

The Question of Ethical Leadership

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the salience of the question of ethical leadership for the radical activist left. It opens with a critique of horizontalism, an outlook that enjoys currency in activist and academic circles, and proceeds to make the case that hierarchies need not be authoritarian and can indeed be beneficial, both from democratic and ethical vantage points. I demonstrate that horizontalism is flawed by examining both its theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of it. In making the case for the desirability of leadership on the left, I draw on facets of Critical Theory, with an emphasis on the ideas of Erich Fromm. Engaging aspects of the famous Fromm-Marcuse debate, I argue that Fromm provides a more robust foundation for a theory of the transition from capitalism to socialism than does Marcuse. I then show that Fromm's distinction between rational and irrational authority, in conjunction with his psychological ideal of productiveness, lays the groundwork for a theory of ethical leadership. While articulating a theory of ethical leadership, I take to task extant, mainstream theories of leadership for circumscribing the potentialities inherent to ethical leadership. I argue that ethical leadership can find its most authentic expression only in the domain of radical activism and politics. I then delve into the psychoanalytic problematic of identification, with an eye to demonstrating that certain interpretations of the process of identification encourage an understanding of authority that dovetails with the imperatives of ethical leadership. I conclude by providing two real life examples of ethical leadership, Errico Malatesta and Herbert Marcuse, and by discussing the possibility that charisma can be ethical. I contrast ethical charisma with authoritarian charisma and the manufactured celebrity charisma of the culture industry.

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Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is twofold. The first is to provide a critique and an analysis of the shortcomings of that political and organizational common sense that has come to be known as horizontalism. It seems to have begun to crystallize during the anti-globalization movement in the late 1990s.¹ Precedents include, for example, the famous Zapatistas movement in Chiapas, Mexico, which consists of autonomous indigenous communities that have broken with the state and rely on consensus in their decision making.² Its principles also found exemplary expression in the anti-austerity mobilizations in Argentina in the early 2000s where local community assemblies were created, factories were taken over by workers, and the active subversion of workplace hierarchies was experimented with.³ Marina Sitrin situates the rebellion in Argentina in a broader, global tradition that deploys horizontal principles as part of a radical left tactical repertoire.⁴ She offers a succinct definition of horizontalism:

Horizontalidad is a word that has come to embody the new social arrangements and principles of organization that have resulted from these movements in Argentina. As its name suggests, it implies a flat plane upon which to communicate. It entails the use of

¹ For a discussion of the presence of an anarchist current in this movement, and contemporary radical activism in general, see Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs4xw>.

² Marina Sitrin, "Ruptures in Imagination: Horizontalism, Autogestion and Affective Politics in Argentina," *Policy & Practice* 5 (2007): 45, <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/>.

³ Mark Bray, "Horizontalism," in *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*, ed. Benjamin Franks, Nathan Jun, Leonard Williams (New York: Routledge, 2018), 103, <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315683652-8/horizontalism-mark-bray>.

⁴ Sitrin, "Ruptures," 46-48.

direct democracy and strives toward creating non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian structures. It is therefore a break from vertical methods of organizing and relating.⁵

Mark Bray, an organizer in the Occupy movement, characterizes horizontalism as follows:

While this slippery term has meant slightly different things for different people, it generally connotes a form of “leaderless,” autonomous, directly democratic movement building whose adherents consider it to be nonideological. Since the Argentine uprising, the term “horizontalism” has established itself as the overarching label for this amorphous form of directly democratic organizing that has swept the globe.⁶

Apparently, it is against the backdrop of the events in Argentina, where horizontalism was self-consciously adopted as a political approach, that this notion began to gain wide currency on the left, with Marina Sitrin serving as one of its main popularizers.⁷ Broadly construed, horizontalism positions itself as a progressive response to traditional, top-down forms of organization on the radical left, as well as to dissatisfaction among radicals with representative

⁵ Sitrin, “Ruptures,” 46.

⁶ Bray, “Horizontalism,” 101.

⁷ Sitrin has written about horizontalism extensively. See, for example, Marina Sitrin, “Horizontalism and the Occupy Movements,” *Dissent*, spring 2012, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/horizontalism-and-the-occupy-movements>; Marina Sitrin, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006). In *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*, in keeping with the spirit of horizontalism, Sitrin relates the experiences and views coming out of the popular uprising in Argentina by presenting material from her interviews with participants.

democracy. While horizontalism entails several interrelated commitments, its core tenet consists of the rejection of authority, hierarchy, and leadership. It manifests in an emphasis on direct democracy, individual and group autonomy, consensus building, and the value of assemblies. Most of these principles are of a piece with the tenets of anarchism itself. Although the concept of horizontalism connects with key anarchist principles and has indeed evolved through direct and indirect anarchist influences, it enjoys currency among broader sections of the activist and academic left and has in fact been practiced in different contexts across the globe long before the emergence of the term “horizontalism.”⁸ Moreover, the substantive commitments of anarchism can at times be at odds with horizontalism’s hostility to ideology and prioritizing of means over ends.⁹

The second is to use Critical Theory to articulate a theory of leadership that responds to the horizontalist challenge. The purpose of such a theory is to synthesize the central insights of horizontalism with the benefits afforded by leadership, such that the concerns advanced by horizontalism are taken seriously while its shortcomings are addressed and remedied. Such a theory is predicated on the belief that horizontalism is not inherently incompatible with leadership, so long as one of the core commitments of horizontalism is called into question: its wholesale rejection of authority. Authority, it will be argued, is not only not inherently undemocratic but under certain circumstances can help bolster popular democratic process and participation. This argument is indebted to the distinction between rational and irrational authority drawn by the Frankfurt School. This distinction is crucial to a critique of horizontalism, for, firstly, it permits us to challenge its intransigence with respect to authority, and, secondly,

⁸ Bray, “Horizontalism,” 103-104, 107.

⁹ Bray, “Horizontalism,” 103.

once it is understood that horizontalism conflates irrational authority with authority as such, this distinction makes it possible to preserve and extend horizontalism's critique of irrational manifestations of authority. It should be noted that the distinction between rational and irrational authority lays a foundation for rethinking the import of authority for leftist thought and activism. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to put forth a unique and original theory of *horizontal leadership*.

At the same time, this dissertation has several other, subsidiary aims which, while contributing to the central arguments regarding horizontal authority and in varying degrees being predicated on them, also stand independently. The first of these is to make a contribution to the famous Fromm-Marcuse debate, or rather to attempt to reconfigure and reevaluate it in light of current political developments, such as the recent global wave of authoritarianism. I seek to demonstrate that because of the unfortunate manner in which the debate unfolded, with enmity and bitterness generated on both sides, what has been largely overlooked is the complementarity of the ideas of the two thinkers. Although it has indeed been overlooked, and there is much to be said about the affinities between the two thinkers' ideas, in a sense this notion of complementarity should come as no surprise given the fact that both Fromm and Marcuse reinterpreted the classical Marxian concept of revolution along psychological and characterological lines.

The second of these aims is to make a contribution to the ongoing Fromm renaissance, which features such thinkers as Michael J. Thomspon, Lauren Langman, Joan Braune, Kieran Durkin, Neil McLaughlin, and Jeremiah Morelock. My intention is not simply to contribute to the revival of Fromm's thought but to demonstrate that it can be used to augment Critical Theory and that one of the consequences of Fromm's marginalization in Critical Theory quarters, in

addition to being unjust, has meant a big intellectual loss for that tradition. While, as I will show, all members of the Frankfurt School explored the problematic of authority and articulated the rational/irrational authority distinction, in different ways, it was Fromm who gave this distinction the clearest formulation and thought through its implications most consistently and compellingly. Without Fromm's contribution, it would have been very difficult to make a case for the existence and import of ethical authority.

The third of these aims concerns the sociological problematic of charisma. My discussion of charisma in chapter 5 aims to add a characterological/psychological dimension to existing approaches to charisma and propose two new typologies of charisma on this basis. In fact, the characterological import of charisma has been overlooked by sociologists and Critical Theorists alike. While Weber-influenced treatments of charisma generally ignore the possibility that charisma is ultimately rooted in characterological traits, a serious treatment of the problematic of charisma is also conspicuously absent from the work of both the first generation of Critical Theorists and the secondary literature. Fromm, in his reflections on character and character structure, is also generally silent on the question of charisma. In addition to advancing the admittedly controversial claim that there is such a thing as horizontal leadership, which, again, forms the core of this dissertation, I advance the equally controversial claim that charisma can indeed be ethical and in certain instances might even be serviceable to radical, transformative aims.

I. Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 opens with a definition of horizontalism, followed by a discussion of how horizontalism came to displace traditional modes of organization on the left. I then discuss the core tenets of horizontalism in some detail and contrast it with more traditional forms of

organization. Through an extended analysis of Occupy Wall Street, including its origins, development, and underlying values and principles, I consider the merits of this important movement along with notable shortcomings. I look at two other case studies with a similar aim in mind. I then argue that the shortcomings pointed up by the progressive movements in question are best addressed through a theory of horizontal leadership, which gestures at the importance of identifying horizontal leaders and being receptive to their leadership. It is then suggested that a theory of ethical left leadership must offer criteria for ethical leadership.

Chapter 2 offers an analysis of two schools of thought within contemporary political theory that are identified as the major theoretical foundations of horizontalism alongside anarchism. I first look at the thought of Sheldon Wolin, treating him as a representative of radical democratic theory. I show that Wolin makes room for normatively desirable forms of power in his oeuvre, but that his thought nonetheless falls short of linking these forms of power to the possibility of ethical authority, of which horizontal leadership is a manifestation. Although there are moments in his work that gesture toward the possibility of ethical authority, Wolin shies away from thematizing them and taking them to their logical conclusion. I then engage with the thought of Michel Foucault, treating him as a representative of poststructuralist theory. I show that in his oeuvre Foucault generally fails to distinguish between power and domination and for this reason is unable to identify the ways power could be serviceable to transformative aims. The next section engages thinkers in contemporary radical political theory whose ideas point to the possibility and importance of developing a more nuanced understanding of power and authority. The first is Amy Allen, who develops a unique typology of power in the process of attempting to articulate normatively desirable forms of power. The second is Jacques Rancière, whose ideas about authority offer insights into what ethical, or emancipatory, authority might look like. I

argue that ultimately even these thinkers' more nuanced understanding of power and authority falls short and thus highlights the need for a more robust theory of ethical authority. The seeds of such a theory can be found in the work of the first-generation Critical Theorists, especially that of Erich Fromm.

Chapters 3 through 5 each have a distinct focus, but the overarching arguments guiding all three chapters are informed by a psychoanalytic approach. In varying degrees, all three chapters make use of Fromm's unique combination of ethical and psychological insights about character, especially chapters 3 and 5. Delving into the Fromm-Marcuse debate, chapter 3 employs Fromm's characterological insights, especially his idea of productiveness, to make the case that leadership of the horizontal variety on the left is both possible and desirable. One aspect of this argument consists of relating Fromm's ethical and psychological ideal of productiveness to the character structure of horizontal leaders. This chapter also takes a close look at Fromm's contributions to the problematic of social and political transformation via his debate with Marcuse. It is suggested that the way the debate unfolded obscures the ultimate complementarity of the two thinkers' ideas about social transformation. Specifically, I contend that Marcuse's notion of the Great Refusal conceptually furnishes us with the moment of refusal that must precede the transition to a more just society, while the theory of ethical authority lurking in Fromm's writings lays the conceptual foundation for a theory of transition. The two most significant areas of disagreement have to do with Fromm's idea of productiveness and the question of what kind of subjectivity a genuinely socialist society is conducive to. I argue that Marcuse's charge that Fromm's ideal of productiveness is conformist can be addressed by clarifying that the concept is essentially critical rather than conformist to the extent that it anticipates a different social reality. Marcuse is right to point out that Fromm is not always

consistent on this point, so the clarification is meant to save the concept from flirtation with conformism, reading Fromm against himself. The other most significant point of contention between the two thinkers concerns the question whether there is room for the ego, as conceptualized by psychoanalysis, in a socialist society. I suggest that this dimension of the debate remains unresolved and merits further discussion and debate. Pursued in good faith, further debate around this issue can yield important insights about what individuality as well as intersubjectivity might look like in a socialist society, and whether thinking about this question psychoanalytically is at all useful. In any event, pursuit of this debate in good faith presupposes letting go of any lingering animosity on either side.

Chapter 4 contains an excursus wherein I look at the ways the question of ethical leadership has been framed in business journals, paying particular attention to *The Leadership Quarterly*. Since at least the early 2000s, these journals and similar venues have been keen on identifying the qualities that make leaders ethical and the salience of ethical leadership for the business world.¹⁰ I argue that while these journals' treatment of ethical leadership, which they sometimes link to authenticity and charisma, offers interesting insights, they fail to recognize that leadership that is genuinely ethical is at odds with the interests and agendas of the business world. At best, leadership in the corporate context can play an ameliorative role, helping workers adjust to oppression and exploitation in the realm of work. In a word, in this context, leadership has conformist implications. A genuinely ethical prototype of leadership can only emerge on the radical left, which is intent on dismantling capitalism and ushering in socialism. At the same

¹⁰ Theories of ethical leadership in this literature are often presented in conjunction with, and as a response to, concerns around corporate and managerial accountability. See, for example, Max H. Bazerman, "A New Model for Ethical Leadership," *Harvard Business Review*, September-October, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/09/a-new-model-for-ethical-leadership>.

time, the question of what ethical leadership on the left might look like is raised. It is a salient one given the fact that, as I argue in some detail in chapter 1, the radical left has attempted to eject hierarchies from its ranks, including organizations and social movements. I then delve into psychoanalytic reflections on the problem of identification, asking what healthy identification entails and what this has to do with theories of narcissism. I argue that ethical leadership on the radical left,¹¹ coupled with Fromm's ideal of productiveness, should enable healthy identification, which presupposes rebellion against the status quo and perhaps even an activist consciousness. At the very least, such identification is liable to make individuals more receptive to a different Reality Principle. In the next section I examine in some detail the implications of Fromm's analysis of the distinction between rational and irrational authority, signaling again that it lays the foundation for a theory of ethical authority, which in turn serves as a foundation for a theory of ethical leadership. I then consider aspects of Fromm's work that point to what ethical authority might entail exactly, looking at the significance of his notion of the prophet and his characterization of the revolutionary character, as well as analyzing the implications for ethical authority of Fromm's own activism and organizing work. At the end of chapter 4 the criteria for ethical leadership are set out.

Chapter 5 takes up the theme of charisma. I first briefly engage with innovations around the concept of charisma that have surfaced in the recent literature on the subject. I argue that ethical charisma is on the opposite end of the spectrum from authoritarian charisma on the "charisma spectrum," briefly comparing the character structure of ethical charismatics with that

¹¹ The mainstream left does not share the radical left's reservations about leadership. What distinguishes traditional leadership structures as they manifest in, say, party and union contexts from the type of leadership I am proposing here is the former's generally conformist function, i.e., acceptance of and normalization of capitalist structures. The latter form of leadership is essentially transformative and anti-capitalist.

of their fascistic counterparts and establishing that their respective character structures account for the differences in their charismatic appeal. I then introduce a two-dimensional typology of charisma. I argue that there are two continuums of charisma, with the one just mentioned, which has to do with leaders' character structure, being the more "authentic" and essential source of charisma. The other continuum reflects charismatic appeal of a more superficial sort and has to do with the specific situations and contexts in which charismatics find themselves. I then introduce the notion of celebrity charisma, arguing that this phenomenon is manufactured by the culture industry. I discuss how it interacts with other types of charisma, which continuum it is on, and how it applies to Donald Trump. I suggest directions for future investigations into charisma using the typologies proposed here by way of conclusion. I then make the case that some of the recent literature on charisma reviewed here points towards the possibility of articulating a theory of countercultural charisma from the progressive end of the political spectrum. I take this task on and posit that there are leaders on the left who possess a countercultural charisma, a charisma that is essentially ethical in character because it is rooted in these leaders' productive character structure. My two examples are Herbert Marcuse and Errico Malatesta. In effect, my argument is that their leadership style was distinctive enough to represent a unique, horizontal form of leadership. This style of leadership derives from the same source as their (ethical) charisma, namely, their productive character structure.

Chapter 1: The Emergence of a New Common Sense

This dissertation begins with a consideration of the import of a theoretical current that has of late achieved supremacy among leftist thinkers, if only by appealing to a certain kind of leftist common sense. Owing to its insistence on the urgency of entrenching anti-authoritarianism in the organizational practices of activists intent on challenging the status quo, this current has been aptly dubbed “horizontalism.” The common sense to which it appeals is rooted in historical experience, an egalitarian sensibility, and a number of distinct but overlapping theoretical trajectories within leftist political thought. Its aim is to extirpate any and all hierarchies from the realm of politics, the apparent intellectual basis for which is the belief that a radically different, i.e., liberated, politics, should preclude hierarchical relations. To the extent that it is regarded as prefigurative of this end goal, incorporating the commitment to anti-authoritarianism into progressive political activism is seen as a necessity. Activism on the left, on this view, should be re-organized such that there is no room for relationships that are rooted in authority and deviate from unadulterated mutuality. The purpose of this chapter is to point up the limitations inherent in this common sense. I explore some of the shortcomings of horizontalism by analyzing the attractiveness, evolution and ultimate failure of Occupy Wall Street, which is an exemplar of this organizational principle and is also one of the most ambitious and influential exercises in civil disobedience in recent memory, along with two other kindred movements.

I. Defining Horizontalism

The term “horizontalism” encompasses tendencies across a broad range of theoretical standpoints that are otherwise incongruous with one another, from poststructuralism to certain varieties of socialism. Perhaps this suggests that the meaning of the term is not as straightforward as it seems. Nonetheless, there does seem to be considerable overlap among activists’ and

authors' use of the term across the leftist spectrum. So, what exactly does this term mean, and what accounts for its appeal among leftists?

