beaten up by a man who thought I was a man. Being taken for a man, by these men, meant that they felt they could challenge me to a fight, in public, and my "manhood" would mean I would defend myself. Once it was over a fender bender, once it was over asking the man sitting next to me at a concert to please stop using his mobile phone and talking loudly. In both cases, I narrowly escaped being punched in the face, and in both cases my avoidance of the physical fight resulted in a slur "faggot" the first time, "pussy" the second. And in both cases, I was totally fearful that if they figured out I was "really" a woman, at any point, it would be much worse. One learns the social meaning of being a woman potently from the ways it is imposed on those whose biology alone do not paint a target on them. And I suspect many trans women, from experience, find the male privilege that is lived out over and against subordinate others to be as revolting as the rest of us do.

Now return to our observation that gender is a relational category. Where do trans women stand in relation to men? (For that is the question, not how do trans woman stand solely in relation to women, as is often treated as the only question.) The radical feminist analysis revealed that femininity under conditions of male domination entails widespread forms of discrimination including sexual access for men to women on men's terms, often with impunity, including often with force. How do trans women stand in relation to these forms of male power? Trans women are often socially marginalized, locked out of employment opportunities for gendered reasons, excluded from housing opportunities, lack basic protections for physical safety and bodily integrity, aggressed against for their perceived gender transgression, raped in order to be taught the meaning of womanhood and for who knows what other "reasons," forced to sell their bodies for sex for sustenance, and murdered for asserting their right to exist. That starts to sound a lot like being a woman in this world to me.

This insight that one's assigned social status as subordinate on the basis of sex, and in turn sexuality, is what socially defines "woman" is not mine, of course. Nor is the insight that one need not be biologically a woman to be subordinated as women are. In their canonical work on pornography, Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin expose pornography as "a form of discrimination on the basis of sex." Because their analysis is grounded in material reality, they define pornography as "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women, whether in pictures or words, that also includes… women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation… sexual pleasure in being raped, sexual objects for domination, conquest, violation, exploitation…" among other things.[6] Yet, in the subsequent subsection, they add "The use of men, children, or transsexuals in the place of women…[in the list enumerated] above is pornography for the purposes…of this statute."[7] There it is. When one is socially reduced to sex, treated as women definitively are treated, one is a social woman. Possession of female sex organs is not a necessary condition. To hold as the only constant or ultimate prerequisite the possession of "the female sex organs" as a basis for womanhood is to re-essentalize biology.

It must be said, however, that to the extent that some trans gender theorists or persons claim that their internal sense of gender as male or female is the product of hormones shaping the brain in utero, or offer up any other biological basis of gender identity, they are also essentializing gender in a way that is false (scientific research does not vindicate this claim) as well as politically dangerous. [8] Relying on a politics of immutable characteristics for asserting rights claims is tempting under the current legal framework, but not only is it irrelevant to inequality in fact, it's as likely to work against unequal groups as for them, as history has repeatedly shown. It also makes gender a problem with you rather than with the world, as evidenced by the "gender dysphoria" disorder diagnosis.[9] Describing the desire to live as the sex opposite of one's assigned sex at birth as a "disordered" or "dysphoric" condition relative to individuals omits (and possibly eliminates) any critical assessment of the sex/gender system as it operates independently of individual desires.

Another issue that seems to divide radical feminists and trans people is that radical feminists want to eradicate gender while trans people tend to want to celebrate gender, or at least to be allowed to live a gender in peace. Radical feminists want to abolish it while trans people want to assimilate with another position in it. Trans persons and trans-theorists are certainly no monolithic set, and I cannot speak for either group. However, some trans-theorists argue that "trans genderism" serves to denaturalize the sex/gender identification that forms the foundation of patriarchy. Gender and sex can come apart, they show, and male bodies doing feminine gender or female bodies doing masculine gender expose this rift. And if sex is social, doing gender is doing sex. Radical feminists aim for a world in which people can dress, behave, act in ways that reflect their self-understanding and not be assigned roles, especially hierarchically ranked ones, on the basis of their sexed body types. There are shared premises here. The category trans* is broad; only some of those persons who identify as such seek to surgically transform their bodies to gain the appearance of sex organs representative of typical biological males and females. As to whether that choice is in keeping with a radical politics that aims to denaturalize gender and free the body from gender, I have this to say: In a world in which hierarchy isn't transcribed on bodies, surgical transformation of one's body to meet an ideal, an archetype, won't be perceived as necessary to live and be loved the way one wants to live and be loved, whether with breast implants or mastectomies, penis enhancements or penile implants, liposuction or collagen injections, face lifts, leg lengthening, or whatever and anything else. It may be a form of conformity to sex and gender to change one's body and adopt stereotypical roles, but it is a perceived necessity that surely radical feminists, if anyone, should understand the pressure to accomplish. And many trans people, having been required to sex-stereotype themselves thoroughly to be allowed to transition, have a grasp of the politics of this dilemma that is more trenchant than the understanding of many who are born women.

Which brings me to another element of the critique of trans* offered in the name of radical feminism: that trans women perform hyper-femininity, akin to blackface. Well, so do plenty of biological females. Radical feminism is not, as I understand it, committed to androgyny as the only politically acceptable form of self-representation. But there is a deeper issue here involving the distinction between the ideal world, the one we want to live in, and the world we do live in, the here and now. In the here and the now, failure to have a clear and intelligible

gender presentation that signals “woman” or “man” renders one socially unintelligible, sometimes invisible, and sometimes frightfully visible (as a target of violence). Such social unintelligibility comes at a steep cost and can often only work for an individual with many other layers of privilege protecting them. I am an academic philosopher, now with tenure. The safety of that means that I can work and earn money while living out my perceived androgyny. But it also means that every first day of a semester, I have to live with the fact that half of the class will think I am a man and half will think I am a woman. The students are often baffled; it takes some time to ease that uncomfortableness in the classroom. It means that I have to time my bathroom visits to avoid producing confrontation and fear in women in the bathroom, everywhere I go. It means that I fear and dread traveling to parts of the country where people like me are made to know we aren’t welcome. It means in every single interaction with a person I’ve just met, I wait to see “who” they think I am. This is no cake walk in the park, folks. Add to this narrative that part of the way I get interpreted is a result of the body I was given. I am tall, 6 ft. I am big; I’ve got the frame of a linebacker. When I was a teenager and tried to do the somewhat feminine thing, at least with very long hair, I was still often called “sir.” I was just a boy with long hair to them. I am pretty sure that if I were 5’ 2” and thin, I would be seen as a woman, irrespective of my gender neutral or masculine dress. This is to say, bodies matter to how we are socially interpreted, independent of our choices. If others choose to gender themselves in this world, in the here and now, and that includes “re-sexing” their bodies to remove any question in a society obsessed with the natural basis of gender, I get why.

Another objection some radical feminists make against trans women is that they stand in relation to women as Men in sexuality; Shelia Jeffreys claims that a core part of trans women’s sexuality is the fetishization of the female body, so much so that these “men” want to become women.[10] Aside from the fact that the empirical basis for this claim is in serious doubt, there are other ways to think about this. I have long thought about my own lesbianism that I am a lesbian because of gender not because of sex.  That is, it’s not about male or female bodies for me, but about gender. I can’t be a woman in relation to a man, and in particular that means to me being feminine in sexuality.  I literally can’t do it and be authentic in any way.  I don’t want to perform sexy in the way that is sexy to men.  But, I can be sexual in relation to a woman because then I don’t have to be feminine (there are no scripted power roles involved).  (This is not to say that plenty of lesbians don’t do power roles in sexuality, they do. I don’t.)  Now that I am thinking about this topic, the question arises:  what if trans women don’t want to be men in sexuality?  That is, what if they can’t be masculine in relation to women in sexuality in any authentic way, don’t want masculinity as such anywhere near their sexuality?  I don’t mean they can’t perform, or get off, but literally don’t want to play the role of masculine in sex.  If that is right, then it may just be that the way they can be with women is as women precisely because there is no necessarily scripted dominance/power role in that relation.

I don’t know this to be true, but if it captures a part of the set of trans women, there is something really interesting going on here. And it is the opposite of fetishization. It is the only way they can imagine or live, or imagine to live, egalitarian sex. Add to this analysis the social symbolism of a penis, and you can see pretty easily why one might be motivated to remove that “offending appendage”. I am not saying this is true of all trans women. But it does offer a way

of thinking about trans women sexually that is an alternative to seeing them as fetishizers of the female body. It gives a very unwierd meaning to their desire, if it exists, to make love with women like women do. Before one jumps to the conclusion that I have just said that egalitarian sex between men and women, or men and men, or trans men and women is impossible, I haven't said that and do not think that. I have said that the socially scripted roles of masculinity and femininity in sexuality are not egalitarian, and situated trans women at a potential location in that critique, which is a radical feminist critique if there ever was one.

On an airplane from Chicago to Baltimore, the flight attendant taking drink orders turns to me and says, "what would you like to drink, sir?" I was about 27 at the time and more in place where I would correct anyone who called me "sir." I have now stopped correcting people and just let them believe whatever they believe about me. In this case, I said to this flight attendant, a woman, "I would like a coffee, and I am a woman, not a sir." She looked at me, and said "excuse me?" I said, "you called me sir, but I am woman." I wasn't angry or confrontational, I said it flat and matter of factly. She scanned me from head to toe and said "no, you are not." Meanwhile, all the passengers around us are now observing the conversation. I said, "yes, I am." Again with no inflection. She handed me the coffee with a "whatever," turned her back, and proceeded with her drink orders. This actually happened! No doubt many trans persons live with this kind of thing on a daily basis, although maybe they are better at looking like a woman than I am. I know it's humiliating, it's anxiety-producing, and it's also just plain exhausting. The entitlement of perfect strangers to pronounce what or who you really are, to dismiss you as crazy, to make a public display of your "freakishness," is beyond comprehension. Why do they care?

Of course there are some sex differences between biological females and biological males (the largest clusters of sex types). Reproductive politics is one way these sex differences, bodily differences, come to matter. No biological male has yet been impregnated as a result of a rape or any other way, nor will a biological male need an abortion anytime soon. Such facts cannot be elided. But so what? It's equally true that not all females can become pregnant, either because of infertility or age. Yet all persons concerned with women's equality have a stake in reproductive politics and they know it. Reducing this, an issue with a biological basis, to a "woman's issue" in the biologically limited sense of woman-born-woman limits our political base in the interests of male domination.

To return to the woman question: the category woman is political. "Women" is a political group, for whom the aim of a radical politics is full equality including real liberation. Equality for women, as a group, will be real when sex/gender are no longer a basis for status. Equality for all women will be real when the various forms of interlocking and pyramiding hierarchies — race, class, age, sexuality, geopolitical location, etc. — are no longer used for social ranking.

Catharine MacKinnon, who has been around these politics a long time, put it to me this way. After all these years surrounded by born women who do not, for reasons we do get, identify as women at all, not to mention all those who say they are feminists but clearly have priorities other than the liberation of women from sexual violence and exploitation, it is a breath of fresh

air to encounter this whole new group that identifies as women, wants to be women, sees through sex roles, and opposes sexual violence. Not to mention making the question of sex, which has been pretty thoroughly absorbed into a discourse of gender, interesting all over again.

## Notes

[1] My given name is Paula. My parents and everyone else have called me "Lori" since day one, however.

[2] Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (Basic Books: NY, 2000). See pp. 36-77.

[3] Since I wrote this article, the festival has announced this year will be its last. https://jezebel.com/trans-excluding-michigan-womyns-music-festival-to-end-t-1699412910

[4] Many of these claims have been made to me in private conversation with radical feminists over the "woman" issue.

[5] You can access a copy of the poem here: https://www.sojournertruth.org/Library/Speeches/AintIAWoman.htm

[6] Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, ed.s., *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 435.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Again, claims of the biological basis of trans gender "ism" have been made to me in private conversation by self-identified trans persons. The media is also particularly invested in this narrative, as are some scientists. Here is one example: https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7689007.stm. Much of the media coverage tends to focus on biological explanations of trans identification.

[9] The DMS V, the latest version, defines gender dysphoria disorder here: https://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Gender%20Dysphoria%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf.

[10] Shelia Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny* (New York: Routledge, 2005), argues that "transfeminity" is a form of masochism that is based in the sexual eroticization (and fethisization) of subordination. See, pp. 46-66. Since I originally wrote this article, Jeffreys has published *Gender Hurts: A feminist analysis of the politics of trangenderism* (New York: Routledge, 2014). Tim R. Johnston writes an important critique of the book here: https://hypatiaphilosophy.org/HRO/content/gender-hurts-feminist-analysis-politics-transgenderism.

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# Four Years After the Arab Revolutions: Fighting on Amid Reactionary Retrenchment

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### The Present Moment

Over the past year, the outlook for revolutionary change for democracy and social justice in much of the Middle East and North Africa has become bleak. Egypt has experienced authoritarian military rule at a level that exceeds the repression of Mubarak, thus rolling back the 2011 revolution, even as the US has restored military aid. Libya has descended into chaotic war between rival factions, both of them marked by warlordism.

Bahrain continues under lockdown, with the US maintaining both its imperialist naval base and its support for the sectarian Sunni monarchy. Yemen's democratic opening has given way to a sectarian civil war with massive bombing of civilians by the US-backed Saudis. And most tragic of all, Syria has seen its grassroots democratic opposition shrink as jihadists gain more and more power, sometimes with the collusion of the murderous Assad regime, which itself projects a Shia-oriented sectarianism amid massive backing from Iran. To cap it all, the ultra-fundamentalist ISIS (so-called Islamic State) has maintained most of the territory it seized last year in Iraq and Syria, visiting horrors upon women, religious minorities, and any who dare to express any reservations about its retrograde worldview.

However, this is not the whole story.

First, Tunisia certainly remains a bright spot, relatively speaking. In this small country, where the 2011 revolutions began, Islamist rule was averted and a liberal democracy that allows the left and trade unions to organize openly has been achieved, albeit with no serious measures to deal with the poverty and economic oppression that were at the root of the 2011 revolution.

Second, over the past year, leftwing Kurdish forces have fought the reactionary ISIS on two fronts. In Iraq in summer 2014, the People's Protection Forces (YPG) of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union party (PYD) protected the Yazidi minority from genocide, while in Syria in the fall of that year, they held the town of Kobane against ISIS, at the same time setting up a secular leftist self-governing community that empowered women and working people. While one can question whether the YPG has entirely broken with its Stalinist past, it has been a major force against ISIS, even compared with other Kurdish groups.

Third, a leftwing coalition headed by Kurds, and including socialists, feminists, and LGBT activists, has entered the Turkish Parliament as a result of the June elections in which it scored 13% of the vote, denying the Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) the supermajority it sought in order to change the constitution.  Several observers have noted that this continues the spirit of the massive 2013 Gezi Park movement.

All of these events are occurring in the context of machinations by global and regional imperialist powers. The US-UN-Iran agreement is a major turning point in regional politics, one that has threatened old US allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia. It occurs in the context of the rise of ISIS, which has placed the US in an implicit alliance with the Iranian regime, especially inside Iraq, where US planes have aided Iranian forces allied with local Shia militias. Not only is the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran — even if a decade or more down the road — jarring to US allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel, but also of deep concern to these allies is the possibility in the near future of at least a slight US shift toward Iran in terms of regional politics as a whole.

In the rest of this article I will look more closely at some of these developments across the region. But before doing so, I want to address two widespread limitations that have characterized much of the response to the Arab revolutions on the left.

The first limitation is seen in the denial that these were even revolutions at all, despite the fact that in the remarkable year 2011 three governments actually fell (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) and three more were seriously challenged (Bahrain, Yemen, Syria). Some longtime Marxists have argued that these were not revolutions because they did not change the class structure of society. This is a very narrow definition of revolution, which is at variance with Marx's own view of different types of revolution, one of them "the merely political which leaves the pillars of the house standing," and the other "a radical revolution," attaining or at least aiming at "general human emancipation" (Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction" [1843]. The Arab revolutions were somewhere in between these two types of revolution, mainly expressing political (democratic) aims, but also expressing class and economic ones, especially in Tunisia and Egypt.

The second limitation has taken the form of the premature burial of the Arab revolutions. When Islamist groups won elections in fall 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt, some were quick to say that the Arab Spring had already turned into the Arab Winter. That may be true today, but not everywhere and it was certainly not the case in 2011. For example, from 2011 to 2013, Tunisia deepened its democracy by placing the Islamists on the defensive after radical jihadists assassinated 2 leftist leaders. In Egypt too, the hour of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood was rather brief, as the military took advantage of mass discontent with the Brotherhood, including on the left, to stage the coup that reverberated against the left as well as the Islamists. At a more general level, the spirit of the Arab revolutions continues to reverberate throughout the region (Turkey's Gezi Park and 2015 elections) and more widely around the world (Occupy, Black Lives Matter, Podemos in Spain, etc.).

At a regional level, what the Arab revolutions achieved that cannot be put back into the bottle is the upsetting of a decades-old dualism in which nominally secular authoritarian regimes legitimated themselves by pointing to retrogressive Islamist authoritarianism as the only real alternative. At a global level, the Arab revolutions illustrated for a new generation the suddenness with which mass movements of millions can arise, overthrowing seemingly entrenched regimes in a matter of days. This remains an historical fact even though in today's retrogressive climate, as Marxist scholar of the region Gilbert Achcar noted in an interview last winter, many parts of the region are again locked into "the bipolarity between two equally reactionary forces — the old regimes on the one hand, and the Islamic fundamentalist opposition forces on the other" (Vidya Venkat, "'Arab Spring has now turned into winter'," *The Hindu* 12-25-14).

## The Egyptian Tragedy

The fact that reaction, civil war, and repression reign today in Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, and Libya needs to be viewed dialectically. In Egypt, for example, the brutality of the repression should not be seen, in essentialist fashion, as proof of that country's inherent authoritarianism or penchant for military rule. Instead, the very ferocity of the repression under General Sisi is necessary for the rulers in order to contain the very real threat to the system that the 2011 revolution represents.

When the Egyptian revolution began on the heels of the overthrow of the regime in nearby Tunisia with a demonstration in January 2011, three demands were articulated on the streets: end poverty and unemployment, end the state of emergency and establish an independent judiciary, and political reforms like dissolution of the corrupt parliament and new elections. During the ensuing few weeks, vast crowds gathered on Tahrir Square and the movement spread from student youth to the working people, forcing the resignation of the Mubarak government. The US arrived very late, sticking with Mubarak until nearly the end.

Over the next two and a half years, until summer 2013, three forces held power: the military, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the streets where the youthful left had at least some sway. At first, it seemed that the Brotherhood and the military would create a new regime where the Islamists would rule. But this did not go down well with the youthful revolutionaries, who kept up a protracted resistance on the streets. By spring 2013, this resistance had grown even larger. At this point, the revolutionaries, who had voted in 2012 for the Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi as president rather than a pro-military candidate, made the fateful decision of allying with the military against Morsi. They did succeed in creating extremely large demonstrations that brought millions onto the streets. But just as the Brotherhood tried to confiscate the 2011 revolution, the military now proceeded to confiscate the 2013 protests, installing General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as supreme ruler.

Sisi first targeted the Brotherhood, essentially outlawing the entire organization, in the process carrying out infamous massacres. Soon, however, he also targeted the smaller leftist forces and the liberal intellectuals. A few have disgraced themselves by tacitly supporting the Sisi regime,

which by now exercises a more severe dictatorship than had Mubarak himself. Others, however, like the founders of the youthful April 6 Movement, have paid the price for their revolutionary principles and are now in prison or dead. One prominent example is Shamaa al-Sabbagh, a socialist poet killed by police as she sought to lay a wreath at the site of the 2011 uprising in Tahrir Square. Many others have simply disappeared, Latin American junta style.

Sisi has also targeted the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip. He razed the entire border town of Rafah last winter, sealing up the border even more than the Israelis have done on their end. Judges doing his bidding have reversed the sentences on Mubarak, his sons, and their cronies. Morsi has been sentenced to death in a bizarre case targeting him for escaping from one of Mubarak's prisons during the 2011 uprising, a breakout that is now officially — and preposterously — attributed not to the Egyptian masses but to militant Islamist Palestinians from across the border in Gaza (Jared Malsin, "Egyptian Court Sentences Morsi to Death," *New York Times* 5-17-15).

In April, the US responded to these outrages by restoring all military aid to the regime, which had been suspended since the 2013 coup.

As a result of Sisi's decision to outlaw the Brotherhood, violent terrorism has grown, with radical Islamists telling the Brotherhood youth that democratic politics is a sham. A group based in Sinai that has declared its allegiance to ISIS has gained steam, assassinating the chief prosecutor in June and destroying a naval ship in July. This is the kind of opponent that Sisi wishes for, however, as it helps his narrative of all Islamists as terrorists, and also allows him to present himself as the rational alternative.

Similarly to Saddam Hussein in his last years of power, Sisi has also manipulated Islamic themes, leading to the accusation that he is perpetuating "an Islamist agenda without Islamists." More significantly, Sisi has attacked "deviance and perversion," as gay men have been rounded up and subject to anal tests by police, and radical philosopher Alain Badiou's book *In Praise of Love* has been banned (Hélène Sallon, "En Egypte, Sissi impose un nouvel ordre moral," *Le Monde* 12-14-14).

But what is really tragic about Egypt is that parts of the left and the trade union movement helped sow the revolution's demise, first by trusting the Muslim Brotherhood too much, then by trusting the military to overthrow Morsi and to institute a democratic order. In the worst cases, some of these people supported Sisi in the crucial early months when he was consolidating his power. Many on the left have continued to resist and have paid the price, while also laying the ground for the next outbreak of revolution. Still others are now in exile, rethinking in the face of the wrenching events of the past four years.

### The Syrian Crucible

No country has suffered more than Syria as a result of the repression of the Arab revolutions. In a civil war that still seems far from over, some 220,000 people have perished, most of them civilians. Despite the spectacular barbarism of ISIS, magnified by the global media, the vast

majority of these deaths have occurred at the hands of the Assad regime without much media exposure, whether in its dark prisons or the communities that its military has firebombed over and over again.

According to UN estimates, by this summer some 10 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes, with 4 million of them now languishing abroad. This means that nearly half the population of 23 million people is now refugees, most of them from the Sunni Arab majority that forms the core of the base of the opposition. For its part, the regime has fallen back more and more onto its sectarian base among the Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shia Islam. Some observers have suggested that the Assad regime's strategy involves the permanent expulsion of Sunni Muslims, in order to forcibly alter the country's demography in its favor. (At present the population is about 60% Sunni Arab, 16% Alawite and other Shia-oriented, and 11% Christian.) If true, this would amount to ethno-religious "cleansing" as seen in Bosnia, which would constitute a form of genocide.

A year ago, it seemed that revulsion at the rise of fundamentalists within the opposition had strengthened the Assad regime's base of support and that it was likely to prevail in the end. This also produced a decline in international support for the rebels.

However, the regime seems to have weakened in recent months, as its military has become overstretched due to the scale of the fighting and the drying up of its base for recruits among the ethnic minorities, especially the Alawites, many of whom are fleeing the country.

While Russia's involvement has been steady, Iran has increased its activity in Syria in response to these regime setbacks. Large numbers of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, their Lebanese Hezbollah allies, as well as Shia volunteers from Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere have joined the fray. This has also had major sectarian economic and cultural implications. Wealthy Iranians have reportedly been buying up real estate in Damascus. Last November, Assad allowed for the first time a large public celebration on the streets of Damascus of Ashura, the most important Shia religious holiday. This broke with decades of regime policy restricting outdoor religious celebrations of Syria's various religious communities to specific neighborhoods where they predominate rather than the city center. While Damascus is by no means about to become a majority Shia city, these developments have stoked Sunni fears (and prejudice) regarding the danger of a Shia "takeover," which could increase even further the sectarian element in the civil war (Amar Abdo Rabbo, "A l'instigation de l'Iran et avec l'aval de Bachar al-Assad, les chiites se comportent en maîtres à Damas," *Le Monde*, 11-10-14).

Some cities, most significantly Idlib in the north, have fallen to rebels, who are primarily Islamist, although not ISIS. And though the Assad regime was able to retake some of the southern cities like Homs, the key northern city of Aleppo remains in play in a three-pronged battle among the Assad forces, the mainstream rebels, and ISIS. Last year, mainstream Syrian rebels took on ISIS as an enemy of their uprising, driving it from the center of Aleppo. As I argued in a previous article, it was this defeat that drove ISIS back into Iraq, where it captured the second largest city, Mosul, and re-emerged as an even greater force (Kevin Anderson,

"Popular Movements and Their Contradictions: From the Arab Revolutions to Today," *The International Marxist-Humanist*, July 26, 2014). By spring 2015, however, those mainstream rebels had become even more Islamist, and they used armed force to make groups like the more secular Hazzm Movement join the Islamist coalition that is fighting Assad and ISIS in Aleppo. For its part, ISIS has gained additional territory in some parts of Syria, this spring taking the historic city of Palmyra, where it threatens to blow up its sizable Roman ruins, which form a key part of Syria's and the world's cultural heritage.

While the magnificent Syrian civil opposition that arose in 2011 has been to a great extent driven underground by the militaristic maneuvers of increasingly Islamist armed factions, it has by no means disappeared. To take one dramatic example, inside the ISIS capital city of Raqqa itself, a network of clandestine revolutionaries has spraypainted "Down with ISIS" on walls and has sent damning videos out of the city: "We are revolutionary activists, anti-regime and anti-ISIS. Since ISIS took control of the city in January [2013] our role is to expose its crimes" (Benjamin Barthe, "A Rakka, des citoyens journalistes résistent," *Le Monde* 11-18-14). When a grassroots democratic movement is forced off the stage by authoritarian armed groups, its aims can sometimes also be reflected in exile politics, as seen in a March 2015 demonstration in Paris on the fourth anniversary of the 2011 uprising in Syria. There, rally organizer Hassan Lababibi declared: "Assad and Daesh [ISIS] are two sides of the same coin, and getting rid of Assad carries with it the disappearance of ISIS" ("Manifestation à Paris contre Assad et l'État islamique, un 'monstre à deux têtes'," *Le Monde* 3-15-15).

Wealthy Saudis and other Gulf Arabs have continued to supply ISIS and other jihadist groups with funds and arms, most of which pass through Turkey, where the moderate Islamist and increasingly authoritarian government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan has turned a blind eye, if not engaged in actual assistance to the fundamentalists. Thousands of foreign fighters have arrived in Syria, most of them also passing through Turkey. The most extreme among the Sunni fundamentalists, like ISIS or the local Al Qaeda branch Al Nusra, are of the same ilk that attacked the World Trade Center on September 11. Here, it should be remembered that most of these groups trace their origins to the Afghan war of the 1980s, when the US played with fire in order to counter Russia in the Cold War by arming, funding and organizing jihadist groups. Moreover, ISIS actually formed out of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the most extreme form of Sunni resistance to the US Occupation of Iraq, a group that was condemned even by Al Qaeda for its brutality toward Shias.

ISIS and the Assad regime have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship, and the regime certainly seemed to encourage ISIS's rise for two reasons: (1) sapping the forces of the other opposition groups, which ISIS was bent upon dominating or destroying; (2) allowing its most unattractive enemy to become more prominent, thus gaining reluctant support at home and abroad. As French journalist Alain Frachon reminds us, the Assad regime is no bulwark against Islamism, as some elements of the international Left maintain:

"They are intrinsically linked to radical Islam: its violence is the reflection of theirs in a diabolical pact. To get the Americans to leave Iraq after the 2003 invasion, Bashar Assad's

Syria organized or supported jihadist networks… that went on to nourish Al Qaeda in Iraq, the womb of the Islamic State [ISIS]… In 2011, during the first days of the rebellion that threatened it, the same regime, playing the sorcerer's apprentice, freed the most radical jihadists from prison: this was in order to portray the ongoing confrontation [with the civil opposition] as a struggle against [religious] extremism! Recruiting Bashar Assad into the struggle against jihadism is like bringing pyromaniacs into the fire brigade" (Alain Frachon, "Islam: la bataille des réformateurs," *Le Monde* 1-16-15).

As is well known, in 2014 ISIS took over large swathes of Iraq, including its second city Mosul, gaining huge caches of arms and money. At this point, the US started to alter its policy toward both Syria and Iran. It began to work almost openly with Iran in Iraq to forestall further gains by ISIS, given the disintegration of the Iraq Army in the Sunni belt. This meant US airstrikes to support Shia fighters, some of them Iranian Revolutionary Guards. In Syria, the US also began to bomb ISIS and Al Nusra targets, something that outraged the Syrian resistance, which noted that the US had not intervened — and was still not intervening — against the Assad regime itself, which had carried out so much more carnage than had these fundamentalists (Michael Karadjis, "Syrian rebels overwhelmingly condemn US bombing as an attack on revolution," *Links International*, September 25, 2014).

In April, another cruel setback occurred when ISIS forces, apparently abetted by Al Nusra, overran the Yarmouk district of Damascus, whose 160,000 residents once formed the largest Palestinian refugee community outside the West Bank and Gaza. Beheadings of perceived opponents of ISIS began immediately, in what some are calling the second Palestinian Nakba, a reference to the catastrophe for Palestinians of 1948 defeat of the Arabs by Israel. By 2015, only 18,000 increasingly desperate souls remained in Yarmouk, with some 200 having died of outright starvation during a 700-day siege at the hands of the Assad regime. At the beginning of the 2011 uprising, Yarmouk tried to stay neutral, but was pressed by Assad's forces to side with the regime. Once they refused, they were put under siege. Many observers say that it is inconceivable that ISIS could have entered Yarmouk without the complicity of the Assad regime (Gerry Emmett, "Death in Yarmouk," News & Letters, May-June 2015). Assad is now calling on Palestinians to rally to his side against ISIS, something neither the Palestine Liberation Organization nor Hamas has agreed to do (Clément Melki, "Ce qui se joue à Yarmouk," *Le Monde* 4-11-15).

### Syria Again: Enter the Kurdish Left

But the newest development in Syria in the past year has been the rise of the Kurds as an independent factor. This began in 2014, when the US-backed Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq almost buckled in the face of the ISIS conquest of Mosul. After thousands of members of the Yazidi minority fled onto the blisteringly hot and arid Sinjar Mountain in order to escape ISIS beheadings and sexual enslavement, the US only sent airdrops of food and water and the Peshmerga did little. Instead, the Marxist People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) took to the field across the border in Northern Iraq, establishing a human corridor to Turkey to rescue the Yazidis when no one else

would do so.

Six months later, in fall and winter 2014-15, YPG forces inflicted the first major defeat on ISIS at Kobane, Syria, a Kurdish town bordering Turkey that ISIS had surrounded, threatening to kill or enslave the population. Kobane's successful resistance, abetted by 700 US airstrikes, galvanized the progressive left all over the world. Images of youthful YPG women fighters enjoying equality with their male counterparts, as well as their explicit revolutionary politics, suggested a leftwing turn in Syria after years of horrific civil war. Their enactment of social justice measures in Kobane seemed to recall — and perhaps even deepen — the original social justice content of the Arab revolutions of 2011 in Egypt and Tunisia.

As a group of Iranian writers stated at the time: "An autonomous society with its radical democracy, Kobani is experiencing three special years [sic]. Community councils, in which every walk of life has its own representatives, are the decision makers. Kobani people don't have their own masters, they make their own destinies. Kobani has surpassed all identity borders of race and gender and is a perfect model of human equality, an example unrivaled in the modern history of the region; a life in which people can live differently, an equal life free from all identity limitations; a style of life in which every member of society, whatever their religion, gender and race is, live with equal rights and shoulder to shoulder they manage their society; a life in which man is valued because he is a human. From this viewpoint, Kobani is crucial as a resistance center. Reactionary governments of the area and colonial governments are scared of the spread of such an idea of lifestyle in the region, an idea roaring to the people of the world that ideals of equality and freedom are not mere dreams" ("Kobani, Another World: A Declaration of 209 Social Activists of Tabriz in Support of Kobani Resistance," October 2014)

Since 2012, the PYD has established Rojava, a de facto autonomous Kurdish zone in northeastern Syria, an area not far from where ISIS has its core strength. The PYD is the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) of Turkey, historically a Stalinist Kurdish nationalist group with an iron hierarchical discipline. For a time during the 1990s, PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan orchestrated their guerrilla forces in eastern Turkey from Syria, where the Assad regime granted the PKK legal status. Since his expulsion from Syria and capture by the US and Turkey in 1999, Ocalan has altered his politics, now espousing Kurdish autonomy — dubbed "Democratic Confederalism" — inside Turkey rather than independence. He has also written of a libertarian form of socialism influenced by an eclectic mix of disparate sources, including Friedrich Nietzsche and US anarchist and social ecologist Murray Bookchin.

It was this type of politics that was on display in Kobane last winter and that won the admiration of so much of the global left. For example, the anarchist David Graeber compared Kobane to the anarchist and socialist revolutionaries of Spain in the 1930s. Acknowledging the authoritarian history of these Kurdish tendencies, Graeber focused on grassroots democracy and changes in property relations: "Clearly, authoritarian elements remain. But what has happened in Rojava, where the Syrian revolution gave Kurdish radicals the chance to carry out such experiments in a large, contiguous territory, suggests this is anything but window

dressing. Councils, assemblies and popular militias have been formed, regime property has been turned over to worker-managed co-operatives – and all despite continual attacks by the extreme rightwing forces of Isis" ("Why is the world ignoring the revolutionary Kurds in Syria," *Guardian* 10-8-14). Graeber also compared the PKK-PYD to the Zapatistas.

An international delegation of leftist academics reached similar conclusions after visiting Rojava in December, giving particular stress to women's liberation:

"In Rojava, we believe, genuinely democratic structures have indeed been established. Not only is the system of government accountable to the people, but it springs out of new structures that make direct democracy possible: popular assemblies and democratic councils. Women participate on an equal footing with men at every level and also organize in autonomous councils, assemblies, and committees to address their specific concerns. The women we met embodied the empowerment, self-confidence, and pride recently gained by the women of Rojava. We saw banners and slogans that read: 'The Rojavan revolution is a women's revolution.' It really is."

"Rojava, we believe, points to an alternative future for Syria and the Middle East, a future where the peoples of different ethnic backgrounds and religions can live together, united by mutual tolerance and common institutions. Kurdish organizations have led the way, but they increasingly gain support from Arabs, Assyrians, and Chechens, who participate in their common system of self-government and organize autonomously" (Statement from the Academic Delegation to Rojava," *New Compass: Toward an Ecological Society*, January 15, 2015; see also socialist feminist Meredith Tax, "The Revolution in Rojava," *Dissent*, April 22, 2015).

**Controversy on the Left over the Syrian Kurds**

Not all are so enthusiastic about the PYD and Rojava. Longtime Syrian revolutionary — and former Marxist — Yassin al-Haj Saleh has pointed to the PYD's failure to support the 2011 uprising and noted their earlier history of "siding with a regime that never recognized the very existence of the Kurdish population (8-10% of Syrians) in Syria, let alone their rights," something he attributed to "lenses borrowed from the PKK in Turkey" (Frieda Afary, "Syria, Iran, ISIS and the Future of Social Justice: 'In dialogue with Yassin al-Haj Saleh'," *Radio Zamaneh* 5-29-15; see also "Anarchist Federation statement on Rojava," December 1, 2014).

To be sure, the PYK even today enjoys a truce with Assad regime forces at several locations, part of a "non-aggression pact with Damascus" (Allan Kaval, "A Kamechliyé, capital fantôme du Kurdistan de Syrie," *Le Monde* 6-16-15). At the same time, however, the PYK has fought against Assad's forces elsewhere, as in the strategic city of Hasakah, where its forces repulsed those of the regime and its allies in January and began to establish a local autonomous zone, while also having to contend with ISIS forces in the area. In Hasakah the PYK espouses the same concepts of grassroots democracy that it put forth in Kobane. At the same time, however, the Asayish, the PYK political police, seem to exercise substantial control over the population, including drafting youth into their armed forces (Allan Kaval, "Hassaké, carrefour de la guerre

civile syrienne," *Le Monde* 4-15-15).

As Joseph Daher, a member of the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria put it in an interview during the siege of Kobane last year:

"What is happening in the Kurdish autonomous region is far from perfect. There is repression of Kurdish activists and forced conscription — people who refuse are imprisoned. Institutions that criticized the PKK were closed. The PYD — the Democratic Union Party, a Syrian Kurdish political party established in 2003 — like its mother organization the PKK, is not democratic in its internal functioning. We must remember for example the protest movements in late June 2013 in some cities of Rojava, such as Amouda and Derabissyat, against the repression by the PYD of Kurdish revolutionary activists."

"But at the same time you have some very positive aspects when it comes to the protection of religious minorities, strengthening women's rights, and secularism. In comparison with the popular councils that were established from below in the liberated areas of Syria by the revolutionaries, which are real examples of self-administration, in the case of Rojava it is more a dynamic from above, led and controlled by the PYD. So again, these are the different aspects that you can say about this intervention in Kobanê and how I see it." ("Kobanê, Turkey, and the Syrian Struggle: Joseph Daher interviewed by Riad Azar," *New Politics* 11-18-14).