In its most basic sense, this term denotes a rejection of hierarchy in all its guises and speaks to the need for ways of engaging one another that affirm equality and ensure that everyone's opinions are seen as valuable and are heard. It intimates as well that, as a matter of course, one ought not to be expected to submit to any kind of social and political authority and, in a similar vein, that the radical left should seek to do away with hierarchies that become entrenched through representation, political or otherwise. In a word, the notion of horizontalism bespeaks the rejection of representation and a commitment to anti-authoritarianism and equality. It should be noted that this term is largely critical and prescriptive in character; this points to its entwinement with questions of politics. It makes sense to interrogate the explicitly political commitments toward which horizontalism gestures in order to unpack its relationship to the political. What is the political salience and scope of the principles of anti-authoritarianism and equality? More specifically, what is their relevance to progressive activism and leftist politics?

It should be stressed at the outset that those preeminent intellectuals who explicitly embrace horizontalism generally present it as a tool or theory of resistance; horizontalism is often characterized as a means of combatting the oppressions endemic to capitalism, especially the hierarchical structures that sustain and legitimate them. Indeed, since proponents of horizontalism position themselves as detractors of capitalism, and their explication of horizontalist principles revolves around questions of resistance, one may be tempted to conclude that the insights drawn from horizontalism bear solely on activism, protests and exercises in disobedience and have nothing to offer in the way of a positive political theory and alternatives to the status quo. Such a conclusion, however, would be flawed and misleading. For the practices

associated with horizontalism are meant to be *prefigurative*. The concept of prefiguration is key for linking transformative practices with political alternatives. To use lexicon with currency in contemporary continental political theory, the concept of prefiguration helps bridge the gap between theory and practice. Theories of social change, for instance, must be informed by, respond to, and be evaluated against the victories, hurdles, and defeats experienced by those who participate in progressive protests and movements as well as against their evolving wishes, attitudes, and imaginaries with respect to the social order that is to replace capitalism. Relatedly, and perhaps more importantly, it also addresses and helps remedy the disjuncture between the theories of social change and utopian futures propounded by academic commentators and the everyday needs and experiences of those who are disadvantaged the most by capitalism and in dire need of social change. The valorization by leftist thinkers of the principle of prefiguration suggests that the work of imagining an alternative social order is no longer (and logically cannot be) the preserve of a select few but rather imbues the realities and wishes of ordinary folks from all walks of life as they organize and engage in transformative practices. Prefiguration concerns, in a political context, the embodiment of the principles of a different, better social order in the transformative practices that are expected to effect it. In the case of horizontalism, this would imply that the incorporation of anti-authoritarian, anti-representative and egalitarian ways of thinking and acting into progressive social movements and practices is an important—indeed, indispensable—step towards defining and shaping the kind of future that progressives are intent on ushering in. As I will argue later, while subjecting horizontalism to critical scrutiny, prefiguration is the most robust and compelling aspect of this approach to radical politics. A succinct and compelling definition of horizontalism (and a sense of its kinship with contiguous concepts), along with an important caveat, is furnished by Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini:

Horizontalidad, horizontality, and horizontalism are words that encapsulate the ideas upon which many of the social relationships in the new global movements are grounded. The idea that they express is based on affective and trust-based politics. It is a dynamic social relationship that represents a break with representation and vertical ways of organizing. This does not mean that structures do not emerge, as they do with mass assemblies and autonomous governance, but the structures that emerge are non-representational and non-hierarchical.¹²

This passage also lays bare the imaginary within which the notion of horizontalism assumes its full significance, and indicates that for its exponents it links up with and cannot be thought about in abstraction from other progressive political concepts. The most salient of these are direct democracy, prefiguration, and perhaps also the twin, affect-based concepts of responsibility and care. The importance of direct democracy for a theoretical standpoint that valorizes anti-authoritarianism is self-evident. The principle that underlies the rejection of vertical authority within the ranks of activists and protesters is mirrored in the repudiation of political representation and the hierarchical relationship it tends to impose on representatives and those they are tasked with representing, with the latter being subordinated to the former, often both in terms of priority of interests and the right to be heard. Both horizontalism, which is concerned with the equality of each activist or protester in relation to all others, and direct democracy, which challenges political representation (the state, the party, representative institutions, etc.),

¹² Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini, *They Can't Represent Us!: Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy* (New York: Verso, 2014), 17.

are grounded in the logic of *radical democracy*. Prefiguration, as we have already seen, ensures that these anti-authoritarian and anti-representative sensibilities illuminate a pathway to a radically different kind of society, or, in other words, imbues them with transformative energy. Undeniably, as far as radical political theory is concerned, horizontalism and the political imaginary that nourishes it is a force to be reckoned with.

Yet I would like to suggest that horizontalism also has serious limitations. To the end of identifying some of these limitations and demonstrating the need for a re-evaluation on the part of leftists of the new horizontalist common sense, I consider the development, intricacies, and internal dynamics of one of the most robust expressions of horizontalism in recent years, which also generated a great deal of enthusiasm among leftists of various stripes: Occupy Wall Street (hereafter OWS or Occupy). Readers should bear in mind that my use of the word “horizontalism” hereafter encompasses the radical imaginary delineated above rather than merely denoting opposition to vertical forms of leftist organization. The word “horizontalism” has been selected to represent the imaginary in question because of its evocative quality.

The main reason why the discussion that follows orbits around OWS, as opposed to any number of other viable candidates, is that the deployment of horizontalist ideas in this movement was for the most part deliberate. What I mean by this is that one of the chief architects and organizers of this mobilization was David Graeber, an avowed proponent of horizontalist ideas who, in the movement’s aftermath, also published a book dealing with OWS’s relationship to horizontalism. The extent of Graeber’s involvement in the movement is evidenced by the fact that he has been credited by some with the invention of the catchy and influential “we are the

99%” slogan.¹³ This instantiation of praxis, in conjunction with Graeber’s treatment of Occupy as a success in his book on Occupy, makes the movement fertile ground for critique.

Incidentally, Marina Sitrin and Mark Bray, who, like Graeber, are both activists and champions of horizontalism, also partook in the movement and subsequently offered reflections on their experiences in it by way of published work, some of which is explored in the discussion that follows. Other considerations that informed my decision to focus on Occupy include the perception among leftists that the movement was emblematic of a shift on the left from traditional hierarchical politics to novel, horizontal forms of organization and activism as well as the fact that Occupy, as far as challenges to the status quo go, was quite promising in terms of the enthusiasm it generated within the ranks of the left as well as in terms of concrete accomplishments. Before delving into the problems that bedeviled Occupy, I discuss some of its merits and some of these tangible accomplishments. A wide-ranging critique of OWS, which is the focus of the discussion that follows, will allow me to segue to an analysis of the theoretical inadequacies of horizontalism vis à vis radical leftist thought in the next chapter. Readers are encouraged to bear in mind that my aim here is not to offer an exhaustive analysis of the movement but articulate some of its main tendencies and their relationship to Occupy’s ills.

II. Occupy Wall Street: A Movement?

It is important to have some sense of what was unique about Occupy in order to be able consider its merits and failures in a balanced manner. At the same time, I do not want my discussion of the movement to become mired in a lengthy discourse about every facet of the movement and its evolution. Other activists, scholars and activist scholars have provided book-length accounts of

¹³ Mark Bray, *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2013), 156. PDF.

this multifaceted movement in all its nuance. In what follows I provide some context for the emergence of the movement and consider some of its distinctive and defining characteristics.

David Graeber points out that while the core of Occupy was made up of disaffected, educated youth, the movement's gradual swelling can be accounted for by the participation of other segments of the American population, perhaps most notably the working class. Common to both of these seemingly disparate groups, argues Graeber, was anger over ever-growing and unchecked debt.¹⁴ Although there is, as is always the case with such things, room for disagreement about the reasons for the emergence of Occupy, scholarly accounts generally converge on two major catalysts: the widespread disillusionment with Obama's policies during his tenure as president and debt (David Graeber and Marina Sitrin emphasize debt; Bray emphasizes Obama's policies).¹⁵ To be sure, while these factors are what seems to have sparked an interest and a willingness among Americans to flock en masse into Zuccotti park in New York and subsequently into Occupy spaces in other cities across the United States, they do not account for the immediate choices, made mainly by a group of activists, that gave shape to the movement.

The momentum for the occupation of Zuccotti Park must be situated in the context of a broad array of upheavals across the globe, as well as in other parts of the United States, that have adopted the tactic of occupation. Notable sources of inspiration include the Zapatistas in Mexico, the *Indignados* in Spain, the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, and the list goes on.¹⁶ The

¹⁴ David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, A Crisis, A Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), 73.

¹⁵ Graeber, *Democracy*, 74-87; Sitrin and Azzellini, *They Can't Represent Us!*, 155-157; Bray, *Translating Anarchy*, 173-176.

¹⁶ Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers: The Making of the 99 Percent Movement* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20-36. PDF.

occupation tactic in fact dates at least as far back as the occupation of public and private spaces by Argentines in response to the economic crisis of 2001. David Graeber details the immediate events that led to the formation of the ideas behind what would become Occupy through an account of his own brainstorming efforts in concert with a group of fellow activists who might collectively be credited with spawning the movement and giving it its basic form and orientation. This includes this group's initial decision to defect from a larger group that promised to hold a general assembly, where everyone could be heard, in preparation for *Adbusters*'¹⁷ proposed occupation of Wall Street but failed to follow through, the decision to occupy a park, the decision to foreground the relationship between the inadequacy of representative democracy in the US and the concentration of wealth in the hands of elites—reflected in the adoption of the “99 %” slogan—and, most importantly, the decision to ground the nascent movement in horizontalist principles and practices.¹⁸ Indeed, the movement's horizontality, as manifested in its singular forms of organization, discussion, and decision making, would become the movement's most prominent feature.

Occupy's horizontalist tendencies are evidenced by its adherence to such practices as the consensus process, which animated the general assemblies; this practice is in turn grounded in the principles of direct democracy and direct action. The significance of the consensus process lies in the recognition that everyone has the right to be heard, that all voices are equally important, and that no one should be expected to be bound by a decision to which they had not agreed. So important is this practice to direct democracy that Graeber devotes considerable space

¹⁷ *Adbusters* is a radical Canadian magazine famous for creating “anti-ads” or subversive advertisements and attempting to place them in mainstream venues (<https://www.adbusters.org/>). Graeber, *Democracy*, 6.

¹⁸ Graeber, *Democracy*, 3-54.

to its explication in *The Democracy Project*, his book on OWS.¹⁹ As noted above, “direct democracy” denotes a rejection of political representation, while “direct action” emphasizes the desirability of acting in a way that mirrors the essence of a different social order, which entails flouting conventions attached to oppressive institutions and disregarding the institutions themselves, especially the trappings of the state. It is closely tied to the concept of prefiguration, and can be distinguished from civil disobedience, the latter being a form of protest that largely accepts the legitimacy of extant social structures.²⁰ Together, the interrelated principles of direct democracy, direct action, and consensus formed the Occupy movement’s core organizational repertoire. The actual occupation at Zuccotti Park commenced on September 17, 2011, and was prefigured by the collective decision-making body that has been dubbed The New York City General Assembly.²¹ The central Occupy locale in New York consisted of several encampments, and, at first glance, there is nothing overtly radical about that. When one considers the culture of general assemblies, alongside a plethora of working groups, the “people’s mic” convention, and the flowering of libraries and kitchens, that became part and parcel of life at Occupy, the movement’s radicalism becomes manifest. Although when reading participant accounts of the movement one gets the sense that you had to be immersed in that collective experiment to experience its vibrancy and dynamism, it is incontrovertible that Occupy engendered feelings of solidarity, hope, and a sense of possibility. It is indeed this distinctive culture, made up of the horizontal practices enumerated above, that gave Occupy its unique radical texture.

The movement’s immediate aim, at least as envisioned by key organizers as the movement was beginning to take shape, is summed up nicely by David Graeber:

¹⁹ Graeber, *Democracy*, 194-207.

²⁰ Graeber, *Democracy*, 232-242.

²¹ Sitrin and Azzellini, *They Can’t Represent Us!*, 151-154.

We decided that what we really wanted to achieve was something like what had already been accomplished in Athens, Barcelona, and Madrid, where thousands of ordinary citizens, most of them completely new to political mobilization of any kind, had been willing to occupy public squares in protest against the entire class of their respective countries. The idea would be to occupy a similar public space to create a New York General Assembly, which could, like its European cousins, act as a model of genuine direct democracy to counterpoise to the corrupt charade presented to us as “democracy” by the U.S. government. The Wall Street action would be a stepping-stone toward the creation of a whole network of such assemblies.²²

For its organizers, the intended impact of Occupy was reaching and engaging the larger population through contagion, or what Graeber refers to as “contaminationsim”; practices of direct democracy were expected to start resonating with and impacting the lives of ordinary folks.²³

What, in the final analysis, did Occupy accomplish? It is undeniable that the two-month long occupation of Zuccotti Park, along with the offshoot occupations across the country, was an impressive feat. First, the movement helped articulate the reasons for Americans’ resentment toward the ruling elite and expressed the urgency of the need for change. Second, the movement’s unwavering commitment to horizontalism showcased the plausibility and desirability of direct forms of democracy. Third, Occupy provided people with a sense of what

²² Graeber, *Democracy*, 42-43.

²³ Graeber, *Democracy*, 22-23.

collective empowerment and belonging look like. Fourth, and this point encompasses all the other ones, Occupy highlighted the need for a radically different kind of society. Beyond this, Occupy also yielded some more tangible results, though rather indirectly. Its influence reverberated through a host of activist initiatives, as many Occupy participants went on to found projects in which they drew on their experience with the encampments. Notable initiatives include Occupy Our Homes, Strike Debt, and Occupy Sandy.²⁴

III. What Went Wrong?

Occupy Wall Street, one of the most inspiring and iconic progressive social movements in recent memory has, in what may perhaps be considered an ironic twist, given rise to questions about the efficacy of leaderless progressive social movements. Priding itself on a commitment to egalitarianism and horizontalism, the movement spurned organizational hierarchies: “In self-conscious contrast to the vertical structures of mainstream political parties, unions, and traditional Left organizations alike, OWS embraced horizontalism.”²⁵ Although OWS furnished spaces wherein the populace could cultivate an anti-capitalist consciousness, vocalize its malaise, and call the legitimacy of the status quo, especially institutionalized “democracy,” into question,²⁶ its efforts generally fell short of articulating the desirability and feasibility of radical social transformation and of sustaining mass popular mobilization. Of course, one might plausibly argue, by way of a rejoinder, that making a case for socialism was not on OWS’s agenda, that the movement did not unanimously and unequivocally seek to overhaul the system,

²⁴ L. A. Kauffman, *Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism* (New York: Verso, 2017), 171.

²⁵ Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce, and Penny Lewis, “Occupy After Occupy,” *Jacobin*, January 6, 2014, <https://jacobin.com/2014/06/occupy-after-occupy>.

²⁶ Marina Sitrin, “Horizontalism and the Occupy Movements,” *Dissent*, spring 2012, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/horizontalism-and-the-occupy-movements>.

that its aims were limited to dramatizing and contesting inequality, and thus that it cannot be faulted for not putting forth a transformative vision or even a coherent agenda. For instance, David Graeber, who, as I have noted above, was one of the movement's chief architects, has insisted that its strength lay precisely in its rejection of institutionalized hierarchy, as manifested in the state apparatus and ossified political structures—in other words, that the movement was primarily meant, by pointing up their defectiveness, to serve as a critique of entrenched structures of power. Moreover, by enabling participants to practice direct democracy, it was supposed to highlight the viability of direct democracy as an alternative principle of political organization.²⁷

I should reiterate at this point that it is not my intention to argue that OWS was completely unsuccessful and that it bore no fruit. Rather, I wish to demonstrate that, owing to its commitment to horizontalism, it could not have gone much further than it did. With this caveat in mind, and the avowed ambitions and goals of OWS's intellectual bulwark notwithstanding, I aim to demonstrate that the movement brought into relief, through the way it unfolded, the inadequacy, from a radical socialist standpoint, of leaderless progressive movements. I now turn to several incisive, and interrelated, critiques of the movement.

As Occupy grew in size and scope, it began to face several persistent challenges. One source of ongoing tension was the commitment to direct democracy. It seems that participants became so enamored of the idea of consensus, all the while struck by its common-sense character, that they were afraid to loosen their grip, lest it give way to some sort of leadership structure. Consensus-based assemblies were normalized to such an extent that there was resistance to anything that seemed to stray even a little from this eminently direct form of

²⁷ Graeber, *Democracy*, 87-98.

participation; proposals by experienced organizers to adopt the spokescouncil model so as to relieve some of the pressure generated by the General Assembly—put forth due to mounting pressures from frustrated occupiers and organizers—for instance, faced fierce resistance, especially from staunch anarchists, before the issue was put to a vote and the proposal finally accepted.²⁸ Indeed, the dogmatism with which the consensus model was defended appeared to some as religious in character. The prominent political organizer L.A. Kauffman has aptly termed this trend within Occupy, and the left at large, “the theology of consensus.”²⁹ The consensus model was also problematic in other ways: general assembly sessions could go on for hours, and some took to independent decision making. Kauffman notes: “The proceedings of the general assembly stretched on for hours, often without resolving the issues at hand; increasingly, unaccountable informal leaders made pressing decisions behind the scenes and outside of the formal process.”³⁰ Informal leadership became a target of Occupiers’ ire when it became manifest that a class of self-styled leaders, who conferred with one another about a host of issues at a remove from the general assembly, had emerged.³¹ Other problems included sexual harassment and assault.³² The money that had been donated to the movement, too, became a source of tension.³³ The setbacks enumerated above are relatively minor, in the sense that none of them is likely to have seriously undercut the Occupiers’ efforts. Some of them are, however, reflective of larger, more serious problems. These, I would like to suggest, can be linked to the movement’s horizontal mode of organization, a corollary of which, of course, is the absence of

²⁸ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, 124-125.

²⁹ L.A. Kauffman, “The Theology of Consensus,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, November 24, 2015, berkeleyjournal.org/2015/05/the-theology-of-consensus/.

³⁰ Kauffman, *Direct Action*, 170.

³¹ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, 123.

³² Kauffman, *Direct Action*, 170.

³³ Kauffman, *Direct Action*, 171.

leadership. Before I proceed to discuss the problems in question, which revolve around the question of leadership, it is important to provide readers with a sense of what I do and do not mean by leadership.