Two issues are paramount here. First, there is a strong element of grassroots democracy, women's rights, and a leftist political program on property relations being implemented in Rojava. This is very important indeed. One would have to be very naive to think that this is the only element and that the PKK-PYD have not retained some of their old practices and theories.

But what seems to be happening, as Onur Kapdan, a Turkish leftist intellectual suggests, is that the PKK and PYD have been evolving over the past decade or so, moving away from their earlier Stalinist politics and organizational forms and toward something more open. This is even more the case when it comes to legal Turkish groups linked to them, like the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). This young intellectual writes that in Turkey "young Kurdish activists," sometimes influenced by the Zapatista movement in Mexico and by anarchism, "have been pushing different interpretations of revolution and independence as well as different organizational forms to achieve that. I believe that this new generation managed to push the PKK towards their interpretation as well." At the same time, this correspondent concludes, some PKK leaders "are still as Stalinist as it gets." This has led to a three-sided debate in Turkey among the HDP youth, Ocalan, and older Stalinist elements of the PKK (Onur Kapdan, private communication, 7-28-15).

Second, one cannot underline too much that the PYK and Rojava are the most important force confronting ISIS barbarism in eastern Syria and northern Iraq, a barbarism that enslaves women and executes Shia Muslims, religious minorities, and anyone else who does not swear immediate fealty to their dogmatic form of Islam. (ISIS is so repulsive that even the knee-jerk response to all forms of US intervention, even those against genocide, that is usual in many

parts of the global left, has been strikingly absent this time.) The PYK and Rojava are confronting something like fascism and they are espousing principles of gender equality, religious tolerance, and progressive changes in the socio-economic system.

Overall, despite their compromises with Assad and their legacy of Stalinism, one can say that the PYK and Rojava are putting forth not just resistance to ISIS — and to an extent, Assad — but also a vision of different human relations, toward the overcoming of the oppressions of gender and class. Such a vision is sorely missing at this juncture, not only in the Middle East, but also globally. (See Peter Hudis, *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism*, Chicago: Haymarket, 2012. Also, it goes without saying that examples like Kobane should not be seen as connected to the spurious Stalinist notion of "socialism in one country," since no truly revolutionary transformation can be ultimately successful without the uprooting of the global capitalist system.)

In June, the PYK, in alliance with Syrian opposition forces and with support from US airstrikes, took from ISIS an even more important border town, Tal Abyad. Control of this town cuts off the supply line from Turkey to the ISIS capital city, Raqqa (Ben Hubbard and Maher Samaan, "Kurdish Fighters in Syria Seize Much of ISIS Stronghold," *New York Times* 6-16-15). It also linked two large parts of Rojava together, which had been separated by this ISIS stronghold up to now. The fact that the PYK and the Syrian opposition were allied in this attack could be a turning point for the entire Syrian civil war, although that of course remains to be seen.

The ISIS response was swift, and murderous. A week after Tal Abyad, ISIS forces raided Kobane again. Before they were driven back, they had managed to kill some 150 people, most of them civilians. A few weeks later, an ISIS suicide bomber blew himself up in the Turkish town of Suruc, killing 31 young supporters of Kobane who had gathered there. Far from intimidating the supporters of Kobane, it only increased their determination. (This incident is discussed more below, in the section on Turkey, but first I want to take up briefly another relatively positive development in the Arab world, in Tunisia, where events have taken a turn different from both Egypt and Syria.)

### Liberal Democracy in Tunisia under a New Constitution

In what amounts overall to a very bleak period for the Middle East four years after the 2011 revolutions, another positive development needs our attention, the establishment of democracy and constitutional rule in Tunisia. This small country, the first to rise up in the 2011 revolutions, has also been the most resilient in terms of maintaining some of the original goals of 2011. However, this resilience has been limited to the political level, that of democratic and human rights, and does not extend to the social sphere, to the central demands also raised in 2011 for an end to poverty and unemployment.

As in Egypt, Islamists and their allies came to power in the first post-revolution elections in fall 2011, but the Tunisian Islamists of the Ennahda Party were less dogmatic than the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, the military was far weaker — and the trade unions and the

left stronger — than in Egypt. Still, it took massive street protests in 2013 after the assassinations by Salafists of two leftist leaders, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahimi, to force Ennahda to retreat and to allow a more secular and feminist Constitution to be written and enacted in fall and winter 2013-14.

Feminists also played an important role from 2011 onwards in combating any attempt to roll back the fairly strong women's rights gains achieved since Tunisia won its independence from France in 1956. At least around gender, much of the Tunisian constitutional debate took place on the streets as feminists vehemently opposed a 2012 draft paragraph written by Ennahda supporters that described men and women as "complementary" rather than "equal." According to sociologists Mounira M. Charrad and Amina Zarrugh, "Women's organizations, which historically did not exert significant influence on the state in Tunisia, have been exceedingly important to debates about the constitution… All of a sudden, constitution writing emerged as an integral part of the new 'politics from below' in which different groups expressed their opinion, sometimes vehemently." This is very different from the top-down enactment of women's rights provisions under the pre-2011 regimes and it suggests that the new gender rights in the 2014 Constitution will enjoy a deeper level of support within society as a whole (Charrad and Zarrugh, "Equal or complementary? Women in the new Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring," *Journal of North African Studies* 19:2 [2014]). A very small LGBT movement has also emerged publicly, and it is campaigning discreetly to decriminalize homosexuality, now punishable by up to three years in prison (Frédéric Bobin, "En Tunisie, le combat fragile des homosexuels pour la reconnaissance," *Le Monde* 7-1-15).

The 2014 Constitution enshrines a host of democratic and human rights for citizens in relation to the state. It also establishes the principles of gender equality and parity in terms of political representation. In the sphere of religion, it prohibits the accusation of apostasy (takfir), a common tactic of religious extremists that amounts to a call for someone's assassination. These are very significant gains indeed. They are not, however, without their limitations, even on gender. As French scholar Edith Lhomel notes, while women are granted political and economic equality, "these advances unfortunately do not pertain to the private sphere" (Espoir de la Constitution tunisienne," *Esprit* 3-4 [2014]).

The biggest gaps appear in what the Constitution does not even address seriously, the socio-economic sphere. With unemployment and recourse to informal labor at catastrophic levels, young people have been immigrating across the Mediterranean to Europe in droves, often at great risk. Some youth have been drawn to radical Islamist groups, which have profited from the chaos in Libya and the availability of funding from Gulf Arabs to set up training camps in Libya. These Salafists, most of whom now express loyalty to ISIS, have recently bragged of their role in the assassinations of the two leftist leaders in 2013. More recently, they have staged two terrorist attacks on Western tourists, in March and in June. These have claimed dozens of lives and will only increase economic misery by damaging the country's important tourism industry.

The March attack occurred just six days before the leftist World Social Forum in Tunis, which

led to the fear that many organizations would pull out at the last minute. Instead, there was “an avalanche of messages” stating that virtually all of these leftist organizations would attend, “more than ever, in a spirit of solidarity with the Tunisian people.” The opening demonstration of the WSF ended at the Bardo Museum, the site of the attack, under the slogan: “The peoples united, for freedom, for social justice, for peace, and in solidarity with the victims of terrorism and all forms of oppression” (Pierre Beaudet, “Le Forum social mondial, un outil toujours essentiel pour les mouvements et les luttes: Entrevue avec Gustave Massiah”).

Thus, Tunisia has set up a somewhat liberal democratic republic in which feminists, trade unions, and the socialist left can organize openly, something that is hardly the case in most of the region. This has by no means brought about the original revolution’s social justice aims.

Two sets of elections were held in the fall of 2014. In the parliamentary elections, the Nida Tounes Party — a coalition of liberals, nationalists, former officials from the regime of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, and some parts of the left — came in first, but without a majority. The moderate Islamist Ennahda Party placed a close second, while the openly socialist Popular Front drew about 6% of the vote. The first round of the presidential elections had a similar result, with the second round giving a clear majority to Nida Tounes leader Beji Caid Essebsi, who was by then supported by most of the non-Ennahda parties, including the Popular Front, which saw the Islamists as the greater enemy. Essebsi, an 88-year-old politician who served under independence leader Habib Bourguiba, retired from politics in the early 1990s, during the first years of Ben Ali’s rule. In the immediate aftermath of Ben Ali’s overthrow in 2011, Essebsi became interim prime minister, but was for a time eclipsed by Ennahda.

The recent terrorist attacks on tourists have led to a crackdown by Essebsi’s government, with some stringent new security laws that undermine civil liberties enacted. At the same time, social unrest persists. As Nadia Marzouki and Hamza Meddeb report: “Since the formation of the government in February 2015, strikes, demonstrations and occupations of work places have been incessant. Members of the health sector, schoolteachers, railway workers, civil servants have organized numerous protests and strikes. Since March 2015, strikes in the mining region of Gafsa have completely blocked all economic activity in the surrounding area. Recently, clashes occurred between unemployed youth and police forces in the city of El Faouar in the South West of the country. The protesters reclaimed their right to employment and the development of their marginalized region, where many oil companies are installed without endorsing any social or environmental responsibility in the development of the area. As representative of the middle classes, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) appears increasingly unable to deal with these protests and to channel the social claims of the disenfranchised lower classes, who feel excluded from political representation and from enjoying the benefits of the revolution” (Marzouki and Meddeb, “Tunisia: Democratic Miracle or Mirage,” *Jadaliyya* 6-11-15).

On the one hand, this kind of unrest shows the severe limits of the new political order that has been established in Tunisia, one that is still clearly within the framework of capitalism. On the other hand, it is only through these kinds of actions that the revolution begun in 2011 can be

deepened into something that fulfill those aspirations at their deepest level by challenging that very capitalist order.

### Turkey in Flux, with Erdogan on the Defensive

Turkey, which straddles Europe and the Middle East, was not immediately convulsed by the Arab revolutions of 2011. However, as the new social consciousness born in 2011 spread globally, it eventually reached Turkey as well. The resulting Gezi Park occupation of 2013 constituted the most significant leftist mass movement in Turkey in decades. It also created the first serious challenge to over a decade of the ascendancy of the Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its demagogic leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan. As against earlier Turkish leftist upsurges, which involved hierarchically organized trade unions and Marxist-Leninist parties, Gezi had a more grassroots, more horizontalist flavor, one that emphasized ecology (the spark for the protests) and feminism alongside older leftist concerns like labor and the Kurdish struggle. After several weeks, the protests, which had spread across the country, were put down via harsh police repression (Onur Kapdan, "Reflections on Turkey's Gezi Park Protests," *The International Marxist-Humanist* 8-13-13).

A year later, the spirit of Gezi seemed to have dissipated as the AKP won easily against the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) in the mayoral election in Istanbul, while Erdogan soundly defeated the CHP in the August 2014 presidential election. In neither case did the CHP invoke the Gezi protests. Erdogan then set about turning the largely ceremonial presidency into a new power office after having installed a close ally as prime minister, here following the pathway of Russia's Putin.

Within the next few months, Erdogan's support plummeted, however. In fall 2014, as ISIS seemed on the verge of overrunning Kobane, Erdogan not only refused to support the Kurds, but also seemed indifferent to their fate. This led to outbreaks of violence across Turkey in which pro-Kobane demonstrators clashed with Erdogan supporters, leaving some 40 people dead. Even though the Turkish border has been the main conduit for ISIS recruits, it was only after strong US pressure that Erdogan allowed Kurdish Peshmerga forces from Iraq to cross over to Kobane, while still refusing to allow the US to use its military bases in Turkey to bomb ISIS.

By 2015, Erdogan had detained a journalist from the respected leftist newspaper *BirGun*, his police had violently repressed the May Day labor rally, and he had continued to make disparaging remarks about women. Erdogan had also begun construction of a 1000-room presidential palace, which led critics to dub him the new sultan of Turkey, this at a time when the economy had slowed down and unemployment had reached 11%.

Most importantly, his indifference to the fate of Kobane inflamed the Kurds, driving away his conservative religious Kurdish supporters. This also outraged the Turkish radical left, which looked to Kobane as well. The radical left now largely united behind the new Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in the June 2015 parliamentary elections.

In these elections, Erdogan was seeking a supermajority for the AKP in order to change the Constitution to convert the presidency into the chief executive office, thus prolonging his rule. Instead, in a sharp repudiation of the AKP's 14 years in office, it failed even to maintain a simple majority in the new parliament.

A second and equally significant new development in these elections was the strong showing for the Kurdish-led HDP, which garnered 80 seats in the new parliament, with 13% of the total vote. Under its co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas (m) and Figen Yuksekdag (f), the HDP reached out far beyond its leftwing Kurdish base to embrace numerous other progressive communities and areas of concern. For example, some 32 of the HDP's deputies are now women, this after Erdogan had declared that equality of the sexes was "against human nature" (Ghalia Kadiri, "Les femmes entrent en force au Parlement," *Le Monde* 6-10-15)

This HDP success occurred in the face of a violent verbal and physical campaign accusing it of terrorism. This included physical attacks on over 70 of its offices across Turkey. Then on June 6, the day before the election, a suicide bomber sympathetic to ISIS blew himself up at a large HDP campaign rally in the principal Kurdish city, Diyarbakir, killing two people.

Istanbul political scientist Ahmet Insel connected Erdogan's defeat to the spirit of Gezi as well, which had evidently not disappeared: "Undoubtedly, it is the HDP, this alliance between the pro-Kurdish party and multiple organizations of the left and of civil society that is the great victor in this election… Embodying in a way the spirit of the Gezi Park movement of June 2013… [they] suffused Turkey with their demands for equality and recognition, for participatory democracy and for respect for pluralism" (Ahmet Insel, "Après le revers électoral d'Erdogan, 'la Turquie respire!'," *Le Monde* 6-9-15).

HDP leader Demirtas touched these core issues in a pre-election speech: "I did not become a candidate in order to preside over an authoritarian, bureaucratic, anti-democratic, sexist state. The president we hope for is one who will be with the people on the streets…. We will establish assemblies of women, youth, the disabled, belief groups, cultural and ethnic groups, farmers, workers and laborers. Instead of increasing the powers of the presidency, we will undertake a presidency which will guarantee the increased power of the people…. Life together can only be based on equality and freedom. The pressure on all the oppressed and excluded faiths—Alevis, Christians, Jews, Yazidis—must be lifted. The way must be opened for all faiths and worldviews to coexist freely in a pluralist democracy…. The call for a new life means a sexually free society. The system ignores the fate of those LGBTI individuals who face oppression and murder because of their sexual orientation or sexual identity. The very existence of LGBTI individuals is seen as a crime. Homophobia and transphobia are encouraged. In the way of new life, every citizen, whatever their sexual identity, will have equal rights and be able to live freely life without facing discrimination."

On the need to uproot capitalism, the HDP leader became a bit more vague, however: "The neoliberal period has brought fundamental changes in property relations, production and employment. The production process has been atomized, split into small units and reorganized.

Under the heading of 'flexible working,' workers face insecure, subcontracted, uninsured employment conditions that not only divest workers of their basic employment rights, but also rights in all aspects of their lives…. The new life must guarantee the social rights of all workers, especially those in precarious employment" ("Turkey's left party leader Selahattin Demirtas' call for 'new way of life': radical democracy," *Links* 6-8-15).

Afterwards, Demirtas underlined HDP's debt to earlier movements: "As to our source of inspiration, it can be found in the common history of Turkey's socialist movements and in the Kurdish movement, among those who resisted at Kobane and at Gezi Park" (Selahattin Demirtas, "Le rêve d'une Nouvelle Turquie est possible," *Le Monde* 6-30-15).

On July 20, large group of Kurdish and leftwing activists, mainly youth, gathered in Suruc, Turkey, just across the border from Kobane in order to organize support for that town which, as discussed above, had recently been attacked again by ISIS. These youth did so in the wake of both this electoral upsurge for the HDP and that of the Kurdish YPG having wrested the key Syrian border town of Tal Abyad from ISIS. As an evident act of revenge, ISIS supporters proceeded to set off a bomb that killed 32 people and wounded over 100.

This forced Erdogan finally to acknowledge ISIS as a threat to Turkey itself. Thereupon, he did three things: (1) he allowed US planes to target ISIS from Turkish bases; (2) his air force bombed ISIS positions inside Syria; (3) his air force bombed Kurdish positions in Iraq, and, despite his denials, apparently Syria as well. In so doing, Erdogan sought to contain the decline in his support at home and to firm up his ties to US imperialism, which seemed to oblige. He demagogically equated ISIS with the Kurdish liberation fighters to justify his attack on the latter. His aim seems to be to shore up his support at home by appealing to anti-Kurdish fears. In terms of his subimperialist aims, he wants to weaken and destroy the large liberated Kurdish enclave on his southern border that includes Kobane and other towns wrested from ISIS and Assad. Whether this will help him at home or with the US remains to be seen.

What is clear is that since Gezi and Kobane, new liberatory forces have emerged inside Turkey, at a level not seen in decades. To be sure, the AKP machine remains entrenched and is counterattacking, but it was the AKP that was placed on the defensive, first with Gezi in 2013, and then with the 2015 elections. At this writing, it is unclear if it will be able to recover from this setback. Moreover, it should be noted that the most effective challenges to the AKP of late have come from new forces tied to the left, not from the old Kemalist or military establishments.

### Where Things Stand in Summer 2015

Overall, the situation in the Middle East today is one of counter-revolution and retrogression, whether one considers the Sisi regime in Egypt, the rise of ISIS, the carnage in Syria, or a host of other setbacks for the forces of democracy and human emancipation.

At the same time, we have seen a few green shoots that point – amid all the carnage, repression, and imperialist maneuvers – in the direction of an emancipatory future. As

discussed above, these include the emergence of leftwing Kurdish forces in Syria, the Tunisian Constitution, and the new ferment inside Turkey, sparked in part by those new developments in Syria. These green shoots encompass a host of issues central to the twenty-first century left: grassroots democracy, feminism, self-determination for oppressed minorities, LGBT liberation, and, to a degree, discontent with the capitalist order.

“The revolution is dead, long live the revolution!” (Marx, The Class Struggles in France [1850]).

# No Democratic Theory Without Critical Theory

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Since the fall of totalitarian regimes after World War II and the Cold War, mainstream sociologists have fundamentally assumed that the political system of democracy is the only desirable political model to facilitate decision-making in both advanced capitalist countries and developing countries in what used to be referred to as the Third World.

Yet this de-facto utopian depiction of 21st century political life has been marred by repeated critiques of actually existing democracies from mainstream sociologists, among many others. The problem, for these sociologists, is that actually existing democratic processes are increasingly characterized as undemocratic (Cairns and Sears 2012; della Porta 2013; Perrin 2014). This tension between on the one hand, the expansion of democracy globally, and on the other hand, the increasingly undemocratic character of this democratic expansion constitutes the central paradox that sociologists of democracy seek to understand and rectify. For mainstream sociologists, integrating participatory and deliberative democratic processes into the liberal democratic system constitutes the normatively preferred path to democratic rejuvenation. Yet, to what extent can this call for quantitatively more and qualitatively better participatory and deliberative democratic procedures be sustained in the face of a neoliberal economic system that not only subverts the responsiveness of democratic institutions to popular influence but also colonizes those democratic citizens themselves and transforms them into minions of the capitalist system, willing to protect the interests of capital over the interests of the public?

The problem is that modern societies, as democratic societies, contain existing power structures, such as ideologies, institutions, parties, and associations that have resisted the formation of a more substantively democratic society responsive to public participation.[pullquote]The problem is that modern societies, as democratic societies, contain existing power structures, such as ideologies, institutions, parties, and associations that have resisted the formation of a more substantively democratic society responsive to public participation.[/pullquote] In fact, American society has never been a democratic society if democracy is defined as a political system that channels the collective popular will of the entire populace directly through the governmental apparatus. Instead, the labeling of the American political system as democratic refers to a narrow and specific definition of a hollowed-out "democratic method" and serves to conceal the extent to which American society resists substantive democratization (Schumpeter 1942). Mainstream sociological democratic theory that seeks to counter the democratic method and advocate for a more substantial democracy

risk positing visions of democracy that are incompatible with the operation of politics in actually existing democracies (e.g. Polletta (2013) calls for an increase in the participation of citizens in a political system that is less and less responsive to citizen participation). In effect, mainstream sociological democratic theory makes assumptions about the existing political system without situating their claims within the socio-historical circumstances existing in that particular society. This means that to the extent to which there is any kind of democratic theory within mainstream sociology, it has stagnated in its ability to capture the highly dynamic changes in society that influence democratic processes, which thereby undercuts mainstream democratic theory's relevance to theorizing political processes occurring in American society.

## Mainstream vs. Critical Sociological Democratic Theory

Within the larger tree of democratic theory that is characterized by the contributions of political science, political theory, political philosophy, and political sociology, this essay focuses on the specific branch of political sociology that concerns democratic theory. Because no established sociology of democracy exists as a unifying framework for researching democratic processes, sociologists remain fragmented in their approaches to democratic theory. On the one hand, mainstream sociological democratic theory is characterized by those political sociologists who tend to utilize normative and empirical frames to understand the quality of actually existing democratic processes (Cairns and Sears 2012; della Porta 2013; Perrin 2014). These mainstream political sociologists subscribe to democracy as the superior normative political model and construct empirical possibilities as a function of the theories they employ, rather than posit empirical possibilities as a function of actually existing circumstances. The dilemma, therefore, is that the problems and solutions prescribed to rectify democracy are a dependent upon the particular frame being utilized to examine democracy.

In comparison to this mainstream sociological approach stands a critical sociological approach to democratic theory. This critical theory of American democracy in the 21$^{st}$ century recognizes the potential detrimental bearing concrete socio-historical circumstances have on the attempt to theorize modern democratic societies. In effect, mainstream sociological democratic theory does not sufficiently consider how concrete socio-historical circumstances affect the formulation of their normative and empirical theories of democracy. As a result, mainstream sociology's contribution to democratic theory has been limited and even more so, may subvert the attempt to apprehend the actually existing processes of modern democratic societies, specifically American democracy.

This critical orientation to democratic theory stems from the foundational work of Critical Theory as it was first articulated by Horkheimer (1937) in *Traditional and Critical Theory* and developed further by Dahms (2008) in *No Social Science Without Critical Theory*. In his article, Dahms attempts to reclaim the lost programmatic core of the first generation of the Frankfurt school. Dahms urges practitioners of social theory to pay attention to the concrete gravity that specific socio-historical circumstances impose on the attempt to understand socio-historical circumstances. For mainstream sociological democratic theory, this call has fallen on deaf ears.

Mainstream sociology therefore operates under theoretical assumptions whose validity they do not question with regard to the functioning of actually existing democracy under concrete socio-historical circumstances.

The work of Andrew J. Perrin, who is the prominent chair of the theory section of the American Sociological Association, is exemplary in this regard of mainstream sociological theorizing. Perrin's (2014) most recent work, *American Democracy: From Tocqueville to Town Halls to Twitter*, fits well within the larger cultural turn that has emerged within the discipline of political sociology. Perrin utilizes a Tocquevillian and culturally oriented framework for understanding the contours of American democracy. In this way, Perrin claims that he is not studying the government, but "the polity," which denotes an implicit connection between the people and the processes of government (p. 3). Perrin's sociology of democracy therefore seeks to theorize the role of 'the people' in actually existing American democratic society.

In emphasizing the cultural dimensions of democracy, Perrin neglects the economic dimensions. In giving almost no mention at all to the economy in his examination of democratic processes, Perrin therefore implicitly assumes the independence of the political from the economic, as if they were separate modes of power. "Democracy, in other words, is not only, or even primarily, a political phenomenon. It is also a deeply social, institutional, cultural, and historical phenomenon" (p. 13). Apparently for Perrin, democracy has no connection to the economic realm at all.

It even appears as if Perrin goes to lengths to avoid talking about the economy, such as when he states, "Civil society is the area of life that isn't governed by economic markets, private family life, or government actions" (p. 57). Although Perrin never clarifies the relationship between civil society and the economy, the original democratic theorist of the public sphere, Habermas (1962), never neglected the economy's impact, and ultimately its perversion, of civil society, the public sphere, and democratic processes. Even in Perrin's (2014) discussion of "efficacious citizenship", or ways that citizens influence political processes that venture beyond voting, Perrin lists such actions available to citizens as to "circulate and sign petitions; answer public opinion pollsters; organize, join, and participate in organizations; send letters to representatives and to the editor; read blog posts; read and post in social media such as Facebook and Twitter; protest, run for office, and more" (p. 75). Interestingly, giving campaign contributions or lobbying is not listed as an effective action in exercising one's political voice. By not recognizing the political power of campaign contributions and lobbying, Perrin neglects one of the most effective means citizens have to exercise their voice in American democracy and thereby further conceals the extent to which the corporation and elites today increasingly use this political right to augment their power to the detriment of citizens.

Even as Perrin goes to lengths to include Horkheimer and Adorno in his work, he emphasizes the Frankfurt school's cultural theory and ignores how their cultural theory was fundamentally linked to the logic of capital (Dahms forthcoming). Perrin therefore commits an untenable act of distortion of their theory. Overall, Perrin recognizes that capitalism has an impact on political processes; however, he fails to consider that by ignoring the economy in his overall

formulation of democratic theory, he has neglected an integral component to how actually existing democratic processes occur in American society in 21st century political life.

Perrin's analysis represents the form that ideology assumes today. He describes how democracy is supposed to work, as a culturally-collective system that transforms the preferences of people into public policy. However, by not accounting for the interconnectedness of the political and the economic, Perrin's understanding of American democracy is what Lois McNay (2014) would call "socially weightless." Perrin proposes the validity of a theory of American democracy that is so far removed from the logic of actually existing democratic processes that ultimately, his theory fails to provide any meaningful insight into how American democracy actually functions.

Perrin is not the only mainstream sociological theorist with a problematic understanding of actually existing democratic processes. In her book *Can Democracy Be Saved?,* della Porta (2013) presupposes that democracy is experiencing a legitimation crisis and therefore needs to be saved. Della Porta is not suggesting that democracy, in general, is in crisis. Rather she is referring to a specific version of liberal democracy that she posits has become undemocratic and less responsive to the people's will. The global social movements, such as Occupy to the protestors against austerity all over Europe, that seek to integrate participatory and deliberative forms of democracy into the liberal democratic system are challenging this democratic deficit, according to della Porta.

Della Porta contends that since the turn of the millennium, the core tenets of a legitimate and representative liberal democracy have been corrupted by neoliberal globalization, which has produced a decline in the welfare state and a subsequent shift to markets as the legitimate distributor of resources, and also a shift of power from political parties to the executive, and finally a shift of power from the nation-state to undemocratic international government organizations. Della Porta suggests that these changes in modern societies have challenged the legitimate, liberal model of democracy and transformed it into a "neoliberal conception of democracy, based upon an elitist vision of electoral participation for the mass of citizens and free lobbying for strong interests, along with low levels of state intervention" (p. 24). The crisis of democracy results as (neo)liberal democracy increasingly subverts the peoples' will to be represented in government.

While della Porta's treatment of the economy and global relations between states, international government organizations and markets constitutes a significant advance from Perrin's cultural and national analysis of democracy, della Porta's treatment of democracy falls into a similar set of traps as Perrin.

Della Porta perceives the undemocratic features of neoliberal globalization and details participatory and deliberative modes of governance that seek to re-integrate people into the political process, however, she cannot account for the concrete mechanisms that would be needed for citizens to realize a more participatory and deliberative democratic system in the face of the ruthless and relentless neoliberalism.  Who are these people who are theorized to

save democracy? The core problem of mainstream sociological democratic theory is that its theorization of the people is completely devoid of any connection to how the people actually learn and acquire the skills necessary to understand and advance a substantive form of participatory democracy. It is merely assumed rather than critically evaluated that people acquire the skills and abilities necessary for a substantive democracy through various processes, experiences, and institutions of American life.

The persistence of mainstream sociological democratic theory to acknowledge, while simultaneously ignore, concrete socio-historical circumstances, in favor of a normative and ideological theory of democracy, is at the heart of the contradiction in mainstream sociological democratic theory. If actually existing democratic processes in the United States increasingly conform to the model of the "democratic method" as Schumpeter and later rational choice theorists have developed it, then American citizens are being socialized to satisfy a particular version of 'the people.' According to the democratic method, 'the people' are theorized to be a passive electorate that seeks to maximize their self-interest by voting for political parties that are perceived to be commensurate with their interests. This is a passive and demobilized citizenry, and it has increasingly become the reality of democratic life for a majority of Americans. For example, the national turnout for the 2014-midterm elections was 36.3 percent of Americans—the lowest turnout in 72 years (Alter 2014). The reality of the American people stands in stark contrast to the version of 'the people' posited by mainstream sociological democratic theorists. In their theories, 'the people' are assumed to be active agents who have in interest in not simply electing politicians, but in participating and deliberating to create public policy themselves that protect public interests.

The model of 'the people,' advocated by mainstream sociological democratic theorists, contradicts the reality of 'the people' that exists in actually existing American democracy.[pullquote]The model of 'the people,' advocated by mainstream sociological democratic theorists, contradicts the reality of 'the people' that exists in actually existing American democracy.[/pullquote]  The implication is that the solution to the crisis of liberal democracy, which for della Porta is simply to supplement liberal democracy with more participatory and deliberative forms in a context of high-quality communication that empowers citizens, is fundamentally flawed. An empirical example derived from the United States in November of 2009 illustrates how the solution strategy of mainstream sociologists functions to empower not people, but capital and corporations. At this time, a random sample of three hundred Michigan residents convened in Lansing to participate in a deliberative democratic forum that sought to develop a solution strategy to address the state's impending fiscal crisis. Organized by Stanford professor James Fishkin and his Center for Deliberative Democracy, the three-day deliberative democratic forum established, as much as possible, the conditions to facilitate rational deliberation among citizens across the political spectrum, in a mock ideal speech situation (Center for Deliberative Democracy 2010).

The deliberative democratic experiment resulted in increasing popular support for raising taxes on themselves, through the sales and income taxes, and cutting the business tax for corporations (Center for Deliberative Democracy 2010). In effect, deliberative democracy,

which has been endorsed for its promise to empower the public to realize their interests, has resulted in citizens taking on the burden of the state's fiscal crisis and allowing corporations to exact more and more profits in the process. This outcome, more or less, resembles the neoliberal economic tool of austerity where citizens shoulder the burden of fiscal adjustment while the interests of capital are protected. In the United States, the people not only vote for representatives who implement austerity, which has happened on both a federal and state level, but also actively desire austerity, and in this example, will implement it themselves if given the option.

## Theorizing Capital at the Center of Democratic Processes

Mainstream sociological democratic theory is unable to reflect on its immersion in time in space, and its associated ideological mode of theorizing. Furthermore, it rejects the need to reflect on the nature of reality in general and of concrete challenges in particular because reflection would impede the employment of normatively-inspired strategies for democratic rejuvenation. To put it simply, if mainstream sociological democratic theory actually took seriously the implications of concrete socio-historical circumstances, their normatively-inspired democratic theory of having 'the people,' as they currently exist, save democracy would have to be fundamentally revised if not all-together abandoned. However, Dahms (2008) situates sociology as the discipline theorized to be oriented to studying specifically what impact concrete socio-historical circumstances have on the development of theory and empirical possibilities. Thus, sociology, in its non-mainstream variants, is actually well positioned to confront the discrepancy between idealized projects of democracy and the actuality of modern society. Furthermore, sociology is positioned to discern the forces in society that compel people to act in particular ways in different contexts.

A critical sociology of democracy could satisfy the requirements needed to adequately apprehend actually existing democratic processes in American society.

Overall, it is possible to suggest that actually existing democracy in American society has never meant to realize the collective popular will. Following Postone's (1993) suggestion that social theorists must grasp "the constraints to democratic self-determination that are imposed by the abstract form of domination rooted in the quasi-objective, totalizing, historically dynamic form of social mediation that constitutes capitalism" (p. 393). It may be possible to take this statement further and posit that capital is the subject of democratic society, not the people as traditionally conceived. Such a process can be traced through the continued evolution of the corporation as a legally protected 'individual' whose massive capital reserves and employment of an army of lobbyists allow the corporation to be the supreme political actor in what is an increasingly incorporated American state. In effect, American democracy, as it exists, cannot realize the will of the people, as commonly theorized by mainstream sociological democratic theory, but instead, actually existing democracy has contributed to the abolition of the people as a social actor able to protect its interests in the democratic process.

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# The Practical Import of Political Inquiry: Perestroika's Last Stand

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*So let's switch off all the lights and light up all the Luckies, Crankin' up the afterglow Cause we're goin' out of business, everything must go.*

–Walter Becker and Donald Fagen

Disciplinary disputes in political science, have often implicitly and explicitly involved questions about the nature of social science knowledge. Despite this they have not produced radical reformulations of the disciplines ruling ideas of social inquiry. Examining some of these disputes shows the need for a deeper questioning of the nature of political inquiry and its relation to a critical social theory. This can be achieved by an analysis of the participants' perspective in social inquiry.

In March 2013, the US Senate voted approved an amendment which defunded Political Science grants from the National Science Foundation budget for the upcoming fiscal year. The amendment proposed by Senator Tom Coburn eliminated Political Science funding by NSF unless a project "is certified as promoting national security or the economic interests of the United States." [1]This amendment would have changed the accepted criteria of the NSF which takes scholarly merit and impact as the prime criteria. Coburn to be sure had a neo-liberal agenda which was aimed at much at "wasteful" government funding of research and of delegitimizing government programs aimed at the public good, than at academic political science. He followed in the wake of earlier republican criticisms that accused the NSF of mismanagement.[2] Still Coburn repeated some widely held criticism of political research. He pointed to the seeming triviality of research which present common sense knowledge as scientific discoveries, such as a $251,000 study measuring public attitudes toward congress. Such a study might yield little more than the layman's knowledge of the public's distaste for congress.

While funding was restored for Political Science, the discipline reacted swiftly and aggressively to the threat to its treasured funding. It was clear that in the current political climate the negative publicity was impacting the perception of Political Science. The APSA criticized the politicization of research that would undermine the neutrality of the scientific process "Adoption of this amendment is a gross intrusion into the widely-respected, independent scholarly agenda setting process at NSF that has supported our world-class national science

enterprise for over sixty years"[3] Despite the fact that the NSF largely favored quantitative research based on an implicit natural science model, one which was widely contested in the discipline, the report rallied around the threat to the prestige and status (not to mention money) associated with an NSF grant. There was little questioning of whether the kind of research NSF funds is really in the public interest or promotes discussion of vital public affairs. With this report a second round of disciplinary reform came to a definitive end.

The 2014 APSA task force report "Improving Public Perception of Political Science's Value" [4]can be seen as the official response to the actions of the senate (and in 2014 the house). Brushing aside any question of the merit of various approaches to political inquiry, the report sees the problem as one of communication and public relations. Both internal and external conflicts have generated a need to make political science more visible and to raise public awareness about the value of political science research. Internally, conflict built into the system of rewards that full time faculty encounter. Faculty get rewarded for inner-university achievements, such as research and instruction: "universities have developed an infrastructure to nurture and reward these activities [creating and disseminating knowledge to students]. This infrastructure gives scholars a direct personal stake in the creation of knowledge and rewards them for conveying knowledge to students and to groups of similarly situated colleagues."[5] Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether this white bread description of the system of academic rewards bears much relation to the reality of the corporate dominated university populated by low paid adjuncts, faculty, according to the task force, are not rewarded for trying to engage a broader audience. The beleaguered professoriate is forced to "choose between actions that produce pay raises and promotions and actions that broaden the value of their expertise"

External challenges have also arisen. Faculty and university administrators are faced with the influence of new communication technologies that have erased or at least severely eroded the traditional gatekeeping functions of academic expertise. This erosion has led to challenges to the legitimation of the scholarly enterprise. On the one hand the rising costs of university education has led to questions about criticism of the value of a college education, and on the other lay individuals are able to have their say on matters of public import using technologies like the internet. Even children and poor people (for heaven's sake) the report notes can use social media to give their views.[6] Given this situation political scientists need to act aggressively to enter this new communicative world.

The report provides a number of rather bland solutions to this new situation. It hopes to change the reward structure of academia in part by making political science more visible, They include hiring an outreach director and a science writer, creating a speaker's bureau, teaching communication skills, and creating new and exciting electronic journals. These changes however, are meant to compromise academic excellence. Any work ought to retain its scholarly quality and be subject to peer review,

The report responds to public questions of legitimacy with new strategies, but not a new conception of the relation of expert knowledge to layman's knowledge. It retains the veneer of

scientific expertise, while venturing into the world of new media and takes for granted the separation of scholarly production from the rest of social life. Thus it maintains the image of the expert scholar whose scientific expertise stands above and beyond the knowledge of layman. In my view the Task Force report seems regressive. It ignores the several decades of criticism concerning the practical import of science research and its internal connection to practice.

Of course this is not the first time the discipline has faced challenges to its scientific self-image. Two movements in particular from within the discipline challenged the assumptions of scientism in political science: the Caucus for a New Political Science in the late sixties and the Perestroika Movement in the first decade of this century.

Arising in the midst of the social conflicts of the sixties the Caucus for New Political Science formed in 1967 and challenged the then dominant behavioralist and pluralist conceptions of political science. The caucus raised both methodological and practical political issues. They rejected behaviorism with its natural scientific and value free approach and sought a political science that was engaged with public issues. They urged the APSA to abandon its own neutrality on public issues and take a stand against the Vietnam War and to speak out on other public issues.[7] The events of the sixties had highlighted the sterility of much mainstream research. The dominant forms of pluralism uncritically celebrated American democracy as a post ideological consensus, and neglected issues of power and domination, ideology, poverty and inequality. In contrast, the caucus sought an engaged scholarship that "aimed at making the study of politics relevant to the struggle for a better world." While efforts to gain positions of power within the APSA were not successful, the caucus did have a long term effect on the direction of political science scholarship. As the behavioral model fell apart due to both internal and external shortcoming there was room for a wider variety of approaches to political science including interpretive, phenomenological, critical theory. postmodern and feminist approaches.[8]

Several decades later the situation had once again changed. New forms of scientism had come to predominate. A broad movement toward qualitative approaches to political science came to the fore, accompanied by the increasing dominance of rational choice theories. These approaches came to dominate publication in the major journals in political science, and had reduced qualitative comparative and historical approaches to a secondary role. Political science research was once again modelled more closely after natural sciences and the discovery of invariant regularities. Rational Choice research was characterized by a proliferation of formal constructions of models of action generated from axiomatic assumptions like neo-classical economics.. It was often hard to see how these formal models bore much relation to practical political problems or even to generate empirical predictions that were not trivial. Further these models failed to help us interpret cultural identities or practices which were not based on strategic action. The massive failure to understand Islamic cultures and the failure of US triumphalism, stand out as examples of the failure to take more seriously interpretive and historical approach to other cultures.[9]

It was against this background of this new disciplinary constellation that the anonymous Mr. P. sent out a series of emails that started what became known as the Perestroika movement.[10] His criticisms of the dominance of formal models and quantitative research struck a broad chord among many political scientists. It started a wide ranging discussion about both approaches to political science and its practical uses. The main focus of Perestroika's reform was the creation of methodological pluralism and greater diversity in the discipline. It wanted to change the way publishing was organized and change the governing structure of the APSA as well as the organization of graduate education. Though it was certainly concerned with the public use of political science, it was less explicitly concerned with engaged scholarships as with reform of the discipline from within, although many pushed perestroika to take a broader role. This conflict was a major line of force in Perestroikan debate.

Perestroikans liked to use the language of rebellion and insurgency to characterize their project. They wanted to storm the barricades and tear down the walls of a rigid bureaucracy that had kept them and their work subordinate, and the lively wide-ranging discussion and activist spirit had an impact. Some journals changed their politicies to incorporate a broader range of approaches and a new journal was born to address the need for more relevant scholarship. Still the extent of disciplinary hegemony and the sense of felt oppression by qualitative theorists should not be underestimated. Proficiency in statistical techniques had become a powerful sorting device for purging the discipline of "soft" thinkers.[11] A number of graduate students and young faculty who told stories of pressure to do qualitative work chose to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals. However, Perestroika had some internal problems which lead it to fragment. It had little or no structure. Organized around an email discussion list with an anonymous moderator, Perestroika took no official position on anything. To be sure there were Perestroikan panels and meetings at conferences and even Perestroikan candidates ran for offices, but they bore no official imprimatur. Perestroikan goals remained unclarified. In my view Perestroika cohesion was organized primarily around the charismatic personality of Mr. P. and when he stepped down after several years, there was no real permanent organization to routinize his charisma.

The challenge to the gatekeepers of the discipline however only went so far and this created in my view unresolvable tensions in Perestroikan discussions. The barricades even within Perestroika were up for graduate students who went beyond criticism of methods and directly challenged the authority and wisdom of faculty mentors. Graduate students especially were subject to be dressed down by some members for the audacity of their suggestions. The same went for part time faculty. Even though the decline of historically oriented scholarship bore a direct relation to devaluation of the humanistic knowledge and the use of low paid adjuncts many assiduously avoided these connections. The biggest tension remained between those who wanted a better deal in the profession and those who saw the problem of knowledge in broader terms.

The lively discussion of politics in the perestroika list in the early years, waned after Mr., P stepped down various attempts were made to make Perestroika a no politics zone. Apparently the irony a polical science discussion group trying to ban political discussion escaped some and

discussion of any political issues often received a rebuke from more conservative types attacking “those liberals” Perestroika went from a lively and challenging discussion filled with excitement to a moribund list with the occasional job announcement or news item, Imagining perestroikans putting their careers in peril for reform as antiwar critics in the caucus for a new political science did a generation earlier is seemed more and more unlikely. The internal reform of the discipline necessarily involved a change in the way it addressed the public world as well.

Perestroika’s last stand came when Glenn Beck libeled well known activists Richard Cloward (by then deceased) and Frances Fox Piven as treasonous conspirators.[12] I have detailed the demise in a bit more detail in my contribution to the symposium Perestroika at Ten[13] so I will not repeat it here. Beck’s attack on their activist scholarship illustrated the widening gap between those who thought Perestroika ought to take a stand and defend public intellectual activity, and those who wanted it to be little more than a method group had become unbridgeable. After all even the staid APSA council protested it as has had the ASA. Rather than tearing down the walls in the spirit of insurgency, it was putting up barriers to that very spirit. It had lost its raison d’être

## Perestroika’s Legacy

Perestroika’s legacy remains ambiguous. In his analysis of revolutionary movements in Political Science John Dryzek, writing in 2006, considers Perestroika a potential revolutionary moment — though one on which a final judgment cannot be rendered. He claims

A successful revolution may be defined in terms of resetting the discipline’s agenda, as validated by the recognition of practitioners, whether or not they shared the movement’s commitments. Practitioners then have to position themselves in relation to the new understanding, even if they do not share it. Success must be recognized as such. [14]

I think however, Dryzek is a bit loose with his use of the term revolution to describe disciplinary changes. His notions really represent changing disciplinary ruling groups not a change of disciplinary structure. For example, behavioralism certainly made a change in how politics was studied but not a radical change in how the “data” of political science were understood in relation to observers and participants. It may have changed the techniques of science, but retained its commitment to a scientisitic approach. It was still what Horkheimer referred to as “traditional theory.” David Easton for example says that “Most narrowly and most accurately the phrase [“behavioral sciences—BC] refers to those bodies of knowledge, in whatever academic department they may be found, that provides or aspire to provide verified principles of human behavior through the use of methods of inquiry similar to those of the natural sciences.” [15] Similar calls for objective science and rise of scientism in political science go back to the early 20th century. [16]

If Perestroika simply aimed at the incorporation of interpretive, historical or comparative case

studies into the mainstream then it would be another candidate for regime change in political science. It might even be considered a partial success having some impact in reforming journal practices and raised awareness of need for greater methodological diversity. However, it failed to address more fundamental challenges. While Perestroika originated in a methodological dispute, these disputes inevitably raised critical questions both about the character of social science knowledge and its relation to critical social and political questions. There was extensive discussion of the practical implications of research but little about its participatory character. It did not produce a compelling account of the way that critical understanding and practical commitment is built into the structure of social inquiry. Others like Rabinow and Sullivan cognizant of this issue. They note that interpretative understanding represents not simply one method among many. "This view" [of method as central – BC] "Displaces the significance of the interpretive turn, and ultimately empties it of its capacity to challenges practices of knowing in our culture." What does the incorporation of interpretive and historical understanding in political science inquiry say about the dominant conceptions of disinterested inquiry? [17]

There is a connection between the methodological imitations of political science and its practical failures. In and of themselves quantitative inquiry and rational choice models shorn of interpretive frameworks tell us little about what we ought to do or how to employ political understanding in a productive way. They have not produced nor can they produce any invariant laws of social action, in practice, they have been largely misleading. Rational Choice in particular suffers from what has been called "Model Platonism,"[18] We need to ask the additional question: What is the relation between political inquiry and political understanding in the public world and everyday life and how does inquiry shape this direction? These questions however take Perestroika's debate out the realm of academia purity to ask about the connection between academic knowledge and the everyday social world. I think however, that the connection of methodological failure to practical political life was never sufficiently developed, and this was one major reason that Perstroikans failed to transform the discipline. The issue is not simply one of increased methodological awareness or increased practical utility. The is inherent connection between social inquiry and everyday life that remains unanalyzed

The report of the Task Force seems to me to illustrate this failure. It defends a traditional view of social science knowledge as produced by experts and disseminated to the public without any awareness of the limits of these models. We need to develop a model of inquiry that stresses the reciprocal relation between inquiry and social life.

At the risk of calling on the owl of Minerva, I develop a few notes aimed at radically rethinking social inquiry in order incorporate a more reciprocal relation between participants' and inquirers. Perhaps a new round of reform will someday take up these questions more seriously.

### Taking the participant's perspective seriously

After the members of the Frankfurt Institute fled Nazi Germany for New York City, Max

Horkheimer published his seminal essay “Traditional and Critical Theory.”[19] Horkheimer defined critical theory in opposition to ‘Cartesianism’. Whether it was rationalist or empiricist, traditional theory assumed the perspective of the external observer. Insofar as they sought a pure theory, Horkheimer’s contemporaries, such as Husserl, took it to be ‘a systematically unified set of propositions taking the form of a systematically unified deduction’. (Horkheimer, 1972, 190)  Following the model of the natural sciences, pure theory sought to subsume particular facts under causal laws that in the best case could be expressed mathematically

By contrast, Horkheimer drew on Marx’s materialist critique of political economy. Here, according to Horkheimer, the facts are intrinsic or internal to material life processes within which social actors are always and already embedded as participants. Though contemporary critical theory does not accept this premise in that exact form it still assumes that the theorist shares the standpoint of a participant and has an equal standing with other member of society. Horkheimer argued that, while it takes society as its object, critical theory changes the relation of the ‘subject’ to the ‘object’ of inquiry. Because it conceives facts not as ‘stand-alone’ data that is external but rather as intrinsic to the perspective of the participant, it maintains a reflexive relation to the social subjects who are at the same time the objects of the theory. It aims to overcome the separation of the supposedly detached theorist from the citizen. The theorist is both analyst and member of society. The aim of theory is not the achievement of systematic purity, but the elucidation of the social process in its interconnections and developmental tendencies. Like subjects who engage in practical activity, theory seeks a better life. It is “not just a research hypothesis which shows its value in the ongoing business of men; it is an essential element in the historical effort to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men.”[20] (245-6). Thus critical theory is not concerned with the accumulation of knowledge by itself, but to promote freedom from unnecessary restraint and empower the free development of human abilities. Horkheimer does not see this as an abstract ought or imperative to make an impact on society. It stemmed from the fundamental connection of theory and social involvement in the creation of knowledge.

Thirty years later writing against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, Christian Bay raised a similar critique of the neutrality of inquiry. Bay argued that the conception of the scholar who could effectively separate public and private roles was an illusion. Like liberal political theory, which separates public and private, the scholar thinks he can separate his personal and scholarly roles. From nine to five he is the detached neutral scholar. Afterwards he can engage in politics, but he should never politicize his work. [21] Bay, like Horkheimer, rejected this view. Far from being neutral in his work, the scholar that refrains from politics is in fact already taking a stand. He tacitly accepts the status quo. The neutral stance excludes critical discussion of current events and suppresses dissenting views, Bay’s work was important for its impact on the Caucus for a New Political Science, which advocated for a more committed conception of politics. Neither Horkheimer nor Bay rejected methods of social science research. They did however hold that research is not sufficient without critical reflection. It is not a neutral gathering of “facts.” Horkheimer thought that the role of theory was to provide a diagnosis and analysis of historical conditions, which integrated the results of the more special sciences. However, he thought that much of the research of his time especially “mathematical

political economy" had lost contact with the fundamental situation of the times or with knowledge connected to historical reality.

While Perstroikans addressed some of the concerns raised by these dissenting thinkers, they did not follow this insight far enough. Rogers Smith concurs with critical theorists that scientific inquiry into human affairs, especially political affairs, is distinctive because propagation of the results necessarily affects both the studiers and the studied. Instead of extending this insight into a conception of the relation between researchers and participants, Smith focuses on the relative precision of knowledge and causal explanations, not on understanding of our social and historical situation. "I conclude" he notes, "that the main endeavor of political science should be to make roughly probable empirical and logical cases for and against claims about political questions that many people can be persuaded to regard as substantively important."[22] This formulation tacitly reverts to the model of an expert who stands outside his audience and who provides use information to them. He leaves out the reflexive and critical elements of social science inquiry that link participant and observer.

Even less can be said about what has been called the perestroika "lite" debate. If the contributors to a symposium in *Political Studies* are any indication, the discussion of the relevance of political inquiry has fallen behind earlier movements.

Under the rubric of "perestroika lite", a debate over the relevance of political science has taken place primarily in Europe. According to Matthew Flinders and Peter John, political scientists increasingly feel pressure "to demonstrate the impact or relevance of their research and writing." [23] Unlike the American context, European political science is less informed by rational choice and quantitative approaches. Thus the authors claim that the "lite" debate takes place primarily on the terrain of the institutional context of academic knowledge and does not contest questions of the nature of knowledge. This debate takes a sociological view of the creation of knowledge and its dissemination.

The analyses of an earlier generation of political scientists from the Caucus for a New Political Science to Perestroika have rested on the thesis (according to Flinders) that the professionalization of political science and its ensconcement as an academic discipline has led to the isolation of knowledge from practical engagement. Academic work has failed to contribute much to improving democracy and instead has led to a sense of irrelevance.

The contributors to a symposium in Political Science Review express some hesitance about Perestroika's critique. Writing against the backdrop of the British Higher Education Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 that attempts to specify criterion of impact, Peter John is skeptical of the evidence that the impact or relevance of political science has decreased. He decries the lack of empirical evidence that political science has less impact than in the past and suggests that not only direct but indirect influence is apparent in contemporary political science. The internet and new social media can provide new opportunities to disseminate findings and of creating 'impact.'[24] Following him, Flinders argues that the issue is not really a decline in relevance but a perception gap. Critical histories of political science such as Ricci's

*The Tragedy of Political Science* have emphasized a narrative of decline.[25] Since academic political scientists have come to believe these narratives of decline or tragedy they have come to inform the debate. His article implicitly transfigures this debate from one of the value of knowledge to one of the translation of expert cultures to the public. Other contributors are even more skeptical. They believe political science is already policy relevant; the problem is simply that politicians ignore this work. Still others see the pressure to be relevant as indicative of a tyranny of relevance which threatens to "politicize" research or threaten its integrity by demands for impact. They want to make sure that an intact expert culture pursues its own idea of good research.[26] Translating "pure research" into a practical context often proves difficult and can negatively impact research according to Flinders. Seeking a more nuanced notion of the relevance of political science Flinders calls for an "art of translation" that is sensitive to the difficult task of mediating research to the public.[27]

While these critiques raise questions about the relation of experts to their audience and challenge us to think more precisely about relevance and impact, they are at one with the APSA task force in their need to retain an intact expert culture whose integrity is maintained through a strong separation from the participants' perspective. In one sense the criticism provided by Perestroika lite is in error: Perestroikans did provide some studies showing that major journals had become dominated by quantitative and rational choice approaches that had questionable relevance or empirical content.[28 The second criticism concerning the narrative of decline requires a different approach. Flinders makes a faulty assumption here; such questions cannot be settled by more date about impact but require an answer to the question knowledge for what? Questions of decline and tragedy are inherently historical and have to do with the identity of the discipline.

The lite approach however suffers from a second more significant weakness. In focusing on the question of transmission it leaves both the origins and the terminus of the process unchanged. Since by the admission of its practitioners it is not concerned with questions of knowledge it really cannot address questions of whether types of knowledge might affect the way in which questions of relevance or impact are defined. Transmission is seen as the instrument of relevance. It seems to take for granted the existing practice of research and the current structure of the public and tacitly adopts the natural scientific model of the relation of research to the public. More than mediating expert inquiry and public life, the question of bearing of knowledge to everyday requires both a transformation of inquiry and the reinvention of public life.

Certainly, Flinders is sympathetic to the more critically oriented attempts to increase the relevance of social inquiry. He cites Michael Burawoy's proposal for a public sociology as a primary example of the plurality of ways that knowledge can be translated into public discourse. Burawoy's develops a number of roles for critical sociological knowledge that are not compatible with Flinders' notion of transmission.[29] Public sociology, in the sense employed by C. Wright Mills, was the translation of private troubles into public issues, a tradition of writing that also included Gunnar Myrdal, David Reisman, Mills himself and more recently Robert Bellah, among others. This group advanced a view of a public sociology that

addressed not just sociologists but social and political publics on matters of social import.

They are written by sociologists, they are read beyond the academy, and they become the vehicle of a public discussion about the nature of U.S. society—the nature of its values, the gap between its promise and its reality, its malaise, its tendencies[30]

Burawoy contrasts this with an organic public sociology that is connected more directly to social groups. Unlike the mediated relations of traditional public sociology, Burawoy posits a sociology that is connected to and does research for groups such as labor unions, oppressed minorities and even NGO's Both versions of public sociology as well as a critical sociology are reflexive: they raise questions of sociology for whom and knowledge for what, and both reject the idea of sociology as puzzle solving or problem solving and instead are oriented to dialogue about the value foundations of society and the value foundations of sociology. As dialogue these are not simply expert judgments passively received by the public they require a dialogue in which these values are deliberated.

A somewhat similar proposal, without the Gramscian overtones, has been made in political science around the idea of Participatory Action Research. Here researchers are more directly advocates for participants in the groups they study. Burawoy's proposals as well as those of participatory research are quite different than the transmission/translation model proposed by Flinders and cannot be easily accommodated into his model. For both Burawoy and participatory action, researchers are not just looking to transmit knowledge but to transform the relation of participants and observers in research, and with it the relation between experts and the public. The challenges participatory research pose to standard definitions of the relation between inquiry and those who are the subject of inquiry, make inquiry into a dialogical process more than a one-way investigation. Critical theories like Burawoy's and others aim at insight into social processes and problems and transformed self-understanding — not just the collection of data or the solution of isolated problems.[31]

Independently of these developments Bent Flyvbjerg developed a conception of social inquiry that was influential for many of the activist Perestroikans. In the first part of this work, *Making Social Science Matter*, Flyvbjerg developed a neo-Aristotelian approach to social inquiry which was practically oriented. [32] His phronetic social science was based on the contrast between *epistemé* and *phronesis. Epistemé* in Aristotle's usage is a form of certain or exact knowledge based on the theoretical standpoint of an observer who seeks permanent universal and decontextualized truth. In contrast, *phronesis* is a skilled performance or wise judgment which is internal to a community or context. Like Aristotle Flyvbjerg conceives of actors in a concrete situation who have to decide the right thing to do in an indeterminate and conflict filled situation. Flyvbjerg equates episteme with an approach based on natural science models, asserting that: "the study of social phenomena, is not, never has been and probably never can be scientific in the conventional sense of the word 'science', that is in its epistemic meaning . . . it is therefore not meaningful to speak of 'theory' in the study of social phenomena, at least in the sense that "theory" is used in the natural sciences." [33] *Phronesis* develops practical insights rooted in experience. For example a comparative analysis may not just rely on

generalization from many cases but a grasp of one case that generates a new insight. Practically oriented inquiry means the social researcher has to address questions of what we ought to do not just description of the way things are. Phronetic social inquiry never rises to the level of universal judgments, nor does it seek law like generalizations. It is also practical and normative, aimed at the good life. Phronetic research is evaluative and value oriented. It uses knowledge to discover the right thing to do or to challenge power relations. The phronetic inquirer does not stand outside or above practice. He is part of the same social world as the participant.

Flyvbjerg however employs a notion of skilled performances which creates some tensions with the model of mutual understanding of participants that Neo-Aristotelians and interpretive theorists employ.[34] In doing so he bypasses the idea of theory that is developed by Critical theorists and equates all theory with the natural scientific process, In replacing the external observer with the skilled practitioner, he holds that insight into the social world often requires the unique skills of the social inquirer in his role as a member of the social world. The social inquirer becomes a virtuoso performer. This formulation relies on a notion of practical know how adapted from Hubert Dreyfus' analysis of learning skilled performances. Dreyfus developed an influential version of know based on an interpretation of the existential phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.  He conceives of the acquisition of skills that is of practical know how as independent of linguistic meaning ("semantically interpretable brain representation") and propositional content, Instead it can be seen as a kind of perceptual learning. In Dreyfus' model of learning a skill, individuals move from a novice status of one who must be explicitly instructed in skill to an expert or virtuoso who has mastered a skill and knows it intuitively. These expert skills are contextual responses that are not stored in "mental representations." The driver knows how to navigate the road without thought or calculation.[35] Dreyfus extends this type of know how to social understanding. He thinks social scientists who are virtuosos can know situations and patterns without cognition. This formulation has been influential in phronetic approaches to social science, which rely on the distinction between (practical) judgment and (theoretical) reason. However, this argument comes up short. The problems with Dreyfus's formulation begin with his starting point: the individual mastering a skill. It bypasses consensual relations. Such mastery is already meaningful and reflexive whether or not it is theoretical because it is embedded in the context of social relations. The artist who creates new art and new meaning still has to communicate that meaning to the audience. The social scientist who grasps patterns that others miss still grasps a meaningful pattern that has to be made more explicit and communicated to others. Insight and virtuoso skill while embedded in practical know how are still not simply pre-reflexive. Even musical skill is a social skill it requires a shared musical system in order to make sense, and requires an audience which recognizes the skill in the performance.

The standpoint of the prereflective subject does not seem to provide the resources needed to formulate a critical theory. The latter has to reflect on the nature of society and the way organized relations power like domination and oppression stand in the way of changes that realize the practical good Flyvbjerg seeks. Although in the second part of MSSM Flyvbjerg addresses questions of power via a Foucault his version of this dynamic still does not explain

critical reflection. Thus in order to get more fully at the relation between experts and participants we have to explore its intersubjective roots.

## Toward a theory of the participant's perspective

Human Beings are, in Charles Taylor's phrase, self-interpreting animals. We are concerned with understanding the meaning of our own existence. What we are is indistinguishable from how we understand ourselves.[36] As Taylor puts it, "our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed in our understanding of reality." [37] The self is not a physical object independent of our understanding of meaning, but an agent who acts on his or her own interpretations. Our interpretive capacity is a practical capacity, an internal element of the participants' perspective. Interpretation takes place in contexts of involvement and engagement with the world, with others, and with one's own inner world.

Interpretive understanding is not another method. It is an original orientation toward our existence. We only make sense of things through interpretation. It is part of the world of involvements and commitments that we inhabit and come to understand. This practical element is primary. It can never be replaced by a transcendental subject or an objectifying scientific theory. We are situated subjects who are active in the world. We only have experiences through our active engagement with the world, through our own involvements, projects and plans. Our knowledge of the social world is never simply imprinted on us through passive sensation or grasped by disengaged reason. It draws on the practical perspective of subjects engaged in understanding and evaluating their lives. We carry out our plans and projects with a performative attitude.

The participant's basic attitude toward others is one of concern.[38] As practical actors we are involved in interaction, we are concerned with how to act, what to do and who we are. Things matter to us. They matter not simply because we want to achieving goals or find the most efficient instrumentalities to an end, but because our fellow humans, with whom we share attachments and common fates, matter to us – and we have to take a position on the way we carry out these relationships. Our concern then also includes judgment on the rightness of norms or the goodness of life plans. It matters what kind of ethical or moral positions we take in relations to others.

Concern is essentially evaluative. We are involved with ourselves and others through bonds of morality and solidarity and we are mutually accountable to others. We have to be able to give reason for our actions including norms that justify our actions. Concern extends to what we can call moral emotions. They are not just feelings or irrational impulses, but have a rational content to the extent they are based in the fulfilment or violation of these mutual expectations. I might feel disgust if someone is treated with disrespect and subject to unfair treatment because its violates my sense of respect for others, or I might feel guilt or shame if I harm

others These are elements of our practical and evaluative orientation to the world. It signifies the way we we stand toward things. We evaluate our lives from the viewpoint of human flourishing and wellbeing. Because humans are capable of not only achieving happiness and well-being but also suffering and failure, they have to evaluate their ongoing activity.

Interpretive understanding is also historical. We understand ourselves and others as historical beings that have future projects with roots in the past. Historical understanding has a narrative structure involving a life history as well as a social and cultural one. For some like Gadamer, the weight of history and tradition often seems more central than the power of agency and initiation; he argues that our (historically effective) understanding is more being than consciousness. Ultimately, he emphasizes authority more than constrictive history. It is the unfolding of something already present.

In contrast the conception of the participants perspective constituted through mutual accountability, stresses that the power of agency is as important as that of tradition. We can modify and break traditions and create new ones. Cultures and traditions cannot be viewed as holistic unities but are themselves internally and externally contested.

Interpretive understanding is the basic medium of social life, and has an intersubjective or dialogical structure.[39] Understanding is mutual understanding; it takes place under the horizon of a shared social world. The self is a social entity which is not an immediate unity of experience, but a synthesis of the perspectives of ego and other. These two aspects never merge into a completed whole; hence the interpretive theoretical understanding of subjects can facilitate critical reflection. [40] Self-understanding is social. We do not simply understand ourselves from the first person perspective of a participant who understands and evaluates her own situation as an isolated consciousness or independent creator of meaning. We understand ourselves through the second person perspective of a partner in interaction who can be an addressor or addressee in interaction that is linguistically mediated.

Being a participant in the social world means that our world is constituted through shared meanings norms and expectations. In order to have practical evaluations we have to have some shared norms or expectations that are the basis of our evaluations. We cannot engage in such communication without acknowledging that others are beings capable of speech and action. We are linked in reciprocal perspectives, of I and you in which I understand myself — and you as beings capable of responsibility and accountability. These processes of making sense in concert include commonly held claims about what is true or valid. While in mundane settings these are often more properly expressed as know-how, a context dependent practical knowledge, they can always be made explicit when called into question. Linguistic intersubjecivity is closely linked to practical life as our way of getting by in the world. It always begins as a context bound knowledge of the practical social world

The participant’s perspective is thus a performative one. In speaking, we say something to someone about something in the world. This is the basic form of communicative social action.[41] Once we engage in communicative action, we also involved in a consensual form of

social action. Whether or not we reach agreement, we are engaged in a consensual activity in which we can and often do agree on things. Consensual action does not rest on the presumption of an achieved consensus that is fixed, final or permanent. Our actions always have an element of contingency. We carry out our lives through these consensual relations: we reregulate our actions, and form our own plans of life only in and through this medium of linguistically mediated symbolic interaction. Understanding is first of all practical. We do not simply describe a state of affairs but say something about our relation to the world, about how things are and how we stand. If you tell me we ought to raise the minimum wage to a living standard, you are making a claim about the norms we should carry out if we have proper concern for human welfare and basic fairness. These are not just descriptions but commitments. If you stand in favor of universal health care, you implicitly or explicitly express that you want people to be treated in with equal dignity. Our understanding is a way of getting on in the world. We do not simply have experiences or attitudes we carry them out in the performative attitude from the standpoint of first and second person participants in a social world. Social interaction takes place through the reciprocity of perspective of speaker and hearer in language. In processes of mutual recognition, we can take the role of the other toward our own linguistic utterances. This form of interaction supposes that we understand ourselves through the response of the other to our meaningful actions, gestures, speech – in short, our overall comportment to the world. The participant takes a position on elements of the world. These commitments only can be made in the participant's perspective.

Consider the situation of moral actors as an example of the performative attitude. Moral sensibilities come to the fore in situations when we feel hurt or betrayed by the actions of others. Because we are vulnerable to the actions of others, we can be hurt when they treat us with disrespect or act deceptively. Hegel was one of the first to link this vulnerability to the sense of mutual respect and recognition in social interaction. Just as criminal violates our sense of the common norms we hold to be important for social order our moral sense is violated by acts of disrespect. Our sense of offense is indicative of the fact that the participants' perspective is a normative order, and we cannot understand these norms without reference to the participant's perspective.

Individuals are embedded in communicative experience, that is, in an interactive context in which subjects are linked though an intersubjectively constituted nexus by their participation in language. In this context, participants are oriented to mutual understanding and agreement. They only come to be individuals through interaction and forms of mutual accountability. We find ourselves in a world of with other subjects connected though speech and action. Our perspectives are interwoven in our social roles and mutual understanding with a communicative social context. As communicative participants we make up and renew the social world though our action and interaction in social life worlds.

## Participants and life worlds

Interpretive understanding is always contextual. We only understand meaning against a

background of other meanings and social practices. The life world can be understood as the background conditions, such as practical attitudes, forms, and stocks of knowledge social practices and abilities that are shared by members of a culture.[42] They make up a set of taken for granted assumptions that constitute social worlds. The structures of the lifeworld serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they are the tacit background condition of understanding; on the other, they contain the elements that we must take up and employ actively in interaction and mutual understanding.

My own perspectives on the life world and those of others who share that world are built up through a multiplicity of reference points. These reference points are both horizontal and vertical. I live in a world of contemporaries that nonetheless encompasses the past and the future. My own life takes place within traditions and stocks of knowledge that have been handed down to me and which I will pass on to others I come to be a self through learning these traditions and taking them up in my own life plans and memories. In this process participants share a stock of mutual knowledge that is largely implicit and taken for granted. It provides participants with interpretations of the world they inhabit and provides typical norms or prescriptions for what we can normally expect to happen in the social world and in nature. I have background knowledge of things, from the seemingly trivial, such as how to greet another person, to what to expect in from the objects of nature and the roles expected of me in society. The life world represents the world of common sense, what “we” generally take for granted or expect to happen. It provides a repertoire of understandings and expectations that we can draw upon in order to carry out interaction, At the same time, the life world sets the boundaries of possible projects and actions and has provides the vocabulary of motives that individuals can employ. This stock of knowledge is to be sure distributed differentially.[43] Not everyone knows everything in the same way or with the same depth. I may know a lot about the music of the 1960 is but very little about being a plumber.

Philosophical hermeneutics, especially the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, has stressed the way that our interpretive access to the social world is shaped by history and background. When we study history we do not view it from the outside, but rather study a process of which we also participate in. We would not have access to the world without begin shaped by history and we cannot analyze a history of which we are not always a part. This means for Gadamer we both belong to and are dependent upon society – something that is exemplified in our embeddedness in language. He stresses the way in which social inquiry like history has a formative effect on the inquirer, History for example is not an objective study or pure research but itself is a way of transmitting (or modifying) tradition. In the same way, social inquiry is also practical. It is always engaged in projects for interpreting our place in society; thus social inquiry has a normative import. The inquirer can never withdraw from the social world to an objective observer’s perspective. This would require the interpreter cut herself off from the processes of interpretation. The interpreter cannot eliminate the concepts or preconceptions that she relies on and access to the interpretations of her or of others.

Despite its notable achievements Gadamerian hermeneutics often rests too heavily on the weight of tradition and history and less on the ability to transform tradition. The structures of

the life world are practical elements of the mutual understanding or participants. While much of this world remains explicit, far from being passively received but taken up by participants and accepted or rejected, Everyday life is constituted through interpretive accomplishments; individuals are agents who are capable of reflexively monitoring and accounting for their actions.. Since mundane social action is largely practical, based in the knowhow of the individual and the stock of mutual knowledge. This aspect of mutual knowledge can become explicit when our actions, norms or motives do not make sense to others or even at times to ourselves. We can then be called on to give an account of our actions in terms of the reasons why we acted as we did. Social actors, in Anthony Giddens' felicitous phrase engage in reflexive monitoring of action. They know what they do in the course of doing it.[44] "Actors—also routinely and for the most part without fuss—maintain a continuing 'theoretical understanding' of the grounds of their activity."[45] We are always knowledgeable subjects who make sense of the world through rational understanding and we constantly monitor that understanding in the course of our interaction in order to reproduce or transform it.

There is no sharp distinction between the unreflective form of ordinary interaction and critical reflection. For this reason, mutual accountability is not a special form of action but an element of ordinary interaction. In the course of interaction, we can and often are asked to give an account of our actions to others who do not necessarily understand it or question their own accounts. We constantly renew, repair and transform our mutual understandings in the course of everyday life.

Albrecht Wellmer emphasizes the fragility and contingency of mutual understanding when he states.

The commonality (intersubjectivity) of linguistic meaning is therefore not something given once and for all, something "present-at-hand [vorhandenes].; rather it is something precarious and discontinuous; it is fragile, it is never complete, it is always to be restored anew in the processes of linguistic communication, which is also the process of developing linguistic meaning. [46]

Historical and critical interpretation has to be viewed more as an ongoing achievement that involves a strong element of reflexivity.

## The status of social inquiry

The social researcher who takes up the study of social life encounters participants who like herself share social life worlds and have practical commitments and involvements. Both participants and researchers are entwined in relations of mutual understanding, The social inquirer has to understand those she studies as individuals capable of accounting for their action and has to see how and why subjects make sense of their world. The researcher only has access to these elements because of her own status as a participant in social life.

Our interpretive access to the social world yields a fundamentally different conception of

inquiry than does the model of naturalistic social science inquiry prevalent in social science. However, it is not as some have recently argued the result of two-world ontology.[47] On this view, the natural and the social are separate and distinct entitles. Yet the same body can be treated physiologically that is a natural entity, socially or even psychologically without being a different entity in a different world. The distinction between types of inquiry is mainly epistemological. It is concerned with the type of knowledge that is sought and the type of interpretive access it requires. While the natural scientific encounters a world of physical objects that do not communicate, while on contrast the social researcher encounter a world of other subjects who are engaged in interpretation.

Consideration like these are behind Anthony Giddens notion of the double hermeneutic of social inquiry.[48] Not only is the researcher a member of a community of researchers who

use language to formulate theories and research, the "object" of study is other human beings who are co-interpreters of social worlds. The researcher's access to this meaningful social world that makes up this domain relies on her participants understanding. It is thus an element of the same social world it proposes to study. The researcher only has access to the world of others because she takes a first or second person perspective toward meanings. They participate in a common world that is constituted by mutual understanding. The social world is that segment of the world that can be grasped and understood only through this double hermeneutic.

We are always part of a social environment and part of a history. We are formed by our history and background conditions as a necessary feature of understanding. We cannot objectify our history or social experience, and treat it like an object of nature that can be mastered and controlled. Thus, the social researcher always encounters a world of meaningful social action that is symbolically structured. The researchers is not only one for whom the scientific world is symbolic (as in the natural sciences) but the objects she studies are also participants for whom the social world is symbolically structured. She has to bring to bear her own ability to understand from her own participation in social life. There are no pure observers in social life. We can only assess the past and understand it in a more critical way, thus we can change our courses of action. The double hermeneutic implies that even inquirers are practical actors whose very inquiries are elements in the social world they inhabit.

The basic concepts used in social research then have to be of the same type that actors use in their ordinary life. This is not to say that the concepts have to be identical, but the basic concepts are non-objectivating. They refer to the activities of subjects who are capable of mutual understanding. To view action from the outside as mere behavior is to lose sight of its performative aspect as a part of a social world.

Some researchers in the manner of Max Weber (and later Alfred Schutz) accept the meaningful character of social action yet maintain a distance between the participants and the role of the researcher as a non-participant. While the researcher must understand the meaning of actions, she need not be a participant in the social world or pass judgment on it. The researcher may

for example view ideas of legitimacy as de facto as claims that a certain social authority or government is obeyed. In such cases however, the researcher takes a position superior to that of the participant. While she takes her own norms to be valid she does not engage with the values of those she studies. She regards the norms of the social world as simply matters of opinion or taste without engaging participants in processes of mutual understanding.

This understanding of social research dissolves however, once we incorporate elements of mutual understanding and mutual accountability into our conception of meaning. We have to attribute to participants the same type of understanding as the researcher– that is a social actor capable of communicative relations with others, who can provide accounts that they can evaluate. Participants' consider events in their world using notions of truth or validity broadly speaking. Inquiry has to take seriously these claims if they want to make sense of those they study. An interpretive inquiry which takes the claims seriously does not stand above the everyday life because it employs the very same capacities as actors. There is no expert or virtuoso knowledge that is in principle inaccessible to others. If we fail to acknowledge these capacities we are not taking others seriously as subjects in a social world.