One reason why this excursus is necessary is the overwhelming recognition in the literature on Occupy, as I have already pointed out, that the movement, contrary to organizers' intentions and the spirit of the movement, was not altogether devoid of leadership. At some point during the two-month occupation, one could observe increasing stratification within the movement's ranks, with the emergent upper echelon being composed of seasoned activists in possession of free time, special skillsets, and networks. Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky aptly sums up the distinguishing characteristics of this group: "Those who participated most actively in the decision-making process tended to be those with the time, the know-how, and the networks that were the unspoken arbiters of power and influence."³⁴ Such stratification within Occupy's ranks lends credence to those early criticisms of participatory democracy that emphasized the problem of informal influence, which is likely to prove the most enduring obstacle for this form of organization and thus call for creative solutions.³⁵ The existence of a class of informal leaders seems to cast doubt on the claim that this was a leaderless movement, and at the same time to undermine critiques of the movement that take this aspect of it for granted. In point of fact, however, the emergence of informal leaders within groups that reject structures and hierarchies is almost inevitable owing to power differentials. Indeed, as is borne out by the Occupy experience, the power wielded by informal leadership may be more insidious in spaces that are otherwise

³⁴ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, 9.

³⁵ Jane J. Mansbridge, "Time, Emotion, and Inequality: Three Problems of Participatory Groups," *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 9, no. 2-3 (March 1973): 361-367, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002188637300900217>.

opposed to hierarchy, in that affirmations of equality at the level of process as well as at the level of rhetoric make it difficult to acknowledge, expose, and check it. I would like to suggest that this form of leadership exemplifies *irrational* authority. What is to be lamented with respect to Occupy's mode of organization, then, is not the absence of leadership as such but rather the absence of a particular kind of leadership: leadership rooted in rational authority. While I discuss the nature and significance of rational authority in some detail later, it is worth teasing out the basic difference between rational and irrational authority at this point.

Rational authority consists in hierarchies that can be justified with reference to a particular function, one that generally benefits those at the lower rung of the hierarchy. Irrational authority, on the other hand, consists in the exercise of power for power's sake; here, those at the upper rung of the hierarchy have a vested interest in its continuation.³⁶ This distinction implies that not all authority is illegitimate, and that certain forms of it are desirable and might even be necessary. Arguably, it is the absence of robust authority of the rational variety that made Occupy vulnerable to the formation of self-aggrandizing cliques amid a string of failures. To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that Occupy would have fared significantly better with a top-down, centralized form of leadership along orthodox lines. At any rate, the distinction between rational and irrational authority, which is propounded and dissected in the writings of the Frankfurt School, forms the basis for many of the arguments put forward in subsequent chapters, especially those concerning the merits of ethical leadership on the left.

Let us now consider Occupy's major failures and shortcomings in turn. First, the movement failed, over the course of its two-month existence, to attain cohesiveness; the most

³⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 224-225.

important manifestations of this problem were the absence of a coherent agenda and, more damningly, an inability by occupiers to reach a consensus on even the most basic questions, such as whether capitalism is generally a desirable form of economic organization.³⁷ This situation in turn militated against making demands on the state and seeking concrete concessions by way of increased wages, improved social welfare, debt cancellation, etc. Together, these realities illuminate Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell's inclination to characterize the affective bonds generated within the movement as "togetherness" rather than unity.³⁸ The defense mounted by enthusiastic leftist theorists to the effect that formulating specific demands would have made the movement vulnerable to co-optation by centrist organizations and thus undesirable,³⁹ while not without merit, primarily serves to obscure the indeterminacy that permeated the movement. As John Ehrenberg's discussion of the movement's avowed commitments intimates, these were mostly bereft of political substance.⁴⁰ Although, viewed through the lens of Marcuse's *Great Refusal*, the rationale for refusing to engage with state institutions is clear and compelling enough, the movement's inability to produce a list of positive (if only minimal), unifying political objectives merits condemnation, and, it can be plausibly argued, is responsible for the

³⁷ Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell, "A Critique of the Occupy Movement from a Black Occupier," *The Black Scholar* 41, no. 4 (December 2011): 44, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1080/00064246.2011.11413575>.

³⁸ Campbell, "A Critique of the Occupy Movement from a Black Occupier," 43-44.

³⁹ Stanley Aronowitz, "Where Is the Outrage?," in *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*, ed. Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter N. Funke (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), 346-347. Even Aronowitz recognizes, of course, that sustained organization and a broader vision and strategy are needed for movements like Occupy to have a chance at accomplishing anything that is more than ephemeral in character. Aronowitz's discussion can be situated in the broader context of the difficulties of organizing a historically decentralized American left. Aronowitz cites the vicissitudes of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as an example of the fragmentation that tends to occur on the American left in the face of the challenge of organization and centralization (349-350).

⁴⁰ John Ehrenberg, "What Can We Learn from Occupy's Failure?," *Palgrave Communications*, no. 1 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.62>.

movement's withering.⁴¹ It is noteworthy that even Noam Chomsky, whose attitude toward OWS was one of unbridled enthusiasm, expressed support for the formulation of at least short-term demands and objectives.⁴² Some of Occupy's detractors, like David Marcus, attribute the failure to put forward a list of demands to the movement's anti-institutionalism. Marcus goes so far as to compare Occupy with the libertarian right in his discussion of the movement's refusal to formulate specific demands, given the former's anti-institutionalism. His point is that in the pursuit of the creation of "bubbles of freedom," however commendable in its own right, such movements must not lose sight of the fact that dismantling structures that sustain, say, economic inequality, may require interaction with extant, power-laden institutions.⁴³ To other commentators, however, it was abundantly clear that the main factor that militated against the introduction of specific demands was infighting along ideological fault lines: "While the reformers demanded the intervention of the federal government, their revolutionary peers rooted for its overthrow. While the former cheered the unions' calls for 'jobs, not cuts' and 'jobs, not wars,' the latter took up the student movement's call to 'occupy everything, demand nothing.' On the whole question of demands, at least, common ground was nowhere to be found between the two warring camps."⁴⁴ On this reading of the situation, what had been presented as an unequivocal choice by Occupy's champions in an attempt to bolster its image, was in fact the product of schisms and disunity among the occupiers. It is not clear that a list of demands that might have provided the movement with a modicum of direction would have undermined the radicality of its critique of the status quo.

⁴¹ Aronowitz, "Where is the Outrage?," 349.

⁴² Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (New York: Zuccotti Park Press, 2012), chap. 1. PDF.

⁴³ David Marcus, "The Horizontalists," *Dissent*, fall 2012, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-horizontalists>.

⁴⁴ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, 51.

Second, and related, the movement failed to produce a robust, compelling and imaginative vision of a radically different society. Such a vision may well have existed among veteran activists and learned academics, and traces of it could perhaps have even been found in the practices and attitudes of other occupiers, but it certainly did not extend beyond the movement itself. The ability to expose ordinary folks who are otherwise distant from politics and activism to radicalism is a benchmark for evaluating the promise of a transformative progressive movement, and there is no question that Occupy missed the mark. Mark Bray, an anarchist thinker and an activist who was one of Occupy's organizers, notes and laments this failure.⁴⁵ However, his anarchist views prevent him from linking this failure to the movement's horizontalist commitments and the absence of leadership.

To be sure, not all leftist political theorists accord the same weight to having and exploring a transformative vision. The idea of leaderless progressive movements certainly resonates with thinkers who either prioritize the contestation of entrenched hierarchies and the generation of new social and political possibilities, or "openings," over transformative projects tinged with utopianism, or simply eschew such projects. This class of thinkers includes poststructuralists. Although a detailed discussion of the relationship of poststructuralism's theoretical outlook to OWS now would take us too far afield, it would not be amiss to say a few words about it here as this would help convey the important caveat that the critiques I level against the movement are predicated on a commitment to transformative socialism and may for this reason not sit well with leftist viewpoints that are not compatible with my own. Bernard Harcourt's piece on OWS, "Occupy's New Grammar of Political Disobedience," exemplifies the poststructuralist rejection of utopianism and a transformation-oriented politics. In this article he

⁴⁵ Bray, *Translating Anarchy*, 265-266.

argues that a new grammar is needed to reflect the specificity of the Occupy experience and its objectives and accomplishments. Harcourt also openly acknowledges and celebrates Occupy's leaderlessness, providing an inkling of poststructuralism's distaste for leadership.⁴⁶ This view is informed by poststructuralism's celebration of difference, incredulity with respect to hierarchies, and staunch opposition to "grand narratives"—especially those underpinned by a telos of emancipation that has its roots in Enlightenment thought—which, poststructuralist thinkers maintain, tend to be spurred on by a naive conception of subjectivity and its relationship to power.⁴⁷ Poststructuralists trace Marxists' commitment to establishing a communist utopia, which in their imaginary is linked with the absence of relations of domination, back to the Enlightenment project of grounding both human essence and social progress in rationality and absolute truth.⁴⁸ Indeed, the Marxian notion of "false consciousness," while identifying a warped state of consciousness, at the same time gestures toward the prospect of freeing an underlying, truer self, i.e., that in us which is essentially human.⁴⁹ According to champions of poststructuralist thought, once the naive notion of a human essence is jettisoned, and the impossibility of doing away with power altogether is recognized, one ought to begin to approach politics as a site of permanent contestation wherein only contingent victories for freedom can be secured. At any rate, since essences are anathema to poststructuralists—in large part because

⁴⁶ Bernard Harcourt, "Occupy's New Grammar of Political Disobedience," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/nov/30/occupy-new-grammar-political-disobedience>.

⁴⁷ Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 92-100.

⁴⁸ Saul Newman, *Power and the Political in Poststructuralist Thought: New Theories of the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780203015490>.

⁴⁹ Newman, *Power*, 63.

they think that talk of essences invariably legitimizes the operation of certain kinds of power and simultaneously helps obscure this fact⁵⁰—they balk at grand narratives in the realm of politics.⁵¹ Given the poststructuralist underpinnings of Harcourt’s position, his rationale for divorcing what he terms “political disobedience” from the horizons of radical political transformation is clear enough.⁵² At the same time, from the standpoint of a transformation-oriented, socialism-bound leftism, the romanticism of extreme autonomy and ad hoc decision making that suffuses his reflections on OWS can be said to obscure the movement’s lack of direction and the inevitability of its unraveling.

This brings me to my third, related, and perhaps most potent, critique of the movement. This critique draws inspiration from unexpected quarters, namely, Mark Bray’s anarchistic reflections on the movement’s shortcomings. Bray sets out to expose some of the liberal tendencies that bedeviled the occupiers. One of the most notable of these is the tendency of the movement’s avowed ideological and outcome neutrality to degenerate into an uncritical tolerance of any and every kind of view or ideology; this problem, Bray argues, was epiphenomenal in relation to the broader issue of what he dubs “liberal libertarianism.” To illustrate his point, he recalls an incident that took place in Toronto, where members of the local Occupy movement were deeply divided on the question of whether a group of Nazis should be allowed to “express themselves” freely within the movement.⁵³ In a word, occupiers’ respect for the liberal principle of free speech blinded many of them to the distinction between free speech and hate speech—admittedly, although the distinction holds up to critical scrutiny in this

⁵⁰ Newman, *Power*, 83.

⁵¹ Newman, *Power*, 49.

⁵² Harcourt, “Occupy’s New Grammar of Political Disobedience.”

⁵³ Mark Bray, “Five Liberal Tendencies that Plagued Occupy,” ROAR May 14, 2014, <https://roarmag.org/essays/occupy-resisting-liberal-tendencies/>.

scenario, it may be harder to defend in other instances. The sentiment implicit in this distinction is that values and ideological commitments cannot be dispensed with altogether. Of course, Bray's own criticism of the occupiers' qualms about expelling the Nazis centers on anarchism's anti-authoritarianism. Occupiers who were wedded to anarchism ought not to have shied away, in his view, from rebuffing the bearers of an ideology so overtly authoritarian in character. Addressing the limits of a position of ideological neutrality, Bray remarks: "Truly revolutionary solidarity strikes a balance between advocating for our [anarchists] anti-capitalist, anti-hierarchical politics and recognizing that these values and ideas must be freely adopted rather than mandated. Our politics must maintain an anti-authoritarian normativity if they are to avoid falling into the liberal impotence of value neutrality."⁵⁴ This prescription, however, showcases the profound antagonism at the heart of anarchist thought rather than offering a meaningful solution to it. The underlying tension pointed up here is between anarchism's radical libertarianism and a firm commitment to foisting, however subtly, this principle on everyone who has yet to adopt it. It is not clear how an ideology that is defined by anti-authoritarianism could forbear compromising on this core value, yet the alternative, the welcoming of authoritarian viewpoints into progressive spaces is no less problematic. Indeed, the facile solution offered by Bray points up the idea that anarchists should not balk at promoting a specific agenda, one that encompasses in skeletal form a vision of what society ought to look like. They should steer participants away from attitudes that affirm and valorize authority. A critical reader might pose the following question to anarchists like Bray: What if a local movement, or segments thereof, decided in a completely self-conscious manner, collectively and democratically, to erect structures of authority, if only experimentally? Would this be proscribed

⁵⁴ Bray, "Five Liberal Tendencies that Plagued Occupy."

by anarchist logic? If so, and I suspect that Bray and others would indeed condemn such a move, does this not imply that anarchism's staunch anti-authoritarianism is self-contradictory? If we had to spell out the underlying logic of anarchism, it would look something like this: "You may choose to pursue whatever avenues you like, and work together in envisioning an alternative social order, so long as you do not stray from the path of anti-authoritarianism; the perils of such a path are self-evident." But are these perils really as self-evident as anarchists would have us believe? I think not. And if they were, there is no escaping the conclusion that in promoting a mode of collective organization devoid of hierarchy, anarchists are erecting a very clear moral hierarchy. This observation bears on horizontalism as a political and an activist philosophy, as well, as noted by David Marcus. There is no question that Bray's interest in Occupy, both in terms of approval and critique, revolves around the objective of imagining a different kind of future, presumably one amenable to anarchist values.⁵⁵

Putting to one side this critical treatment of Bray's response to the issue, the possibility that too great an emphasis on autonomy, both that of the individual in relation to the group and that of the group in relation to other groups and the state, might lend itself to aimless and fetishistic liberalism within such movements is all too real. The concerns about "liberal libertarianism" outlined above are echoed in David Marcus' pointed remarks about the affinities between Occupy's horizontalism and liberal ideology: "It can be argued that horizontalism is in many ways a product of the growing disaggregation and individuation of Western society; that it is a kind of free-market leftism: a politics jury-rigged out of the very culture it hopes to resist."⁵⁶ Such trends were discernible within Occupy, for some of the participants valorized the creation

⁵⁵ Bray, *Translating Anarchy*, 268-271.

⁵⁶ Marcus, "The Horizontalists."

of “free spaces,” enticed by the possibility of experiencing real belonging and individuality. This in turn made them lose sight of the bigger picture, i.e., the need to overhaul the system, which requires bringing ever larger masses of people into the fold. As Bray aptly notes, such rarified spaces, although they may well buttress the radical imagination over the long term, run the risk of becoming self-referential and irrelevant to the lives of most working people. He remarks: “Political work that doesn’t leave space for the majority of the population can only be a niche phenomenon.”⁵⁷ Finding ways to radicalize and mobilize the bulk of ordinary people is a key aspect of building out, as Bray refers to it, collective power. Beyond a depoliticising romanticism attached to the idea of constructing free spaces, Occupy’s flirtation with liberal libertarianism manifested in the pervasiveness of the idea that all opinions are equally valuable and that “silencing” anyone is tantamount to coercion and tends to reproduce hierarchies. Such an attitude on the part of many occupiers made it difficult, for instance, to deal with individuals who regularly disrupted meetings.⁵⁸ Such an attitude, of course, reflects a failure to strike a healthy balance between the desire for autonomy and responsibility for the collective’s welfare. Some of Bray’s pointed remarks about this issue are worth reproducing in full: “That’s because for many *liberal libertarians* OWS wasn’t really about struggle and coordinated action; it was about an experience of personal growth and emotional expression. Their hazy vision of social transformation is about changing individual hearts and minds through personal interactions without any reference to engaging larger structures of power.”⁵⁹

This threefold critique of Occupy points up the chasm created within the movement by the absence of a center of gravity that only robust leadership is capable of producing. Does this

⁵⁷ Bray, *Translating Anarchy*, 258.

⁵⁸ Bray, *Translating Anarchy*, 91-94.

⁵⁹ Bray, *Translating Anarchy*, 94.

imply the desirability of reverting to the older, more established form of organization, i.e., one that is vertical in character? I believe the answer is “no.” This model of leadership, in being overly formalistic, centralized, rigid, and suffused with authority, is not amenable to genuine democratic governance and the benefits that go along with it. Such governance requires that participatory democracy be at least a major component of the organizational forms adopted by progressive social movements. Indeed, some theorists have underlined both the plausibility and desirability of hybrid structures that combine elements from different organizational forms.⁶⁰ Francesca Polletta calls attention to the benefits associated specifically with the deliberative component of participatory governance, which bolster its status vis-à-vis vertical modes of organization in addition to the benefits attributable to, say, the prefigurative aspect of such governance. One such benefit is solidarity. The decision-making process forces participants to contend with and learn to appreciate the views of others in the group; this helps cement ties of solidarity within the group and, by extension, allows individuals to develop a strong sense of collective power and possibility. Another important benefit afforded by decentralized consensus building processes is tactical innovation. By rejecting traditional notions of authority and expertise and inviting each member of the group to contribute to the deliberative process through whatever knowledge and skillsets they possess, participatory democracy enables the generation of solutions that are tailored to the exigencies of a situation. In a word, it injects innovation and experimentation into, thereby making more expeditious and flexible, the process of tactic selection. Lastly, the deliberative dimension of direct democracy makes participants more politically savvy, in terms of their ability to think through the advantages and drawbacks of

⁶⁰ Francesca Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2002), 218-225.

specific proposals, and consequently promotes the cultivation of qualities associated with leadership. Immersion in a deliberative processes along egalitarian lines, however, also implies a re-evaluation of the criteria for leadership and the construction of new ones. This in turn translates into diminished dependence on traditional forms of authority.⁶¹ This list of the benefits of participatory democracy is by no means exhaustive. Polletta's emphasis on the deliberative aspect of direct democracy is meant to combat the notion circulating among its detractors that this form of democracy predominantly resonates with "young idealists uninterested in practical political gains or instrumental effectiveness."⁶² Her careful interrogation of this idea helps us recognize that, in being eminently political, direct democracy cannot be simply counterposed to "real politics" and dismissed on these grounds, all the while showcasing, by way of contrast, the serious deficiencies that bedevil orthodox forms of organization. Although it is clear that vertical modes of organization do have their own benefits, and may even be preferable to horizontal ones in certain cases, the latter's many advantages, at least as far as effecting radical social change is concerned, ultimately tip the scale in its favour.