The mutual accountability of participants and researchers provides a way of grasping the meaning of participants' actions. Understanding is inseparable from evaluation. In order to understand the meanings of participants in our social world we have to be able to reconstruct the reasons for their actions. Consider the case of legitimacy again. The concept of legitimacy for example cannot be understood simply by the observance of conforming behavior, or a belief to understand legitimacy one has to understand it as a claim to validity in which a claim is recognized and justifications are given. We understand legitimacy in a specific situation only when we understand what that claim means in that society. Otherwise we could not distinguish between say someone who conforms to a standard without necessarily accepting it or one that accepts it out of convention or one that accepts the reasons as valid. Nor can it explain why legitimacy might be rejected, All these might become important in interpreting and explaining a situation of conflict for example. The researcher has to grasp the contexts of action as the appropriateness of action just as a participant might do in her life. Part of this background context includes notions of truth or falsehood, good or evil that participants employ as well as their stance toward those social norms. In short the inquirer has to have sense of life world background that participants share and the specific responses of individuals to that background. For participants have to take norms and practices up an accept reject or modify them. We also have to be able to take the social context in which these claims take place and grasp the reasons why they still make sense or do not make sense to us today. We cannot understand others or make sense of the meaning of culturally distant or historical meanings without engaging in these evaluations. The researcher has to maintain the performative attitude toward language that she uses as a participant in mundane speech and action. It is this performative dimension of inquiry that that Weber's value-neutral observer denies. Once we grasp that the participants are capable of providing reasons for their actions and must engage in mutual accountability then we have to accept that the participant is on the same level as the researcher or theorist. This implies however the subject or subjects of inquiry are capable of assessing the researcher's reasoning too. They can assess the models employed the reasoning

and the conclusions of the researcher, criticizing the aims of the research or the norms that the researcher or theorist employs in her own work. Social research is thus implicated in a form of mutual critique.

Social scientific theories are themselves practical. They "constitute moral interventions in the social life whose conditions they seek to clarify."[49] This insight takes two different directions. Since the social researcher is always a participant who takes a performative attitude towards communication the results of inquiry have a practical dimension that effects not only the knowledge of the researcher but her understanding of herself and her world. Second, the results of research are taken up into the life worlds of participants and become part of their everyday knowledge thus changing their understanding of themselves. In both cases, participants have a reflexive relation to forms of knowledge. They are aware if what they do in the course of doing it and engaged in the ongoing evaluation of their plans projects and the norms the use to evaluate them.

It is this reflexive relation that provides a basis for critique. Participants' have the potential to change their lives though insight and transformation Critical theories link these interventions back to the understanding the participants have of their own world but add a diagnostic analysis. They seek to initiate or facilitate reflection on the conditions preventing the realization of human flourishing.

These same structures also simultaneously provide the critical means to penetrate a given context, to burst it open from within and to transcend it; the means if need be to push beyond a de facto established consensus to revise errors, correct misunderstandings and the like. Critique can go further and illuminate distortions that are systematically embedded in personality structures and power relations in society. The same structures that make it possible to reach an understanding also provide for the possibility of reflexive self-control of this process. It is this potential for critique built into communicative action itself that the social scientist by entering into contexts of everyday life as a virtual participant, can systematically exploit and bring into play outside these contexts and against their particularity[50]

The notion that researchers and participants are on the same level and hence part of a mutual critique may be seen by some as a challenge to the integrity of research or to the expert's necessary separation from the public. It might be seen as an example of the tyranny of relevance. However, the notion of reciprocal critique does not give the participant priority over the researcher. Both parties have an equal role and are equally able to argue positions in a discourse, but they have to use publically acceptable reasons. However, it is also a mistake to draw a large gap between researcher's experts and mundane social actors. Actors are knowledgeable about the conditions and contexts of their actions. Not only do they have extensive knowledge of local conditions and contexts, in modern societies actors are aware of the results of scientific research and often have some knowledge of it. As Giddens remarks, the ordinary actor in modern society is already a sociologist. Actors have the abilities to engage in discussions and deliberations based on mutual understanding. Such discussions include questions of the logical, interpretive, diagnostic or "empirical: adequacy of theories or of

observations. However, they would also include normative and ethical considerations on the values inherent in research and society. Whether or not layman can always grasp the subtleties of mathematical analyses (assuming that actually matters) they can quite capably engage in discussions about the normative implications of research. On the other hand experts and researchers must begin to treat participants as actors who are capable of criticism but also who regard others and equal being who are worthy of ethical regard.

The relation of expert knowledge to layman and to the public is however, not adequately understood by the transmission model. It is better conceived as what Gadamer termed the fusion of horizons. The major question is not how knowledge formed by experts is disseminated to the public but how knowledge shapes us as actors. Social inquiry is an element of self-understanding. Also at stake are issues of democratic education and the self-understanding of social actors. Critical self-understanding puts one's own sense of one self in relation to larger social process in which we are participants and opens up possibilities for greater freedom through transformation of self and society.

The idea of a mutual critique means that research is not isolated but has a collaborative element to it. This idea has gained recognition in recent work about participatory research. It also gives us a way to understand the position of critical theory. The critical theorist, though she might have specialized knowledge in an area of research, is still a co-participant in a process of mutual understanding. She has no privileged position in relation to emancipation or the pursuit of a good or happy or just life. The quest for a critical theory is a collaborative one.

If interpretive social science is to be more than just one method among many, and not just a another tool in the methodological tool box, its role as explicating the basic relation of the inquirer to the "subjects" of inquiry has to be emphasized. Social inquiry begins (and ends) from the practical standpoint of a participant.  The inquirer can only know and understand the meaningful statements of others or engage in meaningful social action because she shares a common social world, not just a community of scientific interpreters. Knowledge of the social world is valid because other members of the social world can assent to it. To understand the social world is not to observe it but to interpret and evaluate it; and to understand social action is to understand the (sometime unacknowledged) reasons why actions occur. Ultimately knowledge of the social world has to become an element in the critical understanding of the participants and help to create the possibility of a better world.

## Notes

[1] Mollie Reilly "Tom Coburn Amendment Limiting National Science Foundation Research Funding Passes Senate Huffington Post March 21, 2013 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/21/tom-coburn-national-science-foundation_n_2921081.html

[2] Reilly "Tom Coburn Amendment"

[3] Reilly “Tom Coburn Amendment”

[4] Arthur Lupia, University of Michigan, Chair of the Task Force and John H. Aldrich, Duke University, APSA President Improving Public Perceptions of Political Science’s Value Report of the Task Force on Improving Public Perceptions of Political Science’s Value Washington D.C. American Political Science Association August 2014

[5] Improving Public Perception: 1

[6] Improving Public Perception: 8

[7] Clyde W. Barrow The Intellectual Origins of New Political Science New Political Science 30:2 215-244 free online access at DOI: 10.1080/07393140802082598

[8] See the essays in James Farr, John Dryzek and Stephen Leonard (1995) Political Science and History Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

[9] On the explanatory weaknesses of rational choice models see Donald Greene and Ian Shapiro *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996

[10] The Original email sent out to Political Scientists is reprinted as, Perestroika (pseud) “The Idea: The Opening of Debate” in Kristen Renwick Monroe *Perestroika: The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science* Yale University Press, 200 : 9-11

[11] In addition to many stories recounted in the discipline I was explicitly rejected for jobs which had absolutely no relation to statistical analyses for lacking sufficient coursework in the area.

[12] For a summary of this attack see the editorial Glenn Beck Targets Frances Fox Piven The Nation February 7,2011

[13] I provided one brief sketch of these issues in Perestroika’s Last Stand PS: Political Science & Politics 43:4 October 2010.753-754

[14] John Dryzek “Revolutions Without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science” APSA 100 :4 2006: 487-92

[15] David Truman, “The Impact on Political Science on the Revolution in the Behavioral Sciences”: in S. Sidney Ulmer ed. *Introductory Readings in Political Behavior*. Chicago: Rand McNally 1961 11

[16] Raymond Seidelman: and Edward Halpern. *Disenchanted realists: Political Science and the American Crisis: 1884-1984* Albany: Suny Press 1985. 25. On the growth of scientism Dorothy Ross *The Origins of American Social Science* Cambridge 395ff

[17] Paul Rabinow and William M Sullivan *Interpretive Social Science a Second Look* Berkeley: University of California Press1987 :2

[18] Hans Albert classic article has been recently translated fron the German by Darrell Arnold and Frank Maier-Rigaud Model Platonism: Neoclassical economic thought in critical light Journal of Institutional Economics: 2012 1 – 29 doi:10.1017/S1744137412000021

[19] Max Horkheimer "Traditional and Critical Theory" in Critical Theory Selected Essays. Also see his remarks on the division between the Scholar and the Citizen in Dawn and Decline

[20] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory 245-6

[21]Christian Bay. "Politics and Pseudopolitics: A Critical Evaluation of Some Behavioral Literature." *American Political Science Review* 59:1 March 1965: 35-51. Also see *Strategies of Political Emancipation*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press 1981; H Mark Roelofs. "Citizen Scholars" Scholarly Citizens: A Tribute to Christian Bay." New Political Science 11:3 1992 51-61.

[22] Rogers Smith. "Should We Make Political Science More of a Science or More about Politics?" PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 35, No. 2. (Jun., 2002), pp. 199-201***

[23] Matthew Flinders and Peter John. "The Future of Political Science." Political Studies Review 11(2) 2013:222.

[24] Peter John "Political Science: Impact and Evidence" Political Studies Review 11(2) 2013 168-73.

[25] Matthew Flinders 'The Tyranny of Relevance and the Art of Translation" Political Studies Review 11(2) 2013 149-67.

[26] Ronald Ragowski "Shooting (or Ignoring) the Messenger" Political Studies Review 11(2) 2013 216-21.

[27] Flinders

[28] For example see Gregory Kazka "Perestroika and the Journals" PS: Political Science and Political Volume 43:4 October 2010, 733-734; Kazka "Methodological Bias in the American Journal Political Science" in Kristen Renwick Monroe ed. Perestroika: The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science. New Haven: Yale University Press 2006: 342-45; David Pion-Berlin and Dan Cleary, Methodological Bias in the APSR Monroe: 304-22

[29] See the volumes Public sociology: ideas arguments and visions for the future ed Dan Clawson Berkeley: University of California Press 2007 especially Michael Burawoy, "For Public Sociology" 23-64

[30] Burawoy, "For Public Sociology" 28

[31] For some examples of Participatory Action Research see Corey S. Shdaimah and Roland W. Stahl “Doing Phronetic Social Science A Case Study” in Caterino and Schram ed Making Political Science Matter New York: New York University Press, 2006: 98-116. ; Leonie Sandercock and Giovanni Attili Unsettling a settler society: film, phronesis and collaborative planning in small-town Canada In Bent Flyvbjerg, Todd Landman and Sanford Schram eds. Real Social Science: Applied Phronesis Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 137-66.

[32] Bent Flyvbjerg” Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001. For a collection of essay that elaborates this perspective see Bent Flyvbjerg, Todd Landsman and Sanford Schram eds. Real Social Science: Applied Phronesis Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012. For a set of critical evaluations see Brian Caterino and Sanford Schram editors Making Political Science Matter :The Flyvbjerg Debate and Beyond New York University Press 2006

[33] Bent Flyvbjerg Making Social Science Matter: 25

[34] See my essay “Power and Interpretation” in Brian Caterino and Sanford Schram editors Making Political Science Matter :The Flyvbjerg Debate and Beyond New York University Press 2006: 134-51

[35] Hubert Dreyfus “Intelligence without representation—Merleau’s Ponty’s critique of mental representation: the relevance of phenomenology to scientific representation” Phenomenology and the cognitive Sciences 1:367-383 2002

[36] Charles Taylor “Self-Interpreting Animals” in Philosophical Papers I: Human Agency and Language Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985:45- 76.

[37] Charles Taylor ”Self-Interpreting Animals” 47

[38] Andrew Sayer. Why Things Matter to People: Social Science Values and Practical Life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011: 1-2

[39] This notion is fully developed in Hans-Georg Gadamer Truth and Method

[40] Keith Topper. The Disorder of Political Inquiry. Cambridge MA:Harvard University Press 2005

[41] Jurgen Habermas. Moral Consciousness and Communicative action Cambridge MA: MIT Press: 1990: 46-7.

[42] Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann The Structures of the Life World Evanston Northwestern 1973 Schutz The Phenomenology of the Social world. Evanston Northwestern 1967

[43] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the

Sociology of Knowledge New York: Anchor 1967

[44] Anthony Giddens, (1986) The Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration Berkeley: University of California Press

[45] Anthony Giddens, (1986) The Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration Berkeley: University of California Press

[46] Albrecht Wellmer. Endgames: The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity: essays and lectures. Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1998 218

[47] Laura Ephraim Beyond the two sciences settlement: Giambattisto Vico's Critique of the Nature-Politics Opposition" *Political Theory* published online 5 August 2013 Political Theory DOI: 10.1177/0090591713492777

[48] Anthony Giddens New Rules of the Sociological Method 2 edition Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993

[49] Anthony Giddens New Rules of the Sociological Method 2ed Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993

[50] Jurgen Habermas. Theory of Communicative Action volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society Boston: Beacon Press: 1986: 120-121 A recent attempt to employ this perspective is Fredrik Sandberg and Andreas Wallo The interactive researcher as a virtual participant: A Habermasian interpretation Action Research 2013 11: 194

# Moral Currents in Durkheim and Huysmans

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*Between science and art there is no longer a gulf, and one may pass from one to the other without any break in continuity.* – Durkheim

If, as it has been said, photography is always real but never true, literature is always, if conversely unreal, nevertheless *true*.[i] I find it curious that sociology would forsake literature to the extent that it has. As Lewis Coser says, "Literature, though it may also be many other things, is social evidence and testimony. It is a continuous commentary on manners and morals.

Its great monuments, even as they address themselves to the eternal existential problems which are at the root of the perennial tensions between men and their society, preserve for us the precious record of modes of response to peculiar social and cultural conditions" (1972: xv).[ii] The lack of engagement is especially curious in light of the fervent efforts of key European writers to provide the public with an increasingly scientific view of the world, starting around the middle of the 19th century, that would even "have delighted an Emile Durkheim" (Lepenies 1988: 6). Perhaps we should devote more time to art – not necessarily in the spirit of *Bildung* (though, that is not a bad motive by any stretch) but in the quest for an enriched comprehension of the eruption of modernity and its trajectory.

A novel is not only an *exquisite* experimental construct but also an intersubjective sign world where the analyses of representations converge: "Just as science affects perceptual and cognitive transformations by changing our models of the world as a natural order, art similarly affects paradigm-induced expectations. Instead of taking science as the measure of all things – scientific realism – we argue that there is no fundamental difference in the way in which science and art empower us to articulate the world; this is the view of symbolic realism" (Brown 1977: 24). The novel, etc., can also provide that which is impossible in a positive scientific analysis: a meta-perspective on a whole world, under development. D. H. Lawrence put it like this: "'being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog'" (quoted in Lodge 1990: 20).[iii] On balance, I suspect works such as Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, or the works of Mark Twain, etc., offer greater sociological and social-psychological insights than the twaddle produced by our mainstream social science industry today. Following Durkheim's own *modus operandi*, I will try, briefly, to extend his work on suicide by calling up a passage from Huysmans' classic *Against Nature* to further elucidate the dynamic and *dialectic* nature of

social forces as they operate in social reality, in *Against Nature*, and in Durkheim's own theory of organizational dynamics and moral pathologies.[iv]

Durkheim's theory of self-destruction in *Suicide* rests on a set of ontic and organizational assumptions regarding society as system of representations dynamically crystallizing and dissolving, forming and reforming atop an 'ocean' of protean moral energies relatively infinite in magnitude and just as 'infinite' in their forms of objectification. Most currents fail to materialize, flowing back into the 'reservoir' from whence they originate;[v] others harden into either transitory or persistent forms of obligatory conduct, feeling, and consciousness. Equilibrated (isonomic) conditions of solidarity and regulation, though ideal-typically central to Durkheim's model of organization and social reality,[vi] are problematic in modern societies continuously buffeted by positive or negative crises of one form or another.[vii] As such, pathological disequilibrium or asymmetrical distortions tend to be the norm or even chronic in modern (and now 'postmodern' societies). Authoritative, systemic responses to these disturbances are sometimes excessive (overshooting their target) but often insufficient, lacking, with regard to the particular challenges at hand.[viii]

The literature built up around Durkheim's *Suicide* is quite voluminous and one is hard pressed to imagine that anything remains to be said regarding the concepts of egoism, altruism, anomie, and fatalism.[ix] Nevertheless, two interrelated features dominate the decades-long sociological commentary on Durkheim's famous four-cornered typology (Besnard 2005)[1] of self-destructiveness: first, these concepts are almost universally preserved in their ideal-typical purity in ways that Durkheim did not intend (as McCloskey noted as far back as 1976 – and it is still generally the case more than thirty years later) resulting in a stultification of theoretical insight; secondly, related to the previous point, not much attention has been paid to what Durkheim called the "composite varieties" of these concepts – the simultaneous "contradictory coexistence" of oppositional forces within one and the same society, institution, class, or self. In short, Durkheim's thought is littered with references toward these contradictory fusions of countervailing forces (i.e., in what we might refer to as the 'speculative identity' of contraries) whether we are interested the furtive relationship between empiricism and mysticism (1982: 74); the masked egoism of the humble servant (1982: 37); the Stoic desire to dissolve into the abyss of the infinite; Epicurean sects, and so on. Durkheim's various elaborations typically utilize literary and sometimes historical references to illustrate the concrete manifestations or what we might refer to as the personifications or perhaps *impersonations**[x]*** of these social forces ([1887] 1951: 277-94):

Egoism: Lamartine's *Raphaël* (Stoic); Epicurus (Epicurean);

Altruism: Cato; Commander Beaurepaire (obligatory);

Anomie: Chateaubriand's *René;* Goethe's *Werther* and *Faust*; the poet Musset's impression of Don Juan;

Fatalism: limited to vague notions regarding young husbands, prisoners, slaves, military

references, etc.

What is crucial when it comes to Durkheim's presentation is the recognition that his typology hinges *not* on static concepts functioning as diametric oppositions but as *polarities*.[xi]

Egoism, altruism, anomie, and fatalism are not merely independent or insulated forms or wholly separate 'conditions' whereby we may characterize a society or account for a sudden burst of self-destruction but coalesce into "mixed types" ([1897] 1951: 293), interpenetrating forces that function simultaneously as causes and effects, symptoms and remedies, and so on, combining in contradictory ways and, importantly, undergirded by a network of underground tunnels, trap doors, false bottoms, inverters, rectifiers, etc., that link these polarities together in varying dyadic and triadic formations.[xii]

The "mixed types" that Durkheim enumerates in *Suicide* (and elsewhere) are as follows: egoism and anomie combine to form what Durkheim calls the "disease of the infinite"; egoism and altruism combine to form (positively) the primitive cosmopolitanism of 19th century French Jews and (negatively) German authoritarianism ("will mania" or "hypertrophy of the will") examined in his pamphlet *Germany above All* – Durkheim also indicates that Stoic suicides are characterized by this blending of egoism and altruism, roughly formulated; altruism and anomie (in its active-regressive form) combine, *for us*, as generalized fanaticism and manifest in phenomena such as *jihad* or suicide bombings where self-destruction is coordinated with the actual or attempted annihilation of the other; in his introduction to *Division of Labor* we find the fusion of egoism and fatalism as the "sociological monstrosity" – a society of atomized individuals held together by a police state or iron-fisted structural mechanisms; following the notion of a "disease of the infinite" (egoism combined with anomie) *we* might extend something similar to the premodern affinity for fatalism and altruism by referring to it as the "disease of finitude."[xiii]

As exhaustive as Durkheim was I have not found in his own works an illustration or literary reference to an example of all four forces functioning simultaneously within a given system or self-system. Another work, however, goes further than anything I've seen in bringing all four currents together in a succinct and illuminating way that is directly relevant to the Durkheimian way of thinking: Huysmans' *Against Nature*, where the author captures the neurotic misery of an deregulated[xiv] egoist, Des Esseintes, attempting (and failing miserably) to construct a solitary world of his own, free from the corruption and influence of society.[xv]

After finally disintegrating into a near-fatal physiological state the protagonist's doctor orders Des Esseintes back to Paris and its vibrant social life of frivolity and distractions. After consulting with multiple doctors, Des Esseintes faces the unavoidable fact of returning and drowning in bourgeois insipidness. Facing the inevitability of the situation closing around him he explodes furiously, propelling his self into an identification with the anachronistic object of bourgeois scorn: the Church. Literally every element we could wish for is tightly compressed into a compact denouement:

‘May you crumble into dust, Society; old world, may you expire!’ exclaimed Des Esseintes, filled with indignation at the ignominious spectacle he was conjuring up; his protest shattered the nightmare that oppressed him. ‘Ah!’ he said; ‘to think that all this is not a dream! To think that I shall be rejoining the depraved and servile rabble of this age!’ He turned for help and comfort to Schopenhauer’s consoling precepts; he repeated to himself the painful axiom of Pascal’s: ‘The soul sees nothing that, upon reflection, it does not find distressing,’ but these words echoed in his mind like meaningless noise; his ennui broke them up, stripping them of all significance, all consolatory power, all gentle, effective potency.

He finally realized that the arguments of pessimism were incapable of giving him comfort, that only the impossible belief in a future life would give him peace.

A fit of rage, like a fierce gale, swept away his efforts at resignation, his attempts at indifference. He could no longer deceive himself, there was nothing, nothing left, everything had been brought down; the bourgeoisie sat about on the ground, as though on a Sunday outing, stuffing themselves from paper bags, amid the majestic ruins of the Church which had become a place of assignation, a pile of debris, defiled by contemptible gibes and infamous jokes. Surely, in order to prove their existence beyond any doubt, surely the terrible God of Genesis and the pale Crucified Christ would revive the cataclysms of the past, reignite the rain of fire that once consumed those cities of the damned, those abodes of death of long ago? Was it possible that this filth would continue to flow and with its pestilence swamp this old world in which nothing now grew save seeds of iniquity and harvests of shame?

…. Exhausted, Des Esseintes collapsed into a chair. ‘In two days’ time I shall be in Paris,’ he exclaimed; ‘it really is all over; the waters of human mediocrity, like a tidal wave, are rising up to the sky and will engulf this haven whose sea-walls I have with my own hands most unwillingly breached. Ah! My courage fails me and I am sick at heart! Lord, take pity on the Christian who doubts, on the unbeliever who longs to believe, on the galley-slave of life who is setting sail alone, at night, under a sky no longer lit, now, by the consoling beacons of the ancient hope!’ ([1884] 1998: 180-81).

His hitherto dimly perceived bond of sympathy and perverse fascination with the Church and otherworldly asceticism is revealed, in a flash, under the pressure of a fated re-emersion into the stupidity of Parisian life; this egoist is literally transported to the doorstep of institutionalized discipline and self-abandonment. The ‘progressive’ anomie of a wealthy Stoic lifestyle mixed with hedonism, or, really, sybaritic indulgence slowly degenerates into a ‘regressive’ draining of resources and a physiological breakdown. It is the being cornered, caught between a rock and a hard place, that triggers the rage (what Durkheim identifies with “active” and “regressive” phases of anomie) that will metamorphose Des Esseintes into his polar opposite form and make possible his transposition into a world of discipline and self-renunciation.[xvi]

Societies and selves tend to oscillate, sometimes quickly and violently, from one form of existence to a polar opposite. Today's revolution is tomorrow's restoration; fellow travelers whipsaw into rabid anti-communists; Trotskyists in the spring, Nixonites in the fall; one generation of conservatives produces the next generation's progressives; yesteryear's communist regime is today's capitalist hothouse.

The dismantling of the Glass-Steagall Act during the 80s and 90s led to massive deregulation of finance and, in combination with other pressures such as wage stagnation, debt explosions, de-industrialization, ignominious and fruitless wars, and so forth, have set the US on an interesting course that, if dialectical theory offers any insight at all, may swerve in a completely unforeseen direction when least expected. Empire and ego, macrocosm and microcosm, may at any moment appear to be a lost cause, tumbling headlong into a cataclysmic abyss, but every constellation and social pathology contains the germs of their own transformation. Intervention, not even on a grand scale, but only mild intercession with an eye toward 'facts' may be all that is required to effect a dramatic and sudden reversal or inversion. Or, if virtue carried to excess is a vice, then perhaps vice, pushed even further into unreality, is an underground tunnel into another polar reality. Either way, Huysmans has crafted the line for our epoch as well: "May you crumble into dust, Society; old world, may you expire!" To help it along its way, sociology must metamorphose by reengaging with philosophy (its collective consciousness according to Durkheim) and also, crucially, undertake a theoretical renewal by 'going down' as Nietzsche would say into new, neglected, or unexplored currents of human life.

## Notes

[1] The four-cornered typology no longer gets the job done in my estimation. I have since moved to viewing the problem in terms of the "social octahedron" which I have begun to elaborate in Worrell (2014).

[i] In a work of fiction we see things that have not really occurred *just like that* but *just like that* we recognize in them a reality beyond a mere story. I am tempted to go all the way and claim that the novel is true and real but also excessively true and real in a way that makes for an ideal sociological engagement. How can a 'fiction' be true and real? Marx's phenomenology of value formations in volume one of *Capital* offers insight into the truth and reality of not only accidental commodity exchange but the reality of something like a novel: "The universal equivalent form comes and goes with the momentary social contacts which call it into existence" ([1867] 1976: 183). Few would deny the reality, truth, and facticity of that great delusion, exchange-value. A network of fantasies supports every society and even the methods of interpretive sociology (where science is synonymous with precision concept construction, conceptual model building, theory formation, the refinement of problems, and historical-comparative analysis) are largely fictions that are simultaneously real and true.

[ii] Of course, like Coser, I am not referring to a 'sociology of literature' but, instead, to a

'literary sociology.' Such an enterprise was not so outlandish to some of our important predecessors and some works of sociological import are so exalted in their execution that they compare more favorably with art than academia – consider Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. If sociology continues to unfold in its current trajectory (anti-theoretical, methodically bloated, and with a money-grubbing eye on corporate synergy) it will be relegated to nothing more than a 'career opportunity' for intelligent dunces in the post-secondary educational industry.

[iii] "'…God knows the world, because He conceived it in His mind, as if from the outside, before it was created, and we do not know its rule, because we live inside it, having found it already made.' 'So one can know things by looking at them from the outside!' 'The creations of art, because we retrace in our minds the operations of the artificer, Not the creations of nature, because they are not the world of our minds'" (Eco 1983: 247-48)

[iv] If we had more space an alternative exploration of the same problems could be conducted more profitably via Maupassant's *A Life*. In my estimation few books pair as well with *Suicide*, though *A Life* sets out from an entirely different quadrant and the denouement is entirely different. The special virtue of *Against Nature*, however, is the extraordinary and compact conclusion.

[v] A reservoir of energy created by repression and obligatory sacrifice.

[vi] See Bearman (1991) for more on the relationship between the types of suicide and the organizational structure of self-destruction.

[vii] Equilibrium, within the context of Durkheim's concept of *homo duplex*, posits a kind of multidimensional reality where individuals prosper due to a harmonization of social functions with private existence. The fatalistic and altruistic premodern world represents a kind of 'over-real' condition of segmentation and communal member-ship whereby the collective type largely eclipses the undeveloped self. Modern capitalist society represents a dramatic slippage off the 'bubble' of equilibrium and, consequently, a de-sublimated swerve into the 'unreality' of the anomic world and the aimless movement (what Hegel referred to somewhere as 'pure axial rotation') toward infinity.

[viii] Witness the pitifully weak efforts to 'regulate' Wall Street in the last couple of years that virtually guarantee further dramatic shocks in the domains of speculative finance as well as any number of unforeseen consequences.

[ix] Egoism is literally self-ism, *excessive* individualism, over-individuation, or the insufficient presence of society in the individual – Durkheim also refers to egoism as the "infinity of dreams"; altruism, the opposite of egoism, is literally 'otherness' or the excessive presence of society within the individual, too-rudimentary an individuation; anomie is not Merton's "normlessness" (see Hilbert 1986) but deregulation and the "infinity of desires"; and, its opposite, fatalism, is over-regulation or "moral despotism" (Durkheim [1897] 1951). For Durkheim, fatalism was primarily a religious and premodern category and had, as such, fallen out of relevance for the modern world (2004: 159, 164). Weber's *Protestant Ethic* is the perfect

companion piece to *Suicide* for exploring the fatalistic nature of predestinationism and the fatalistic qualities of capitalism

[x] 'Impersonation' has an older meaning as 'personification' (but also quite literally 'in' + 'person') that is quite an interesting on various levels if we are interested in the ways in which forces work through and operate through individuals – Lacan comes to mind but also the tradition of Absolute idealism (von Hardenberg's 'magical idealism' especially) and semiotics (Eco provides a good example).

[xi] Durkheim's 'sociological realism' or what we might call his 'constructionism' is a third way between nominalism/crude empiricism on the one hand, and, and the crypto-theology of Realism/rationalism on the other. His reliance on conceptual *polarities* represents a bid toward a dialectical comprehension of social forces in motion. Proceeding as such, Durkheim's sociology (regardless of how he may or may not have comprehended his own practice) represents a powerful extension and transformation of the tradition of absolute idealism, broadly conceived, at the point where the 'Absolute' was reconstituted as, essentially, collective consciousness and its crystallizations imperfectly worked out by his philosophical predecessors: Hölderlin, Hardenberg (Novalis), Schlegel, Schelling and, finally, Hegel (see Beiser 2002). Polarity, as opposed to simple diametric or logical opposition, insists on a fluid continuum between contraries and their capacities for emergent syntheses. 'Polarity' retains fidelity to social dialectics. "Dogmatic empiricism and dogmatic rationalism both end in failure," says Cassirer, "because they cannot do justice to this actuality, this pure process-character of knowledge. They negate the process by denying polarity, which is the true driving force of knowledge, the very principle of its movement. This polarity is destroyed if, instead of relating the opposing factors to one another and connecting them intellectually, we seek to reduce the one to the other. Empiricism does this by dissolving the constructive concepts in the given; rationalism, conversely, does it by reducing every datum to the form of its conceptual determination. But in both cases we have a leveling of the fundamental oppositions whose clash truly builds up the objective world of physical knowledge" (1957: 414). Compare, especially, Schelling's concept of the "indifference point" and Durkheim's notion of equilibrium (see Pinkard 2002: 183).

[xii] In the pre-Hegelian forms of Absolute Idealism (i.e., Novalis, Schlegel, Schelling, etc.) we find conceptual oppositions that "stand in a continuum where they are in inverse ratio to one another. The more we proceed in one direction, the further removed we are from the other. The middle point, where the two poles are perfectly balanced with one another, Schlegel calls by the neutral term 'reality'" (Beiser 2002: 458). Nielsen emphasizes this aspect of polarity and synthesis with respect to Durkheim: "When seen as a matrix of categories, which define the horizons of experience, they take on a very different quality than when they are treated separately as causes" (1998: 94).

[xiii] Unlike his exploration of the composite varieties of egoism and altruism, Durkheim does not dwell on the nature of anomie and its blending with fatalism – we may recall that Durkheim relegates fatalism to a mere footnote and as mostly irrelevant for the modern world. However,

it is interesting to note that while anomie (and its blending with egoism) is the dominant characteristic of capitalist modernity for Durkheim, Weber emphasized the opposite form, fatalism, as the dominant feature of modern society – and, of course, its blending with pessimistic egoism and the 'identity' of anomie and fatalism: "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so…. fate decreed that the cloak [of materialism] should become an iron cage" ([1930] 2001: 123). In Weber's sense, we see that it is our anomic devotion to material goods is our fatalism; the more we consume the more we enslave ourselves. One of the few discussions of this blending of fatalism and anomie is to be found in Miller (1996: 114-16). We might simply identify the dyadic fusion of anomie and fatalism as various moments in the post-Fordist regime of magical-capital accumulation (see Worrell 2009 for more on this form of spectacle) or perhaps simply 'eco-nomic monstrosity.'

[xiv] 'Antinomian' but in a purely secular sense; the protagonist alternates between an active and indulgent (+) hedonism and a passive deprivational (-) Stoic languor through most of the book. Only at the end do we see a cataclysmic dialectical transformation of the self.

[xv] Tester notices some vague connection between Huysmans and Durkheim's work on suicide but he swerves erratically through the subject and, since he believes that Durkheim "can see the world only in terms of perennially apart oppositions" (1993: 73) he fails to appreciate the truly dynamic nature of Durkheim's theory of social forces and organization.

[xvi] See Durkheim's early philosophy lectures for his sense of the different forms of egoism, especially the Stoic and Epicurean (2004). Stoic and hedonistic currents are enabled by the centrifugal effects of wealth but the route into altruistic self-abandonment of this kind of person is activated by the inversion of 'progressive' anomie into its 'regressive' and active form that are enmeshed with Epicurean tendencies. To avoid physical death Des Esseintes commits a moral sacrifice of the unhinged self, delivering it to the doorstep of institutional control. Key to the Epicurean form is its sectarian nature and affinity for a high degree of regulation (Durkheim 2004: 233-34).

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# A Critique of Axel Honneth's Theory of Reification

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This cited anecdote is a commonplace phenomenon in capitalist society. No one *would* dare say the waitress is mistaken in referring to the customer as his[1] order, but no one *should* dare say that for all of history customers have always been identified as their orders. Marxists have long identified seeing human-beings as things (e.g., exchange relations, currency, commodities, etc.) as the process of reification. This essential critique of the capitalist way of life has "fallen into virtual oblivion in recent years," [i] albeit the phenomenon of reification is a salient characteristic of the growth of capitalist relations.

Axel Honneth should be admired for bringing the theory of reification back into academic discourse in his recently published book *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*. Honneth wants to construct his theory in relation to Georg Lukács's essay *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,* published in his 1922 masterpiece *History and Class Consciousness*. Since Lukács's publication, the theory of reification never lost its cogency; it only lost its academic appeal. Unfortunately Honneth's title is misleading. Instead of giving us a new look at an old idea, he gives the reader a unique look at a misunderstood idea.[pullquote]Instead of giving us a new look at an old idea, he gives the reader a unique look at a misunderstood idea.[/pullquote] By this I mean he develops his own unique theory of reification, which lacks a strong connection to the original theory, because he seems to have misunderstood the initial theory. If he has understood the initial theory, then he rejects it (implicitly), in which case one wonders why he refers to his own idea as reification too. Finally, if he really understood the original theory, he would have been more careful in writing his own theory, which can be criticized by the original theoretical insights as expressed by Lukács and Karl Marx.

In this essay I intend to present Axel Honneth's theory of reification. Then I will critique his theory in two ways. 1) I will show that he misunderstood Lukács's theory, and 2) I will show that the insights Marx gave, regarding reification, work as critiques of Honneth's theory too.[ii] In order for Honneth's theory to be viable he must meet the challenges of Marx's structural analysis of capitalism. In the process of critiquing Honneth I will incorporate the work of Andrew Feenberg,[iii] and I.I. Rubin.[iv]

## Honneth's Theory

Honneth wants to revive the theory of reification, initially espoused by Marx, augmented by Lukács, and eventually completely reworked by the Frankfurt School. He believes that to "settle the question of whether the concept of reification still retains any value today," we should return to Lukács.[v] After giving the reader Lukács's supposed view, Honneth develops his own theory.

Honneth's theory of reification can be grounded in empirical experimentation, with philosophical cunning. Emphatic engagement, which ontogenetically precedes a neutral stance towards reality, for Honneth, is the necessary precondition for developing a theory of reification as a neutral or objectively calculating stance towards reality. If it can be shown that humans are first emphatically engaged – in a relational sense – with the world, and another subject, and later lose their sense of emphatic relation, then somewhere along the line the subject has reified the world and/or the other.

Honneth wants to pinpoint "forgetfulness of recognition," as the process of reifying the other.[vi] This framing of the problem has a necessary implication. If I forget how to recognize, I must have once known how to do it. Somewhere along the line of development, my former ability to emphatically engage with the other was severed. Honneth is convinced that Heidegger, Dewey and Lukács shared this same philosophy, albeit their explication of the theory was semantically different.[vii] By explicitly referring to this phenomenon of forgetfulness, Honneth is expanding upon the presumptions of Dewey, Heidegger, and Lukács. However, not wanting to rely solely on arm-chair philosophy, Honneth offers the reader empirical evidence.

In order to vindicate his theory, Honneth brings scientific research forward, specifically developmental psychology. "In the fields of psychology and socialization research, it has long been agreed that the emergence of children's abilities to think and interact must be conceived as a process that occurs in the act of taking over another person's perspective."[viii] After citing several theorist (e.g. G.H. Mead, and Donald Davidson), he concludes that psychological research conducted on children has "demonstrated with astounding regularity that…[Children] must first have emotionally identified with an attachment figure before," they can adopt the stance of this person toward the world.[ix] Thus, emotional attachment precedes adopting the stance of the other. This other is a person, and the relationship is intersubjective. Moreover, this relationship is primarily between child and parent. This emotional advancement toward the other could not be made if the child "had not already developed a feeling of emotional attachment to a psychological parent."[x] Ergo the child's "act of placing oneself in the perspective of a second person requires an antecedent form of recognition." This antecedent form cannot be developed cognitively, and always contains elements of "openness, devotedness, or love."[xi]

Honneth wants to show that this antecedent form of recognition takes place prior to cognition. This requires ontogenetic evidence. He cites the research of Peter Hobson, and Michael Tomasello (both developmental psychologist). After experimentally observing 9 month year old children, they came to the conclusion that this antecedent act of recognition, which was

empirically taking place, must precede cognition, since cognition develops temporally after 9 months of age. This research is quite tantamount to Meads concept of "playing."[xii]

If the reader accepts Honneth's conclusion, which is essentially the conclusion of Tomasello and Hobson, then we must ask ourselves, temporally, when does the child, or adult, lose this ability to emphatically engage the other? When did empathy wane away? If "in human social behavior, recognition and emphatic engagement necessarily enjoy a simultaneously genetic and categorical priority over cognition," why is it lost? This leads Honneth to ask "how can the concept of reification be formulated once again for us today in a way that takes as much account as possible of Lukács original intentions."[xiii]

According to Honneth – and the conclusion is false – Lukács believed that humans came to regard each other in a neutral way, constituting their new "second nature," and thus failing to emphatically engage the other. Since we now know, ontogenetically, that humans once had this capacity, and have since lost it, we are to term this "forgetfulness of recognition" as "reification."[xiv] But what is the source of this forgetfulness? Lukács, and/or Marx, would of course emphasize the way society (re)produces itself, specifically the capitalist process of (re)production.[2] Honneth will not entertain this point, believing that having shifted "the concept of reification from a simple level…to a complex level," the problem of finding the source of forgetfulness cannot be as easy as Lukács and Marx made it seem (but did they make it seem easy?).[xv] He will however consider social sources of reification, but not the ones Lukács and Marx consider, because they rely too heavily on the base as necessarily, and directly, determining the superstructure of society.[xvi] Although Honneth considers social sources as potential mediators of reification, he admits his results are only in their hypothetical stage. The two sources he speculates one are online job interviews and dating websites. Nonetheless, he offers almost no answer as to what causes the forgetfulness of recognition. For someone steeped in critical and social theory, to debar capitalism as a source is vexing. I will now contest that had he understood Lukács and brought Marx into his analysis, he could in fact address his own problem, in identifying sources of forgetfulness.

## Understanding Lukács

The fact Honneth is now choosing to incorporate Lukács into his theories of intersubjectivity is almost vexing. In an older essay he wrote that Lukács's theories are "shielded completely from any form of general empirical examination," thus "Lukács's critique of reification" ceases to have "any significance in the realm of social philosophy."[xvii]

In outlining Honneth's theory of reification, it is important to remember that he gives us a tenuous starting point. Although he believes he needs to develop his theory against the backdrop of Lukács's essay, he does not inform us why he chooses Lukács over Marx (whose name and works never appear in the text in anything more than a vague referential way), nor why the reader should, either. Chronologically, Marx precedes Lukács in developing the theory of reification, and Lukács was consistent in his work of reminding his reader of this point. To understand Lukács completely, one must also understand Marx. Lukács makes this point

crystal clear in the thesis of his essay:

> *Our intention here is to base ourselves on Marx's economic analyses and to proceed from there to a discussion of the problems growing out of the fetish character of commodities, both as an objective form and also as a subjective stance corresponding to it. Only by understanding this can we obtain a clear insight into the ideological problems of capitalism and its downfall [emphasis in original].[xviii]*

Three things are strikingly clear from this thesis: 1) Lukács theory is grounded in Marx's economic analysis. The economic structure precedes the individual.[xix] 2) Lukács wants to understand "the problems" (i.e., reification) that emanate from treating commodities in a fetishistic way. 3) Lukács was never dealing with individual consciousness, or any loss of emphatic engagement to the other. Like Marx, he is concerned with more generalized social relations.

Honneth on the other hand begins with an analysis of what he believes Lukács is saying about the individual, and ends his book passively suggesting that looking to structural sources of reification is unhelpful. Whereas Lukács begins in the exact opposite way; throughout Honneth's entire book then he has put the proverbial cart before the horse! Although Lukács will go on to discuss the way humans treat each other under capitalism, his essential starting point is the way humans relate to the commodity form (i.e., use-value, value, and where it comes from), both as objects, and as subjects towards those objects). Any talk about ontogenetic ontology, and antecedent forms of expression, while interesting, are not exactly relevant to how a subject views a commodity (he may even love a commodity, emphatically – which is a problem in and of itself), nor the type of subjectivity required to enter an exchange relation that (re)produces the social and economic situation.

In one passage, Lukács even damns the "bourgeois method", which tries to neutrally examine a phenomenon and report it as an ahistorical "essence" of the "individual"; which is ironically what Honneth is doing by extrapolating generalized conclusions about mankind from narrow infant studies. In retort Lukács contends:

> *The essence of history lies precisely in the changes undergone by those structural forms which are the focal points of man's interaction with the environment at any given moment and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and his outer life. But this only becomes objectively possible (and hence can only be adequately comprehended) when the individuality, the uniqueness of an epoch or an historical figure, etc., is grounded in the character of these structural forms, when it is discovered and exhibited in them and through them[emphasis added].[xx]*

Even if Honneth's studies into the nature of adolescents are to be taken as ahistorical truth,

man's inner and outer nature (his historical essence e.g., Monarch, monk, or CEO) is going to be expressed, and molded, by specific focal points which include objective and subjective interaction with the environment he is born into. If we want to know why one is not emphatically engaged, we must proceed to analyze, dialectically, man's mediation with his environment. To present Lukács as being first theoretically concerned with our forms of engagement, antecedent to our historical backdrop is untenable. As Lukács later remarked in the third volume of his *Ontology of Social Being*: "the social here and now… cannot be reconstructed experimentally precisely because of the radical irreversibility of social being," and, mirroring one of Marx's points, "As the human anatomy provides the key to the anatomy of the ape, so the more primitive stage can only be reconstructed in thought from the higher stage," giving us only "approximation[s]."[xxi] The same holds true of reconstructing in thought the more primitive/adolescent stages of our human essence, from our higher/adult vantage point. We are left only with approximations, always already mediated by an insurmountable position of social being.

Andrew Feenberg points out (and I agree) that what Lukács specifically meant by reified consciousness can be expressed in Lukács statement:

> *Man in capitalist society confronts a reality 'made' by himself (as a class) which appears to him to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself; he is wholly at the mercy of its 'laws', his activity is confined to the exploitation of the inexorable fulfillment of certain individual laws for his own (egoistic) interests. But even while 'acting' he remains, in the nature of the case, the object and not the subject of events. The field of his activity thus becomes wholly internalized: it consists on the one hand of the awareness of the laws which he uses and, on the other, of his awareness of his inner reactions to the course taken by events.[xxii]*

This theory does not, as Honneth suggested it did, critique the neutral or contemplative stance man takes in society. Instead, it refers to the fact that man, as subject, is not in control of the alien laws that ostensibly govern society.[3] Feenberg summarizes this mode of being, this form of reification, in an uncanny example: "The capitalist investor stands in a contemplative relation to the stock market. He tries to position himself in relation to trends, not to control the trends."[xxiii] Thus, clarifying Lukács's thesis, that the individual subject, relates to his object (the stocks), as an actually existing object (fetishizes them), and in the process of treating them with objectivity, he (re)produces a social way of being that he in fact cannot actually control. His only semblance of control is *conformity* to alien laws, even if he sees through said laws. This alien process is experienced by the worker, the capitalist, and the bureaucrat, who are all reified "in the sense that [they]…cannot alter their laws, only understand and manipulate those laws to personal advantage."[xxiv]

Clearly Lukács's theory does not concern itself with a "forgetfulness of recognition," nor some form of detached engagement with the other. Lukács, as a revolutionary, was primarily

concerned with superseding the conditions that gave rise to alien laws that commoditized, and reified, the subject's social life. Honneth wanted reification to "lose its dramatic character and instead prompt some illuminating speculation."[xxv] Lukács was adamant that reification needed to be obliterated, by a self-aware proletariat, who recognized themselves as the subject-object of history, and engaged in revolutionary praxis. Thus the source for quelling reification was revolution, not philosophical speculation, and hypotheses about dating websites. Or, as Marx would say to Honneth, in favor of Lukács: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."[xxvi]

## Marx's Structure

Sartre makes an observation in his *Search for a Method* which remains true in relation to Honneth:

> *I have often remarked on the fact that an "anti-Marxist" argument is only the apparent rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea. A so-called "going beyond" Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy which one believes he has gone beyond. [xxvii]*

This sentiment is extremely contentious, but in relation to Honneth, I believe it is mostly accurate. Honneth states that

> *according to our analysis thus far, we only reify other persons if we lose sight of our antecedent recognition of their existence as persons [this]…demonstrate[s] just how unconvincing is Lukács' equation of commodity exchange and reification, given that the persons with whom we interact in the process of economic exchange are normally present to us, at least legally, as recognized persons. [xxviii]*

Marx's structural analysis of the alien laws which capitalism (re)produces itself under, must be taken into consideration, if Honneth is to 1) Identify sources of our reification and 2) Inform us what needs to be changed in order to quell reification. Moreover, Marx's structural analysis must be taken into consideration in order to defend Lukács theory, and indicate that just because people enter intersubjective relations as legally recognized people (if they do at all), it does not necessarily follow that these relations are *de facto* not reified.[4] If this can be demonstrated, then Honneth's theory loses serious veracity.

I.I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* defends Marxist economics from charges of error. In this book he introduces the ingenious notion that "the theory of fetishism is, *per se*,

the basis of Marx's entire economic system,"[xxix] and proceeds to highlight the role reification played in Marx's system. By reviewing Rubin's work, we can further understand how people under capitalism are reified in spite of Honneth's claim regarding legal recognition.

The first point Rubin makes, about intersubjective relations under capitalism, is that the basic production relations "connects the participants for a short time, not creating a permanent connection between them," nevertheless, these abrupt connections are necessary, when considered in their totality, for "maintaining the constancy and continuity of the social process of production." That is, the moments of intersubjective relations on the market are A) fleeting and too fast for sincere recognition and B) always already mediated by the *economic* relation underlying them, to prevent a genuine and sincere relationship from developing. Even if I recognize my pizza delivery man as a fellow human being, the exchange is too fast for me to establish the type of emphatic engagement I would with my parent, at the age of nine months, and our exchange is already pre-mediated by the necessity of sale and purchase. We treat each other primarily as means to an end.

Before returning to Rubin's analysis, the pizza delivery example needs to be extended even further, because in this relation, we have an intersubjective moment whereby we can either affirm or deny Honneth's theory. Before Marx utilized reification in *Capital Vol I,* he used the term in *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. Utilizing reification, in his analysis of exchanging commodities for money, or for other commodities, Marx points out that under capitalism, where labor has an exchange value (e.g. cost of labor power), the individual labor of the person is perceived as a thing (a temporal quantifier). Thus the work of concretely different people "is equated and treated as universal labor only by bringing one use value into relation with another in the *guise* of exchange value." Although the exchange appears to be between people it "is necessary to add that it is a relation hidden by a material veil." And thus, "all the illusions of the monetary system arise from the failure to perceive that money, though a physical object with distinct properties represents a social relation of production." [xxx] Marx goes on to expand upon the reification of money, but I do not think it is necessary to elaborate this point to critique Honneth's theory. Money is the material veil of individually concrete labor that is abstracted into socially necessary labor time (dehumanization has already begun), and thus quantified into value, for exchange. Thus, when my relation with the pizza man is analyzed from a third point of view (distinct from the point of view of A and B above), we must recognize that I am exchanging part of my formally concrete labor time, via currency (representing my labor abstractly), for someone else's concrete labor, now abstracted too, viz. the pizza. But the producer of the pizza, let alone the producer of the ingredients of the pizza, and the machines that make it (in this case variations between constant and variable capital), are disguised, or do not appear on the scene directly, but are having their *formerly* concrete labor mediated by the exchange of currency (between me and the delivery man), without ever actually entering the intersubjective relation of sale. Moreover, in the process of paying for this pizza, by a currency that already mediates these faceless producers' concrete attributes into the abstract and universal value exchange system, I am (re)producing the very conditions that lead to the continuance of a productive relation that is never entirely intersubjective. Thus, even if I retained full emphatic engagement, antecedent recognition, and desired to engage with the

other, the structural arrangement of this transaction prevents that process from existing, and actually (re)produces its continued nonexistence.[5] When all uniquely concrete labor can be sold and bought with currency that measures concrete labor abstractly, and socially, we are always already (re)producing relations of reification.

Alas, capitalism cannot proceed to (re)produce itself, without reifying concrete labor, into abstract labor, as mediated by socially necessary labor time, and quantified into value, which serves as the medium of exchange.[xxxi] Value is objective, and immaterial, as Marx would put it, abstracting from the real material relations of men, leaving those relations completely reified.

Really delving into Marx's theory of value, whereby the theory of reification is seen as undergirding the whole process is outside the scope of this essay. However, it is important to point out that structurally, according to Marx and Lukács, all concrete labor (i.e., the labor John Doe does as a unique human being) is always already abstracted into socially necessary labor time. When we order a pizza, we all expect it to arrive in thirty minutes or less; this is a role that society pressures upon the producer as producer (not as John Doe). And we exchange in general an equivalent for the thirty minute pizza (e.g. $20), no matter which chain we order it from. Thus, the employees' uniqueness, and role as human beings, in any place of employment, is always already mediated by social expectations that are abstract and temporal.[xxxii]

This leads to the next stage of reifying the human being from the point of view of the capitalist. The capitalist must pay the worker enough to reproduce the same labor power for the following shift (i.e., his ability to (re)produce the same work into the future). This wage for labor power is also abstracted, and generalized (e.g. the minimum wage). Thus, all workers of a lower class are paid the same general sum, albeit what each *actually* needs to (re)produce himself into the future is always quantitatively different, given variables of family size, preexisting debt, medical conditions, etc.

All of these points lead up to Rubin's conclusion that under capitalism:

> *Separate individuals are related directly to each other by determined production relations, not as members of society, not as persons who occupy a place in the social process of production, but as owners of determined things, as social representatives of different factors of production.[xxxiii]*

Thus, what ought to be direct social relations, that are emphatic, and intersubjective, end up as "material relations" between persons, and "social relations between things."[xxxiv] This moment where social relations are personified by things, is clearly demonstrated when someone can be a capitalist because of the money they own, and not because of their uniqueness as a human being. Or as Marx put it roughly in *Capital*, it is not because you are a titan of industry that you become a capitalist; instead it is because you are already a capitalist

(a possessor of lots of money-other peoples abstracted labor) that you become a titan of industry.[xxxv]

It is at this point of development that Rubin offers the reader keen insight into why, even if Honneth is correct, capitalism is most assuredly a *source* of reification, despite Honneth's contention otherwise:

> *Every type of production relation which is characteristic…[of] a capitalist economy ascribes a particular social form to the things for which and through which people enter the given relation. This leads to the "reification…of production relations among people. The thing which is involved in a determined production relation among people and which has a corresponding social form, maintains this form even when the given, concrete, single production relation is interrupted…Since the things come forth with a determined, fixed social form, they, in turn, begin to influence people, shaping their motivation, and inducing them to establish concrete production relations with each other. Possessing the social form of "capital," things make their owner a "capitalist" and in advance determine the concrete production relations which will be established between him and other members of society. It seems as if the social character of things determines the social character of their owners [Emphasis in Original].[xxxvi]*

Rubin goes on to develop this point, but further development is unnecessary to vindicate that the structures of a capitalist economy does *at least to some degree* reify the subject, or impinge upon his mental autonomy.

The final point that needs to be made, regarding Marx's analysis of the structure of capitalism, is that even if Honneth is right that all subjects are legally recognized citizens, it does not follow that all relations under capitalism are therefore *intersubjective* a*nd thus not prone to reification*. Moreover, the matter of forgetting to be emphatically engaged (the core of Honneth's thesis) is not necessary for reification to take place.

When Marx analyzed the process of absolute surplus value[xxxvii] (i.e., the extraction of surplus value by increasing the temporal duration, and/or intensity of the workers' productivity), he refers to the fact that the owner of the company will place a representative on the work floor (e.g., a manager, assistant manager, district leader, etc.), in order to ensure time is not wasted, and work is always productive. For example, ensure the worker does not spend too much time taking out the trash, or making a phone call. As a company expands outward, geographically, the capitalist loses the ability to maintain intersubjective relations with all employees, at all times, during all shifts. A representative of the interest of capital accumulation – the manager – must act on the capitalist behalf. Even if the capitalist does not intend to extract absolute surplus value (unlikely), he still has his relation to his employees mediated by someone else. As this process expands, with the outward expansion of capital, the capitalist eventually only *sees* his employees as statistics, numbers on a chart, and

representatives of *abstract labor*. Labor power, as Marx rightly pointed out, is completely commoditized. It is not possible for a multinational corporation to function on the basis of each employee being unique, and emphatically engaged with; the only way the company can continue to (re)produce itself, is to (re)produce its labor pool as one of many *costs*, that are subjected to the interest of the capital accumulation process, and almost never as intersubjective relations. This relation is indicative of a panopticon, where the capitalist(s) see their employees in a mediated relationship (via charts, graphs, and reports), but the employees never see their real boss. Thus, through mediating the workers via graphs, the relationship is not intersubjective between both subjects, but only – as the panopticon demonstrates – unidirectional. The capitalist sees the worker, already reified, but the worker, never sees the capitalist. Thus, reification is not a moment, or pathology, where one *forgets their emphatic recognition*, but as Marx and Lukács suggested, the capitalist relations of production set people in relations where *recognition never takes place to begin with*, independently of someone's *capacity* to recognize.

Although there is more to be found in Marx's analysis of reification and capitalism (e.g., In *Capital Volume III* where he discusses how land becomes a value, and capable of exchange), continued critique is rather superfluous, to vindicate my primary point: despite Honneth's objection, the structure of capitalism is in fact a source of reification, and to move the theory of reification in a direction that is contentious to this point, is to lose the foundation upon which reification was built, and to render the theory less profound, and less capable of real agitation.

## Conclusion

I have reviewed Axel Honneth's theory of reification and I have demonstrated that in regards to Lukács's theory, he seems to have misunderstood the idea from the start. Therefore, we are not given a new look at an old idea, but a new idea, generated from a straw man. Also, Honneth rejected capitalism as a source of reification, and I have demonstrated that despite the main tenet of his theory – reification is forgetting how to emphatically engage with the other – reification can in fact take place even if one never forgets how to emphatically engage. To move away from structural reification, and direct the theory towards the responsibly of subjects, is to give capitalism more credit than it deserves, and hold people more responsible than they ought to be. As Ernest Mandel wrote in 1970:

> *This habit of reification is not the fault of the inhumanity or insensitivity of the workers. It results from a certain type of human relation rooted in commodity production and its extreme division of labor where people engaged in one trade tend to their fellows on as customers or through the lenses of whatever economic relations they have with them.[xxxviii]*

## Notes

[1] I will stick to masculine nouns and pronouns, for the sake of clarity, because the authors I am citing are using masculine language too.

[2] (Re)production refers to a phenomena that Marx points out under any mode production. In any act of production, once performed, the producer(s) are simultaneously reproducing the circumstances that undergird the act of production. The term "(re)production" denotes this point: "Whatever the form of the process of production in a society, it must be a continuous process, must continue to go periodically through the same phases. A society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and as flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction." For a full elaboration read see chapter 23 of *Capital*. This concept will play an important role in critiquing Honneth.
Marx, Karl. *Capital*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 711. Print

[3] These laws are of course historical, and surmountable, through revolutionary praxis, as Lukács emphasizes ad nauseum throughout the book.

[4] Just to give a crude and horrifying example, it's not as if the day after (or even decades after) the emancipation proclamation, racial harmony followed suit. To cite legal recognition as evidence of intersubjective relational cognition is tenuous at best.

[5] This example exists for more than a pizza exchange, and can be found in almost every market exchange some set of producers, or producers of constant capital (i.e., the means of productions themselves) is only recognized through a distant purchases currency exchange.

[i] Honneth, Axel. *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 3. Print.

[ii] Honneth is also critiqued my Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, and Jonathan Lear, none of whom are Marxist, nor fans of Lukács. So, although their critiques are cogent, I intend to ignore them, and focus solely on Honneth's relation to Lukács, Marx, and Marxism, voices that are oddly absent from an initially Marxist theory.

[iii] He holds the Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of Technology School of Communication, at Simon Fraser University. And wrote a very cogent critique of Honneth's book in his essay titled *Rethinking Reification*, which was published in chapter six of *Georg Lukacs: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence.*

[iv] "Born in Russia in 1886, I. I. Rubin was an activist, economics professor and then a researcher at the Marx-Engels Institute. In 1930 he was arrested, imprisoned, exiled and then disappeared. (For his sister's account of this, see B.I. Rubina's essay in R. A. Medvedev *Let History Judge,* translated from the Russian by Colleen Taylor, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1972.) Rubin also authored four books. The English titles are: *History of Economic Thought; Contemporary Economics in the West; Classics of Political Economy from the Seventeenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Century;* and *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*. Summarized from "About

the Author" in *TOV*."
https://marxists.org/archive/rubin/index.htm

[v] Honneth, Axel. *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 21. Print.

[vi] Ibid 52.

[vii] Ibid 28-30

[viii] Ibid 41

[ix] Ibid 42

[x] Ibid 43

[xi] Ibid 45

[xii] Ibid 43

[xiii] I bid 52.
As I will argue later, considering Honneth never understood Lukács's project, why is this question even a question?

[xiv] Ibid 56

[xv] Ibid 58

[xvi] This view of the base and superstructure is an old canard, that neither Lukács nor Marx held, and Lukacs former student, Istvan Meszaros, Professor Emeritus at the University of Sussex, has utterly refuted this conception of the base superstructure in:
Meszaros, Istvan. *Social Structure and Forms of Conciousness, Volume 2: The Dialectic of Structure and History* . New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011. Print.

[xvii] Honneth, Axel. *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007. 25-26.

[xviii] Lukács, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. 84.

[xix] As Marx said in the 18th Brumaire: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

[xx] Ibid 153.

[xxi] Lukacs, Georg. *The Ontology of Social Being 3. Labour*. London: Merlin Press, 1980. II-III.

[xxii] Feenberg, Andrew. *Rethinking Reification*. 4. The essay can be downloaded off his faculty website:
www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/lukacs-honneth.doc and it also appears in the book *Georg Lukacs: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence.*
[xxiii] Ibid.

[xxiv] Ibid.

[xxv] Ibid, Honneth, 28.

[xxvi] Engels, Frederick. Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy. New York: International Publishing, 2010. 82.

[xxvii] https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/critic/sartre1.htm

[xxviii] Ibid, Honneth, 75.

[xxix] Rubin, I.I. *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*. Aaker Books, 2008. 6.

[xxx] Marx, Karl. *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. New York: International Publishers, 1970. 34-35

[xxxi] Unfortunately I am having to summarize Marx's theory of value into a paragraph, for the sake of space constraints. For more info see:
Marx, Karl. *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. New York: International Publishers, 1970. 34-180.

[xxxii] Ibid, Rubin, 5-55.

[xxxiii] Ibid, Rubin, 21.

[xxxiv] Ibid, 22.

[xxxv] Marx, Karl. *Capital*. New York: Penguin, 1990. Chapter 13.

[xxxvi] Ibid, 24

[xxxvii] Marx, Karl. *Capital*. New York: Penguin, 1990. Part Three.

[xxxviii] Ibid, Mandel, 26.

# Prefatory Note to The Twin Research Debate

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Small assumptions can make colossal differences. Tobacco is safe. What's good for Wall Street is good for Main Street. Genes influence everything we do – and twin studies allegedly prove it. Even when a myriad of environmental and social factors actually are acknowledged, genes nevertheless are said to affect everything that matters about human behavior, at least "in part" (whatever that may mean), and that this crucial role is supposed to deserve unquestioned assent and to command a substantial amount of collective resources. Gene research, after all, is pricey. Given the questionable foundations of the science, and what's at stake, we should not allow ourselves to be seduced by the statistical pyrotechnics of the proponents.

According to this modern scientistic gospel, there is a gene, or an interacting group of genes, behind every mental disorder, act of criminality, and political inclination.[1] Note the obligatorily rhetorical piece "Do Genes Determine How you Vote?" – with implied affirmative answer – in the highly reputable British newspaper *The Independent* during the 2015 election.[2] Stenographic science reporters routinely relay claims that a gene for this or that condition has been nabbed, and reckon that the cure, in the form of a profitable pill or physical intervention, cannot be far behind. As glum critics long have observed, these assertions always are blazed in headlines, and always soon are retracted, or hedged into oblivion, in small print.[3] Nothing has changed. On the day this piece goes off to layout a gaggle of scientists announced they have found a gene 'associated with thinking skills,' results which they caution 'remain to be replicated.'[4]

Most genetic researchers nowadays recognize that environmental factors play some sort of role, yet, based on their genetocentric interpretations of twin studies, clearly subscribe even more so to the existence of congeries of many genes of varying effect size that play an important part in causing behavioral characteristics and disorders. These researchers usually stipulate that preliminary gene association results need to be replicated. At the same time, journalists in major media outlets frequently sensationalize their work and lead the public to believe that the 'smoking gene,' as it were, for any given behavior has been nabbed. Even after replication attempts fail, these accounts leave the false impression among the general public that genes causing strong behavior differences have been located, if not caged.

Any infinitesimal statistical correlation typically is hailed as a harbinger of a clinching proof. Genes are deterministic in the sense that whatever behavior you care about, the person who exhibited it undeniably possessed genes, period. While the history of science shows that enthusiasm for a hypothesis can indeed be an asset, the accompanying urge to overlook contradicting factors is a common and dangerous one.[5] Researchers rarely see what they are

not looking for, especially if their paychecks, as that noted investigator of the human condition Mark Twain remarked, depend on not seeing it.[6] The current cultural climate renders citizens easy prey to overhyped non-discoveries. Keep in mind that everyone engaged in gene research, even the most talented and skeptical practitioners, benefits materially from these misapprehensions.

Even when making allowances for environmental influences, researchers typically shortchange this factor so as to maintain perhaps the most expensive snipe hunt in history. Human experience is not supposed to matter very much or, in some formulations, at all. If it did, we might behold an overdue spate of widely publicized genuine critical reflections about all the blanks these researchers are drawing. Scientists, being human, often resort to *ad hoc* statements and other extenuating justifications to pursue research aligning with expectations of what they will find. This phenomenon is particularly egregious in the avid hunt for genetic causes of criminality and psychoses. In a 2009 *Nature* article "Finding the Missing Heritability,' several prominent researchers, poring over a dismal record of non-findings for genetic causation, wind up advocating more of the same because they are so certain the genes are 'out there."[7] For them heritability is at the core. Heritability, however, is a woefully and easily misunderstood concept but it is misunderstood to the advantage of those who believe we inherit our behavioral (hot temper) as well as physical traits (red hair).[8]

Much of the misplaced confidence in genetic explanations stems from studies of fraternal and identical twins. The general public has no idea how dubious these studies actually are, reanimated lately by what is termed a trait-relevant Equal Environment Assumption; hence, the debunking intervention below. The artful *ad hoc*-ery of this explanatory strain goes so far as claiming that identical twins 'create their own environment,' rather than the environment – say, parents with four figure incomes versus parents with six or seven figure incomes – influencing them. More on this in the main article below. The formidable co-authors argue on ample evidence that the classical twin design has outlived its natural scientific life because it is perpetuated by a set of assumptions or defenses that are starkly circular. Assumptions fuel conclusions (only genes matter) at the same time that those conclusions are used as a rationale for the assumptions. If there is no 'smoking gene' then the public is entitled to ask what exactly the money is being doled out to do?

Outside the alluring artificial framework of twin research design, it is extremely apparent that a lousy and deprived upbringing, no matter what your gene make-up, can make you miserable and vulnerable.[9] Human adaptation is dominated by environmental sensitivity that is only weakly influenced by genetic variation, and is powerfully influenced by the contingencies of our specific socioecological niches. It is clear and well established that the environment seriously affects the development of any child. So the co-authors consider it highly relevant to analyze whether identical twins are more similar on this account than fraternal twins. Because beliefs influence public policy, the stakes are huge.

## Notes

[1] *Merriam's Dictionary* online entry for 'scientism' is perhaps too apt. The second (2) definition, as intended here, is "an exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of the natural sciences to all areas of investigation (as in philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities)." The first (1) definition, though, is "methods and attitudes typical of or attributed to the natural scientist (!)'[exclamation point mine]. www.merriam webster.com/dictionary/scientism. See the 2013 exchange about the concept between Stephen Pinker and Leon Wieseltier at www.newrepublic.com/article/114548/leon-wieseltier-responds-steven-pinkers-scientism.

[2] https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/generalelection/general-election-2015-do-your-genes-determine-how-you-vote-10173588.html. Noting that causation instead runs both ways between genome and environment, see Evan Charney and William English, 'Candidate genes and Political Behavior,' *American Political Science Review* February 2012, p. 30.

[3] For background see Kurt Jacobsen, 'The Mystique of Genetic Correctness' *Logos,* 6, 1 (Winter-Spring 2007). *https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/issue_6.1-2/jacobsen.htm*

[4] One sincerely hopes they confirm it this time and manage to put it to some use themselves. 'Researchers find Gene associated with Thinking Skills," *Medical Press* 15 July 2015. https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-07-gene-skills.html

[5] On the difference between 'logic of discovery' (where hunches and hopes abound) and 'logic of justification' see Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974, rev.).

[6] Upton Sinclair can be credited with a less folksy formulation, which I have tapped, of Twain's observation that "You tell me whar a man gits his corn pone an' I'll tell you what his 'pinions is." The posthumously published essay 'Corn Pone Opinions' can be found in Mark Twain, *What is Man? And Other Philosophical Writings* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973). Ed. Paul Baender.

[7] Teri A. Manolio et. al. 'Finding the Missing Heritability of Complex Diseases' *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science* 461, 8 October 2009.

[8] Heritability is a population statistic with scarcely any predictive power regarding, or applicability to, individuals. For a concise critique see Jay Joseph, "Are DSM Psychiatric Disorders 'Heritable?' *Madness in America* Blog 24 June 2015 www.madinamerica.com/2015/06/are-dsm-psychiatric-disorders-heritable

[9] See, for example, Kate Pickett and Richard G Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (London: Penguin, 2010) and Anthony Atkinson, *Inequality – What Can be Done?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

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# The Twin Research Debate in American Criminology

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*"There is a danger of concealing assumptions which have no factual basis behind an impressive façade of flawless algebra."*

*— Lancelot Hogben, 1933[1]*

The debate on the validity of twin research has recently resurfaced in the field of American criminology, and has major implications for other areas of behavioral research as well. Criminologists Callie Burt and Ronald Simons, in a 2014 critique of twin, adoption, and other "heritability" studies in their field, challenged the assumptions underlying studies of reared-together twins (the "classical twin method"). They also challenged the behavioral genetic position that observed behavior is the result of the additive influences of genes, the "shared environment," and the "unshared environment." [2] They concluded that the field should abandon heritability studies because they are "methodologically flawed," and because they are based on "an oversimplified and incorrect model of gene function" based on the "biologically unsound" practice of "partitioning genetic versus environmental influences on variance in phenotypes."[3] Burt and Simons' original article was followed by two lengthy responses from a group of leading biosocial criminologist twin researchers, which include J. C. Barnes, John Paul Wright, Brian Boutwell, Kevin Beaver, and their colleagues (hereafter, Barnes and colleagues).[4] Burt and Simons responded to these and other critics in a subsequent article.[5] Our purpose here is to focus on the twin method and its key assumptions.[6]

Twin studies of criminality and "antisocial behavior" (ASB) are not new, and go back to the 1930s and earlier, when biological and genetic theories of crime flourished in the United States, Germany, Scandinavia, and elsewhere.[7] Since that time, the main technique used by supporters of genetic theories of human development and human behavioral differences has been twin research, which has been put forward as a scientifically validated research method that provides an ideal "natural experiment" for assessing the relative importance of heredity and environment. In almost all cases these studies are based on reared-together twin pairs, while in an extremely small yet influential handful of studies, twin pairs were said to have been reared apart in different families. These "reared-apart" (separated) twin studies, however, are plagued by numerous invalidating problems and biases, which include that most pairs were not truly "reared-apart," and the role of cohort effects and other non-genetic influences inflating twin correlations.[8]

At the same time, apart from a few possible minor exceptions, decades of searches have failed to produce confirmed gene findings at the molecular level for differences in personality,

socially disapproved behavior such as criminality, the normal range of IQ (cognitive ability), as well as the major psychiatric disorders.[9] Indeed, Barnes and colleagues could not name any confirmed gene discoveries for behaviors studied in criminology, or for that matter any other type of behavior. As sociologist Aaron Panofsky put it in his 2014 book *Misbehaving Science*, "Molecular genetics has been a major disappointment, if not an outright failure, in behavior genetics."[10]

Rather than arrive at the reasonable conclusion that no such genes exist, however, most genetic researchers interpret these negative results as evidence of a "missing heritability problem," enabling genomic research to continue as a major focus of research attention and funding.[11]

## The Classical Twin Method

In the context of the stunning failure to discover genes, behavioral genetics and its adherents in various fields have fallen back on emphasizing "classical twin method" comparisons between MZ (monozygotic, identical) and same-sex DZ (dizygotic, fraternal) twin pairs reared together in the same family home. MZ pairs are said to share 100% of their segregating genes, whereas (like ordinary siblings) same-sex DZ pairs are said to share only 50% on average.[12] If MZ pairs resemble each other more (correlate higher) than DZ pairs for the behavior, behavioral disorder, or medical condition in question, twin researchers conclude that it has an underlying genetic component.

Genetic interpretations of twin method results, however, are based on twin researchers' much-criticized MZ-DZ "equal environment assumption" (EEA). According to this assumption, MZ and DZ pairs grow up experiencing roughly equal environments, and the only factor distinguishing them is their differing degree of *genetic* relationship to each other (100% versus 50%). Twin researchers' acceptance of the validity of the EEA allows them to argue that genetic factors explain the usual finding that MZ pairs behave more similarly (or correlate higher on psychological tests) than do same-sex DZ pairs. Twin correlations are then factored into more complicated "biometrical model fitting" (structural equation modeling) procedures, which produce numerical estimates of heritability, and of the "shared" and "unshared" environments.

During the first 40 years of the twin method (roughly 1924 to 1964), twin researchers in psychology and psychiatry defined the EEA—without qualification—as the assumption that MZ and same-sex DZ environments are equal. By the early-1960s, most twin researchers came to agree with the critics that MZ pairs experience more similar environments, that they are treated more alike, and that they are socialized to be more alike than DZ pairs. As behavioral geneticists John Fuller and William Thompson put it in their field-defining 1960 work *Behavior Genetics*, "MZ pairs are treated more alike, and may even be confused, by parents and associates. MZ co-twins model their behavior upon each other to a greater extent than DZ co-twins." Seven years later J.C. DeFries, another leading early behavioral geneticist, wrote that the validity of the EEA is "questionable."[13] (Barnes and colleagues also recognized that MZ

pairs experience more similar environments than DZ pairs, and that MZs are emotionally closer to each other, more often belong to the same peer networks, attend classes together more often, and are dressed more similarly than are DZ pairs.[14])

Like most types of human behavior, MZ twin pairs correlate significantly higher for criminal and antisocial behavior than do same-sex DZ pairs.[15] The key question, which has always been the main area of contention between twin researchers and their critics, is *why* do MZ pairs show greater behavioral resemblance than DZ pairs? Twin researchers answer that MZs' more similar genetic resemblance is the cause; most critics answer that the cause is MZs' more similar environment. We and others have published detailed critical analyses of twin research during the past 20 years, and have called the validity of the EEA and the twin method into question.[16]

Critics point to the sometimes subjective and political aspects of defining criminal and antisocial behavior, in addition to the fact that, even though most people break the law at various times in their lives, poor people and people of color are more likely to be arrested, charged, and convicted of a crime.[17] Criminality is a social construct that depends on context. "Killing," wrote Hubbard and Wald, "can be heroism or murder," and "taking someone's property can be confiscation or theft."[18] The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) behavioral criteria for diagnosing antisocial personality disorder are vague and subjective. And yet, the ability to define and validate "criminal and antisocial phenotypes" is a basic requirement of genetic research in criminology.

In light of the overwhelming evidence that MZ pairs experience much more similar environments than experienced by DZ pairs, twin researchers of the 1960s and 1970s were faced with two options: (1) abandon the twin method, including all previous results, because the EEA is false, or (2) redefine the EEA in an attempt to keep the twin method alive. They chose Option 2.