If it is manifest that traditional forms of leadership are woefully inadequate, and that horizontalism, though preferable to the former, also falls short in important ways, what exactly are we left with? I would like to suggest that while horizontalism should indeed continue to play a central role in leftist organizing, it must be supplemented by leadership, but of a kind that constitutes a marked departure from traditional vertical practices, which tend towards bureaucratization, centralization, and the reproduction of power-based hierarchies. These aspects of leftist leadership have, traditionally, been entwined with authority and have thus contributed

⁶¹ Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting*, 210-212.

⁶² Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting*, 203.

to the perception that authority is essentially the ability to wield power over others. But this in fact is only true for *irrational* authority. Once it is dissociated from these tendencies, authority is seen in a new light as its productive potentialities come to the fore.

IV. Other Horizontality Driven Movements

We would do well to consider other movements that embraced horizontalism and faced similar challenges to shore up the claim that these problems are endemic to the horizontal mode of organization rather than, as advocates of horizontalism might argue, being incidental to it. The movement associated with the *Indignados* in Spain is an especially good example as it shared with Occupy not only a commitment to horizontalism but also the occupation tactic, among other things. This, of course, is unsurprising as it is clear that Occupy was at least partially inspired by the mobilization in Spain.⁶³

This movement emerged in response to a full-blown economic crisis that commenced with layoffs across the country, followed by considerable retrenchments in education, social services, and healthcare. The EU, the governing party (PSOE), and the banks all had a hand in the crisis. Piqued by the perceived indifference and corruption of the politicians, thousands across the country, relying initially on fora offered by social media, took to the streets. On May 15, 2011, massive demonstrations erupted in large cities such as Madrid and Barcelona. Following these demonstrations, participants decided to converge on the central squares in both cities, and a decision was made to occupy these spaces until an understanding concerning what democracy ought to look like was reached. The ranks of the occupiers grew as many more would join in the coming days. The occupation in Madrid was the heart of the movement. Much like

⁶³ Ernesto Castaneda, "The Indignados of Spain: A Precedent to Occupy Wall Street," *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3-4 (August 2012): 309-313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.708830>.

Occupy, the movement's commitment to horizontalism manifested in the establishment of a general assembly in the occupied square, a proliferation of commissions (working groups), and the rejection of leadership: "No leaders were recognized, everybody represented just her/himself, and decisions were left in the hands of the General Assembly meeting at the end of every day, and in the commissions that were formed on every issue that people wanted to act upon."⁶⁴ The following description of the encampment in Barcelona provides a sense of its scope and dynamism:

Once the Plaza Catalunya was 'occupied', a small semi-autonomous town was born within it. People that camped in the Plaza spent the night there. During the day, different committees met and discussed specific topics regarding education, health, migration, national finances, proposals for alternative national budgets, movement fundraising and accounting, internal security and so on. Different proposals were written carefully and formally, uploaded to the Internet, printed and distributed among the occupiers, who would later be asked to debate and vote on them. Walking through the camp, one would see single and collective tents as well as booths hosting commissions, libraries and book sales.⁶⁵

As with Occupy, the movement was kickstarted by the anger of futureless college graduates but subsequently gained wider support as it attracted folks of different ages and from diverse social

⁶⁴ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 116, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=1174339#>.

⁶⁵ Castaneda, "The Indignados of Spain," 312.

backgrounds.⁶⁶ What was striking about the movement was the strong presence of those who had little prior experience with activism.⁶⁷ The *Indignados* also shared with Occupy the recognition, tinged with utopianism, that a very different kind of social and political organization is possible, as expressed in such slogans as “Another politics is possible.” Another affinity is that the occupiers in Spain, like their American counterparts, regarded prefiguration as an essential part of transformative politics and thus eschewed all forms of violence.⁶⁸ Unlike Occupy, however, which rallied under the 99 % banner and can thus said to be *primarily* economic in its orientation, the *Indignados* foregrounded the illegitimacy of representative democracy, calling for its replacement by real, that is, participatory, democracy. Moreover, in contrast to Occupy, as enthusiasm in the squares began to wane and occupiers began to disperse, the movement managed to retain its vigor through a process of decentralization whereby decision-making power was devolved to smaller assemblies in neighbourhoods across the country. The larger assemblies’ staunch adherence to horizontalism carried over to these smaller ones.⁶⁹

The affinities set out above help explain why Occupy’s failures mirror those of the *Indignados*. One recurring challenge was that of consensus building. Debates in the general assembly often dragged on for hours and there was a sense among participants that they were bogged down in mindless proceduralism. Moreover, an intransigent minority had the power to impede decision-making and hold the rest of the participants captive. In light of this problem, some of those who participated in the occupation have even opined that horizontalism must

⁶⁶ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 118

⁶⁷ Mayo Fuster Morell. “The Free Culture and 15M Movements in Spain: Composition, Social Networks and Synergies,” *Social Movement Studies*, 11, no. 3-4 (August 2012): 388, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.710323>.

⁶⁸ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope* 138-139.

⁶⁹ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 135.

strike a balance between the imperative of consensus building and considerations of time and efficiency. Another parallel that can be drawn between the two movements concerns the limitations of the assembly model of decision-making. Similar to Occupy, the assemblies of the *Indignados* naturally could not accommodate the schedules of most working people, who were thus automatically excluded from the deliberations that took place in them.

More significantly, like Occupy, the *Indignados* failed to produce a list of demands. It was even openly acknowledged that the assembly was largely ceremonial since it yielded no concrete proposals. As with Occupy, although the movement, through its offshoots, helped improve people's lives in a real material sense, no real political change was on the horizon as a result of its activities. The most meaningful change it effected was the development within the populace of a new political language and imagination.⁷⁰ Although it may be plausibly argued that such a shift in people's understanding of what is politically possible and desirable is a stepping stone to a more action-oriented political attitude, and thus that the *Indignados* may yet be vindicated, such an approach to the problems of activism and change is not without risks. In the absence of a unifying force that could sustain militancy on a large scale, the idea that the mass mobilization that took place in Spain is but a prelude to concrete transformative practice potentially lends itself to the indefinite postponement of action, the working through of ideological disagreements, and the revelling of activists in reveries wherein slowness is idealized. At times, lucid assessments of the movement are offered: "But the ways to link these feelings with action, leading to material change in people's lives and social institutions are still to be explored."⁷¹ Yet such lucidity easily gives way to a complacent faith in the virtues of

⁷⁰ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 145.

⁷¹ Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 146.

gradualism and process, as well to an overestimation of people's willingness and ability to partake in processes of change under a regime that mutilates them emotionally, psychologically and ethically.⁷²

Indeed, the entwinement of gradualism with horizontalism dates as far back as the mobilizations in Argentina that gave a name to this conception of and approach to politics. It seems that, from the start, the idea of consensus-building was not simply about making decisions collectively but also learning from one another in the process, forming new opinions, and perhaps most importantly, reclaiming a sense of community. The affective, community-building dimension of horizontalism is affirmed by Marina Sitrin: "Horizontalidad does not just imply a flat plane for organizing, or non-hierarchical relationships in which people no longer make decisions for others. It is a positive word that implies the use of direct democracy and the striving for consensus, processes in which everyone is heard and new relationships are created. Horizontalidad is a new way of relating, based in affective politics, and against all of the implications of 'isms.'"⁷³ Indeed, the concept of horizontalism encompasses, in addition to anti-authoritarianism, autogestion (autonomous, collective decision-making) as well as affective politics. The very *process* of deliberation, from a horizontalist point of view, is an important ingredient of the renaissance of affective and communal life. Beyond the complacency that might result from gradualism—which might manifest in the refusal to think about concrete programs and actions—the fascination with community life and direct democracy in general might be instrumental in lending decision-making at the local level the appearance of the most profound expression of radicalism and politics; this could in turn undercut the prospect of coordinating

⁷² Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 146-147.

⁷³ Sitrin, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), vi.

mass mobilizations with more ambitious goals. The *Indignados* are a case in point. The movement in Spain, following the fragmentation of the large assemblies at the plazas into smaller ones in neighborhoods across the country, increasingly became more local in orientation. As one participant has pointed out: “One of the typical criticisms made of the neighborhood assemblies is that they are focusing too much on the local scene. They are very neighborhood-centered, and lose a global perspective. I think both things are necessary. It’s great to have people doing things at a local level, recovering the relationships in the neighborhood, but it’s necessary not to lose the global view of what we have in common.”⁷⁴

V. Authority and the Great Refusal

Marcuse’s concept of the Great Refusal, some argue, has its limitations in terms of conceptualizing the kind of active resistance that must take root if capitalism is to be overhauled. Alex Khasnabish, for instance, contends that the refusal of domination must be followed and supplemented by prefigurative work—exemplified by the insurrections adumbrated above—accentuating the affective component of such work and its centrality to a “radical imagination”; the radical imagination, in his view, is one of the prerequisites of sweeping social change.⁷⁵ In dissociating the Great Refusal from the radical imagination, on the grounds that only a prefigurative politics is capable of producing an alternative vision of society, this treatment of the concept obscures the fact that every genuine refusal, as we shall see shortly, is undergirded by an inkling of what society should, ideally, look like. Khasnabish goes on to suggest that Marcuse’s sketch of a “new sensibility” in *An Essay on Liberation* has affinities with the concept

⁷⁴ Sitrin and Azzellini, *They Can’t Represent Us!*, 143-144.

⁷⁵ Alex Khasnabish, “The Radical Imagination Beyond Refusal,” in *One-Dimensional Man 50 Years On: The Struggle Continues*, ed. Terry Maley (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2017), 109-116.

of the radical imagination.⁷⁶ In chapter 3, I will discuss Marcuse's concept of the new sensibility in some detail, arguing that the Great Refusal has to be understood in the context of Marcuse's call for a new morality and sensibility. I wonder, at any rate, whether the concept of the radical imagination fully captures what social movements must look like today to be able to effect genuine transformation. A prefigurative politics certainly seems to aid in the formation and enshrinement of a radical consciousness by holding up the possibility of a different society and empowering people to construct it, but such affect-laden, community-generating work tends, as we have seen, towards isolationism. In the context of Occupy, such isolationism manifested in the tendency among participants to think of the occupied space as a private utopia or refuge. In the case of the *Indignados*, such isolationism took the form of a retreat to local community-building efforts.

Douglas Kellner's bifurcated view of the relationship between supporters of horizontalism and advocates of hierarchy and authority perhaps allows for a more pointed evaluation of the problematic of horizontalism. On the one hand, this view alerts us to the polarizing tendencies of the debate that rages within the left about whether horizontalism, as an overarching strategic approach to organizing among progressive social movements, is desirable or the best one. It emphasizes too that horizontalism's common sense status on the left is open to contestation. On the other hand, this manner of addressing the issue obfuscates the need for a more nuanced approach to the leadership vs. horizontalism debate, and in particular for the need to re-conceptualize leadership.⁷⁷ Slavoj Žižek's contribution to this debate, unabashedly

⁷⁶ Khasnabish, "The Radical Imagination Beyond Refusal," 113.

⁷⁷ Douglas Kellner, "Insurrection 2011: Great Refusals from the Arab Uprisings through Occupy Everywhere," in *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*, ed. Andrew T Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter N. Funke (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), 219-220.

representing the leadership pole, serves as a corrective to the habitual and at times uncritical celebration of horizontalism on the left. In positing centralization as the only alternative to participatory democracy, however, his approach too lacks finesse. Though he rightly emphasizes the need for strong and decisive decision-making and action in certain circumstances, a need which can all too easily be obscured by the “theology of consensus,” his position downplays the perils of centralization, which, in addition to being amenable to the concentration of power, which might lead to its abuse, may stifle the creative, eros-based impulses of individuals that play a central role in envisioning a different society.⁷⁸ It is manifest that the radical imagination will more readily take root against a backdrop of participatory democracy than that of sclerotic hierarchy. The conundrum that the left must contend with, then, is how the flowering of a new social and political sensibility can be promoted in tandem with the establishment of robust authority, which can aid in enshrining it whenever it arises and directing it outward, toward ever greater parts of the population. The question of strategy Kellner poses with respect to the recent upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia is of interest to the left at large: “Their challenge is also to generate political leaders and groups who nurture democratic institutions and social relations without developing oppressive modes of power and reverting to old modes of authoritarian governance. It is clear that the left is in dire need of a model of resistance that melds horizontalism with authority. Less clear, however, is what this means exactly both theoretically and in practical terms.”⁷⁹

I do not agree with Kellner’s characterization of Occupy as a Great Refusal. For one

⁷⁸ Slavoj Žižek, “Occupy Wall Street: What Is to Be Done next?” *The Guardian*, April 24, 2012, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/apr/24/occupy-wall-street-what-is-to-be-done-next.

⁷⁹ Kellner, “Insurrection 2011,” 219.

thing, the movement was not nearly cohesive enough to merit this designation. The starkness of the movement's ideological fault lines is evidenced by its eventual split into an unyieldingly radical element intent on depriving the state of legitimacy, on the one hand, and a coalition of reformists who insisted, no less adamantly, that engaging with the state is crucial for effecting social change on the other. The ideological bifurcation that precipitated this split is compellingly articulated by Gould-Wartovsky: "The split left two rival factions in its wake, known as the 'Ninjas' and the 'Recidivists.' The Ninjas were avowedly anarchist and anti-capitalist, opposed to the making of demands, and oriented toward the reoccupation of urban space. The Recidivists touted a more pragmatist, populist politics, centered on coalition-building and community organizing for political and economic reform. The factions would go on to form opposing poles within the 99 Percent movement, competing for organizational resources, ideological hegemony, and the loyalty of the people in the middle."⁸⁰ For a movement to measure up to Marcuse's vision of the Great Refusal, its call for a new social order has to be unequivocal and contain a concrete transformative vision.

On this score, it is worth asking, how can an anti-authoritarian stance be reconciled with, say, a neo-Marxist socialist vision? This question bears on the problem of prefiguration. If, as anarchists maintain, progressive social movements must embody in their practices the characteristics of the society they seek to usher in, anarchist activists ought to be intransigent with respect to the need to root out hierarchical practices from said movements. How can such a stance be squared with socialist perspectives that make room for hierarchies in their transformative vision, and may thus, well in keeping with the idea of prefiguration, regard the incorporation of hierarchies into social movements as a necessity? While it is certainly true that

⁸⁰ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, 166.

many differences may be overcome during the process of consensus building, it is doubtful that such fundamental theoretical differences as these can be reconciled. Someone like Bray would be receptive to compromise on many issues, but it is manifest that his commitment to anti-authoritarianism is not one of them, given the fact that anti-authoritarianism is a pillar of anarchist thought. To be sure, Graeber himself is not oblivious to this quandary:

But this also means one cannot rule definitively on such matters because at the moment there is no absolute consensus within the movement about what the strategic horizon ultimately is. We have on board everyone from liberals interested in driving the Democratic Party to the left so as to return to something more like New Deal-style capitalism, to anarchists who ultimately wish to dismantle the state and capitalism entirely. *The very fact that they have been able to work so well together at all has been a minor miracle.* At some point, difficult decisions will have to be made (emphasis mine).⁸¹

Unfortunately, this is the extent of Graeber's engagement with the issue; he shies away from thinking through the implications of this and proffering potential solutions. We will return to Marcuse's concept of the Great Refusal in chapter 3, arguing that it complements a transition-oriented understanding of socialism. The significance of the concept in this connection will be unpacked via a consideration of its relationship to Fromm's thought as I link it to the problematics of authority and leadership.

⁸¹ Graeber, *Democracy*, 259.

VI. Socialist Strategy and the Question of Leadership

The question of whether Occupy's tactics should be valorized is entwined with the problem of strategy. With respect to strategy, two questions are of special relevance: 1) Can Occupy be judged to have been successful in relation to the criteria set out by its organizers and exponents? It is clear, given the anarchist underpinnings of many of these thinkers' ideas about social transformation, that answering this question necessitates reflection on whether Occupy and its offshoots successfully implemented anarchist strategy; 2) A second, related question concerns anarchism itself. Is anarchism feasible and desirable, from the vantage point both of strategy and the envisioned terminus of social transformation?

Although I have offered preliminary thoughts on this score above, it might be helpful to lay out key aspects of Occupy's proponents' vision for social change, however tenuous it might have been. The spread of the logic of direct democracy was in turn meant to facilitate the emergence of a new political common sense and,⁸² more concretely in terms of strategy, precipitate the establishment of a network of small-scale, community-based assemblies that would presumably foster the development of a strong collective consciousness locally and subsequently pursue more ambitious agendas in concert, taking over ever greater parts of the city and slowly destabilizing the authority of reigning political and economic institutions. The ultimate goal was to be rid of capitalism and to establish alternative institutions capable of competing with and eventually supplanting the state. Graeber outlines four potential strategies that might have been pursued as a way of effecting this transformation had Occupy retained its vigor or the exiled occupiers somehow managed to re-establish a foothold in the spaces that had

⁸² Graeber, *Democracy*, 275-282.

been occupied.⁸³ Each of these strategies provides an answer to the question posed by Graeber at the end of this terse description of Occupy's immediate goals: "In either case the ultimate aim would be to create local assemblies in every town and neighborhood, as well as networks of occupied dwellings, occupied workplaces, and occupied farms that can become the foundations of an alternative economic and political system. How then could that network of liberated spaces and alternative institutions relate to the existing legal and political system?"⁸⁴ Each strategy in fact amounts to a variation, with due consideration for the limitations and possibilities endemic to specific contexts, on dual power, an approach to social transformation originally proposed by Marxists against the backdrop of the Russian revolution. The strategy of dual power consists in establishing alternative institutions that offer a host of social services currently furnished by the state and an infrastructure with the aim of curbing dependence on and interaction with the state and in the process creating an anti-capitalist, anti-state core of supporters within the populace. For the sake of simplicity, the final aim of dual power can be formulated thus: two loci of power cannot coexist, as one will at some point be dwarfed, and ultimately eliminated, by the other.⁸⁵ Ultimately, once this becomes feasible, the goal is to confront the state head on and wrest power from it. Drawing on noted anarchist Murray Bookchin's transformative vision, grounded in a theory of libertarian municipalism, a blueprint for pursuing such a strategy in U.S. cities is offered in the award-winning essay *Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual*

⁸³ Graeber, *Democracy*, 262-268.

⁸⁴ Graeber, *Democracy*, 261.

⁸⁵ David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), 165, https://ocul-yor.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_YOR/1jocqcq/alma991023732959705164.

Power and Beyond.⁸⁶

I have already discussed some of Occupy's notable shortcomings. Some developments in the movement may be considered weaknesses on the basis of the criteria embedded in Graeber's dual power strategy. For starters, Occupy failed to carve out spaces wherein sections of the populace could practice direct democracy, or, as Graeber might put it, a variegated network of occupied spaces, with each in possession of its own assembly, which is to exert pressure on the state and its legitimacy through the provision of services it is currently responsible for furnishing. The most radical, successful and enduring example of dual power seems to be the Zapatistas, who eventually managed to effect complete rupture with the state through their oppositional practices.⁸⁷ At the other end of the spectrum is the case of Argentina, which, through an upsurge of popular resistance, saw the occupation of factories and establishment of local assemblies. These radical tactics were employed in tandem with the renunciation of representative institutions and politicians, who were seen as corrupt and greedy. While the Zapatistas, prior to completely breaking with it, initially engaged the state, Argentines' distrust of politicians was so intense that they refused to do so; the people's disapprobation was so palpable that politicians would be greeted with contempt when spotted on the streets. This wave of resistance in the face of intensifying austerity, beyond showcasing the potentialities inherent in radical democratic practices, managed to secure meaningful concessions from the government once it reasserted control. These concessions included the decision to default on Argentina's debt, which ended up benefitting many of the world's poor and allowing Argentina's economy to

⁸⁶ John Michael Colón et al., *Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual Power and Beyond* (The Next System Project, 2017), <https://thenextsystem.org/announcing-the-winners-in-our-essay-competition>.

⁸⁷ Graeber, *Democracy*, 263-264.

recuperate. Yet this suggests that the occupations and takeovers themselves were short-lived, for whatever concessions the government was forced to make it did against the backdrop of the dissolution of these radical experiments, although some self-governing institutions, as Graeber notes, did survive. As far as Graeber is concerned, the strategy pursued by Occupy mimics the one employed in Argentina in that it sought to delegitimize the state and drive a wedge between it and the elites that rule it, on the one hand, and the rest of the population on the other.⁸⁸ With no immediate effect on the state, Occupy's most material accomplishments may be found in the grassroots activities of some of its notable offshoots. Although there are certainly indications that it effected a shift in the political common sense, such an accomplishment is a far cry from the tangible strategic victories and advancements required by the dual power approach. As such, its very real triumphs notwithstanding, it is fair to conclude, from an anarchist standpoint, that Occupy was by and large a failure. The answer to the first question posed above, then, is a qualified "no." As the authors of the aforementioned essay point out, "Yet the utopian spirit that swept the globe in 2011 hasn't yielded comprehensive alternatives to the present political and economic system. Occupy and the movements it inspired have failed to answer the question of what that other world—the "Next System"—should look like and how we can possibly get there."⁸⁹ One might wonder, though, whether Occupy's failures were contingent, that is, a consequence of unfavorable circumstances in conjunction with a maladroit use of the tactical repertoire at its disposal, or are rather indicative of the inadequacy of this repertoire. Since much of this repertoire, including the principles of leaderlessness and participatory democracy, is rooted in anarchism, this implies that the underlying problem is anarchism itself, or at least key

⁸⁸ Graeber, *Democracy*, 267-268.

⁸⁹ Colón et al., *Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual Power and Beyond*, 2.

aspects of it. If this is in fact the case, Occupy was doomed from the start.

What, then, would a non-anarchist approach to social transformation that preserves the desirable aspects of horizontalism look like? The logical leftist alternative to examine is a socialist approach which, while embracing and foregrounding the potentialities immanent in participatory democracy, does not unequivocally eject hierarchies from its strategic repertoire and generally treats class as a privileged site of revolutionary struggle. Like their anarchist detractors, many Marxists in fact recognize the value of and subscribe to the dual power model of revolt. Though Marxist attitudes to the state constitute a spectrum, with positions ranging from advocacy for engagement with electoral politics to insistence that engagement with the state must be minimal on the ground that, given its entanglement with elites' interests and economic imperatives, electoral politics can at most contribute to the forging of an oppositional consciousness within the populace. The respective positions advanced in a recent exchange between Charlie Post and Eric Blanc on the pages of *Jacobin* exemplify these two ends of the spectrum, with the former representing the worker-focused model of social transformation and the latter adopting a democratic socialist attitude.⁹⁰ To obviate confusion, it should be noted that democratic socialism is different from social democracy, the latter being wedded to the prospect of attaining progressive change within capitalism and using parliamentary means. The democratic socialist stance is at odds with dual power since it sees as indispensable to the building up of socialist power through the creation of a socialist party alongside the gradual

⁹⁰ Eric Blanc and Charlie Post, "Which Way to Socialism? A Conversation with Eric Blanc and Charlie Post," *Jacobin*, July 21, 2019, jacobinmag.com/2019/07/socialism-revolution-electoral-politics-mass-action.

empowerment of workers and the promotion of class consciousness through mass movements.⁹¹

The Marxist socialist stance that is most closely aligned with anarchism is that represented by Post's side of the debate. Hostile to the state, it espouses participatory democracy, as embodied in, say, popular assemblies, but stresses that building up working class militancy is the most effective way of generating a network of broad-based alliances capable of posing a real threat to the status quo. The result of patient organizing, such a network of alliances is poised to capitalize on capital's weakening in moments of crisis.⁹²

Here one encounters opposition to top-down politics, including bureaucratization and centralization, as manifested in parties, unions, etc. While retaining the focus on class, this strain of socialism, unyielding in its commitment to radical democratic practices, emphasizes grassroots activism and militancy as a means of fostering class consciousness. In relation to unions, for instance, it promotes the participation in contract negotiations of all workers and argues for the paramountcy of collective decision making. It is concomitantly critical of traditional, top-down models of union organization. It also prefers mass strikes to general strikes because the former consist in a spontaneous expression of revolt from below that is resistant to orderliness and the command of union bosses. Following Rosa Luxemburg, David McNally sets out the main features that distinguish mass strikes from general strikes:

First, Luxemburg chooses the term mass strike to distinguish it from the often-ritualized general strike, typically bureaucratically stage-managed by labor officials for a

⁹¹ Neal Meyer, "What is Democratic Socialism?," *Jacobin*, July 20, 2018, <https://jacobin.com/2018/07/democratic-socialism-bernie-sanders-social-democracy-alexandria-ocasio-cortez>.

⁹² Blanc and Post, "Which Way to Socialism?"

single day. Such general strikes have none of the energy, spontaneity, and combativity of mass strikes that begin from below in walkouts by angry workers and then cascade into a wave of strikes and demonstrations. This dynamic of self-activity from below—in contrast to bureaucratic control from above—is the second key characteristic of the mass strike for Luxemburg. Finally, the mass strike is not a single event. Instead, it is a multidimensional social process embracing strikes, demonstrations, street battles, ‘riots,’ sit-ins, and the building of assembly-style popular organizations in workplaces and communities.⁹³

Although it is much more receptive to leadership as an instrument of social transformation than anarchism, this variety of socialism is adamant about the centrality of *organic leadership* in particular to the promotion of militancy in the workplace.⁹⁴ In other words, it foregrounds the potentialities of leadership from below, which emerges from the workers’ ranks and is forged in the crucible of class struggle, has a singular understanding of workers’ capacities and needs, and is therefore key for consolidating workers’ power. This kind of leadership is juxtaposed with the limited potential of formal or institutional leaders, who are beholden to the union bureaucracy and are much more concerned with securing their place in the hierarchy than advancing the interests of the membership. The strength of this approach lies in its prioritizing of the struggles of ordinary folks and a concomitant wariness of the utopian reveries that animate much contemporary anarchist thought owing to their detachment from the realities confronting regular

⁹³ David McNally, “The Return of the Mass Strike: Teachers, Students, Feminists, and the New Wave of Popular Upheavals,” *Spectre* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 3, <https://spectrejournal.com/the-return-of-the-mass-strike/>.

⁹⁴ Kim Moody, “Reversing the ‘Model’: Thoughts on Jane McAlevey’s Plan for Union Power,” *Spectre* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2020), <https://spectrejournal.com/reversing-the-model/>.

people. Although it acknowledges the salience of utopian thinking for the construction of an oppositional consciousness, it stresses that only concrete utopias are conducive to this task.

David McNally's reflections on the complexity of the issue are apropos:

It can become tempting for left-wing currents in the Global North, which often lack any real roots in working-class communities and organizations, to attempt to create spaces (from co-ops to communes) consisting of handfuls of people who imagine that they operate on a higher moral plane than the wider society. These efforts are typically characterized by the substitution of lifestyle choices for real mass organizing. At the same time, much of what passes for mass politics on the contemporary left is often found to be singularly lacking in the utopian impulse.⁹⁵

It would certainly recognize Occupy as a valuable exercise in disobedience that, given its adversarial relationship to the status quo, is likely to bear fruit, yet would be unwilling to accept the claim that such a movement and any of its immediate offshoots could serve as substitutes for the arduous task of radicalizing the working class, bit by bit, year by year. Notable representatives of this variant of contemporary socialism, which may be termed "socialism from below," are David McNally and Kim Moody. Despite their embrace of radical democracy and wariness of top-down models of leadership, its leading lights are receptive to the possibility that a revamped party model might have a role to play in dismantling capitalism. And leadership too,

⁹⁵ David McNally, "Utopia," in *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late Capitalist Struggle*, ed. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor and AK Thompson (Chico: AK Press, 2016), 173, <http://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1232608&site=ehost-live>.

as I have already noted, is never entirely off the table for this current. Yet the potential of leadership is certainly undertheorized by it.

McNally sets out the main principles of socialism from below in *Another World is Possible*. In keeping with the views outlined above, McNally is wary of electoral strategies for transformation, pointing out that socialist leaders who seek to usher in sweeping social changes through the party system as a rule end up submitting to the imperatives of capital. The two apparent exceptions at the time this book was written, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Bolivia's Evo Morales, were prevented from bowing down to the ruling class because of strong pressure from the social movements that helped get them elected. Identifying radical democracy as the bedrock of socialism from below—which he differentiates from top-down socialist models—he points up three core features: direct action, participatory democracy, and mass mobilization. The first two features coincide with the central tenets of contemporary variants of left-wing anarchism, which I have already discussed in some detail. McNally situates his version of socialism from below squarely within the dual power tradition. The import of these various facets of radicalism is linked by McNally to the Marxist motif of self-transformation. Active, democratically-driven participation in mass struggles of various stripes is what enables workers to develop a sense of their own capacities, ability to transform the world, and the superfluity of employers in the spheres of production and distribution. When all three elements are present in a social movement, argues McNally, we can be certain that what anarchists call prefiguration is underway. In his singular vision of transformation, socialists are to employ strategies that combine labour activism, community organizing, and all manner of mobilization in the streets.

Mass strikes are regarded as crucial nodes in the interplay of these multiple sites of struggle.⁹⁶ Effective resistance requires political organization, which consists in coordination, networking, the construction of common fronts, and the creation of spaces for education as well as organizations embodying radical democratic principles and ambitions. Depending on the context, this *might* entail the creation of parties and movements.⁹⁷ Parties, indeed, are as far as any of the authors discussed here are willing to go in their embrace of leadership. To be sure, McNally and like-minded Marxist thinkers assume that a stratum of leaders will be formed through multifarious, democratically driven anti-capitalist struggles. But the horizontalist moorings of this brand of socialism seem to militate against the development of a *problematic* of leadership within the literature. The stakes of such a problematic are described pointedly by Kellner apropos the Arab Spring: “The question thus emerges from the Egyptian and Tunisian insurrections whether movements and masses without charismatic leaders and progressive parties can construct a genuinely democratic society, without producing oppressive institutions and violence. Their challenge is also to generate political leaders and groups who nurture democratic institutions and social relations without developing oppressive modes of power and reverting to old modes of authoritarian governance.”⁹⁸ Such a problematic would entail reflection on the type of leadership that is most amenable to horizontalist principles, how such leadership might facilitate the enshrinement of radical democratic practices among workers, and what checks are needed to ensure that it does not lend itself to the reproduction of oppressive hierarchies. In the context of Occupy, some anarchist thinkers came to speak of “leaderfulness,” which implies that

⁹⁶ David McNally, *Another World is Possible: Globalization & Anti-Capitalism*, 2nd ed. (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2006), 344-378

⁹⁷ McNally, *Another World*, 344-391.

⁹⁸ Kellner, “Insurrection 2011,” 219.

there was a tacit acceptance among them of the need for a modicum of direction and guidance. Yet this concept remains—deliberately, I surmise—nebulous. Fearful of departing from the left’s new horizontalist common sense, contemporary Marxism is only slightly more forthcoming in its acknowledgement of the necessity of robust leadership.

Venturing outside the realm of radical democratic revolutionary strategy, one finds currents of the contemporary left that are much more receptive to non-horizontal forms of organization.⁹⁹ Yet here too discussions of leadership are few and far between. Indeed, the absence of robust and systematic theories of leftist leadership seems to bedevil the non-anarchist left at large rather than being unique to the contemporary iteration of Marxism outlined above. Nevertheless, it might be fruitful to briefly consider some of the ideas around the problem of leadership that have either been resurrected or enjoyed currency on the left for the very first time in recent years. It was the renowned philosopher-cum-iconoclast Ernesto Laclau who took the initiative in challenging the contemporary left’s stance on the twin phenomena of populism and charismatic leadership.¹⁰⁰ Laclau was the first prominent left-leaning political theorist in this century to attempt to vindicate populism as a leftist strategy. His seminal work *On Populist Reason* has sent ripples through the contemporary left. The publication of this text compelled the left to rethink the meaning of populism, which up until that point (especially in Europe) had largely been associated with right-wing demagoguery and ethnocentrism.¹⁰¹ Most important, leadership is a significant, indeed indispensable, element in Laclau’s theory of populism.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See, for example, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London: Verso, 2015), 155-174.

¹⁰⁰ The question of charismatic leadership and its relationship to ethical authority will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

¹⁰¹ John B. Judis, “Rethinking Populism,” *Dissent*, fall 2016, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/rethinking-populism-laclau-mouffe-podemos>.

¹⁰² See, for example, Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

Chantal Mouffe would later elaborate on the centrality of leadership to the model of populism developed by her and Laclau, but more on this below. The normalization of populism on the left in Europe in recent years is evidenced by the deployment of a populist logic by Spain's Podemos, which has made significant strides in the country's political arena since its establishment. At least initially, the party's founders coalesced on the importance of charismatic leadership for securing electoral victories as they have become disillusioned with the political prospects of horizontalism. Noteworthy in this regard is that Podemos is an outgrowth of the populist *Indignados* movement; the party leaders self-consciously broke with the movement's horizontalism in an effort to transpose its momentum to parliamentary politics.¹⁰³ At any rate, Laclau's theory of populism, by their own admission, played no small part in Podemos' leaders' embrace of populism. Undoubtedly, his work held considerable sway over the thinking of other prominent European leaders as well: "Mouffe and Laclau's influence is not limited to Spain. Yanis Varoufakis, the former finance minister of the Greek left-wing party, Syriza, who is now leading a movement to reform the European Union, got his doctorate at Essex. Rena Dourou, the governor of Athens, and Foteini Vaki, a member of parliament, studied directly under Laclau there. Before his death in 2014, Laclau was also a trusted advisor to presidents Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of Argentina, both of whom came from the Peronist party."¹⁰⁴

As I have already noted, Žižek is another prominent thinker of the contemporary left who is adamant that leftists should not shy away from relying on centralized, party-driven

¹⁰³ Lluís de Nadal, "On Populism and Social Movements: From the Indignados to Podemos," *Social Movement Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 2021): 38-42, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1080/14742837.2020.1722626>.

¹⁰⁴ Judis, "Rethinking Populism."

politics. His neo-Jacobin musings, however, generally do not extend beyond recognition of the need for unity, discipline, and a revolutionary vanguard willing to take power.¹⁰⁵ Taking her cue from him, Jodi Dean is another prominent leftist intellectual who sees the party as a strategic necessity; she sees in it, among other things, the locus of the affect that nourishes the revolutionary sensibility and provides its members with a sense of purpose and unity. She writes: “So instead of considering the communist party in terms of ideology, program, leadership, or organizational structure, I approach it in terms of the dynamics of feeling it generates and mobilizes. More than an instrument for political power, the communist party provides an affective infrastructure that enlarges the world.”¹⁰⁶ She certainly also recognizes the need for leadership more generally, but her considerations of leadership are intended to complement her theory of the party.¹⁰⁷ An apology for and a call for renewed interest in the party, rather than leadership, remains her chief theoretical concern. Both Žižek and Dean explicitly espouse communism, and, unlike the strain of socialism discussed above, both are critical of horizontalism because they think it undermines or even precludes *programmatic* approaches to social transformation. I have already demonstrated how debilitating Occupy’s lack of organization and direction were over the long run. While not calling for the establishment of any particular organizational form, Peter Hallward was also among the prominent leftist intellectuals who called attention to the necessity of greater coordination and concerted action among occupiers in his op-ed piece on Occupy.¹⁰⁸ At any rate, like Dean, Mouffe recognizes the

¹⁰⁵ For an explicit statement of Žižek’s embrace of vanguardism, see, for example, Slavoj Žižek, “Shoplifters of the World Unite,” *London Review of Books*, August 25, 2011, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v33/n16/slavoj-zizek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite>.