## Redefining the Equal Environment Assumption

### *Argument A*

The first way that twin researchers redefined the EEA was through what could be called *Argument A*, which holds that MZ pairs "create" or "elicit" their more similar environments because they are more similar genetically.[19] As a leading twin researcher put it, writing in support of the EEA's validity, "Although similarity in environment might make MZ twins more similar, it is equally plausible that by behaving alike, MZ twins create for themselves more similar environments."[20] This, however, is a circular argument because the conclusion that genetic factors explain the greater behavioral resemblance of MZ versus DZ twin pairs is now based on a *premise* stating the very same thing. Twin researchers invoking *Argument A*, therefore, refer to the genetic premise in support of the genetic conclusion, and then refer back to the genetic conclusion in support of the genetic premise, in a continuously circular loop of faulty reasoning.[21] There are additional problems with *Argument A*, and it is clear that it

fails to support the EEA and the twin method. [22]

### *Argument B*

Supporters of the *Argument B* position also recognize that MZ environments are more similar than those experienced by same-sex DZs, but hold that critics must show that MZ and DZ environments differ in aspects that are relevant to the behavioral characteristic (trait) in question. For example, in 1993 a leading group of psychiatric genetic twin researchers wrote, "The traditional twin method…[is] predicated on the equal-environment assumption (EEA)—that monozygotic (MZ) and dizygotic (DZ) twins are equally correlated for their exposure to environmental influences that are of etiologic relevance to the trait under study."[23] This is twin researchers' "trait-relevant" definition of the EEA. It allows them to argue that the twin method is valid even if, as a prominent twin researcher put it, MZ and DZ pairs "experience quite different environments."[24] The mid-1960s developers of *Argument B* simply inserted the term "trait-relevant" in front of the word "environments" in the 40-year-old original definition of the EEA, and then placed the burden of proof on their critics to show that MZs share more similar trait-relevant environments than shared by DZs.[25]

Leading twin researchers and their critics therefore have agreed for over half a century that MZ environments are more similar than same-sex DZ environments, and both also recognize that environmental factors play a role in explaining behavioral differences in the population. Until twin researchers are able to identify specific and exclusive "trait-relevant" factors that contribute to the cause of the behavioral characteristic they are studying, these two widely recognized facts combine to invalidate any genetic inferences based on *Argument B*.

## *The Impact of Identity Confusion and Attachment between Twins*

In a series of "EEA-test" studies spanning several decades designed to test the validity of the equal environment assumption, twin researchers have measured aspects of twins' environmental similarity, such as whether twins shared the same bedroom growing up, had common friends, were dressed alike, and so forth. Although they usually find that MZ pairs grow up experiencing more similar environments than experienced by same-sex DZ pairs, these EEA-test researchers usually conclude in favor of the EEA and the twin method on the basis of *Argument A*, *Argument B*, or both.[26]

At the same time, twin researchers usually fail to acknowledge or adequately assess other important aspects of the twin relationship experienced by MZ pairs to a far greater degree than same-sex DZ pairs. The evidence clearly shows that reared-together MZ pairs experience much higher levels of identity confusion, attachment, and emotional closeness than experienced by reared-together DZ pairs, which will (presumably) lead to greater behavioral resemblance among the former.[27] For example, a schizophrenia twin researcher performed a "global evaluation of twin-closeness" based on 117 pairs, and found that 65% of the MZ pairs had an "extremely strong level of closeness," which was true for only 17% of the same-sex DZ pairs. Fully 90% of the MZ pairs had experienced "identity confusion in childhood," which was

experienced by only 10% of the DZ pairs.[28]

In a 1976 Norwegian twin study of criminal behavior, Dalgard and Kringlen found that 42 of the 49 MZ pairs (86%) had an "extremely strong" or "strong" level of "emotional closeness" (interdependence), which was true for only 32 of the 89 DZ pairs (36%).[29] They found, due to the likelihood that "similar external milieu and mutual identification lead to similarities in personality, including the shared criminal tendencies," that MZ pairs more often "operate together as a unit, and accordingly carry out criminal acts together." They concluded that the EEA is "an assumption which today cannot be accepted."[30] These findings provide additional evidence against the validity of the EEA.

## Implications for Criminology and Other Areas of Behavioral Research

Because the evidence weighs heavily against the validity of the EEA—whether in its original, *Argument A*, or *Argument B* form—some critics have argued that the greater behavioral resemblance of MZ versus same-sex DZ twin pairs can be *completely* explained by non-genetic (environmental, developmental, and random) influences. They conclude that genetic interpretations of all past, present, and future MZ–DZ twin method comparisons in the social and behavioral sciences should be rejected outright, and that the best explanation for present-day "positive" twin study genetic findings in combination with negative results from genome-wide association (GWA) and other types of molecular genetic studies is therefore not that the "heritability is missing," but that genetic interpretations of MZ-DZ comparisons are wrong.[31] Other critics refrain from reaching such definitive conclusions, but argue that the greater environmental similarity of MZ pairs greatly inflates heritability estimates based on MZ-DZ comparisons, and that the genetic contribution therefore is overstated.

### *Barnes and Colleagues' Defense of the Twin Method*

Although Barnes and colleagues did not invoke *Argument A*, their conceptualization of the EEA contained elements of *Argument B*.[32] They raised the following ten major points related to the EEA and Burt and Simons' discussion of it: (1) although the twin method is indeed based on false assumptions, such as the EEA and the "no assortative mating assumption,"[33] the impact of these assumptions is that they "cancel each other out" in favor of genetic interpretations of MZ-DZ comparisons; (2) the twin method debate was "settled" decades ago in favor of its validity, and contemporary critics mainly rehash previous arguments that subsequently were shown to have no merit; (3) twin researchers performing EEA-test studies have upheld the validity of the assumption; (4) the EEA debate must be decided mathematically, and computer simulations provide "mathematical proof" and "demonstrate unequivocally" that genetic interpretations of twin method data are valid, and prove that "violations of the EEA" have only a minor impact on heritability estimates; (5) the results of "reared-apart" twin studies, and adoption studies, produce heritability estimates similar to studies using the twin method; (6) the results of newly developed "cutting edge" molecular genetic studies, such as "Genome-wide complex trait analysis" (GCTA), are consistent with genetic interpretations of twin studies; (7) Burt and Simons' call to abandon heritability studies is wrong, and amounts to a "*de facto* form

of censorship"; (8) Burt and Simons are politically motivated outsiders to twin research; (9) Burt and Simons "cherry picked" studies that support their arguments; (10) Burt and Simons' arguments rely on "highly questionable sources" and "aggressive" politically motivated critics who attack the work of (presumably unbiased and non-politically motivated) "scholars."

Points 1-7 range from very questionable to clearly false.[34] Points 8-10 question Burt and Simons' knowledge, scientific objectivity, and integrity, and we will refrain from addressing them here, while noting that this tactic is sometimes used in behavioral genetics in an attempt to discredit the arguments of its critics.[35]

Regarding Point 1, if the null hypothesis stating that humans carry no genes predisposing them to criminality or ASB is true, then there is no assortative mating bias because mating patterns would have no genetic influence on these behaviors, and any observed MZ-DZ correlational differences would be caused entirely by non-genetic factors.[36] In order for Barnes and colleagues to be able to claim that assortative (non-random) mating patterns "downwardly bias heritability estimates" for criminality and ASB, they had to *assume in advance* that there are genes predisposing people for criminality and ASB. In other words, Barnes and colleagues assumed an important role for genetics as a means of concluding in favor of the very same thing, and like supporters of *Argument A*, their conclusion was based on illogical circular reasoning because it merely restated their premise in slightly different terms.

Previous behavioral genetic researchers also speculated that false twin research assumptions somehow cancel each other out in favor of genetics, usually without producing any "mathematical proof" in support of this claim.[37] The researchers carrying out the famous yet greatly flawed Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart (MISTRA) made a similar argument, writing that some of the assumptions underlying their models and conclusions "are likely not to hold,"[38] and "are generally oversimplifications of the actual situation, and their violation can introduce systematic distortions in the estimates." However, they concluded that "several combinations of violations of assumptions can act to offset each other."[39] Such unscientific speculation has not prevented the MISTRA studies from being widely cited in support of major genetic influences on intelligence and behavior.

Point 2 merely reflects the opinion of researchers supporting behavioral genetic and psychiatric genetic positions, but critics of course continue to highlight what they see as massive problems in twin research. We note that Barnes and colleagues felt the need to produce a 61-page article in response to their critics in a supposedly settled debate, a response that required the collaboration of no fewer than 24 people.[40]

Point 3 is very questionable, as several critics have subjected the EEA-test literature to critical review and have found major problems in this body of research.[41] As Richardson and Norgate concluded, in the context of IQ, "these studies do not support the validity of the EEA."[42] Barnes and colleagues cited Joseph's 2006 book *The Missing Gene* in both of their publications, yet they failed to mention that Chapter 9 of that book consisted of a detailed critical analysis of the EEA-test literature, where Joseph concluded, "The flawed and narrowly

focused EEA-test literature provides little support for the EEA, regardless of how twin researchers have defined it. Moreover, any false theory or assumption can be 'tested' and upheld as long as the 'testers' (1) determine the hypotheses to be tested, (2) perform the tests, (3) draw the conclusions, and (4) remain blind to obvious real-world refutations of their conclusions."[43] Instead, Barnes and colleagues chose to highlight sociologist Jacob Felson's analysis, where he concluded that environmental bias in the twin method "is likely modest."[44]

Although Barnes and colleagues and other supporters of behavioral genetic positions argue that the EEA has been tested and upheld, they completely overlook the best-replicated and longest running EEA-test studies ever performed, which consist merely of all the behavioral twin studies ever published. Nine decades of such studies have shown consistently that pairs experiencing similar environments and high levels of identity confusion and attachment—MZs—resemble each other more for behavior and behavioral disorders than do pairs experiencing less similar environments and much lower levels of identity confusion and attachment—DZs. The results of *these* EEA-test studies strongly suggest that the assumption is false.

Barnes and colleagues' Point 4 argument that the validity of the EEA can be demonstrated mathematically is clearly flawed, and their computer simulations, which again are based on assuming genetic influences, make no more sense than a similarly failed attempt by twin researchers in political science two years earlier.[45] Barnes and colleagues believe that the twin method "rests on a foundation of testable assumptions,"[46] and that "there is no room for subjective opinion….There is only algebra."[47] The EEA is indeed testable, but the only way that twin researchers can test it is simply to determine—based on sociological and psychological information—whether MZ and DZ twin pairs grow up experiencing roughly equal environments. As Barnes and colleagues acknowledged, the results show that MZ and DZ environments are *not* equal.

The EEA debate has nothing to do with "algebra," and has everything to do with the actual lives and experiences of people, or more specifically, the childhood and adult social and familial environments of twins, and the levels of identity confusion and attachment they experience. In their computer simulations Barnes and colleagues produced percentage figures for the "amount of" common environment twins share (or theoretically could share), but these types of experiences are not easily quantified. As a leading American psychiatric genetic researcher noted almost 50 years ago, genetically oriented researchers "like to look at numbers" and "produce and analyze statistics," whereas environmentally oriented researchers like to look at people, and the impact of the environments in which they grow up and live.[48]

In Beaver's 2009 *Biosocial Criminology: A Primer*, the EEA was defined in the *Argument B* sense that the only way that the more similar environments of MZ pairs (such as being dressed alike and looking more alike) would "bias heritability estimates is if they actually increased the similarity of MZ twins on the phenotype."[49] However, there cannot be a "foundation of testable assumptions" without agreement on what the specific and exclusive trait relevant

environmental factors actually are. To the extent that biosocial criminologists recognize relevant environmental factors (see Beaver, Chapter 5), they must demonstrate that *only these factors* are trait relevant for such varying behaviors as aggression, shoplifting, tax evasion, murder, embezzlement, robbery, prostitution, and so on, and then must show that MZ and DZ pairs are equally exposed to these specific and exclusive environmental factors.

Moving on to Point 5, there are major problems with previous criminal and ASB adoption studies, many of which were discussed by Burt and Simons,[50] and reared-apart twin studies are greatly flawed on several critical dimensions (see note 8). Moreover, the heritability concept is controversial in and of itself, with some critics arguing that it is highly misleading and valid only for its original purpose as a breeding statistic,[51] that it does not measure the "strength" of genetic influences, and that its use should be discontinued in the social and behavioral sciences.[52]

Regarding Point 6, in their 2015 rejoinder Burt and Simons cited three studies in which GCTA heritability estimates and twin method estimates differed greatly.[53] One of these was a 2013 study by Trzaskowski, Dale, and Plomin, who compared GCTA and twin method results in a study of "childhood behavior problems," which included autistic, depressive, hyperactive, anxiety, and conduct symptoms. The title of their article read, "No Genetic Influence for Childhood Behavior Problems from DNA Analysis."[54] The researchers used a large sample of over 2,000 twin pairs, and over 2,000 individuals for the GCTA analysis, and found a large difference between twin method and GCTA results. The twin study findings reflected the usual behavioral genetic conclusions based on the acceptance of the EEA and heritability estimates, with the researchers calculating heritabilities in the .40 to .60 range. The GCTA estimates, however, "are non-significant and mostly zero for self-report and parent measures of behavior problems."[55] Rather than conclude that something is wrong with twin method assumptions, Trzaskowski and colleagues decided to attribute this discrepancy to what they called "missing GCTA heritability." Charney discussed several potential biases in GCTA studies, including the failure to adequately account for genetic differences based on variation found among differing populations (population stratification), which introduces a potential environmental confound into GCTA studies. He concluded that the GCTA search for thousands of genetic variants of tiny effect "is the last gasp of a failed paradigm."[56]

### *Twin Method at the Crossroads*

Burt and Simons recommended "end[ing]…heritability studies in criminology."[57] Indeed, if the twin method is unable to disentangle the potential influences of genes and environments, as critics have charged since the 1930s, it certainly follows that the method should be discarded, or that its results should be reinterpreted. Family studies and family pedigree diagrams showing that behavioral characteristics and disorders "run in the family" were once widely, yet incorrectly, seen as providing "conclusive proof" in favor of heredity.[58] Nowadays, leading behavioral geneticists such as Robert Plomin and colleagues correctly recognize that "family studies by themselves cannot disentangle genetic and environmental influences," and seek no mathematical proof to determine otherwise.[59] We argue that a

similar conclusion holds true for twin method data in the social and behavioral sciences, and in many areas of medicine as well.

It was good science and not "censorship" when earlier scientists called for ending studies based on craniometry,phrenology, and physiognomy, and any contemporary criminologist calling for the use of astrological charts to predict whether certain people will commit violent crimes would be justifiably ridiculed. Whether or not the twin method will eventually join these pseudosciences remains an open question, one that will be decided by rigorous public and scientific examination and debate. It is our hope that the recent controversy in American criminology marks a new beginning of this debate, and we look forward to taking part in it.

## Notes

[1] Hogben, L., (1933), *Nature and Nurture,* London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 121.

[2] Burt, C. H., & Simons, R. L., (2014), Pulling Back the Curtain on Heritability Studies: Biosocial Criminology in the Postgenomic Era, *Criminology, 52,* 223-262.

[3] Burt & Simons, 2014, p. 250.

[4] Barnes et al., (2014), Demonstrating the Validity of Twin Research in Criminology, *Criminology, 52,* 588-626; Wright et al., (2015), Mathematical Proof is Not Minutiae and Irreducible Complexity is not a Theory: A Final Response to Burt and Simons and a Call to Criminologists, *Criminology, 53,* 113-120.

[5] Burt, C. H., & Simons, R. L., (2015), Heritability Studies in the Postgenomic Era: The Fatal Flaw is Conceptual, *Criminology, 53,* 103-112.

[6] Methodological problems with past and present behavioral twin studies include small sample sizes, the acceptance of unsupported theoretical assumptions, the lack of an adequate and consistent definition of the characteristic or disorder under study, the questionable reliability and validity of the characteristic or disorder under study, the use of non-blind diagnoses, the use of diagnoses or assessments that were made on the basis of inadequate information, the use of unreliable methods of zygosity determination (whether a pair is MZ or DZ), that hospital psychiatrists might have given MZ twins similar diagnoses because they were influenced by their knowledge of the twins' common genetic heritage, the unnecessary use of age-correction formulas, the use of non-representative sample populations, the lack of an adequate description of the methods, and investigator bias in favor of genetic conclusions.

[7] Allen, G. E., (2001), The Biological Basis of Crime: An Historical and Methodological Study, *Historical Studies of the Physical and Biological Sciences, 31,* 183-222; Fink, A. E., (1938), *The Causes of Crime: Biological Theories in the United States, 1800-1915*, New York: A. S. Barnes and Company; Broberg, G., & Roll-Hansen, N., (Eds.), (1996), *Eugenics and the Welfare State:*

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[8] Joseph, J., (2015), *The Trouble with Twin Studies: A Reassessment of Twin Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, New York: Routledge; Joseph, J., (2014), Studies of Reared-Apart (Separated) Twins: Facts and Fallacies, *Mad in America* blog, published online 12/15/2014. Other critical works on studies of reared-apart twins include: Farber, S. L., (1981), *Identical Twins Reared Apart: A Reanalysis*, New York: Basic Books; Joseph, 2004; Kamin, L. J., (1974), *The Science and Politics of I.Q.*, Potomac, MD: Erlbaum; Kamin, in Eysenck, H. J., vs. Kamin, L. J., (1981), *The Intelligence Controversy*, New York: John Wiley & Sons; Kamin, L. J., & Goldberger, A. S., (2002), Twin Studies in Behavioral Research: A Skeptical View, *Theoretical Population Biology, 61,* 83-95; Lewontin et al., (1984), *Not in Our Genes*, New York: Pantheon; Richardson, K., (1998), *The Origins of Human Potential*, London: Routledge; Taylor, H. F., (1980), *The IQ Game: A Methodological Inquiry into the Heredity-Environment Controversy,* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

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[14] Barnes et al., 2014, p. 597.

[15] Brennan et al., (1991), "Genetic Influences and Criminal Behavior," in Tsuang et al., (Eds.), *Genetic Issues in Psychosocial Epidemiology* (pp. 231-246), New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

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[19] Joseph, J., (2013), The Use of the Classical Twin Method in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: The Fallacy Continues, *Journal of Mind and Behavior, 34,* 1-39.

[20] Kendler, K. S., (1988), "The Genetics of Schizophrenia and Related Disorders: A Review," in D. Dunner et al. (Eds.), *Relatives at Risk for Mental Disorder* (pp. 247-266), New York: Raven Press, p. 249.

[21] Joseph, 2013, 2015. For a list of quotations from twin researchers using *Argument A* in defense of the EEA and the twin method, see Joseph, 2015, Appendix C.

[22] See Joseph, 2015, Chapter 7.

[23] Kendler et al., (1993), A Test of the Equal-Environment Assumption in Twin Studies of Psychiatric Illness, *Behavior Genetics, 23,* 21-27, p. 21.

[24] Bouchard, T. J., Jr., (2009), Genetic Influence on Human Intelligence (Spearman's g): How Much?, *Annals of Human Biology, 36,* 527-544, p. 532.

[25] For early examples of *Argument B*, see Gottesman, I. I., (1966), Genetic Variance in Adaptive Personality Traits, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 7,* 199-208, p. 200;

Gottesman, I. I., & Shields, J., (1966), "Contributions of Twin Studies to Perspectives on Schizophrenia," in B. Maher (Ed.), *Progress in Experimental Personality Research* (Vol. 3, pp. 1-84), New York: Academic Press, pp. 4-5.

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[27] Joseph, 2015, Table 7.1; see also Jackson, D. D., (1960), "A Critique of the Literature on the Genetics of Schizophrenia," in D. Jackson (Ed.), *The Etiology of Schizophrenia* (pp. 37-87), New York: Basic Books.

[28] Kringlen, E., (1967), *Heredity and Environment in the Functional Psychoses: An Epidemiological-Clinical Study,* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, p. 115.

[29] Dalgard, O. S., & Kringlen, E. (1976), A Norwegian Twin Study of Criminality, *British Journal of Criminology, 16,* 213-232, p. 224, Table 11

[30] Dalgard & Kringlen, 1976, pp. 223-225.

[31] Joseph, 2015.

[32] Barnes and colleagues incorporated an aspect of *Argument B* into their conceptualization of the EEA when they defined twins' "true" shared environment as "the degree to which shared

environmental influences *actually* affect the trait" (Barnes et al., 2014, p, 601, italics in original).

[33] *Assortative Mating* refers to a nonrandom pattern of mating in which individuals with similar genotypes and/or phenotypes mate with each other more frequently than expected by chance.

[34] Barnes and colleagues also defended the use of opposite-sex DZ pairs in criminology twin studies, a questionable practice that we do not discuss due to space considerations. For the same reason, we did not address the claim by Barnes and colleagues that behavioral genetic "heritability studies" have helped improve peoples' lives.

[35] Panofsky, 2014.

[36] James, 2014.

[37] See Joseph, J., (2010), "Genetic Research in Psychiatry and Psychology: A Critical Overview," In K. Hood et al., (Eds.), *Handbook of Developmental Science, Behavior, and Genetics* (pp. 557-625), Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 576-577, and the references therein.

[38] McGue, M., & Bouchard, T. J., Jr., (1989), "Genetic and Environmental Determinants of Information Processing and Special Mental Abilities: A Twin Analysis," in R. Sternberg (Ed.), *Advances in the Psychology of Human Intelligence* (Vol. 5, pp. 7-45), Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, p. 23.

[39] Johnson et al., (2007), Genetic and Environmental Influences on the Verbal-Perceptual-Image Rotation (VPR) Model of the Structure of Mental Abilities in the Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart, *Intelligence, 35,* 542-562, pp. 548–549.

[40] Barnes and colleagues' 38-page 2014 article was accompanied by 23 pages of online supporting material. The 24 collaborators included the seven co-authors, five "anonymous reviewers," and twelve other (some prominent) researchers acknowledged by the authors for their help; see Barnes et al., 2014, p. 588.

[41] Critical analyses of the EEA-test literature include: Joseph, 2004; Joseph 2006, Chapter 9; Pam et al., (1996), The "Equal Environment Assumption" in MZ-DZ Comparisons: An Untenable Premise of Psychiatric Genetics?, *Acta Geneticae Medicae et Gemellologiae, 45,* 349-360; Richardson, 1998; Richardson & Norgate, 2005.

[42] Richardson & Norgate, 2005, pp. 344-345.

[43] Joseph, 2006, p. 201.

[44] Felson, J., (2014), What Can We Learn from Twin Studies? A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Equal Environments Assumption, *Social Science Research, 43,*184-199, p. 184.

[45] Smith et al., 2012. See Joseph, 2013 for an analysis of this massively flawed EEA-test study.

[46] Barnes et al., 2014, p. 591.

[47] Wright et al., 2015, p. 114.

[48] Rosenthal, D., (1968), "The Heredity-Environment Issue in Schizophrenia: Summary of the Conference and Present Status of our Knowledge," in D. Rosenthal & S. Kety (Eds.), *The Transmission of Schizophrenia* (pp. 413-427), New York: Pergamon Press, p. 414. Computer simulations do not test environments or specify what trait-shaping environments are. In fact, twin study models usually define the "environment" in very broad and ambiguous terms that include "all of the nongenetic external factors that influence trait variation across a population" (Alford et al., 2005, Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?, *American Political Science Review, 99,* 153-167, p. 156). Hence these models cannot test any actual *interaction* between genes with environmental factors, let alone specific environments. The environment is defined in such a way that it cannot explain any part of the variance that is already associated with (or "explained by") the genetic factor (Shultziner 2013, p. 355).

[49] Beaver, K., (2009), *Biosocial Criminology: A Primer*, Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, p. 45.

[50] Burt & Simons, 2014; Joseph, J., (2001), Is Crime in the Genes? A Critical Review of Twin and Adoption Studies of Criminality and Antisocial Behavior, *Journal of Mind and Behavior, 22,* 179-218; Joseph, 2004, Chapter 8.

[51] Lush, J. L., (1945), *Animal Breeding Plans*, Ames, IA: Collegiate Press.

[52] See Joseph, 2004, Chapter 5, and the references therein. See also Chaufan, C., (2008), Unpacking the Heritability of Diabetes: The Problem of Attempting to Quantify the Relative Contributions of Nature and Nurture, *DataCrítica: International Journal of Critical Statistics, 2,* 23-38; Hirsch, J., (Ed.), (1997), *Genetica, 99* (Issue 2-3, entire issue); Moore, D. S., (2001), *The Dependent Gene: The Fallacy of "Nature vs. Nurture,"* New York: Times Books; Moore, D. S., (2013), "Current Thinking about Nature and Nurture," In K. Kampourakis (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Biology: A Companion for Educators* (pp. 629-652), Dordrecht: Springer. Examples of behavioral genetic researchers who now question the validity and usefulness of heritability estimates include: Johnson et al., (2009), Beyond Heritability: Twin Studies in Behavioral Research, *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 18,* 217-220; Johnson et al., (2011), Heritability in the Era of Molecular Genetics: Some Thoughts for Understanding Genetic Influences on Behavioral Traits, *European Journal of Personality, 25,* 254-266; Turkheimer, E., (2011a), Commentary: Variation and Causation in the Environment and Genome, *International Journal of Epidemiology, 40,* 598-601; Turkheimer, E., (2011b), Still Missing, *Research in Human Development, 8,* 227-241.

[53] Burt & Simons, 2015.

[54] Trzaskowski et al., (2013), No Genetic Influence for Childhood Behavior Problems from DNA Analysis, *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 52*, 1048-1056.

[55] Trzaskowski et al., 2013, p. 1051.

[56] Charney, E., (2013b, September 19th), Still Chasing Ghosts: A New Genetic Methodology Will not Find the "Missing Heritability," *Independent Science News*. For more on potential confounds in GCTA studies, see Conley et al., (2014), Testing the Key Assumption of Heritability Estimates Based on Genome-Wide Genetic Relatedness, *Journal of Human Genetics, 59,* 342-345.

[57] Burt & Simons, 2015, p. 250.

[58] Kallmann, F. J., (1938), *The Genetics of Schizophrenia: A Study of Heredity and Reproduction in the Families of 1,087 Schizophrenics*, New York: J. J. Augustin, p. xiv. For examples of how early eugenicists saw family pedigree studies as providing conclusive proof in favor of heredity, see Davenport, C. B., & Laughlin, H. H., (1915), "How to Make a Eugenical Family Study," *Eugenics Record Office Bulletin No. 13,* Cold Spring Harbor, New York; Davenport, C. B., & Muncey, E. B., (1916), "The Hereditary Factor in Pellagra," *Eugenics Record Office Bulletin No. 16*, Cold Spring Harbor, New York.

[59] Plomin et al., (2013), *Behavioral Genetics* (6th ed.), New York: Worth Publishers, p. 191.

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# Hollywood Follows the Money: Films of the 'Great Recession'

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In his Academy Award winning performance as the corporate raider Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street* (1987), Michael Douglas uttered his infamous credo that, "Greed is good." However, a less widely remembered but an equally revealing Gekko comment was his statement that, "It's all about the bucks, the rest is conversation."

Hollywood seems to have followed up on this Gekko maxim in its attempts to provide some notion of what actually caused the "Great Recession." Of course, giving dramatic life to credit swaps, derivatives, sub-prime mortgages, and how hedge funds operate is a difficult feat. It was clearly much easier to achieve in fine documentaries like Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009) made in his trademark style (where he becomes one of the film's prime subjects) that mixes hard-hitting criticism of capitalism's evils laced with humor, and Charles Ferguson's equally angry but more solemn *Inside Job* (2010) that explores how changes in governmental policies and banking practices helped create the financial crisis.

However, when looking at Hollywood narrative films what you are given are stories that follow the money, but hardly offer any real insight into what caused the terrible financial crisis of 2007-2008. It was a crisis that left the banking system on the verge of collapse, millions unemployed, caused hundreds of thousands of home foreclosures, and the entire global economy in shambles, or as one of the characters in these films remarks, "the end of the world."

It was the Great Recession that gave Oliver Stone the opportunity to bring back the character, Gordon Gekko, in his polished *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps (2010)*. Unfortunately, except for a couple of mentions of the fictional financial firm of Keller-Zabel being overextended in sub prime mortgages, someone mentioning "moral hazard," and the images of bankers seated in the glistening wood paneled conference room at the Federal Reserve like the Mafioso capos huddled around the conference table in *The Godfather* (1972), there isn't much to go on as to the causes of the Great Recession. What there is a superficial critique of the Street's predatory practices, and a reference to the Great Recession by a voice over which repeats the mantra that the definition of madness is repeating the same thing over and over again and expecting different results,

In this film the charismatic, cynical, arch-manipulator Gekko (Michael Douglas again) returns to the outside world after eight years in prison for corporate malfeasance with barely a penny in his pocket and a cell phone the size of a butternut squash. This is remedied by his publishing a best seller, titled appropriately enough *Is Greed Good?* and lecturing to eager young

audiences of aspiring  moneymakers whom he casually dismisses as the Ninja generation—'no income, no jobs, no assets." The gist of his talks is that "money is a bitch that never sleeps." His talk offers far from a profound analysis of how the market works, but it's always delivered with flair.

One of those in Gekko's audience is a hotshot, well-heeled broker, Jake Moore (Shia LeBouf). Jake has a connection to Gekko, since he is living with his estranged daughter Winnie (Carrie Mulligan)—a forgettable character who despises the money culture, writes for a left-leaning blog, and is big on the environment.  Gecko is seemingly desperate to reconnect with her. And Jake, who needs Gekko's help to take revenge on Bretton James (Josh Brolin), the film's prime villain, who he blames for the suicide of his aging mentor Louis Zabel (Frank Langella), tries to make peace between Gekko and his daughter.

Unlike Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) in the original *Wall Street*, who was preoccupied with using any means at his disposal to try to get a piece of the high life, the ambitious Jake may also be enmeshed in the market's ethos, but given the nature of that world is almost on the side of the angels. His financial specialty is cheap, alterative energy, but the character is too dull to offer a different moral perspective than Gekko's– a man who has little interest in serving the environment or doing good in any shape or form, and is driven as much by the "game" itself as by the money it produces.

Stone's direction as always offers bold strokes with little nuance, but is also propulsive and alive. He uses split screens, accelerated motion, montages, and helicopter shots, and strikingly conveys the glow of Manhattan's moneyed world of luxury apartments overlooking the city's jewel-like lights, and lavish fundraising banquets at the Met where the camera floats up to show the lighted candles on the tables making them seem like lily pads floating in a dark sea.

Despite the film being ostensibly critical of the ruthless dealings of Wall Street operators, the latter, especially Gekko carry all of the film's vitality. (We even begin to root for Gekko at the film's contrived sentimental conclusion.) In a film filled with one-dimensional characters, Gekko is the only one who holds our interest, and his powerful presence ultimately dilutes the film's critique of Wall Street.

For all their discussion of millions and billions of dollars the characters in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* are practically puritanical compared to the debauched minions of *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). In the former the only indulgence is the scene Jake and Bretton race high speed motorcycles though the countryside. In contrast, *The Wolf of Wall Street* set the tone of the film by opening with Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DeCaprio) and his dim-witted cohorts hurling helmet-clad dwarfs at a target in their office.

Some of Martin Scorsese's past films like *Goodfellas(1990), Casino(1994)),* and *The Departed(2006*), centered on the world of gangsters, guns, and violence. In this true story *The Wolf of Wall Street  (2013)* he replaces them with white-collar criminals who behave like crude, ignorant louts, albeit comic ones with telephones. And their charismatic, master salesman Capo

de Tutti Capo is Jordan Belfort—smart, wild, and self-destructive.

In a flashback we see Jordon's rise, beginning with being mentored by a coked-up broker Mark Hanna (Matthew McConaughey in a virtuoso cameo) who does a thump and grunt exercise while advising him to consume vast amounts of drugs and masturbate to make it on Wall Street. It doesn't take long for Belfort, whose core of associates are outer-borough ethnics striving for their version of the American Dream to start his own pseudo-white shoe, WASP-sounding operation called Stratton-Oakmont. What it is in reality is a "pump and dump" shop; where brokers urge investors to buy worthless penny stocks; driving the price up, and at a certain point selling to make huge profits. Belfort urges his brokers on, telling them he wants them to be "telephone fucking terrorists," engaging in verbally coercing their customers to buy the stocks.

However, the film's emphasis is not on the workings of the market–though Jordon directly talks to the camera informing us that illegality is his company's governing principle; but on consuming every drug imaginable, buying mansions, yachts and jewelry, and indulging in orgies. Money and its accompanying pleasures are all–and excess and profanity are the rule. Jordan also rips off the working class, and has contempt for people who don't strive to become rich. His behavior is without restraint, and along with his right hand man the fat, infantile, always high Donny Azoff (Jonah Hill) they offer a sales associate $10,000 dollars to shave her head, cover a prostitute with dollar bills, hire a half naked male marching band, and seem to have prostitutes on call around the clock. In fact, Jordan seems to run the company like the fraternity in *Animal House*, and garners only love and adulation from his employees.

Scorsese means the film to be funny, and though at times tedious in its depiction of Jordon and his cohort's dissipation, some of the scenes are touched with genuine black humor. One crucial scene sees the drugged out Jordan crawling to his Lamborghini to try to get home, he sideswipes a number of cars and totals his own, and without ever being conscious that anything has happened. There is something blackly and bleakly comic about these lower middle class guys making so much money that their main goal in life turns out to be getting high.

After being brought down by a solemn, dogged FBI agent (Kyle Chandler) for swindling and money laundering, Jordan gets a reduced sentence for being an informer. After being let out, he goes back to what he knows–giving motivational speeches on salesmanship–without a sign of remorse.

Scorsese doesn't really attempt to illuminate the crisis of 2008. Stratton-Oakmont is too far down the financial food chain from the Goldman Sachs's and Morgan Stanley's to be seen as representative of Wall Street. What is most problematic are that Scorsese's expert zooms, tracking and bird's eye shots, montages, and De Caprio's seductive, animated performance implicitly glamorize this corrupt and callous world. Scorsese may have seen this film as a black comic critique of the money culture run amuck, but portions of the audience identified with and wanted to emulate the hedonistic behavior of Jordan Belfort and his cohort– the odiousness of their actions forgotten in the process.

Belfort's mentor Hanna makes one comment that sharp comment at the film's beginning: "Wall Street is a fake, it creates nothing." It's echoed by Gene McClary (Tommy Lee Jones), a vice president and co-founder of GTX a shipbuilding and transportation firm in TV veteran director John Wells's (ER, West Wing) film *The Company Men (2011)*. McClary says that, "We used to build something here."

However, that has been supplanted by the need, as the CEO of GTX, James Salinger (Craig T. Nelson) says, to keep the share price high so he can get the maximum profit in a looming merger. In pursuit of that, GTX lays off a whole slew of people, among whom are Bobby Walker (Ben Affleck), Phil Woodward (Chris Cooper), and ultimately McClary. The responsibility for its employees is subordinated to the bottom line. As Salinger says, "We work for the stockholders now," and the corporation has become more interested in deal-making and the manipulation of stocks and bonds than in shipbuilding.

Hollywood has dealt with the plight of the laid off middle management executive before in a film like *Up in the Air* (2009), whose opening montage depicted the rage, confusion and despair of men and women faced with the economic and psychological state that the recession had thrown them into. However, the unemployed are little more than an suggestive device in *Up in the Air*, before it plunges into its real interest– romantic comedy. In contrast, *The Company Men* looks directly at the horrific employment market and psychic pain suffered by men whose comfortable world–replete with six figure salaries, stock options, and expensively furnished suburban houses–has been shattered.

The film centers on Bobby's plight. The product of a modest childhood, he's become a swaggering, golf playing, Porshe-driving sales executive, who can't adjust to the fact that he's no longer a top dog. He has a smart supportive wife and a sensitive son, but he's angry and wallows in self pity. "I'm a thirty-seven year old, unemployed loser who can't support his family," he says, but in truth he pays little attention to anyone beside himself.

As a last resort he does construction work for his salt of the earth brother-in-law Jack Dolan (Kevin Costner). Dolan is a skilled carpenter and a decent man and he and Bobby have an uneasy relationship. High on his prior success, Bobby is condescending toward Jack, and Jack, believing in the dignity and satisfaction of hard work is dryly ironic about the pretensions of an executive milieu he has little use for.

The film also touches on the indignities of seeking new employment: the hundreds of resumes sent without getting any response; seminars where the unemployed are encouraged to futilely shout, "I will win;" or in the case of the up from the factory floor exec Phil Woodward, the advice to color his graying hair, so that he doesn't get turned down for jobs because of his age. It's the sense of failure and mounting debts and bills that drives Phil to suicide.

Of course this being Hollywood, the film ends with a wish fantasy that is supposed to leave us with hope. Bobby and a number of downsized employees, are hired back by McClary, who uses part of the outsized bonus he got from his stock options when GTX is bought out, to go back to

his beginnings and open a small ship building outfit.

*The Company Men* is also about the money. At one point McClary confronts Salinger saying that because of all the layoffs Salinger has raked in $22 Million. Salinger responds by telling McClary that because the merger has gone through his stock options are also worth millions.

The most noteworthy of all these films that deal with the Great Recession is J.C. Chandor's *Margin Call (2011*). For along with its obsession about money it also captures the psychology of the people on Wall Street on a night during September 2008. A night when an unnamed 107 year old financial services firm must deal with, as one character puts it, "the greatest pile of odiferous excrement in the history of capitalism," or it will collapse. Discovered by Eric Dale (Stanley Tucci) on the very day he is fired after nineteen years with the firm along with 80% of the risk management department. It is revealed when Peter Sullivan (Zachary Quinto), a young whiz of an analyst who survived the cuts, completes Dale's work and discloses it to his bosses Will Emerson (Paul Bettany) and Sam Rogers (Kevin Spacey in the film's strongest performance).

Until that moment all we know about Emerson and Rogers is that the former chews nicorette gum compulsively and spent $75,000 of his 21/2 million dollar pay and bonuses on hookers, and that Rogers sheds crocodile tears about his sick dog while the bloodletting occurs in his department.

Nonetheless, Emerson and Rogers turn out to be nebulously decent and sympathetic compared to the revulsion that the film inspires for the upper echelons of the company: Jared Cohen (Simon Baker), the callous corporate hatchet man; Sarah Robertson (Demi Moore) the ice cold head of the risk management department, who had vaguely warned of the impending crisis; and most chilling of all John Tuld (Jeremy Irons), the smooth, elegantly malevolent Chairman of the Board, who helicopters in to try to solve the crisis.

Tuld, whose name seems a combination of John Thain the former CEO of Merrill Lynch, and Richard Fuld the head of Lehman Brothers when it collapsed in 2008, is executive who claims he understands little about numbers tells Sullivan: Speak to me as you would a small child, or a golden retriever." He is told that if the mortgage-backed securities currently on the company's books, which are heavily leveraged, decline in value by an additional twenty-five per cent, the company's losses will be greater than its total assets. Consequently, the answer to the company's problems lies with dumping their sub-prime derivatives on the market before other firms are aware of their worthlessness. It's a tactic, which according to Rogers, will undermine any credibility that the company has with other firms and totally destroy the market.

Tuld has no hesitation doing this or turning his executives into scapegoats for the problems of the company. His vision is Darwinian, believing the world is divided into winners and losers, and he wants the company to survive no matter the cost.

His soullessness is echoed, albeit in a minor key, by Peter Sullivan's buddy Seth Bregman (Peter Badgely), whose sole obsession seems to be how much each of the other characters

earns, and the more sensitive Sullivan, who admits he gave up a career, in Tuld's terms as a "Rocket Scientist," for the money. The self-pitying Sam Rogers, who displays a touch of conscience when the dumping scheme is proposed, surrenders because, as he says, "I need the money." The money is the key, and even Eric Dale laments the fact that he once did productive work and built a bridge that saved commuters thousands of hours of time every year, returns to the company when he is threatened with losing his severance and other benefits.

*Margin Call* is an unredeemable dark portrait of Wall Street—a world based on a life of acquisition where the investors are treated like suckers. Though some of the executives in the film may have a residue of decency they all serve a totally soulless and reckless enterprise dedicated to making money.

Chandor skillfully wraps the film in shadows, and darkness, using NYC 's night streets, bars, and strip joints, to convey a world of suspicion and moral blindness. There are also the almost sinister, alienating moments of shots of empty trading rooms lit only by traders' consoles, and the image of Cohen and Robertson venomously exchanging barbs in an elevator as a cleaning women silently stands between them. They behave as if she's wasn't there, a metaphor for work that cares nothing about the human consequences of what they do.

*Margin Call* comes closest of all these films to giving a real sense of what it was like to be there when the financial crisis of 2008 occurred. But even here we get no real sense of what was behind this economic tsunami. Perhaps for any explanation we must turn to the novels (*Le Pere Goriot and Lost Illusions*) of one of the first great chroniclers of early capitalism, Honore de Balzac (1799-1850), who once succinctly stated that, "Behind every great fortune there is a crime."

# Slavoj Žižek: Absolute Trouble or Recoil in Paradise?

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Books Reviewed in this Essay:

Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*, New York, London, Verso, 2014

Slavoj Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, London, Allen Lane, 2014

### Something for Nothing

> *It is not easy to decide whether something can be in itself, or whether nothing can, in which case everything is either nowhere or in something other than itself.*
> –Aristotle, *Physics*

Slavoj Žižek might respond to the quote from Aristotle above by telling us that, yes; everything is either nowhere or in something other than itself. That is, at least, a way to begin any attempt to explain his recent work, which purportedly revises Hegel's dialectics in a materialist fashion. First, I should warn the reader with a new version of an an old joke. The old joke goes like this, "What do you get when you cross the Godfather with a lawyer?" "An offer you can't understand." The new version could go like this, "What do you get when you cross the Godfather with Slavoj Žižek?" "Nothing, really."

For Hegel, the dialectic was a process driven by the emergence and resolution of internal contradictions. The process is teleological insofar as the 'final end' that structures the dialectic is the self-realization of Absolute Spirit, coming to know itself in and through the emergence and resolution of contradictions that are always-already 'within' it. The logic of the dialectical process involves a tripartite movement in which worldviews evolve and develop through internal conflict and contradiction. That is, humans inhabit a world whose horizon of knowledge is comprised of a collective understanding of reality, a *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the age. Every worldview contains contrary ideas and beliefs and a variety of skeptical claims about what is good, true, and beautiful. Reflection upon these different views and skeptical claims brings about an internal tension, similar to cognitive dissonance. This tension is heightened by critique and reflection. The improbable, illogical, undesirable aspects of a worldview are rejected or revised, while the kernel of truth remains and is carried forward.

We cannot think beyond our horizon, just as we cannot speak with words that do not yet exist. This means that at any moment in history, the sum of all human knowledge is also our truth about reality. For what would anything be outside of our consciousness, and what would our consciousness be outside of our worldview? If we wish to critique and reflect upon our worldview we must utilize the language and concepts given by it. However, because we are capable of knowing and believing things that contain contradictions, the truth for us at any given time will be subject to personal doubts, practical exceptions, empirical anomalies, and pressures to conform, agree, and cooperate. As Thomas Kuhn pointed out in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the world's best and brightest scientific thinkers often spend hundreds of years revising and rationalizing an accepted scientific worldview before leaping quite nimbly and without much ado into a different paradigm. While they could see flaws and contradictions within one paradigm – for example, problems with motion in Aristotelian physics – they could not see the solution until the Newtonian worldview was developed. Thus, what is obvious to us was unthinkable for the Medievals.

In most Marxist versions of Hegelian dialectics, there is a glaring, systemic contradiction between the demands of capital, the promise of happiness, and the uses and abuses of labor. In this sense, capitalism is what Hegel called an *Abstract Universal,* the empty shell of an idea of prosperity, happiness, and progress that defines itself through reliance upon unceasing exertion, anxiety, and stress. The fundamental contradiction between labor and capital over-determines all of our social experience, imposing its image of time, space, happiness, love, and success. Critical reflection on the contradiction between labor and capital is the key to resolving the contradictions in personal, familial, or political life. This is not to say that class struggle is the obvious meaning of all other struggles, but that class conflict generates other antagonisms that tend to assume a life of their own, with particular dynamics, stakes, and solutions. Keeping one's finger on the pulse of the dialectic has always meant tracing these antagonisms back to the primary contradiction. This is the meaning of radicalis: getting to the root of the matter.

Turning from the standard account of the Hegelian dialectic, with its teleology, its upward spiraling negations and syntheses, Slavoj Žižek describes a "downward synthesis" wherein we witness "the speculative coincidence of opposites in the movement by which a thing emerges out of its own loss."[1] He explains it this way:

> *When positedness is self-sublated, an essence is no longer determined by an external Other, by its complex set of relations to its otherness, to the environment into which it emerged. Rather, it determines itself, it is "within itself the absolute recoil upon itself" – the gap, or discord, that introduces dynamism into it is absolutely immanent.*[2]

He elaborates, somewhat unhelpfully, by explaining that in the absolute recoil, there is "no positive synthetic result."[3] Žižek describes this downward spiralling negativity in many

different ways throughout *Absolute Recoil*. For example, he compares the downward synthesis to the void as described by Democritus, who told us that no-thing exists just as much as thing, and that no-thing is not nothing. Žižek develops the analogy thus, "something is negated, we get nothing; then, in a second negation, we get less than nothing, not even nothing—not a Something mediated by nothing but a kind of pre-ontological inconsistency which lacks the principled purity of the [Democritean] Void."[4] For Žižek this no-thing is what he called "less than nothing" in his magnum opus of the same name.[5] He claims that this fortuitous pre-ontological inconsistency, which he also calls a gap or a wound, is generated retroactively, as "a withdrawal that creates what it withdraws from," an "action appears as its own counter-action."[6]

His example of the Christian God in the form of wretched Christ is yet another attempt to explain this. When God became man, there was no fusion of the divine and the human. Instead, the important point is that Jesus of Nazareth was the 'less-than-nothing' created, retroactively, by the absolute negativity of God. God's power is demonstrated in this downward synthesis by constructing the lowly figure of Christ, in whom God's "spiritual depth is the monstrous distortion of the surface."[7]

Žižek's "less than nothing" has a Lacanian origin as well. For Lacan, the *objet-petit-a* is the illusory object of desire that blocks access to what we actually desire. For those who crave even more theoretical substance to explain this absence, Žižek describes a kind of Epicurean swerve that functions as the "bone in the throat," destabilizing the void. In this way of seeing things, the standard Hegelian antithesis is revised as our incomplete and uncertain knowledge of the Real and its origins becomes a positive feature of our ontology. This is a phenomenology in which our everyday experience is incomplete, inconsistent, riven with wounds and gaps, and we experience reality as the retroactive effect of its own loss.

We ensure that we never get what we want by substituting one wretched, miserable, version of the Real for another. This must then be negated so that something new that we accept for real may appear. So we begin again forever, with an agitation, a bone in the throat, and upon that basis, we fabricate a lie out of what we think are our desires. But they are not our desires. They are the *objets-petit-a* that prevent us from freeing ourselves. But precisely because reality is a big lie, Žižek sees the future as open for creation of a new Noble Lie, his version of version of the ontological event.

The idea that we build less than nothing upon less than nothing and call it reality is intriguing and squares with Žižek's Lacanian reading of Hegel. I think this may be dialectical, but it doesn't seem very materialist. The title of the book does promise a "*New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*" but Žižek cannot deliver a materialist dialectic based on a theory where the distorted reflections of our real conditions of existence appear as continual displacements that emerge out of a pre-ontological inconsistency. There simply is no *there* there. As for the distinctly Marxist aspect of all his approach, it is very hard to see how class antagonism structures other antagonisms or how ideological displacements of class conflict could be traced back to their source as a means of consciousness raising and conscious change.

By definition, anything could be generated from the less-than-nothing base that Žižek provides in *Absolute Recoil.*

## Žižek on the Dialectic of History

In *Trouble in Paradise,* Žižek claims that retroactivity is the key to understanding and changing the future. In the dialectical analysis of history, each new stage rewrites the past and retroactively de-legitimizes the previous one. The result becomes the starting point of an infinite dialectical process. If each stage rewrites the previous stage, there is no resolution, no upward synthesis, other than in the minds of certain historians and prophets of the end of history. According to Žižek, retroactivity means that the future is unpredictable but also that the past must be repeated.

> *A revolution also has to be repeated: for immanent conceptual reasons, its first strike has to end in fiasco, the outcome must turn out to be the opposite of what was intended, but this fiasco is necessary since it creates the conditions of its overcoming.*[8]

It is the retroactive constitution of the meaning of the failed event that allows us to see how to repeat it. Rather than blunder forward after a failed revolution, hoping, with the faith of a traditional Hegelian, to work the problems out as we move ahead to the next stages, we should immediately double back and repeat. Each second attempt is a negation of the negation that failed. Žižek illustrates this with the example of the colonization, liberation, and transformation of India. The British changed the culture by imposing their political and economic system. As India moved toward Independence, the leaders of the movement pointed out that the British had imposed a flawed, partial, and therefore false version of Western secularism on Indian society. So they tried again and succeeded, applying the form without destroying the distinctly Indian content of the culture. A good idea, applied stupidly and without sensitivity, may still be a good idea.

But I'm not sure this is so far from the standard Hegelian approach. Žižek exaggerates his departure from Hegel. He selects an arcane digression about the *"absolute recoil"* from *The Science of Logic* and raises it to the status of an ontological principle. Although he fashionably jettisons the traditional dialectic and many of the underlying assumptions about potentiality, actuality, essences, and ends, he gets the same result, as his example of India demonstrates quite well. The formerly colonized Indian leaders experienced the fiction of a system founded upon idea of universal rights and dignity which could only be maintained on the basis of servitude and misery for the majority. They perceived the future slumbering within this contradiction and brought forth a truer Ideal.

Žižek's reformulation is part of his commitment to laying the theoretical groundwork for political action and the creation of the new, liberating, ontological event. For this reason, he wants to obliterate all traces of the mechanistic and teleological in Hegel. But, if we cast aside

tendentious and triumphalist readings of Hegel as the theorist of the end of history, art, and all great Ideas, we can see that his basic theoretical insight lies in the undeniable fact that any worldview contains contradictions. These may include unassimilated and resurgent remnants of the past, multivalent fantasies about the real nature of the present, and nostalgic longings for a utopian future, often defined in-and-through various dystopian visions. We should not forget the essentially retroactive point; Hegel's Owl of Minerva was always looking backward for the key to the future and Hegel, at his best, was not prescribing a direction forward. But if it's not Hegel's improper theorization that holds us back, what keeps us from seizing the day, or orchestrating the event?

## Lordship, Bondage, and Culture

One of the more fascinating discussions in *Trouble in Paradise* revolves around the functions of debt, forgiveness, and guilt in the social construction of duty and obligation. Citing the work of Italian sociologist Franco Berardi, Žižek notes that capital is no longer produced by the appropriation of the surplus value skimmed from the labor of the world's workers.[9] Profit now issues from two primary sources: rent for services and interest on loans. This spectacular form of capital is the basis of a global economy funded by debt and rent. Are the banks too big to fail or too unreal to fail? What once may have functioned like a system of accounting, with balances kept and payments noted, now feels more like a global potlatch, with the Lacanian "Big Other" as tribal chief, practicing conspicuous waste as a means to generate social obligations.

The system can afford to waste its surplus because it recoups it in bondage and obedience. When institutions forgive us our debts, we are forever in their debt. We live in "an indefinite continuation of the debt which keeps the debtor in permanent dependency and subordination."[10] Debt obligations uphold the status quo, debt forgiveness legitimizes the status quo, and the frenzy of consumption becomes an end in itself. When the anxiety, stupefaction, and boredom generated by the uncanny groundlessness of the consumer economy tests our stamina, the solution is more of what ails us.

We are hailed as experts in our own trajectories of the self, but we never develop enough escape velocity to transcend the inauthenticity of our projects. The language, affect, and rituals associated with the binaries of stress/relaxation, burnout/reinvention, and depression/contentment are normalized and institutionalized. Here is a system where the individual contains all of the freedom, all of the potential, all of the problems, and all of the solutions; meanwhile the social and political structure cynically reproduces itself without consent or objection. The base may determine the superstructure in the very last instance, but the superstructure that we inhabit is a reflection of itself and its own concerns. It constructs an economic base in its image, not the other way around.

This might suggest that we can liberate ourselves from the burden of this false autonomy and the relations of authority that we embed ourselves in while exercising our freedom. Why don't we? Readers will be aware of the obvious, and still relevant, reasons. Our freedom and our choices are commodified and only serve to strengthen the system. Our power to act is limited

but our feelings of deprivation are relative; therefore, enough is never enough as we run along on our hedonic treadmills. We don't want liberation; instead, we want power. So we satisfy our sado-masochistic desires by working long hours for people we don't like in jobs that don't suit us to get things we don't need so we can feel superior to people we don't know. Moreover, everybody's doing it, our family depends upon us, and so on. But if, through rigorous critical reflection we find an opening in the iron cage, we are faced with one final obstacle: our own obscene desires.

The lie we tell ourselves about why we must obey authority is what makes us obey authority. We construct an image of the father who plays two roles: Father Law and Father Freedom. Father Law is the authority that we simultaneously create and obey; Father Freedom is the guy who can do anything because he's so powerful. If we do our duty to Father Law, someday we can be like Father Freedom. This is the obscene reading of Kantian autonomy; autonomy deferred by autonomy itself. We might even feel compelled to struggle against Father Law in the name of Father Freedom. If we do, they both win. What we don't seem to be able to pull off is to simply stop believing in them. We need our beliefs as *objets-petit-a*, needs that keep us from getting what we want.

What is the nature of this belief that makes it so convincing? Žižek suggests that the new, sensitive, liberal, Father Law exerts a more insidious power than the old patriarchal dads, and much worse than God the Father. God the Father and the patriarchal dad who modeled himself on God terrified us into outward submission but left us inwardly free in all but our weakest moments. The patriarchal dad ordered us to do our duty; outwardly, we usually did it, but our inner freedom, and our ability to develop this into an adult conception of autonomy, remained undisturbed. The new, sensitive, liberal, Father Law wants us to want to obey him; he desires our desire and he esteems our esteem, or so he says. He offers us the choice to do as we wish. He will be disappointed if we choose not to obey, but he will not force us.

In this manner, we internalize the Law along with a debt of guilt that we can never repay, since pleasing him means first interpreting his will and then internalizing it as our own. This is individual responsibility as a form of anxious infantilism. We become narcissistically involved with our imaginary ability to change the world. One example that comes to mind, admittedly, after watching a few episodes of *Portlandia*, is the way in which certain versions of ecology and sustainability are expressed in the form of repression and responsibility, serving the purpose of control rather than liberation. The scientifically nebulous, pseudo-spiritual discourse of sustainability is rife with opportunities for guilt, asceticism, and shame, combined with ceremonial obligations to go green and opportunities to confess one's wasteful sins. "Loving your mother" turns out to be as crazy as obeying your Father. We are propping up this world and staging our social relationships through obedience to our guilt.

### *We are Already Them, They Are Already Us, and Now What?*

*"The problem with fundamentalists is not that we consider them inferior to us,*

*but, rather, that they themselves secretly consider themselves inferior. This is why our condescendingly politically correct assurances that we feel no superiority towards them only makes them more furious and feeds their resentment. The problem is not cultural difference, but the fact that they are already like us, they have internalized our standards and measure themselves by them."*[11]

The syncretic ability of American mass culture is its capacity to be less than zero; to be the space that awaits and absorbs and calls for more. Its superficiality is an inexhaustible form of seduction that masquerades as freedom and openness. This, as much as its decadent content, makes it the object of fear and resentment among the defenders of authentic culture everywhere. Their own definition of authentic culture emerges as a retroactive transcription, written on the palimpsest of history opened up by the dialectic of "Jihad vs. McWorld."[12] In the Koran, Satan is the adversary, deceiver, and tempter who seduces believers away from the authentic and true faith. This is what the Ayatollah Khomeini meant when he called America the great Satan, not so much an enemy as a source of seduction, temptation, and destruction.

> *In contrast to true fundamentalists, [for instance, groups like the Amish who have peacefully withdrawn their identification with modern society] the terrorist pseudo-fundamentalists are deeply bothered, intrigued, and fascinated by the sinful life of the non-believers. One can feel that, in fighting the sinful other, they are fighting their own temptation.*[13]

On this reading, the West is the *object-petit-a* that structures the desires of false fundamentalism. It is not just that 'they' are jealous of 'us'. They *are* us, and we are the bone in the throat that allows them to entertain their fantasies while remaining 'against' us which simply intensifies their desires. When polled about the general Western influences that have negatively affected local values, Muslims cite morals and decadent culture. When asked more specific questions about the negative influence of Western culture on their societies, they mention culture and lifestyle factors, "libertine attitudes toward sex, alcohol consumption, vulgarity and nudity in films and music, and inappropriate dress and hairstyles."[14]

## Only an Event Can Save Us Now

Those readers familiar with the post-Heideggerian philosophical landscape (as exemplified by Alain Badiou, for example) will know that the *event* is a multiplicity or surplus that cannot be understood in terms of the rules or framework that govern reality. The event has no existence in itself and must be retrieved from the multiplicity. When we reach an aporia for which we have no concepts or scripts, we must invent anew through a play of imagination and reason that allows us to posit a new language game, genre, lifestyle, or reality. However, after every event there is a remainder, an excluded series of possibilities, another less-than-nothing,

material for a new inscription. We know that the reality ship will run aground eventually, and we wait, without presuppositions, for openness and (im)possibility.

With the terror of nothingness comes the promise of freedom, the promise of openness in the fabric of being that gives us the ability to continually exercise the imagination. This is the feeling we get when we create something new, something that is ours. It can be-indeed should be-an aesthetic as well as a political act.

For Žižek, the event-worthy situation develops like a mutation. It may occur without notice, but after its effects and the problems that ensue, it can be noticed and repaired. The past continually repeats itself. However, this repetition contains transcription errors. With each mutation, we glimpse a new set of relations that offers the possibility of appropriation and transformation. The event is not a thing on the horizon. It has already happened. In our various iterations of the past, we slowly hit upon the new. But alas, by the time one comprehends the process of retroactivity, displacement, substitution, and repetition, one hardly has any energy left for a creative, revolutionary event.

I have addressed what I consider to be the theoretical core of, *Absolute Recoil and Trouble in Paradise,* leaving Žižek's vast array of interesting examples and exciting tangents for the curious reader to enjoy. After laboring through Žižek's work, reading it in the boring manner of a philosopher, I finally had to ask, or exclaim, What is going on here? The works do contain what are, in my opinion, modest revisions of Hegel, insightful discussions of our ability to deceive ourselves, and riveting cultural commentary and critique. For those who have plenty of time on their hands, and who can tolerate periods of reading in the dim light of partial comprehension, pick up one of these texts, or any of Žižek's texts, for that matter, and enjoy. But, I should warn you again in the same way. What DO you get when you cross the Godfather with Slavoj Žižek? Nothing, Really (no really).

## Notes

[1] Žižek, Slavoj, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*, New York, London, Verso, 2014, p. 1.

[2] Žižek, op. cit., p. 4; The reference to Hegel is G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Atlantic Heights, Humanities Press International, 1989, p. 444.

[3] Žižek, op. cit., p. 336.

[4] Žižek, op. cit., p. 343.

[5] Žižek, Slavoj, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, London, Verso, 2013.

[6] Žižek, op. cit., p. 148.

[7] Žižek, op. cit., p. 336.

[8] *Absolute Recoil*, p. 37.

[9] Berardi, F., *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2012.

[10] Žižek, Slavoj, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, London, Allen Lane, 2014, p. 46.

[11] Žižek, op. cit., p. 48.

[12] See Benjamin Barber's "Jihad Vs. McWorld," Originally published in the Atlantic, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/303882/

[13] *Trouble in Paradise*, p. 48.

[14] https://www.gallup.com/poll/5458/Poll-Islamic-World-Perceptions-Western-Culture.aspx?utm_source=position4&utm_medium=related&utm_campaign=tiles

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# Gabriella Coleman, Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy – the many faces of Anonymous

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*Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy – the many faces of Anonymous,* by Gabriella Coleman. Verso Books. 2014

*The Politics of Open Science,* by Alessandro Delfanti. Pluto Press, 2014

Hardly a day passes without some news of hacking in the headlines. Somebody hacks into a bank's systems, governments hack into email servers routinely, the North Koreans or a disgruntled ex-employee hack into Sony's systems, Islamic State hacks into US media-company Twitter accounts and into military online media accounts, Anonymous hacks into Islamic State's Facebook pages. For many, perhaps most, hearing and reading such news, computer hacking is arcane, mysterious and disruptive. But "hacking" has much wider uses, referring to cobbling technical solutions collectively or to small-scale fixing and assembling. And in computer hacking, there are good guys and bad guys, or white hats and black hats, and many shades of grey.

"All information wants to be free," was the hackers' slogan two decades ago, and that is not so bad as a starting point. Gabriella Coleman takes us into the world of the white hats aligned with the loose collective that is Anonymous, and seeks to persuade us that their "hacktivism" is valid and valuable. She has immersed herself deeply in their virtual and physical company and – as is the temptation of such explorations – she has gone native, from anthropologist to apologist. Coleman has advised, assisted and admonished Anonymous in various circumstances. She has acted as an academically-accredited expert source on hacking and on Anonymous in particular. In this role, she has provided cover for Anonymous, whose code prohibits those involved from acting as public spokespersons.

Coleman brings to light the paradoxes of a movement that wants information to be free, except about itself, and that shuns the media, but wishes for media attention for the spectacles it organises. But she likes Anonymous, and many of its individual activists, and she wants us to like them too. She appreciates their absurdist aesthetic, their playful enjoyment of the "chaotic thrill of entertainment and anarchy". She defends them against stereotyping as asocial nerds or precocious geeks, and then introduces us to a succession of highly educated late-teens whose social life appears to be led almost entirely at a computer screen.

Part of why we should like Anonymous, in Coleman's view, is that they are socially progressive, and they use their technical skills to relevant political and social ends. Indeed, it is easy to

sympathise with them when they pitch themselves against the obscurantist Church of Scientology – and it is in that campaign that Anonymous was born. But Coleman probably overstates their influence on the first manifestation of the 2011 Arab spring in Tunisia. And she certainly stretches a point when, in her concluding chapter, she links Anonymous with "the principle of hope" set out by Ernst Bloch (incorrectly identified as a "Frankfurt School philosopher").

When making the case for Anonymous's radicalism, Coleman returns several times to the example of Irish student Donncha O'Carroll (also O'Cearbhaill, in the Irish form), one of the few leading Anonymous figures who is named. While still in his teens he was being reported in international media as one of the top five hackers in the world, in the FBI's view. Coleman explains his radicalisation in part through the fact that his father was in the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and served time in prison – details interesting enough to be given twice in the book. To be a member of the IRA into the 1980s and 1990s, never mind to be the son of a member, is not necessarily a mark of radicalism. O'Carroll senior is an independent county councillor with a strongly localist orientation. O'Carroll junior tweets in his own name (@DonnchaC), mainly retweeting from other hackers – including another central character in this book, also 'out' in his own name, Mustafa Al-Bassam – on technical and freedom-of-expression issues, and occasionally referring to wider political questions.

In O'Carroll's sub-community, the use of DDoS (Distributed Denial of Services) attacks that close down large systems appears no longer to be an accepted tactic. Coleman acknowledges that Anonymous actions may have caused collateral damage to innocent bystanders, but in mitigation she recounts the internal debates in Anonymous circles. One episode is chronicled at length: the actions of Anonmyous in 2010 in support of Wikileaks, following their massive release of information from US government and agency emails. When credit cards companies and PayPal withdrew transactional services from Wikileaks, Anonymous launched attacks on PayPal. In so doing, they blocked many fully legitimate payments through this service. They also made available to tens of thousands of computer-users the tools for DDoS.  Later, however, a solo run by an Anonymous activist caused consternation in the ranks and the mood for DDoS seems to have shifted.

In some of these debates Coleman has intervened directly. She describes some of the dilemmas of Anonymous as "moral pretzels", but she might, for example, have given more attention to the pretzel of anonymity itself. It can be seen as an increasingly unnecessary evil of the internet, where things are said behind the cloak of anonymity that would not be said openly, thus frequently perverting online discourse.

Her accounts of Anonymous actions and their preparation include extensive and numerous excerpts of online exchanges. These are conducted over IRC (Internet Relay Chat) in little bursts of text like SMS messages, replete with the argot and abbreviations of the community. They make for difficult reading, and Coleman rarely provides a gloss on them, much less a rationale for quoting verbatim rather than paraphrasing.

Coleman repeatedly tells us of her excitement at being close to these exchanges and to the events they related to. She admits that she ignored her family on holiday in California, while she spent hours on end poring over online conversations. She writes herself into many stories, writing breathlessly on how she met individual Anonymous people. It is not enough for her to say that she received an email, but rather “one day, an email landed in my inbox”. She tells us she had sweat on her forehead in anticipation of meeting an Anonymous, and later on the same page, sweat “freezing half-way down my back”.

From all of the detail, however, a picture emerges of an underground movement that has grown randomly, that is organised loosely and operates effectively. What might appear chaotic to the outsider, says Coleman, is characterised by many microstructures. She refers to cabals, but perhaps misses a better analogy in the political world, that of cells. In many militant and political underground movements, members join cells, without necessarily knowing who is in other cells, where they are, or how many there are.

Gabriella Coleman holds an unusually titled chair of Scientific and Technological Literacy at McGill University in Montreal, and she provides an endorsement for Delfanti’s exploration of biohacking, a world of open labs and open-source assembly of organisms. His is a short but dense treatise – based on a PhD dissertation – with several case studies, including that of the scientist-entrepreneur Craig Venter. With a case like that for reference, Delfanti has to develop a careful analysis of the contradictions of openness, capable of being espoused by economic conservatives as well as social radicals. “All information wants to be free”, he reminds us, can also refer to the free market.

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# Daniel P. Bolger, Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

By | 2015: vol. 14, nos. 2-3

Daniel P. Bolger*, Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014)

A book with the defiantly downbeat title *Why We Lost* is not geared to enchant 'higher circles' or make much of a media splash. Count that in its favor. Moreover, in military memoirs about major debacles, the customary tack is for the indignant author to blame shifty politicians, vile fifth columnists, sniveling news columnists or, more gingerly, clueless civilians for betraying intrepid soldiers at the front in 'stab in the back' (*dolchstoßlegende*) fashion. Anyway, people prefer to read about thrilling triumphs instead. The Alamo for Americans, Dunkirk for the British and Thermopylae for the Greeks are among the few defeats that losers spent a lot of ink on and only because of ultimately achieving redemptive victories. Yet in his bold reconsiderations of the misbegotten conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, Daniel P. Bolger, a recently retired three star General, writes ruefully about the lack of military 'pushback' (but not disobedience) to orders from above, which itself is a somewhat dicey position, however much truth there is to it.

Not that the Pentagon knew much more than hubristic political leaders. "As generals," Bolger owns up, "we did not know our enemy – never pinned him down, never focused our efforts, and got all too good at making new opponents before we'd handled the old ones." That short damning litany does sum up a good deal of what happened. By never 'knowing our enemy we never knew ourselves', he confesses, which gets even closer to the nub. In the US, where soldiers are worshipped by conservatives so long as they don't cost them much for aftercare, the military, from chiefs of staff to grunts, were treated as, well, pawns.[1] What a surprise, eh? Did military honchos ever realize that the natty neoconservative 'defense intellectuals' hectoring them were as much their foes as the grottiest guerrilla planting an IED? What difference would it have made if they did? The military is bound constitutionally to follow proper executive orders, no matter how dumb. Would you want it any other way?

Bolger nonetheless wishes the top brass had been brutally frank with the Bush administration about flaws permeating their hernia-inducing wishful strategic thinking. The problem is that any high-ranking officer who quibbled with White House schemes was banished in the blink of an eye. In 2002 Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki was ridiculed by Bush aides for his unwanted estimate that the Army needed many more troops for an Iraq invasion in order to handle occupation duties. He got the heave-ho, despite refraining from questioning the merits

of the invasion itself. Afterward, Bolger confirms, “absolutely nobody in the Army or outside it was concerned about a postwar occupation and how it would play out.” Another case was Joint Chiefs of Staff leader Admiral William Fallon who let slip publicly in the mid-2000s his intention that the US would not invade Iran on his watch. He quickly got the boot, despite his utterly sound concern about overstretching US forces. Real men ‘game-theoried’ going to Tehran.

After the Iraq invasion “no senior officer argued for withdrawal,” Bolger confirms. The show must go on. Careers were on the line. ‘Within weeks of 9/11,’ Bolger says of the Afghan intervention,” the basic goals were fulfilled, not perfectly, not completely, but probably close enough.” Suddenly, they were being dispatched to the Middle East too. The Iraqis were not the culprits that US soldiers were told they were and, years after the invasion, most troops, more painstakingly misinformed than the American public, still held Saddam Hussein responsible for 9/11. After regular Iraqi forces were smashed or melted away, the fedayeen resistance came as a ‘nasty surprise,’ Bolger admits, at least to policy-making insiders. There were plenty of disregarded warnings beforehand.[2] In Afghanistan, after boastful celebrations on ousting the Taliban regime late in 2001, Bolger raises a question that nobody else in the elite ranks thought through at the time, “What if the Taliban broke off for a while, regrouped and returned?”

Bolger, who commanded combat units in Iraq and Afghanistan, regrets the use of an Army trained for short, sharp conventional operations instead for long term attritional counterinsurgency, which they resorted to in order just to hang in there. Actually, in the early going, the generals expected to ‘butcher and bolt’ in punitive colonial era fashion. Commanding general Tommy Franks ‘did not spend much time on Phase four [post war occupation] stuff’ and six months after the invasion, it seemed the better part of valor to many generals to ‘declare victory and leave.’ Bolger can’t seem to figure out, or cope with, the likely reasons why US forces stuck around so long. In retrospect, at least, he understands that “Bin-Laden saw a winning formula which was to get the US to invade Afghanistan.”

In the military you can indeed get away with insubordination if you are sly enough and the right people see the point of it. General George Casey artfully shrugged off Coalitional Authority czar Paul Bremer’s orders in 2004 to arrest cleric Moqtatda Al-Sadr because it was plain to Casey that the Shiite cleric and his militia could be a valuable ally in the extremely urgent task of splitting the Iraqi resistance by turning Shiites and Sunnis against each other. Then an immensely relieved US military apparatus regretfully could portray the eruption of civil war as the revival of ancient implacable hatreds no one could foresee or stop.[3]

Apart from a torrent of suitcases of cash, the Sunni ‘awakening’ was stoked by Iraqi loathing of al-Qaeda intruders who, ironically enough, weren’t around before the Americans and their coalition partners stormed in. So the coalition forces at the time had a lot for which to be grateful to Al-Qaeda fanatics. The invaders’ expeditious formula swiftly became ‘al-Qaeda out, Sunnis in, [Shiite] Iraqis increasingly in the lead.’ The evolution, if that’s the word, of al-Qaeda elements into ISIL today is indisputably a result of the engineered civil war where the reconstituted Iraqi Army behaved as little more than Shiite death squads and the Sunnis

sought any haven from them. No invasion, no ISIL.

Bolger agrees with all those who pinpoint the 2004 Al-Aqsa shrine bombing as the moment in Iraq when it all went undeniably south.[4] The bickering between civilian and military authorities was ceaseless. Exchanges between Bremer and General Sanchez were ferocious. General Tommy Franks called Bush Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith the "****ing stupidest guy on the face of the earth." Bolger justifiably observes:

> *But it is difficult to see how different personalities might have changed that year much. Replace Bremer with Henry Kissinger and Sanchez with Dwight Eisenhower, cancel the de-bathification order, and the stark facts on the ground still sat there, oozing pus and bile. With Saddam gone, any voting would install a Shiite majority, The Sunnis wouldn't run Iraq again. That, at bottom caused the insurgency. Absent the genocide of Sunni Arabs, it would keep going.*

The military opposed the 2007 'surge' in Iraq but Bush pressed ahead to get the welcome cover he needed for his personal exit. The 'surge 'only bought time for withdrawal," Bolger judges. 'If you thought you saw anything other than a stalemate you were kidding yourself.' Bolger criticizes Obama's decision to leave but not do it right away (although Obama was carrying out Bush's October 2008 Status of Forces Agreement to withdraw), and to surge in Afghanistan with 33 thousand more troops but with a time limit.[5] Bolger's reasoning here is a patent flight of fancy: 'The enemy feared a long term commitment of troops on the ground, aircraft overhead, and sustainment of the Kabul regime,' he proposes. 'If the United States agreed to keep them in place for decades, as in post-1953 Korea, as few as ten thousand Americans might have cracked the Taliban will to fight." Sure thing, but a decades-long US/NATO ground presence was never in the cards, as Bolger himself says elsewhere.

What would have been gained? Here is a broad hint of an answer. Bolger describes a fierce Afghanistan hilltop assault where 3 US soldiers were killed and 39 wounded allegedly in order to protect a hundred villagers. These grateful villagers in 2009 generated four thousand votes for Karzai, whose 'writ ran to the outskirts of Kabul' (and they pulled it off it without a single electronic voting machine). Democracy in action. Oh, what about local casualties? "For those tracking at ISAF headquarters in Kabul, not a single noncombatant dies,' Bolger writes, 'although every dead Taliban wore civilian clothing.' Huh? How's that go again? One assumes Bolger is macabrely ironic here, as is many a soldier's habit.

"In Iraq, and now Afghanistan, the thoughtful, deliberative US President thoughtfully and deliberately condemned Americans in uniforms to years of deadly , pointless counterinsurgency patrols,' Bolger charges, 'sure to end in a wholesale pullout." And he proceeds to blame military suicides (at unprecedented rates), drug use, demoralization and some ghastly misbehavior on this decision alone.[6] Obama bears some responsibility – including for drone strikes – but he is scarcely the only villain and he is very far from the worst of them.