¹⁰⁶ Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (London: Verso, 2016), 210.

¹⁰⁷ Dean, *Crowds and Party*, 183-185.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Hallward, “Occupy has the Power to Effect Change,” *The Guardian*, November 22, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/22/occupy-movement-change>.

significance of affect in forging a sense of unity among and empowering militants. Yet she takes things a step further by acknowledging the centrality of leadership to populist politics and embracing the political potential of the charismatic leftist leader:

The role of the leader in the populist strategy has always been a subject of criticism and it is the reason why those movements are often accused of being authoritarian. Many people find charismatic leadership very dangerous and no doubt it can have negative effects. But independently of the fact that it is very difficult to find examples of important political movements without prominent leaders, there is no reason to equate strong leadership with authoritarianism. Everything depends on the kind of relation that is established between the leader and the people. In the case of right-wing populism, it is a very authoritarian relation where everything comes from the top without real grassroots participation.¹⁰⁹

The distinction proposed here between strong leadership and authoritarian forms of leadership is crucial for articulating the defining characteristics of veritable leftist leadership and differentiating it from its right-wing and far right counterpart. It should be noted, however, that Mouffe's approach to progressive change does away with attempting to overthrow the state and extant institutions in favor of radicalizing them through the rhetorical invocation of the democratic spirit and principles that undergird them. In point of fact, she explicitly positions herself against traditional revolutionary socialisms.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Mouffe's engagement with the

¹⁰⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018), 70.

¹¹⁰ Mouffe, *Populism*, 39-57.

problematic of left leadership is too dependent on a discursive model of politics, and also too brief, to allow her to theorize other key aspects of leadership of the left, such as its rational character,¹¹¹ proximity to, if not embodiment of, virtue, as well as its prefigurative quality.

Its prefigurative quality can be subdivided into two components. First, the ethical leader's virtuous disposition anticipates that of the character type that will come to predominate in a socialist society. Morality is an aspect of the society of the future that remains undertheorized on the left, most likely owing to the assumption that its imperatives will fade away following the transition to a non-alienated, peaceable mode of existence. The other-regarding phenomena that fall under the rubric of ethics, which include concern with values such as responsibility, may well be organically integrated into the character type that will come to predominate in a society that has done away with excessive repression and capitalism instead of representing distinct philosophical and scholastic concerns. Even so, a characterologically-grounded discussion of virtue may permit us a glimpse into the emotional and interpersonal lives of the denizens of the socialist societies of the future and how ethical left leadership will help usher in a new type of individual. Second, and relatedly, the kind of authority she exercises anticipates the hierarchical form that will structure a future socialism, i.e., one rooted in rationality and serving as the foundation for the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of so-called social virtues. Indeed, even anarchists seem to concede, at least implicitly, that authority in certain spheres of the decentralized communities it envisages will persist. As Richard De George perspicaciously observes, though there is some confusion on this score among anarchists themselves, in principle, their point of view and intellectual attitude commits them to anti-authoritarianism, or the rejection of austere and abusive authority—as well as perhaps an attitude of scepticism

¹¹¹ The meaning of “rational” in this context will be elaborated upon in the following chapters.

towards authority in general—rather than a rejection of authority as such.¹¹² If the family (in its nuclear form or any other, for that matter) remains an important aspect of society following the dissolution of the state, and it is not unreasonable to assume that it will, for instance, it is apparent that at least a modicum of authority will continue to figure in child rearing practices. More importantly, it is only natural that a morality oriented towards the welfare of the community will have to be buttressed, perhaps among other things, by robust education. This accounts for the emphasis on education, especially moral education, in the anarchist literature. A society founded on anarchist principles will supposedly rely on educators for inculcating the values of solidarity and mutuality. As Judith Suissa points out, on a charitable reading of the work of some of the most notable proponents of anarchism, they are not oblivious to the persistent influence of a competitive and aggressive impulses in us and therefore of the need to continuously reinforce the social ones through a robust system of moral education. The following excerpt from her book on the anarchist tradition's relationship to education is especially illuminating in this regard:

I suspect, too, that most anarchist thinkers were aware of the fact, mentioned in the preceding chapter, that the problem of how to maintain a stateless, decentralized community without resorting to a certain degree of public censure, remains one of anarchism's chief theoretical stumbling blocks. The central role played by educational programmes in so much of the anarchist literature seems to be, amongst other things, an implicit acknowledgement of the need to surmount this problem, although it also, of

¹¹² Richard T. De George, "Anarchism and Authority," *Nomos* 19 (1978): 98, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24219040>.

course, results from the anarchists' contextualist perspective on human nature, as discussed in Chapter 2. And of course, as Goodwin and Taylor note, ideals such as the social anarchists' ideal of a society based on the principles of self-government and participatory democracy, in which there were very few rules for adults, often rested on the assumption of there being 'massive moral education of children.'¹¹³

The suggestion that socialist society will valorize some forms of authority would at least be greeted with suspicion by some anarchists and thus necessitates a reassessment, or at least a clarification, of some of anarchism's key assumptions regarding authority. Although it may take different forms and serve different functions at different times and under different circumstances, the key attributes of ethical leftist leadership, as I demonstrate in chapters 4 and 5, are more or less invariable.

Probing the distinctiveness of ethical left leadership will make it easier to dissociate it from authoritarian forms of leadership, readily identifiable and, hopefully, more acceptable among leftist intellectuals, activists, and the larger population. Simply assuming that leadership will spring up during struggles for radical democracy in, say, the workplace, as the champions of socialism from below tend to do will therefore not do. In light of the horizontalist attitudes of many leftist activist and scholars today, the reconcilability of radicalism with leadership must be demonstrated and defended. All of this implies the elimination of the taboo status of questions of leadership. Delineating left leadership should include an analysis of both the personal qualities of leftist leaders and the nature of their relationship with followers, not least because this can shed

¹¹³ Judith Suissa, *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2016), 73, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780203965627>.

light on why, despite ostensible tensions, ethical leftist leadership is not at odds with horizontalism. This task constitutes the horizon of the present work and will be taken up in due course. The recent political feats of two prominent leftist populists, Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders, have generated enthusiasm and contributed to a renewed sense of possibility among progressives and forced the question of leadership back onto the left's agenda. Renewed enthusiasm about the potentialities of leadership, however, must not lead to a blinkered preoccupation with the potential of leftist leadership exclusively within electoral politics. In a word, it is imperative that the question of left leadership not be subsumed under the problematic of populism. Leader-centric, politically oriented populism is to be thought of as a species of left leadership rather than be identified with it. Leadership, as I conceptualize it here, transcends organizational frameworks.

Chapter 2: The Theoretical Foundations and Justifications of Horizontalism: A Critique

Chapter 1 outlined some of the practical shortcomings of the horizontalist approach to radical politics through an analysis of the obstacles encountered by several recent progressive social movements in their attempt to implement it. This chapter extends my critique of horizontalism by engaging with its theoretical foundations. Specifically, this chapter engages two major theoretical currents that have informed the practice and embrace of horizontalism on the contemporary radical left: radical democratic theory and poststructuralism. By way of a preliminary critical response, it also examines a strain of “post-poststructuralism” that offers potentially interesting insights into the problematic of authority. Rather than providing an exhaustive account of poststructuralist and radical democratic theory and how they respectively inform the practice of horizontalism, I discuss the work of one major figure from each school of thought, with a focus on the way their understanding of power leads them to embrace horizontalism, at least implicitly.¹¹⁴ More specifically, I examine how the ideas of each of the thinkers in question leads them to adopt either a rather uncritical attitude towards authority and to obfuscate the difference between rational and irrational authority—a difference that, if preserved and thematized, illuminates the possibility and desirability not only of legitimate and justified authority but indeed of *ethical* authority—or, in the case of post-poststructuralism, a more nuanced treatment of the problematic of authority that points to an alternative framing of the relationship between power and authority, but nonetheless ultimately falls short of articulating a notion of authority that might constitute a radical break with radical democratic and

¹¹⁴ The impact of poststructuralist thought, and Foucault’s ideas in particular, on political and activist practices on the left are explored in some detail by Richard Day. See Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs4xw>.

poststructuralist understandings of power.

Such a move is indispensable because once thematized, ethical authority gestures toward the possibility and desirability of ethical *leadership*, and the relevance of ethical leadership to the question of which normative principles—as expressed in organizational assumptions, for instance—should guide transformative social movements today cannot be stressed enough, as demonstrated in chapter 1. It is important to bear mind as I move through this critical discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of horizontalism that my aim is to challenge those aspects of horizontalism that are inconsistent with other, what I take to be more central, components of it. Specifically, as argued in chapter 1, at stake is the preservation and buttressing of horizontalism’s commitment to direct/participatory democracy and prefigurative politics, which, I contend, should not be uncritically equated with or taken to presuppose the absence of hierarchies, authority, or leadership. A certain kind of authority and leadership may well be serviceable, at least in certain situations, to practices of participatory democracy and a prefigurative politics, as it can help check the insidious proliferation of informal hierarchies and help build up psychological productiveness among activists on the left and beyond.¹¹⁵ As will be discussed in some detail in chapters 3 and 5, ethical authority has a potentially important prefigurative function, which has to do with its capacity to generate a transformative vision and anticipation of a distinctively socialist form of authority. In short, among other things, this type of leadership can attend to the substantive dimension of participatory democracy and transformative politics, protecting them from the perils of informal hierarchies and saving them from lapses into mere performativity and crude proceduralism. With regards to the radical

¹¹⁵ The meaning of productiveness will be clarified in subsequent chapters. Suffice it to note for now that it has to do with psychological maturity.

democratic camp, the ideas of Sheldon Wolin will be foregrounded.¹¹⁶ Foucault's ideas will be treated as representative of the poststructuralist approach to authority and power, while Rancière's thought will be treated as exemplary of certain (promising) trends in post-poststructuralism. Suspicion of hierarchies—ultimately, as will be shown, this includes Rancière as well—is what unites the thinkers discussed here and underlies their implicit embrace of horizontalism and, to varying degrees, their very understanding of democracy.

I first discuss Sheldon Wolin's unique conception of democracy and how power figures in his thought. I note that while he recognizes the import of power for radical social change, unlike many poststructuralists, the horizontalist imaginary that informs his thought precludes sustained thematization of progressive manifestations of power. I then address poststructuralism's attitude to power. I discuss Foucault's understanding of power, laying out its various facets, and flesh out the nuance his thought adds to traditional understandings of power as I explore secondary literature on Foucault that points to the incompleteness of his theory of power. Foucault's failure to meaningfully distinguish between oppressive and productive/emancipatory forms of power is the centerpiece of most of the criticisms of Foucault's conception of power explored here. I then go on to engage with the thought of

¹¹⁶ The meaning of the concept of radical democracy itself is open to contestation. Some, for instance, tend to associate radical democracy with certain strains of poststructuralism, and with Laclau and Mouffe's work in particular. I do not want to enter a debate here on how to properly demarcate radical democratic theory. Instead, I would like to delimit my use of the notion of radical democracy. Following Little and Lloyd, what I have in mind in terms of radical democracy are those aspects of this tradition that appear to be shared by poststructuralists and non-poststructuralists. These include: 1) the characterization of democracy as an essentially open-ended process; 2) understanding the political as a conflictual space; 3) seeing civil society as the main site of political struggle and contestation; 4) identifying democracy with the political as such; and 5) interpreting democracy as the calling into question of hegemonic norms and the exclusions endemic to them. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, introduction to *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, ed. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 10.3366/edinburgh/9780748633999.001.0001.

Jacques Rancière, whose treatment of the question of authority in one key text, namely, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, lays the foundation for thinking through normatively desirable and, from the vantage power of radical politics, I would suggest, indispensable, manifestations of power. The thinkers discussed in each of the three sections to follow are not put in conversation with one another, though relevant affinities and divergences will be noted throughout the discussion.

I. Sheldon Wolin on Democracy and Power

Wolin has been selected to represent radical democratic theory in this discussion primarily because he very consistently maintains that democracy is a process of collective *empowerment*—through which the assertion of the interests of the majority against the parochial interests of political elites and structural inequality takes place. Power, in other words, is not approached with hostility by Wolin as he recognizes its centrality to “demotic” processes. The principal features of Wolin’s understanding of democracy are as follows: for one thing, key to the radical democratic imaginary within which Wolin’s thought operates is the notion that real democracy is ephemeral and inherently inventive. Wolin’s ideas about the transitoriness of democracy link up with and are predicated on a suspicion of institutionalized forms of democracy. Political exclusion, according to Wolin, is challenged by the oppressed through attempts to expand the scope of the political, not least by calling into question the exclusionary character of existing, hegemonic political institutions and inventing new practices of collective mobilization and decision making. In Wolin’s work, the political appears as the processes associated with attempts on the part of the marginalized and excluded to assert themselves and make themselves heard, and those on the part of ruling elites to repress and exclude these voices.¹¹⁷ More accurately,

¹¹⁷ For a discussion of some of these features of Wolin’s conception of democracy and his relationship to radical democracy, see Nicholas Xenos, “Momentary Democracy,” in *Vision and*

politics consists of restricted institutional spaces—with their narrow and exclusionary universe of political discourse—established and defended by economic elites, whereas the political consists of challenges to politics and the status quo by the demos.¹¹⁸ A crucial component of collective self-assertion, which is also one of its concomitants, is the construction of a new kind of agency. Wolin’s celebration of the construction of collective agency is borne out by the arguments presented in the essays collected in the anthology *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*. Wolin convincingly links the construction of demotic agency to processes of empowerment throughout these essays.

The seminal essay on fugitive democracy articulates with especial clarity Wolin’s conviction that mobilizations of the power of the collective are inherently ephemeral and are inevitably undermined by the institutionalization of the political into politics.¹¹⁹ But when collective power does find an opportunity to express itself, it is a force to be reckoned with. In his essay on revolutions, Wolin contrasts the liberal, primarily negative, conception of citizenship with democratic citizenship, the focus of the latter being the ability to engage in collective activities centering on the common welfare.¹²⁰ He links revolution with the self-assertion and empowerment of the demos, as well as the calling into question of the ossification of politics.¹²¹ As in his other writings, the assertion of commonality is presented here as the

Democracy: Sheldon Wolin and Vicissitudes of the Political, ed. Aryeh Botwinick and William E. Connolly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁸ As we will shortly see, Jacques Rancière draws a similar distinction between politics and the political, linking the former with hierarchies and a repressive status quo and the latter with temporary challenges to this order.

¹¹⁹ Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 107-108.

¹²⁰ Sheldon Wolin, “What Revolutionary Action Means Today,” in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 369-372.

¹²¹ Sheldon Wolin, “What Revolutionary Action Means Today,” in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 376-378.

modus operandi of democratic and collective agency. For him, the trick is to learn to harness this assertion of commonality, which presupposes collective empowerment, while preserving the specificity and multiplicity of everyday sources of collective power (the family, schools, etc.).¹²² This intimates that collective power is not a monolith, and that its survival and effectiveness depends on recognition of this fact. A concomitant of this observation regarding the diverse bases of collective power is that such power is most effectively exercised at the local level, where it remains responsive to the specific needs and exigencies that generate it and is not so easily coopted by the inherently conservative forces of politics. Hence Wolin's praise for grassroots movements, which seem to embrace and preserve the sources that gave rise to them and are hostile to top-down forms of power.¹²³ Indeed, understood as the expression of multiple experiences and relationships, it can be plausibly argued that collective power is inherently at loggerheads with top-down forms of power. Yet while Wolin recognizes that it is important that collective power remain responsive to its local sources and "constituencies," he also hints at the need for more "comprehensive" visions for social change that are precluded by the parochialism of locally oriented political activity.¹²⁴ Although Wolin does not take things beyond this observation in this essay, it does raise important questions not just about the importance of broader political outlooks but about the forms of political organization capable of producing such outlooks as well as generating mobilizations through them. This observation of Wolin's also brings into sharp relief the paucity of engagement in his own thought with the question and problematic of leadership, which can be sidestepped only at radical democratic theory's own peril given its relevance to questions of larger scale, sustained political mobilization and strategy.

¹²² Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," 377-378.

¹²³ Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," 377-378.

¹²⁴ Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," 378.

The instances in his texts where Wolin does deal, however briefly, with the problem of leadership, are telling. A preliminary analysis of these might suggest that Wolin is uncompromisingly hostile to leadership. In “Fugitive Democracy,” for example, he notes that the institutionalization of the political is accompanied by the emergence of leaders and hierarchies, in contrast to the more spontaneous quality of the political—which is grounded in collective action—implying that leadership and hierarchies are inherently antidemocratic.¹²⁵ In an essay devoted to a critical evaluation of the work of Hannah Arendt, Wolin reproaches her, among other things, with elitism, exploring the antidemocratic tendencies in her work and arguing that her understanding of the political privileges the activities of heroic figures who supposedly possess the gifts required by politics.¹²⁶ In linking politics with the heroic feats—which take place outside the concerns and preoccupations of everyday life—of extraordinary individuals rather than with the accomplishments made possible by collective power, Arendt effectively ignores the relationship between democracy and the political. For Wolin, the political and democracy are coextensive, at least to the extent that the political is associated with collective action and the common good.¹²⁷ In any event, though Wolin does not offer explicit criticisms of leadership here, his hostility to it can be glimpsed in the central ideas informing his critique of Arendt’s work. In another essay in this volume, entitled “Transgression, Equality, and Voice,” Wolin’s opening remarks are again indicative of hostility to leadership, in this instance more explicitly, especially through the notion that it is inherently antidemocratic. His target is Pericles, a celebrated figure from antiquity whom Wolin is intent on exposing as a demagogical,

¹²⁵ Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” 108.

¹²⁶ Sheldon Wolin, “Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political,” in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 238.

¹²⁷ Wolin, “Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political,” 247.

manipulative, and antidemocratic character.¹²⁸ The tenor of his criticisms of Pericles seem to conform to Wolin's general suspicion of hierarchies and leadership in politics. Yet in a surprising twist he proceeds to discuss, albeit briefly and obliquely, the possibility and desirability of *democratic leadership*. He counterposes orators who encourage and facilitate public and democratic deliberation to the antidemocratic leadership style of Pericles.¹²⁹ More than that, he touches on what is, as will be later shown, one of the key characteristics of democratic leadership—a robust sense of responsibility and accountability. Wolin's recognition of the importance of accountability for democratic leadership, and tacit endorsement of such leadership, is illustrated in the following passages:

Cleon's adversary, Diodotus, opposed the decree, but as his argument develops it becomes an analysis of the conditions necessary to genuine deliberation and encompasses a conception both of the democratic citizen and of the democratic, though not Periclean, leader. For Diodotus the issue of the decree does concern Athenian interest, but the context of empire requires that interest be considered on a long run basis rather than an immediate interest, such as punishing a rebellion. How, then, should a democracy go about consulting its long run interests, and what are they?

As framed by Diodotus, the broad context is political education in democratic responsibility, not only for the assembled citizens but for the rhetor

¹²⁸ Sheldon Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 59-60.

¹²⁹ Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," 60-62.

who is engaged in arguing the merits of one policy over another. Those who would serve the citizenry must impose on themselves a certain discipline if democracy is to act wisely. They should avoid calumnizing their rivals, for otherwise citizens will hesitate to stand forward and serve the polis. “The good citizen ought to triumph not by frightening his opponents but by besting them fairly in argument.” The crucial obligation is that the speaker ought not to encourage suspicions of the idea of speech (*logos*) or language itself, for that would be to deprive the actor of that which speech makes possible, namely, action informed by forethought.

Diodotus’s rhetor may be said to serve the demos as Plato would later have his Socrates serve the nobility: by raising the particular problem to a more general level, a level, however, that was comprehensible to the Many rather than just the Few and that tried to teach them about the nature of the demands of democratic ruling. The virtue with which Diodotus was concerned was that of the citizen, not, as for Plato, that of the good man. The citizen of Diodotus was man in his corporate capacity.¹³⁰

Clearly, Wolin is attuned to the potentialities embedded in democratic leadership. Yet despite engaging with the question of democratic leadership here, and identifying one of its central features, i.e., accountability, ultimately, he is loath to concede that democratic leadership could meaningfully complement democracy. Following his brief discussion of the merits of democratic leadership he rushes to take up again the cause of collective power, which is seemingly

¹³⁰ Wolin, “Transgression, Equality, and Voice,” 60.

understood here as exclusive of leadership.¹³¹ Still, it is undeniable that at the very least Wolin's attitude towards leadership in this essay is ambiguous rather than wholly negative. For instance, the implicit contrast he draws between Pericles' leadership and that of the "rhetors" is certainly indicative of at least an openness to democratic leadership. One could speculate that Wolin's refusal to seriously engage with the question of democratic leadership past a certain point, however, has to do with a refusal to acknowledge that leadership that is genuinely democratic can only thrive in contexts where the demos is open and receptive to it. Wolin's remarks about both Pericles and the rhetors, for instance, bespeak the privileging of the agency of these actors with respect to their leadership role and a failure to provide a balanced account of the agency of both leaders and followers in the establishment and successful exercise of democratic leadership.¹³² The problematic of agency links up with horizontal thinkers' trouble conceiving of leadership and authority as wielding power in a way that empowers others rather than oppressing them and depriving them of agency.

Wolin's general hostility to leadership in the realm of the political clearly tends towards horizontalism, understood as an umbrella rejection of hierarchies and authority.¹³³ Hierarchy is clearly associated by Wolin with the ossification of the potentialities of the political, with institutionalized politics, and with the stymying of democratic engagement and deliberation. At any rate, it is manifest that the strain of radical democratic theory Wolin subscribes to has affinities with the understandings of the relation between power, authority and democracy

¹³¹ Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, and Voice," 62-64.

¹³² This is an important point, which will be fleshed out in chapter 5.

¹³³ In *Democracy Incorporated*, much consideration is given to the ways American democracy has been domesticated and hijacked by leaders of various kinds. See Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, new ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

underlying the celebration of “strict” horizontalism in progressive activist circles today. His rejection of leadership is in fact akin to anarchism’s attitude to leadership, which will not be taken up again here since it has been analyzed in some detail in chapter 1. As is the case with radical democratic theory, aspects of poststructuralist thought serve as pathways to horizontalism. The thought of Michel Foucault in particular is representative of the intellectual tendencies in question given the weight accorded to power in his approach to the problem of oppression, as well as his insistence that power is ubiquitous, is built into the ontological fabric of society, and generally presupposes domination.

II. Power and Domination in the Thought of Michel Foucault

It is not my aim in this section to provide an exhaustive treatment of Foucault’s theory of power. His theory of power spans many writings and has a unique richness and complexity about it which cannot be fully communicated in a few pages. This section rather provides an overview of Foucault’s key insights regarding power, with an emphasis on their relationship to the problems of domination and authority. Instead of examining Foucault’s entire oeuvre for the purpose of tracing his arguments about power, which have shifted considerably over time, this section looks at writings representative of the “late” Foucault, that is, of the more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of power offered by Foucault in the decade or so before his death, and then proceeds to examine several notable criticisms of it. These writings nonetheless attest to the beginning of an attempt to theorize the difference between power and domination.

In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault outlines a few key aspects of the operation of power. Some of these are worth adumbrating here: One, power is everywhere, is

ubiquitous.¹³⁴ Two, power is not essentially in anyone's possession, operating through the "interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations."¹³⁵ These relations are relations of force.¹³⁶ Three, power is not external to other relationships (sexual, economic, etc.), but is rather both the condition and effect of these. Four, power is not essentially a top-down phenomenon, originating instead at the level of local practices, the effects of which coalesce into strategies. Five, power need not be intentional, despite being governed by a certain kind of logic and being directed toward certain aims. Finally, where there is power, there is resistance, but resistance is immanent in power given that power is relational. Consisting of relations of force, it relies on numerous points of resistance for its multiplication. Resistance, then, is generally to be understood not as something that stands in opposition to power, or could overturn it through great moments of rupture, but something internal to it.¹³⁷ Foucault's thinking about modern manifestations of power culminated in the formulation of two central forms of power: biopower and disciplinary power. These two forms of power constitute two strategies quite distinct in their internal logic and operation from the strategies of power that predominated in Medieval Europe. These two strategies are engendered by the coalescence and overlapping of local manifestations, or tactics, of power.¹³⁸

In a late (1982) essay entitled "The Subject and Power," which is one of Foucault's other most lucid and comprehensive statements about power, he rehearses many of the points about power offered in *The History of Sexuality*, setting out its preconditions and various components.

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 93.

¹³⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 94.

¹³⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 92.

¹³⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 94-96.

¹³⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 135-159.

He notes again that power exists everywhere social relationships do and is coextensive with them.¹³⁹ Social relations embody power, which is constitutive of them. Power is not a self-contained entity, but a relation, or rather a multiplicity of relations (of force). Relating this formulation of the essence of power to domination, Foucault insists that power essentially consists of the ability to act on, or determine, the actions of others.¹⁴⁰ Here he does seem to place more of an emphasis on the role of agency in producing relations of dominations than he does in *The History of Sexuality*.¹⁴¹ Foucault also reiterates the point that a significant component of power is *differentiation*. Power works through differentiations and these in turn enable the erection of hierarchies.¹⁴² It is in the differential and relational aspect of Foucault's understanding of power that one discerns the influence of Nietzsche's ontological claims about the will to power.¹⁴³ These qualities help define a particular relationship or constellation of forces. Moreover, Foucault provocatively argues in this essay that power should be understood through an analysis of the oppressed, i.e., those resisting power. Such an analysis would illuminate the specific logic of local tactics of power, and thereby supply the means to combat it. These struggles are immediate in the sense that they push back against the immediate forces impinging on individuals' freedom, and do not articulate themselves through the invocation of "grand battles"—revolutions, for instance—against oppression. Tellingly, Foucault terms such

¹³⁹ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 791, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197>.

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 789.

¹⁴¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 94-95.

¹⁴² Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 792.

¹⁴³ The will to power, for Nietzsche, consists of a relationship between unequal forces, the interaction of which gives rise to both activity and reactivity, affirmation and negation. For a sophisticated and thorough treatment of Nietzsche's notion of the will to power, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

local resistance “anarchistic.”¹⁴⁴ Since one of the dominant forms of power today, biopower, reproduces itself through the production of subjectivity,¹⁴⁵ resistance should focus on “desubjectivization,” that is, on the refusal of identities or dis-identification.¹⁴⁶

Another key component of Foucault’s understanding of power is the idea that it presupposes and relies on a degree of freedom. Without the forces of freedom opposing it, power would be indistinguishable from simple coercion or violence. Its continued operation thus requires incitement to resistance.¹⁴⁷ As David Weberman points out in his perspicacious discussion of Foucault’s conception of power, by defining themselves a certain way, in terms of specific capacities and activities, people necessarily exclude other activities or capacities from their self-definition. The subject is both created by power relations and, insofar as its creation presupposes a very particular and limited self-understanding, it is simultaneously constrained by them. In other words, they both enable and constrain action. This aspect of power links up with another central motif in Foucault’s understanding of power: it does not have to be repressive. Power multiplies and reproduces itself precisely through the production and promotion of agency, norms, and so on, at least to some extent.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, some of Foucault’s writings seem to suggest that the illusion of freedom generated by subjectivity is essential to the operation of power.

Of course, Foucault’s notion of power is also bound up with the operation of discursive

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 780.

¹⁴⁵ Foucault argues that it derives from pastoral practices, which, through confessions, aim at the “soul” by providing it with an anchor in the form of beliefs, values, norms. David Weberman, “Foucault’s Reconception of Power,” *The Philosophical Forum* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 204-206.

¹⁴⁶ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 781.

¹⁴⁷ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 790.

¹⁴⁸ David Weberman, “Foucault’s Reconception of Power,” 193-197.

systems and systems of knowledge in society. Nancy Fraser sums up nicely the salience of discourse in Foucault's theory of power:

Foucault claims that the functioning of discursive regimes essentially involves forms of social constraint. Such constraints and the manner of their application vary, of course, along with the regime. But they typically include such phenomena as the following: the valorization of some statement forms and the concomitant devaluation of others; the institutional licensing of some persons as being entitled to offer knowledge-claims and the concomitant exclusion of others; procedures for the extraction of information from and about persons involving various forms of coercion; and the proliferation of discourses oriented to objects of inquiry which are, at the same time, targets for the application of social policy. Their obvious heterogeneity notwithstanding, all of these are instances of the ways in which social constraint, or in Foucault's terms "power", circulates in and through the production of discourses in society.¹⁴⁹

It is undeniable that Foucault's theory of power, especially as it pertains to modern manifestations of power, offers unique and valuable insights. Yet it is equally clear that Foucault's inability or unwillingness to think through the difference between oppressive and unoppressive expressions of power constitutes a lacuna, one that calls for further theoretical nuance and elaboration.

¹⁴⁹ Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," *PRAXIS International*, no. 3 (1981): 274, https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/3123299/mod_resource/content/1/Nancy%20Fraser%20Foucault%20on%20modern%20power.pdf.

Amy Allen, in a fascinating discussion of Foucault's conception of power, where she compares it with that of Arendt, notes the centrality of the productive aspect of power to Foucault's thought. She also notes Foucault's insistence on the importance of local (i.e., decentralized) manifestations of power.¹⁵⁰ Following a brief discussion of Foucault's innovations with respect to power, Allen goes on to argue that his understanding of power is ultimately lacking in nuance, not least because he fails to differentiate sufficiently between power and domination, or between desirable and undesirable manifestations of power. As noted by Allen, in a 1984 interview, Foucault does seem to attempt to draw a distinction between socially desirable power and power as domination, noting that some forms of authority, such as that of a teacher over her students, could in fact benefit society.¹⁵¹ Yet Foucault's argument, even in this interview, presumes that power tends toward domination, where domination is understood as a more permanent, oppressive, and stable manifestation of power with very little room for freedom.¹⁵² Given that power is constitutive of the social field, and of subjectivity itself, the best we can hope for is a minimally oppressive play between relations of power. Thus, while Foucault does acknowledge that power need not mean domination at this point in his career, as Amy Allen points out, the idea that power is inherently dangerous and is something we must constantly be

¹⁵⁰ Amy Allen, "Power, Subjectivity, and Agency: Between Arendt and Foucault," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10, no. 2 (2002): 133, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1080/09672550210121432>. The importance accorded to tactics of power in connection with the formation of strategies of modern power regimes in Foucault's thought can of course be gleaned from his elaborate discussion of power in *The History of Sexuality*. It is also here that Foucault identifies the centrality of sexuality to the consolidation of both disciplinary power and biopower: "Broadly speaking, at the juncture of the 'body' and the 'population,' sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death" (147).

¹⁵¹ Michel Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 378-379. PDF.

¹⁵² Foucault, "Politics and Ethics," 378.

on guard against, overshadows Foucault's recognition of unoppressive manifestations of power even in his later thought.¹⁵³ Allen is right to conclude that Foucault's conception of power, even with added nuance, is ultimately unsatisfying, exaggerating as it does the oppressive qualities of power.

Although her focus is the desirability of manifestations of power that facilitate and enable progressive collective mobilizations, Allen makes a point similar to that made by Nancy Fraser and Sheldon Wolin, to name only two commentators on Foucault's understanding of power, regarding the normative confusion haunting Foucault's understanding of power owing, among other things, to his inability to distinguish between power and domination. In an article that provides a nuanced treatment of Foucault's theory of power, Fraser maintains that although Foucault's ideas about power have contributed to the empirical enrichment of our understanding of power, that is, how it operates, his thought is mired in "normative confusions."¹⁵⁴ Among Foucault's contributions to our understanding of power are identification of a distinctively modern form of power, one that is "capillary" in character, i.e., operating at every level of society. Two important concomitants of this understanding of modern power, according to Fraser, are: 1) it is formed through practices of the everyday and is reproduced through and is imprinted on the body; 2) a rejection of "state-centered and economist" conceptions of power. She additionally argues that the most important feature of Foucault's thought is its attentiveness to the political character of basic social institutions and practices, including schools, the family, and sexuality.¹⁵⁵ She then goes on to argue that despite these important insights about power,

¹⁵³ Allen, "Power, Subjectivity and Agency," 142. Allen references at least one other instance in the late stages of Foucault's career—a roundtable discussion—where he acknowledges that power can be used in ways that are normatively desirable.

¹⁵⁴ Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," 282-286.

¹⁵⁵ Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," 279-280.

Foucault's normative commitments remain unclear. She makes several interesting points about Foucault's views vis à vis normativity, especially regarding the problem of domination. The most important of these is that Foucault himself tends to view domination as something that should be resisted while failing to provide this position with a convincing normative grounding and even claiming at times that his analysis of power eschews normativity.¹⁵⁶ This point is reflective of a general lack of nuance and inconsistency in Foucault's treatment of the normativity of power as he "calls too many different sorts of things power and simply leaves it at that."¹⁵⁷ The most serious problem stemming from the normative confusion haunting Foucault's work is articulated concisely in the final paragraph of Fraser's article: "Clearly what Foucault needs and needs desperately are normative criteria for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable forms of power."¹⁵⁸

Deborah Cook offers a number of interesting and compelling insights regarding Foucault's understanding of power in a book on the affinities between the thought of Adorno and Foucault. Interestingly, for instance, she notes that for Foucault, power intersects and overlaps in myriad ways with economic oppression but is certainly not reducible to it.¹⁵⁹ Throughout her discussion of his ideas, she affirms that Foucault ultimately thinks of domination as merely an extreme and stable manifestation of power relations, and that the most progressive political activism can hope to accomplish is the introduction of less oppressive power structures. She sums this up as follows: "Although we can never escape power, we may be able to escape existing forms of domination by struggling against the subjection in which domination now

¹⁵⁶ Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," 282-283.

¹⁵⁷ Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," 286.

¹⁵⁸ Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," 286.

¹⁵⁹ Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West* (London: Verso, 2018), 49, 60.

consists.”¹⁶⁰ One could speculate that the refusal to explicitly think about and articulate forms of power that differ from domination is perhaps what accounts for Foucault’s underdeveloped conception of both the means and ends of resistance to power. Although Foucault may not offer straightforward prescriptions as to why power should be overcome, Cook notes that he subscribes to the following views about resistance to power and its ends: there is something instinctive to people’s resistance to power; the ends of resistance (i.e., freedom) to power are contingent upon specific historical power strategies; at least as a response to the predominant forms of power today, it consists of and aims at the reconfiguration of people’s relationships to themselves and others, and the emergence of more autonomous subjectivities, democratically run communities, and the proliferation of pleasure.¹⁶¹ Beyond this, the ends of struggles against power can at best be illuminated through the critique of existing power relations, a task that falls to the intellectual.¹⁶² As we have already seen, the most comprehensive statement concerning liberation in Foucault’s later work concerns individuals’ ability to resist normalization and socialization, to refuse subjectification. Foucault’s prescriptions and observations on this score are of course not without merit, yet they do leave much to be desired. Interesting and thought-provoking, for instance, is Foucault’s wariness of collective forms of action; he thinks that they can be totalizing/totalitarian, repressive of individuality, and are easily coopted by the state.¹⁶³ As Cook points out, there are echoes of this suspicion of collective action in terms of its ramifications for individuality in Adorno’s thought.¹⁶⁴ Still, perhaps a more nuanced distinction between domination and power could lead to a conception of power that would enable a more

¹⁶⁰ Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West*, 106.

¹⁶¹ Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West*, 97-117.

¹⁶² Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West*, 140, 148.

¹⁶³ Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West*, 96-97, 109-100.

¹⁶⁴ Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West*, 96.

concrete and robust vision for social change.

Sheldon Wolin, echoing Allen and Fraser, makes the case that Foucault's conception of power unduly privileges its oppressive and dominating forms. He maintains that Foucault's understanding of power tends to obscure the ways power can be deployed in the service of "common ends" or the community's welfare. In line with the ideas discussed in the preceding section, Wolin posits the following: "The problem of the political is not to deny the ubiquity of power but to deny power uses that destroy common ends. The political signifies the attempt to constitute the terms of politics so that struggles for power can be contained and so that it is possible to direct it for common ends, such as justice, equality, and cultural values. Commonality is what the political is about."¹⁶⁵ As we have already seen, like Allen, he is interested in retrieving those forms of power that can be used for, and are enacted through, collective solidarity and mobilization, through which resistance to domination becomes feasible. But in Wolin's case, affirmation of the importance of power for progressive agendas does not move beyond the recognition that collective forms of power are salutary. The question must be raised, ultimately, of whether recognition of the difference between power and domination might entail notions regarding the radical left's use of and reliance on power, and what place leadership might have in such notions. As we have seen, the progressive literature that offers a positive appraisal of power is quite limited, and analyses of the productive aspects of leadership are even harder to come by.¹⁶⁶ The critical theorist who comes closest to appreciating the importance of power for

¹⁶⁵ Sheldon Wolin, "On the Theory and Practice of Power," in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 298.