In 2010 General David Petraeus jetted into Iraq bearing a counter-insurgency gospel that Bolger attests already was practiced by US troops in the improvisatory course of trying to salvage a very dire situation. (Bolger's distaste for the showboating Petraeus is palpable.) Bolger believes that the generals hoped – hoped? – their highly skilled troops eventually would figure out a way to win, but "sooner or later, the protracted war goes to the home team." Counterinsurgency, he concedes, works "only if the intervening country demonstrates the will to remain forever – and even then it doesn't always work, as France learned the hard way in Indochina and then Algeria.' Ambassador (2009-2011) Karl Eikenberry, a former general, "did not favor robust counterinsurgency because he believed Karzai's regime was corrupt and erratic and thus would be unable to hold what ISAF cleared.' Yes, so why stick around?

Petraeus' successor General John Allen placed way too much faith in mesmerizing statistics. "Many metrics hung on things that defied numbers," Bolger points out. How do you measure poppy cultivation after the Taliban took its cut? Pure guesstimates of police and army effectiveness were 'taken as fact." "Attacks rose in the summer and fell in the winter," peaked in 2010 during the surge, and never fell below 2600 per month. What constituted an attack anyway? This roasted philosophical chestnut was a real concern and a propaganda tool too. All that this vaunted numerology really disclosed was a stalemate, Bolger justifiably snorts. An external examiner charged that accounting techniques were a "carefully rigged portrayal' designed to show progress. Official reporting, Bolger reckons, "varied from adequate to ludicrous" so that "you had that sick feeling in your stomach that you were looking at hamlet evaluations from outside Danang, circa 1967." Too few fellow officers would understand this mordant reference to the Hamlet Evaluation Survey system and to countless other statistical legerdemains in Vietnam.[7] The military clearly never throws anything useful away.

Bolger discusses the jaundiced grunts-eye view of a formal policy of firepower restraint versus their own self-protective 'preference for 'preemptive fire.' Which prevailed? In a campaign in the Arghandab over 90 days he finds that 2,035 155mm artillery shells, 2,952 mortar rounds, 60 HIMSRS guided rockets, 266 aerial bombs, 19 hellfire missiles, and more than fifty 30mm strafing rounds by A -10 Warthogs and Apache helicopters caused 'hundreds of hostile dead" while 65 yanks died. Some restraint. Meanwhile 'Green on blue' [Afghan allies attacking US/NATO troops] incidents soared during 2011-2014 period, which was "a hell of a way to work together, with a rifle constantly trained on your counterpart."

In a far from final tally, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan generated almost 7000 dead US soldiers, seven times as many wounded, with many more (perhaps 300 thousand more) brain injury and psychiatric casualties.[8] Who didn't return with PTSD? Several wasted trillions pumped up war supplier profits, two-thirds squandered in Iraq. Native combatant and noncombatant casualties are off the charts, certainly in seven figures. "Our primary failing in the war involved generalship," Bolger, looking back, humbly charges. Really, how? "If you reference the war-college lexicon, we – guys like me – demonstrated poor strategic and operational leadership—strategy and 'operational art " translate to the 'Big Picture' (your goal) and the 'Plan' (How you get there)." Yet the military did not call the shots as to invade or not.[9] Civilian ideologues did, so the breast-beating seems peculiarly excessive.

Generals, even those with doctorates, will be generals, however, so Bolger buys media tall tales of Saddam evicting weapons inspectors in October 1998,[10] that noncombatant detainee status 'passed legal muster,'[11] that Saddam 'allowed' Bin-laden to set up in Kurdish areas (which Saddam did not control) and that the Fallujah campaign was conducted to "avenge Blackwater,' which is rather like musket-wielding Redcoats avenging maltreatment of Hessian mercenaries during the American war of independence. (As many 'military contractors' died in those two wars as US troops.) Bolger reports that many veterans were glad he spoke out and it is he, not them, taking the heat, but also mentions many who abhor him for admitting the US lost when in their rosy perspective the 'surges' in 2007 in Iraq and 2009-2011 in Afghanistan led to, um, victorious withdrawals.

Kudos to Bolger for his daring exercise in self-criticism, so far as it goes. One hopes more people of his caliber and decency populate the highest military ranks. One detects guilt here (however misplaced), a capacity for it, without which no one is fully human. Ordinary soldiers, most of them, can experience it – hence, many of their 'adjustment problems.' But very rarely do we find a trace of guilt in leaders for whom the machiavellian ditching of conscience seems a prerequisite for rising to the top. Robert McNamara, bumblingly, displayed guilt. Does soulless Dick Cheney or George W. Bush? As an honorable career soldier, however, Bolger cannot help but subscribe to the belief that smart leadership can save any situation. While that notion is not something you want to discourage in a platoon leader, it is pure folly for commanders to operate on it. Some situations just aren't worth saving, or getting into, but how do you tell your bosses? The US military operated precisely as the lethal war machine they were designed to be, a machine that civilian buffoons ordered to enact a grandiose strategy to reconfigure the Middle East to the liking of US Neocons. We are still counting the costs, and they are mounting.

## Notes

[1] For histories of a tradition of neglect see Larry M. Logue and David Barton, *The Civil War Veteran* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), Paul Dickson and Thomas B Allen, *The Bonus Army*, (New York: Walker & Co, 2004), David Bonior, *The Vietnam Veteran* (Praeger, 1985), and Aaron Glantz, *The War Comes Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[2] See Seumus Milne, *The Revenge of History* (London Verso, 2012), pp. 275-276.

[3] The British Army also made "discreet' contacts with local Iraqi resistance forces to work out deals. John Bew, Martyn Frampton, Inigo Guruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and The Basque Country* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 9.

[4] Dexter Filkins, *The Forever War* (New York: Knopf, 2008), p. 219. "The Iraqis lied to the Americans, no question. But the worst lies were the ones Americans told themselves." (p. 130)

[5] https://www.politicususa.com/2014/06/15/republicans-blame-obama-iraq-bush-signed-agreement-leave.html

[6] https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/military/killed

[7] On similar Vietnam War statistical manipulations see Kurt Jacobsen, *Pacification and its Discontents* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009).

[8] Rebecca Ruiz, 'A Million Veterans injured in Iraq, Afghanistan Wars,' *Forbes* 4 November 2013. https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccaruiz/2013/11/04/report-a-million-veterans-injured-in-iraq-afghanistan-wars/ Also see https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2010/06/iraqafghanistan-.html

[9] In Korea too civilian authorities decided to intervene, despite the "extremely reluctant" joint chiefs. Bruce Cumings*, The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), p. 13.

[10] UNSCOM executive director Richard Butler confirms that Washington ordered the inspectors to leave in advance of the Desert Fox bombing campaign. Richard Butler, *Saddam Defiant* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), p. 224. Also see Scott Ritter, "Saddam Hussein did not Expel Weapons Inspectors," *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs*, May 2002. It was confirmed later that the team contained CIA members too. Simon Jeffrey amd Philip Pank, 'UN Weapons Inspectors' *The Guardian* 9 December 2002.

[11] On the questionable status and its consequences see Jane Mayer*, The Dark Side* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), pp. 7-10, 327-3335, Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth* (New York: New York Review Books, 2004), and Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

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# Michael Gould-Wartofsky, The Occupiers

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Review of Michael Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Occupy was the largest political mobilization of my lifetime. The explosion of energy it produced gave the feeling of perpetuity, with thousands of volunteers supporting each other through donations of food and standing together in solidarity against the police. But as the encampments became rooted, many had to check their excitement with a growing sense of disillusionment. It was clear that the Occupy strategy, and how it played out in practice, was rife with weaknesses that were ultimately exploited by those who sought to destroy Occupy and the discourse that it created. *The Occupiers: The making of the 99 percent movement* is a post-Occupy analysis of the movement from an on-the-ground first-person perspective. The author, Michael A. Gould-Watofsky, is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at New York University, studying social movements. While the text presents many facts to help us analyze Occupy, Gould-Wartofsky's findings rest on a contradictory methodology that is characteristic of sloppy social science.

Gould-Wartofsky sets out to answer a series of questions by dissecting Occupy from the inside-out, beginning his inquiry with the historical root of the occupy strategy. Birthed from the devastation of the global financial crisis and nurtured in an Internet age that allowed for the easy reproduction of memes, the occupation of Zuccotti Park stood on the shoulders of the occupations that came before it in Egypt, Spain, and Wisconsin. Taking Zuccotti as his case, Gould-Wartofsky's questions ask what sorts of politics were birthed inside the occupied squares, and how those political ideologies operated in practice. The final chapters aim to explore the relationships that the Occupiers had nurtured (or neglected) with activist institutions at-large on the local, national, and international levels. (5)

The methodology chosen to answer these questions is ethnography. Gould-Wartofsky's self advertised strength is his proximity to the subject, as he "joined the occupiers in Liberty Square…listening to their stories, observing their everyday practices, and occupying…as an embedded researcher, ethnographer, and photographer." (3) His methods are two-fold, one year of participant observation, and another year (post-Occupy) of collecting semi-structured interviews with various occupiers in New York City and around the world.

On the micro-level, Gould-Wartofsky's research does a fine job in presenting us with a first person account of the issues of Occupy. Considering the threats to validity that stem from full immersion, I was impressed by his critical stance towards the occupation. The text lays out a dense web of facts about the occupation of Zuccotti Park and how it was run – dispelling rumors that were untrue while adding to the arsenal of critiques of all ideological persuasions. Countering the myth of supposed leaderlessness within the encampments, Gould-Wartofsky

demonstrates how occupiers who held significant social capital in the form of membership in various unaccountable decision making bodies, free time, and/or an attractive 'radical' politics, were able to influence the horizontal democratic process and assert their power by creating a de facto ruling class. In describing the discontents of the occupiers' political ideology, Gould-Wartofsky notes,

"Other forms of coordination emerged from behind closed doors, where ad hoc 'affinity groups' met in secret to 'make things happen.' The most influential of them met regularly in a private apartment on the Lower East Side. Its membership was made up of some of the most socially networked occupiers and the most politically skilled organizers." (123)

This gap between theory and practice on behalf of the occupiers made up a worldview that would effect their efforts to organize cohesively.

The schism within the occupiers ran deep. Detailing how political ideologies operated within the square, Gould-Wartofsky categorizes the competing groups as the 'Ninjas' who "were avowedly anarchist and anti-capitalist, opposed to the making of demands, and oriented toward the reoccupation of urban space", (166) and the 'Recidivists', supporters of "a more pragmatist, populist politics, centered on coalition-building and community organizing for political and economic reform." (166) It was this trend that brewed beneath the surface of the occupation's relationships with civil society groups and unions, allowing the struggle for resources within Zuccotti to influence the decisions of how Occupy would relate to other institutional actors. Unable to present a clear message, their alliance with organized labor would ultimately crumble, as portrayed by Gould-Wartofsky in the attempt by West Coast occupiers to shut down Pacific Coast ports with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), "the occupiers…had neglected to consult the very unions on whose behalf they claimed to be speaking." (179) The discussion sheds light on the politics or, perhaps more accurately, anti-politics, of autonomy. This is most clearly stated by Boots Riley, a hip-hop artist interviewed by Gould-Wartofsky, who stated, "[autonomous actors] didn't like the idea of a mass movement in the first place. Their idea of a mass movement is a lot of people that agree with them." (179)

It is obvious that the Occupy encampments were congested with contentions: problems of political ideology, issues of operation and praxis, and a competition for resources that engendered a naive strategy. The facts that Gould-Wartofsky presents tell this story; the elephant in the room is the role of social science in radical politics, a role that I contend is not one of simply gathering facts but rather a role that influences what one chooses to do with the facts. What kinds of trends, findings, and observations can be derived from the facts, and how can they be organized in a way that leads to a richer understanding of social phenomena? Otherwise, there is nothing that separates a well researched work of political journalism from the insight into social life that we entrust to social scientists. It is a critical reflection on methodology, and what sorts of evidence one hopes to generate from their choice of methods, that divides the two mutually beneficial yet distinct genres.

One of Gould-Wartofsky's methodological failings is that he does not discuss whether or not he has any intention of establishing a scope to his research, or if he believes that his findings could be extrapolated to a larger social structure. In other words, does one write about Occupy strictly from the perspective of what happened inside the encampments, or do the actions and activities of the encampments open up a window into a deeper insight of the operation of social movements in the 21st century? If not, then my critique is an ontological one – I believe there is a reality that exists outside of the subject being studied that can influence the subject and ethnography is a tool to study how the subject encapsulates the norms, cognitive patterns, language, and beliefs of that wider reality. If yes, then there are serious questions as to whether he has been able to extend his scope outward enough to encompass the roots of the movement and structural and causal mechanisms that have influenced it.

So how does Gould-Wartofsky feel about method? To justify his use of participant observation, and to explain his methodological choice, he cites three works which contradict each other. The first, *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis* edited by Marxist sociologist and ethnographer Michael Burawoy, is a collection of participant observation studies from a graduate course that Burawoy taught on the topic. The introduction and final chapter of the text are crucial insights into a methodological debate regarding not only Burawoy's own 'extended case method' approach, but also how Burawoy differentiates his approach from others.

"The extended case method…seeks to uncover the macro foundations of a microsociology. It takes the social situation as the point of empirical examination and works with given general concepts and laws about states, economies, legal orders, and the like to understand how those micro situations are shaped by wider structures." (282)

In other words, while Zuccotti Park is the area where Gould-Wartofsky has conducted his participant observation, the purpose of the method is to reveal the influences on how and why people act the way they do in that particular context by zooming out and observing the role of social, historical, and political forces.

The next citation is a collection edited by Jeffrey Juris and Alex Khasnabish titled *Insurgent Encounters: Transnational Activism, Ethnography, and the Political*. The introduction, co-written by the editors, states, "this approach to transnational social movements does not search for universal laws or test already formulated theories. Rather it generates new concepts and analyses in the process of ethnographic engagement." (9) This is essentially a summary of grounded theory, an inductivist method within participant observation which seeks to take empirical data as the point of departure and construct theory from that data rather than begin a study with a research question and a hypothesis. It is the methodological stance that Burawoy places on the opposite end of the spectrum from his own extended case method. Gould-Wartofsky engages with some aspects of grounded theory as when, for example, he poses a series of working hypotheses that he generates after his immersion into Zuccotti rather than frameworks that he used to think about the issues a priori. (44) However, it is precisely Gould-Wartofsky's framing through research questions that might cause controversy among

grounded theory supporters.

Lastly, Gould-Wartofsky cites a working paper on a digital forum co-hosted by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), by Manissa McCleave Maharawal and Zoltan Glück, which argues that the participatory nature of Occupy requires ethnographers who are studying it to fully immerse themselves. “Because of the structure and process of Occupy, ethnography becomes a practice through which the researcher is inscribed in the movement.”[1] It argues that Occupy, as a political body, requires the participation of all in attendance due to its consensus model, therefore the researcher is required to participate if they are to have an accurate look into the everyday life of the encampments. This paper argues for the dissolution of the distinction between participant and observer, holding the extreme position on the spectrum between full participant and complete observer. This seems at odds with Burawoy who states, in the introduction of *Ethnography Unbound,* that participant observation should not be reduced to postmodern concerns of textual analysis, what he likens to literary criticism. “Here scientific theories are exposed as simply another world view, this time that of the observer, in no way superior to the world view of the participant.” (3)

Gould-Wartofsky uses a model of full participation. He states that he was an activist before Occupy and therefore he was already connected with the lead organizers before the event. This has, arguably, given him unprecedented access into the occupations, and allows for a considerable amount of rapport with gatekeepers. The issue not discussed by Gould-Wartofsky or the authors of the SSRC working paper, is that the structural mechanisms of consensus operate both ways; on the one hand consensus forces all participants (and participant-observers) to become engaged with the decision-making process, while on the other hand it disallows the neutrality necessary to counter bias. This is a consequence of the political problems associated with consensus – minorities are not able to make a reasoned dissent and both sides must compromise on their own principles. While it’s impossible to be both a full-participant and a detached observer, a discussion on the merits between the two are crucial for ethnographic reflexivity.

It’s clear that Gould-Wartofsky is picking and choosing from an assortment of qualitative and ethnographic methods to develop a toolbox, which in theory is perfectly acceptable. A mixed method approach that is crafted in the debate between epistemological and ontological viewpoints is always useful in order to be creative with the ways that a researcher seeks to encounter and understand social phenomenon, instead of being a slave to a partisan methodological viewpoint. He generalizes between occupations when interviewing actors from different encampments, in the tradition of the extended case method, but does not observe how super-structural causes could have affected Occupy. He generates concepts from empirical data, ethnographic immersion, and participant observation, in the tradition of grounded theory, but also poses research questions a priori. He is a full participant in Occupy, in the tradition of total immersion, but does not reflect on bias.

In blending methods, what must be clear from the outset is what the researcher is doing, what are the pros and cons of the method, and a reflection and critical engagement with why the

researcher chose the method they did. Otherwise, it is unclear whether Gould-Wartoksky imagines himself to be a social scientist on the ground writing journalism, or if this is supposed to be a work of social science.

Ethnography is a methodology of spectra. Focusing on the researcher's distance, on one end is the full participation in the phenomenon, and on the other a total detachment. Each node on the spectrum requires a discussion on bias and validity; every position will carry its own strengths and weaknesses. And it is this very discussion that is completely lacking from *The Occupiers*– the term 'valid' does not appear once, while 'bias' appears twice, but never about Gould-Wartofsky's own research bias: first in relation to the bias that Gould-Wartofsky seeks to correct from previous studies (12), and second referring to the counteraction of racial bias within the encampment. (99)

Without a clear take on how Gould-Wartofsky feels about the role of a participant observer and the context in which to study Occupy, we are left with an unclear analysis. There is no way to discern how Gould-Wartofsky seeks to posit and discuss occupy in relation to historical, political, and social influences. Whether a researcher chooses full participation or none, to generalize outward or to focus on particulars, to seek causation in the macro or interpret from the micro is a question of technique. What holds them all in common within a methodology is the critical thought that a researcher must engage in with her methods in order to come to the conclusions she comes to. To trace the root of an analysis, the reader must be able to discern what kind of a lens the ethnographer is working through. This requires a conversation that this text lacks.

It is this conversation that Occupy also seemed to lack. After the coordinated crackdown by national and local government actors on Occupy encampments across the country, the occupiers dispersed and dozens of side projects were born in its wake. But their resistance to engaging in debates around the merits of competing political methods continued, often undermining them when they tried to assist the communities most affected by the financial crisis. Gould-Wartofsky, in a concluding chapter dedicated to tracing the activities of the occupiers post-mortem, describes a group of occupiers who allied themselves with housing activists in East New York to take back foreclosed homes by occupying them. With the best of intentions, the action ultimately devolved into chaos when the occupiers lost "control of the space itself to a growing population of squatters, many of them homeless exiles from Zuccotti Park who had come to replace the Glasgow-Carrasquillos in the occupied house." (174) It is in these moments that I see a similarity between Occupy's inability to engage in a discussion on the political methods they chose and their repercussions, and *The Occupiers* lack of a critical methodological appendix. Both seem to lack discipline because they mistakenly believe that being precise equates to being authoritarian, and that holding the privileged position of researcher is a form of power so brutal that it is equivalent to the power held by capital and the neoliberal state.

As Max Weber noted in his essays on methodology, "there is no absolutely 'objective' scientific analysis of culture…of 'social phenomena' independent of special and 'one-sided' viewpoints

according to which…they are selected, analysed and organised for expository purposes." Ethnographic methodology, and the rigor that has characterized ethnographers in discerning that methodology and toolbox, exists for the purpose of understanding how participant-observers, ethnographers, and qualitative researchers come to the conclusions they come to and what influences their interpretive lenses. With this knowledge, the reader is able to make a judgement on where the research fits in the collection of viewpoints that Weber describes. Without this rigor, without clarity, without an engagement in the debate of "who I am, why and how I am doing what I am doing, how I am interpreting what I am seeing and how I am entering into a space that I perhaps may not even understand," anyone can write anything they want and mask it behind the title of social science.

## Notes

[1] https://www.possible-futures.org/2012/03/14/occupy-ethnography-reflections-studying-movement

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# Eduardo Galeano, Children of the Days: A Calendar of Human History

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Eduardo Galeano, *Children of the Days: A Calendar of Human History* London: Allen Lane 2013. Translated by Mark Fried

Eduardo Galeano's Children of the Days is neither a calendar nor a history; nor does it cover all of humanity. It is selective, as it has to be, with less emphasis on the East and more on Latin America, as one would expect. It amounts to his own epitaph to his life and work for Eduardo Galeano died in Montevideo, Uruguay, his birthplace, on 13 April 2015, aged 74, two years after the publication of this book. One of his last visits to the US was an appearance at the Pen World Voices festival in New York in 2013.

Children of the Days retains Latin America as a focus, but with reference to ancient Greek and European history—as well as pre- and post-imperial history in African and Australia–always returning to the resilience of the human spirit confronting the brutality of human imperial violence: violence against nature, against animals, against human beings, against women, of elites against the working class, governments and militaries against their own people, fruit companies against their labourers.

There is whimsy and occasional indulgence (not least in his own pen drawing illustrations) to human greed, folly, madness; the madness of Imperial Spain's insatiable thirst for gold and silver in the New World, a drive that brought about the destruction of most of the indigenous peoples of Latin America; and which did not even bring more than transitory wealth to Spain itself, which, according to Galeano, was left weakened and depleted already in Cervantes's seventeenth century, accursed by the over-abundance of precious minerals which found their way into hands of Dutch and Flemish bankers, to whom war debts were owed—eventually financing the building of St Peter's in Rome.

Wealth brought down the Habsburg royal dynasty, too: Galeano noted in his Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent, published in 1971 (1973 in English), and which became once again a best-seller after President Hugo Chavez presented a copy to Barack Obama in 2009–that the more gold and silver to be found, the greater the poverty (p.32), in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, then as now: "Gold changes into scrap metal and food into poison" (Open Veins, p.2). Nature bestows wealth, which brings about mortality.

Acknowledging his debt to his friend the dependency theorist, Andre Gunder Frank, Galeano's Open Veins is a poetic rendering of international political economy—while the dependentistas Paul Baran and Celso Furtado are named (p.30), theories of centre-periphery 'unequal/uneven

development' and unequal exchange' (pp.28, 16) do not detract from the poetry, become themselves poeticised, as do the 'external proletariat' of Engels (p.38), Marx´s Capital Volume 1, and the work of Ernest Mandel (p.28). Despite triumphalist claims by Alvaro Vargas Llosa (et al., Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot (2000) with an introduction by Mario Vargas Llosa—yes they are related) and others, repeated in the New York Times in 2014, that Galeano had renounced the content of Open Veins, one only has to read Children of the Days to see that it was the Vargas Llosas of this world who changed their spots—well, Mario Vargas Llosa moved to the right and the sons appear to ape the idiocies of their father—while Galeano was consistent through his long writing life. Galeano's gripe against Open Veins was merely that it was written – in his view – in heavy academic jargon—except that it is not: compared with most works of international political economy, Open Veins is clear and engaging, impassioned yet scholarly.

In this other 366 days and nights of love and war, the world is still upside down, governed by those who cannot perceive and serve their own interests, let alone the rest of humanity's. For Galeano, the outcome of colonisation for the indigenous peoples was the "structural violence" conceptualised by Johann Galtung (Open Veins, p. 5) – which continued in a different form imposed by the World Bank as a response to Foreign Direct Investment and loans masquerading as aid in the 1980s and 1990s. While modernisation may benefit some, it comes at the cost of disease and death: "development develops inequality" (Open Veins, p. 3).

The prose poems of Children of the Days (beautifully translated by Mark Fried) are a homage to forgotten heroes—many of them women who fought to defend their land and their people against the colonisers—who might have been airbrushed out of history were it not for Galeano's last effort on their behalf.

By embracing 4,000 years of history, Galeano reminds us of the continuities of arrogance, racism, prejudice that his Open Veins documented in anticipation of Edward Said´s Orientalism of 1978. In Children of the Days, Christian gods are absorbed into the Aztec, Inca and Mayan gods of nature and of the sun who wreak their revenge for development's destruction of the forests, plants and rivers, the source of human life. Galeano´s watershed point once again is 1492 which doomed East and West together to 500 years of imperialism, when Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain in the same year that Columbus sailed to Hispaniola.

Galeano rehabilitates the African gods Iemanyá, Xango, Oxumaré, Ogún, Oshúm, Exú, who accompanied the slaves transported over the Atlantic and on to the plantations, where most perished and from which some escaped into the hills, where their descendants still live (p.73). African gods join Mayan gods and Quetzalcoatl, the Atzec plumed serpent, god of intelligence and self-reflection, god of creation, giver of life (p.23). Galeano laments the loss of books in the burning of the libraries of Alexandria and Baghdad (p.5), and the burning of Mayan books recording eight centuries of Mayan history during the conquest (p.120).

The Guarani tribes of Brazil and the Southern Cone were all but exterminated with the massacre of 1756 (p.48), and the majority of the population of Paraguay was killed in the war

of 1864-70 (p.10). General Efraím Ríos Montt of Guatemala presided over the extermination of 440 indigenous communities in the 1980s.

Drawing parallels across time and space, Galeano recalls that aboriginal children were stolen from their parents by the Australian government in the 1950s; then in Argentina, newborn children of murdered revolutionaries were stolen in the 1970s by the military, as were newborn children of murdered Republicans in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 (p.53).

Captain James Cook's failure to colonise Hawaii is celebrated (p.24). Hegel is trashed for writing off the peoples of Latin America for their physical and spiritual impotence; Winston Churchill's phrases damning the indigenous peoples of both Australia and the Americas are painted back into history: "I do not admit that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia … by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race … has come in and taken their place" (p.27).

The modern state and the liberation of the Latin American colonies in the early nineteenth century brought further destruction of the first nations of Latin America—hence the massacre of the last 500 Charrúa in the state of Paysandú in Galeano's native Uruguay in 1832, shortly after of independence. Similarly in Chile and Colombia Simon Bolívar's freeing of the Americas from the colonial yoke signalled the enslavement or extermination of indigenous peoples in the name of Republicanism.

Modernisation is synonymous with the state—the developmental state—exemplified by first, the dictators of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, and later by the agents of the IMF and World Bank, globalising the remaining independent peoples by offering loans that led to greater dependence in the form of bankruptcy when interest rates rose in the late 1970s through into the 1980s.

The globalization of those who might have preferred to be left outside the modern world continued through the work of the 'international community'—the development practitioners linked to international non-governmental organizations as well as Western governments who wished to open up markets to Western capital and Western products such as Monsanto's sterile 'terminator' seeds (p.260).

Galeano uses this volume to recall also Western heroes of the twentieth century such as Rosa Luxemburg, communist economist and activist, beaten, bound and drowned in the river in Berlin in 1919; and Stéphane Hessel, French Holocaust survivor and inspiration of the Occupy movement, author of "Indignez-Vous!" "Time for Outrage!" who died in 2011 aged 95.

The plight of domestic animals is not forgotten—human cruelty and speciesism is captured in the cat holocaust of the 14$^{th}$ century in Europe where they burned to death along with the herbalists (witches) who were to be outmanoeuvred by professional physicians when science triumphed over sanity.

Imperialism, Orientalism, Modernisation and Capitalism bring in their wake the destruction of

the natural environment, of the Amazon river (p.100), of the sea (Fukushima, p.83), of human health from contamination of fresh water (p. 51), the suppression of women's spirit and female sexuality (pp.41-2); the deaths of workers and trade unionists (p.84), the silencing of free speech.

Galeano appeals to his readers to follow the lead of the storytellers (Horacio Quiroga), poets, revolutionaries (Pancho Villa, Amilcar Cabral), musicians (Violetta Parra and Bob Marley), the prophets and the environmental campaigners (Chico Mendes) to re-enchant the world, art and nature. God is ever present and the earth is not for sale.

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# Murray Bookchin, The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy

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Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*. Edited by Debbie Bookchin and Blair Taylor. New York: Verso, 2015.

The Kurdish-controlled city of Kobane in northern Syria has attracted international attention as the site of some of the fiercest fighting in the struggle against ISIS. In the summer of 2014, forces led by Kurdish People's Protection Units (the YPG and YPJ) defied all odds by fending off ISIS's onslaught for months despite confident predictions by outside observers that the city would fall. After ISIS finally swept into Kobane in a major offensive in September and October, the YPG/YPJ regrouped and, with the assistance of coalition airstrikes and a contingent of Peshmerga troops, succeeded in retaking the city in January of this year. Now, in a city reduced to rubble and peppered with ISIS booby traps, the task of rebuilding has begun.

While the battle for Kobane made international headlines, rarely mentioned was the broader struggle being waged by Syrian Kurds and their allies, a struggle not just for survival, but for social revolution. Not only in Kobane but across the three cantons of Rojava—the Kurdish-majority areas of northern Syria (or West Kurdistan)—people are fighting to protect a fragile social experiment: an effort to reorder society along directly democratic lines. Within the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Syrian state, a network of popular assemblies and councils is taking shape that aims to put the power of deliberation and decision-making into the hands of ordinary people. Neighborhood communes of 300 are being established to decentralize administration, women's councils are confronting issues like patriarchal violence and plural marriage, and businesses are being turned into worker-run cooperatives. The principles informing such experiments—ecological responsibility, gender equality, and religious toleration—stand in stark contrast to ISIS's reactionary ideology of apocalypticism, social hierarchy, and theocracy.

Even more unlikely, perhaps, than the Kurds' tenacious pursuit of this so-called "Rojava revolution" in the midst of the turmoil generated by the civil war and the advances of ISIS is the provenance of core aspects of their political vision in the work of the late American political thinker and activist Murray Bookchin. Bookchin's influence in the region can be traced to a remarkable evolution in the political views of Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), whose Syrian offshoot is the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). Öcalan founded the party in 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist organization whose objective was the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in southern Turkey (North Kurdistan), but

following his capture by Turkish authorities in 1999 and imprisonment on the island of İmralı, Öcalan abjured Marxism and began to search for a new revolutionary framework. He found in Bookchin's work not only staunch criticism of the national liberation paradigm the PKK had been attempting to implement in Kurdistan, but an inspiring alternative: a nonstatist vision of confederated municipalities, each governed by popular assemblies and sovereign in its own affairs, but strong enough collectively to defect from the nation-state without being suppressed.

What Öcalan has termed "democratic confederalism" is, in its broad outline, an adaptation of what Bookchin called "libertarian municipalism" (or, later, "communalism"). Bookchin formulated and honed his conception of libertarian municipalism over the last three decades of his life, fleshing out its theoretical and historical justification at greatest length in major tomes like *The Ecology of Freedom* and *From Urbanization to Cities*. By the early 1990s, Bookchin shifted his emphasis to the popularization of his political program in more succinct essays intended to outline its main components and justifications and anticipate possible criticisms. These essays have been usefully assembled together in print for the first time in *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*. If the flourishing of Bookchin's ideas in Kurdistan is any indication that they still have revolutionary legs, the editors of the collection—Debbie Bookchin (Murray's daughter) and Blair Taylor—have provided a valuable service to political progressives in making what may be Bookchin's most accessible writings more widely available.

Of course, the timing of the collection also invites reflection upon certain ironies. In the last years of his life, Bookchin concluded—not unreasonably—that his efforts to reorient the radical left to a libertarian municipalist agenda had failed. Weary, battle-scarred, and isolated following a decade-and-a-half of public confrontations with representatives of what he perceived as politically poisonous, "anti-humanist" tendencies like anarcho-primitivism and postmodernism, Bookchin could hardly have imagined that his ideas would help to inspire a new revolutionary movement on the other side of the world. Although Öcalan reached out to Bookchin in 2004 in the hopes of initiating a dialogue, it never materialized, and Bookchin died two years later a stubborn but disheartened revolutionary.

The even deeper irony, however, is that from the start Bookchin's libertarian municipalism was tailored not to the instability of civil war, when institutions can be precipitously dismantled and when social experimentation can be bold and visionary, but to the distinctly non-revolutionary conditions of post-1960s America. It is not coincidental that Bookchin's earliest formulations of what would become libertarian municipalism coincided with his move, after the disintegration of the New Left, from the turbulent radical atmosphere of New York City to the comparatively sleepy setting of Burlington, Vermont. Libertarian municipalism was suited to such an environment in part because it was not conceived in traditional revolutionary terms as a means of ushering in an eschatological break with the status quo or fomenting open warfare between opposed classes or against the state. Rather, it was geared towards finding revolutionary potential within existing institutions at the local level and working—in a gradual, piecemeal fashion—to develop that potential as far as possible. In the region of the American northeast

that Bookchin had chosen as his new home, the most fundamental institution of a libertarian municipalist society, the general assembly, was already present in the form of the town hall meeting. Although humble in scale, this institutionalization of direct democracy helped to inspire Bookchin's vision of radical democrats gaining toeholds in municipal settings—whether through winning local elections or rallying the public outside of official channels—and using this footing to expand the use of popular assemblies and turn them towards more radical objects. Municipalities that were democratized and radicalized in this manner could then confederate, Bookchin suggested, gradually building up regional autonomous zones that would eventually be powerful and organized enough to supplant the nation-state.

Bookchin's explications of the libertarian municipalist strategy in the essays that comprise *The Next Revolution* represent an at-times perplexing blend of realism and utopianism. On one hand, he takes the heretical step (for a self-described anarchist) of advocating electoral activity and reformist measures undertaken via established city councils. And even these modest efforts to work within the system, he admits, will more than likely be purely "symbolic" at first, as libertarian municipalists struggle to drum up popular support for their platform using the traditional, banal means of persuasion and propaganda. Progress will undoubtedly be painstakingly slow, advancing unevenly and incrementally through small triumphs, half-victories and resets.

On the other hand, Bookchin elsewhere clings to the fire-breathing revolutionary rhetoric that he first practiced on the streets of New York as a soapbox orator and Young Pioneer in the 1930s. Municipalities democratized and confederated along libertarian lines will, Bookchin proposes, array themselves in "clear and uncompromising" (94) opposition to the nation-state, provocatively asserting their autonomy and effectively daring the state to intervene. Furthermore, however small the first steps counseled by libertarian municipalism may be, its ultimate goals are unabashedly utopian. The refashioning of human life that takes place within liberated municipalities will extend, Bookchin tells us, far beyond institutions, reaching into the very sensibilities of the individual, and resulting in what socialists of old understood as the transformation of human nature itself, the creation of a "new man." The citizens of municipalities will come to see one another as equal participants in a shared political world, their interactions colored by sentiments of solidarity rather than "material gain and egotism" (20). Through their common and concerted action they will help to raise humanity to the "universal state of consciousness and rationality" (21) dreamed of by utopians and fought for by revolutionary socialists.

As confident-sounding as many of Bookchin's proclamations in *The Next Revolution* are, however, the collection is also a document of the revision and evolution of his views—or, at the very least, of the labels that he applied to them. Between the date of the earliest essay in the collection (November 1990) and the date of the latest (December 2002), Bookchin made the notable decision to stop referring to himself as an anarchist, driven by his disgust at the label being claimed by egoists and anti-humanists motivated not by political concerns but by the desire for "a radically unfettered lifestyle" (9). In his essay "The Communalist Project" from 2002, Bookchin proposes to call his perspective "Communalism," a term he traces back to the

Paris Commune of 1871. Bookchin encompasses under Communalism the entirety of his philosophical and political project, with libertarian municipalism now understood as the "concrete political dimension of Communalism" (17).

Even as Bookchin proffers new descriptors, however, he evidences some of the same old tendencies that contributed to his marginalization on the left and that have subsequently limited his appeal as a political thinker. No sooner is "Communalism" put forward as an insignia than Bookchin begins to write of what "Communalists" believe, which happens to read an awful lot like a compilation of Bookchin's own somewhat idiosyncratic positions. (Because Bookchin has been disillusioned by the consensus process, for example, "Communalists" insist upon deciding matters by majority rule). Similarly, in earlier essays and books Bookchin wrote of the ideas of "social ecologists" and "libertarian municipalists"—mythical categories, for all intents and purposes—rather than simply arguing points in his own name. Bookchin can be forgiven for wanting to inspire movement-sized followings that embrace and act upon his views, but these kinds of constructions, along with Bookchin's propensity for excoriating and alienating those who disagreed with him, have given many of his readers the impression that to be a "social ecologist," or a "libertarian municipalist," or a "Communalist" simply means to agree with Bookchin, with little room for deviation.

If the reception of Bookchin's ideas in Kurdistan demonstrates anything, however, it is that keeping those ideas alive means adapting them, revising them, and applying them to new contexts, even if that means confounding the expectations and the intentions of Bookchin himself. *The Next Revolution* has the potential to help revive Bookchin's thought for a new generation of radicals, but only if his work is understood not as a literal blueprint for a movement but as a critical resource that can be used to stimulate a more richly democratic vision and inspire a diversity of struggles.

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