¹⁶⁶ In recent literature, interest in the question of left leadership has been generated predominantly through engagement with the question of left populism. The impetus for engaging with that question has been supplied initially by Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's provocative positions and later picked up by followers and others who saw merit in left populism as a strategy for the radical left. However, the literature on left populism deals with the question

progressive politics is Amy Allen, though her ideas on the subject too fall short in the final analysis, not least because she refuses to thematize the problematic of authority and leadership. She begins interrogating the problematic of power in an explicitly feminist context in the 1990s, outlining an argument concerning normatively desirable manifestations of power and gesturing toward the possibility of ethical forms of authority in a seminal article,¹⁶⁷ and continues to explore this and related ideas in subsequent writings. But the notion of ethically defensible uses of power and authority requires further elaboration. We perhaps receive a glimpse of something more robust from an unexpected quarter: the work of the post-poststructuralist thinker Jacques Rancière.

of leadership and authority rather obliquely and does not thematize the possibility that power might be serviceable to leftist strategy. This has to do with the fact that much of this literature is, while politically salient, weak theoretically. An example of an extremely sophisticated treatment of the problematic of left populism, informed by Laclau's and Mouffe's theorizing, is Marina Prentoulis' recent book on the subject. See Marina Prentoulis, *Left Populism in Europe: Lesson from Jeremy Corbyn to Podemos* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1n9dkft>. Other interesting recent defences of left populism include Michael J. Illuzzi, "Lessons for a Left Populism: Organizing Revolt in Babylon," in *Mapping Populism: Approaches and Methods*, ed. Majia Holmer Nadesan and Amit Ron (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429295089-7/lessons-left-populism-michael-illuzzi>; Harry C. Boyte, "Democratic Populism as Constructive Nonviolence," in *Mapping Populism: Approaches and Methods*, ed. Majia Holmer Nadesan and Amit Ron (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429295089-6/democratic-populism-constructive-nonviolence-harry-boyte>. Jan-Werner Müller is a notable critic of left (and right) populism. His attitude to populism is exemplified by his 2016 book *What is Populism?* See Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.9783/9780812293784>. Other recent interventions in the debate around left populism include, for example, Panagiotis Sotiris, "Is a 'Left Populism' Possible?," *Historical Materialism* 27, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1163/1569206X-00001832>.

¹⁶⁷ Amy Allen, "Rethinking Power," *Hypatia* 13, no. 1 (1998), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1998.tb01350.x>.

III. Rancière's Intervention

Engagements with the way Erich Fromm's conceptualization of authority potentially contributes to our understanding of emancipatory politics are almost entirely absent from Fromm scholarship. One notable exception is "Paths from Erich Fromm: Thinking Authority Pedagogically," wherein the possibility of rational authority as an underpinning of emancipatory pedagogy is recognized, albeit somewhat obliquely.¹⁶⁸ That this exception is found in the critical pedagogy literature is perhaps unsurprising given Paulo's Friere's influence on the field and his implicit preoccupation in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with the question of the emancipatory possibilities intrinsic to certain kinds of pedagogical authority.¹⁶⁹ But apart from Freire, other commentators on education and the question of liberation have alerted us to the import of authority in this equation. I have in mind specifically the work of Jacques Rancière. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he offers original insights into the nature of what might be termed ethical authority. Before proceeding to a discussion of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, however, I would first like to engage with Saul Newman's treatment of Rancière in his book *Unstable Universalities*, because it offers an analysis of the moments in Rancière thought that signal a move away from poststructuralist logic, moments where he, for example, defends universalistic principles and makes room for a robust political sense of collective subjectivity. We have glimpsed, through engagement with Foucault's thought, the deficiencies intrinsic to poststructuralism's understanding of power, which are bound up with its rejection of universality and the notion of a self-contained and transparent human subjectivity. For Foucault, both

¹⁶⁸ Eric J. Weiner, "Paths from Erich Fromm: Thinking Authority Pedagogically," *The Journal of Educational Thought* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 64-69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23767176>.

¹⁶⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 4th ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=6933970>.

universality (and related ethical prescriptions) and discrete subjectivity are questionable, power-laden constructs that in fact serve to mask and normalize the operation of power. A modicum of resistance is feasible, but power can never be extirpated from the social field. Any attempt to present such a possibility necessarily betrays complicity with the workings of power. Since the suspicion of universality in Foucault's thought is grounded in attentiveness to the insidious mechanisms through which power operates, it stands to reason that should his view of power prove untenable, his suspicion of universality would become vulnerable to criticism as well. I hope to have convincingly demonstrated in the previous section that his view of power is indeed untenable and that his conception of universality ought therefore to be subjected to thoroughgoing critique.¹⁷⁰ Saul Newman is one of the political theorists who have been able to identify the weaknesses surrounding poststructuralism's approach to the problem of universality while finding in Rancière's work a robust and compelling response to this approach.

In a highly accessible, informative, and sophisticated discussion of poststructuralism in *Unstable Universalities*, Newman takes poststructuralism to task for its impoverished conception of universality. He explicates the essential ideas behind poststructuralism, situating it at the same time as a response to what Jean Francois Lyotard characterizes as the postmodern condition. For

¹⁷⁰ Owing to his uncompromisingly dismissive attitude towards the possibility that certain universal constants of the human experience, such as sexuality, might serve as a foundation for emancipatory politics, Foucault is at times unduly hasty in his rejection of important concepts emerging out of critical theory. For instance, as Jeffrey Renaud demonstrates in an article on the subject, because he associates Marcuse's ideas about sexuality with an instinctually driven Great Refusal, Foucault misrepresents and obscures aspects of Marcuse's approach to the problem of power, those that are conducive to a productive understanding of power. Foucault's charge that Marcuse understands power as a purely repressive phenomenon is predicated on a failure to meaningfully engage with his concept of repressive desublimation, which speaks to the productive dimensions of power, and is central to a critical theory of society. See Jeffrey Renaud, "Rethinking the Repressive Hypothesis: Foucault's Critique of Marcuse," *Symposium* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5840/symposium201317221>.

Lyotard, this condition consists of the twilight of enlightenment-style discourse—or metanarratives—about objective truth, universality, and self-contained, transparent subjectivity. One reason for this decline is a crisis of legitimation in systems of knowledge, particularly scientific ones, which can no longer purport to underwrite certainty. Claims to knowledge become contests between different systems of thought or “language games.” Indeed, this contest, according to Lyotard, is what constitutes the social field today.¹⁷¹ Newman notes: “Here we might think of the multiplicity of heterogeneous discourses, ideological perspectives, religious sensibilities, moral positions and social identities that make up contemporary societies.”¹⁷² Postmodernity is thus increasingly characterized by differences, fissures, fragmentation, and heterogeneity.

Lyotard himself relates metanarratives or grand narratives to totalitarianism given their pretensions to absoluteness and totality, and therefore seems to at least partially embrace the condition of postmodernity while also recognizing that the processes associated with it are all too easily coopted by capitalist interests.¹⁷³ Postmodernity is a condition rather than a temporal phenomenon, and embedded within it are both reactionary and progressive possibilities, according to Newman. He argues that the poststructuralist critique of modernity constitutes one of these progressive possibilities, and further insists that poststructuralist critique is to be understood not as a rejection of universality but rather as a precondition for rethinking it.¹⁷⁴ “Poststructuralism,” for Newman, “can be seen as a theoretical response—or series of responses—

¹⁷¹ Saul Newman, *Unstable Universalities: Poststructuralism and Radical Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 18-20, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.7228/manchester/9780719071287.001.0001>.

¹⁷² Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 19.

¹⁷³ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 20-21.

¹⁷⁴ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 36.

to the postmodern condition: a response that recognises and *cautiously* affirms the breakdown of metanarratives and the pluralisation of language games.”¹⁷⁵ Poststructuralism builds on and radicalizes structuralism’s premise to the effect that subjectivity is constituted by and is an effect of external linguistic structures. Unlike structuralism, it questions the stability of these structures themselves so as to prevent them from being viewed through an essentializing lens.¹⁷⁶ Newman identifies two dominant strains of poststructuralism. The first, to which belong Lyotard, Deleuze and Foucault, respond to structuralism by arguing that the structures constituting human experience are multiple and heterogenous. The other camp, represented by Lacan and Derrida, stresses the undecidability of the structure that underlies subjectivity. Not only is there a tension between these two approaches, but there is, according to Newman, a class of thinkers which does not neatly fit into either, though it is closer to the second position. These thinkers are indebted to poststructuralism by virtue of their reliance on Lacanian psychoanalysis and insistence that politics is always contingent, but depart from it to the extent they adopt a political position. Rancière is one of those thinkers.¹⁷⁷ Based on Newman’s analysis of Rancière’s work, what further distinguishes the thought of theorists like Rancière from that of the thinkers who fall into the second camp is the introduction of an explicitly universal horizon in their treatment of the process of subjectification. In doing so, and avoiding essentialism, Rancière seems to sidestep the pitfalls, especially easy cooptation by capitalism, of the “politics of difference” Newman links to the thought of both Foucault and Deleuze.¹⁷⁸

Newman seems to associate Rancière with a radical democratic strain of post-

¹⁷⁵ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 33.

¹⁷⁶ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 33-34.

¹⁷⁷ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 34-35.

¹⁷⁸ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 74-82.

Althusserian thought that is very much open to universality, though as noted above, with the reservation that political manifestations of universality, which indeed constitute the political realm as such, are necessarily contingent. Nonetheless, such openness to universality on Rancière's part seems to carry with it receptiveness, however cautious, to the possibility of genuine and meaningful social transformation. Newman traces this aspect of Rancière's thought in relation to subjectification primarily as articulated in his book *Disagreement*. According to Newman, Rancière manages to avoid an essentialist understanding of subjectivity by installing it in the political realm and insisting that it comes into being through the political self-assertion on the part of the excluded or marginalized. In this process, a new, uniquely political agency is constituted, which Newman links to the process of becoming a subject rather than an individual, individuality being linked with everyday roles and norms. It is in the realm of individuality that the self as the effect mostly of power relations resides. In Rancière's account, the self that becomes politicized constitutes a rupture with the self of the everyday, thereby challenging the hierarchical, or "police," order of the everyday.¹⁷⁹ Newman characterizes the non-essentialist and universalist aspects of Rancière's understanding of subjectification, and their entwinement with the principle of equality, in the following manner:

Here we see a *non-essentialist* approach to subjectification: becoming a political subject is not based on some sort of given essence or intrinsic set of interests, or even on an immanent social rationality—these are, in Rancière's analysis, on the side of the 'natural' social order. Rather, the political subject comes about through a rupture of this natural order. We can also see here a clear reference to a universal political dimension—in the

¹⁷⁹ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 89-90.

claim of the excluded part to represent the universality of interests. However, this universal dimension is again not based on any pre-given, essentialist identity or set of interests: rather, it only emerges in a contingent way when a particular group claims to embody this universality. In other words, instead of a universal political dimension being posited as pre-given, as something that emerges in a dialectical unfolding of an immanent social logic, it only appears, in a temporary and irruptive fashion, *through a point of particularity*, a particularity which ‘stands-in’ for this universality, claiming to embody it. However, universality, for Rancière, is not simply an empty space—as Laclau might argue—but is actually constructed around the idea of *equality*.¹⁸⁰

Assertion of and insistence on the equality of the speech and voice of the oppressed with that of the oppressors is a crucial dimension of politics for Rancière. As Newman points out, this also sets him apart from poststructuralist thinkers whose thought tends towards the uncritical celebration of difference. For equality in this context denotes sameness, and it is this sameness through which a collective, universalizing subject is constructed in the process of political articulation.¹⁸¹ Indeed, it is the insistence on the equality of human intellects that constitutes the bedrock of the position expounded in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Here Rancière seems to take things one step further and to push the principle of universality in the direction of ethical and emancipatory authority. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in other words, seems to be one of the places where Rancière’s endorsement of universality is strongest and indeed seems to signal a move away from the poststructuralist incredulity toward universality and power that afflicts

¹⁸⁰ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 90-91.

¹⁸¹ Newman, *Unstable Universalities*, 91.

much of his work, despite Newman's claim to the contrary.

Rancière's ideas about the subject of authority are a valuable asset in the context of the reflections offered throughout this chapter thus far because while remaining in many ways wedded to a poststructuralist outlook philosophically, Rancière's work gestures toward a way out of one of the major shortcomings of poststructuralism, namely, its unnuanced attitude to power and authority. Yet as we shall see, it is precisely Rancière's poststructuralist commitments that make him shy away from offering a robust and systematic defense of ethical authority despite the fact that provocative traces and hints of it are interspersed throughout *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Let us now briefly turn to a consideration of Rancière's treatment of authority in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

One of the central themes of this book is that the most we can do to verify the equality of the intellects is to enact it as a *supposition*. This postulate cannot actually be proven, but nor can its contrary, and that is sufficient grounds for continuously seeking the affirmation of equality. Given the assumption that every intellect is equal to all others, people should be able to understand others' thoughts, whether in verbal or written form. The space exemplary of the affirmation of the equality of the intellects is pedagogical space, which, like the rest of society, tends to be replete with inequality, explication, and stultification. Inequality is perpetuated by teachers who insist on a hierarchy of intellects and on the notion that knowledge must be built up gradually through explication in its recipients, who must at every step acknowledge the superiority of the teacher's knowledge and intelligence, the need for explication, and their own ignorance and inferiority.¹⁸² The belief in the hierarchy of intellects at once stultifies student and

¹⁸² Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 21.

teacher.¹⁸³ As they become more knowledgeable, students in turn earn the privilege of looking down on others who have yet to reach that stage of enlightenment as inferiors.¹⁸⁴ But the underlying reason for students' acceptance of the order of stultification derives from the same sources as the fact of inequality in society at large: the verification of equality is a difficult task, and it is *easier* to assign oneself a place within a hierarchy where one is intellectually superior to some and inferior to others.¹⁸⁵ This, along with an acquired love for domination, seems to be one of the incentives for perpetuating the myth and regime of inequality in the pedagogical realm and beyond.¹⁸⁶ The only way to break the vicious cycle involved is to affirm the equality of intelligences, and to repudiate the method of stultification. This process can be initiated by teachers who are themselves emancipated, that is, believe in the equality of intelligences and eschew the method of explication.

Emancipated teachers are to guide their students in the learning process by subordinating their will, by pushing it to recognize the full capabilities of the intellect and actualize them. So unimportant is the teacher's knowledge for helping her students recognize and engage the power of their intellect that she could just as well be ignorant of the subject matter in which she provides instruction. In fact, her ignorance might be preferable to knowledge as it might help her avoid the pitfalls associated with explication.¹⁸⁷ This entails testing students' answers to check if the student has genuinely engaged with a given text, i.e., with the intellectual powers of the

¹⁸³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 39.

¹⁸⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 22.

¹⁸⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 80. Rancière relates stultification in the pedagogical sphere to broader social hierarchies both in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and a later essay serving as commentary on this work, "On Ignorant Schoolmasters." See Jacques Rancière, "On Ignorant Schoolmasters," in *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation*, ed. Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta (London: Continuum, 2010).

¹⁸⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 80-82.

¹⁸⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 29.

author, whose efforts to communicate a complex of thoughts invites a response by way of understanding and interpretation. While the teacher views herself as her students' intellectual equal, then, there is an inequality of wills at play in this process. As Rancière puts it, "There is stultification whenever there is one intelligence subordinated to another. A person—and a child in particular—may need a master when his will is not strong enough to set him on track and keep him there. But this subjection is purely one of will over will."¹⁸⁸ Since intelligence, in children, originally begins its explorations through the exhortations of need (identifying objects, learning to speak, etc.), it may begin to slumber where need is no longer as potent, and this is where it could benefit from the guidance of another will, which can direct it to continue searching and learning.¹⁸⁹ Rancière is arguing here that a certain type of hierarchy can facilitate learning, and, by extension, help empower students. The subordination of one will by another, in other words, is predicated on both the use of a certain kind of authority as well as the eventual emancipation and empowerment of those who are subjected to it. But it must be stressed here, again, that equality is not the terminus of this process of emancipation but rather its point of departure. If Rancière's characterization of emancipated education is to be compelling, an important question must be raised regarding the role of teachers in the process of learning. What could they impart to their students if they themselves are not knowledgeable about a subject, or at least if their knowledge has no bearing on students' learning, as Rancière claims? The answer is that they could help them set out on a journey of the verification of the equality of intellects, for Rancière is adamant that it is the same intelligence at work in all intellectual operations. He notes, "Whoever teaches without emancipation stultifies. And whoever emancipates doesn't have

¹⁸⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 13.

¹⁸⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 51.

to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants, nothing maybe. He will know he can learn because the same intelligence is at work in all the production of the human mind, and a man can always understand another man's words."¹⁹⁰ What the ignorant teacher can discern in the process of a student's learning are manifestations of this intellect, which include the interactions between the intelligence of the student and that of the author of a given work. Concretely, this takes the form of the student's observing, retaining, repeating, verifying, comparing, and reflecting.¹⁹¹ These abilities are in turn rooted in and presuppose attention, which is the key to applying one's intellect.¹⁹² Attention entails the subordination of reason to the will.¹⁹³ Moreover, attention is the route to acquainting intelligence with itself and with its power.¹⁹⁴ Intelligence asserts and verifies itself in the process of speaking, and it is in an effort to communicate with others, to make our thoughts known to them, that we push our intelligence to learn and to craft words.¹⁹⁵ In any event, we see in Rancière's reflections in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* traces of ethical authority in the context of pedagogy. A teacher is justly authoritative insofar as her will trains or pushes the will of the student to exert itself in the process of the verification of her intelligence and its equality with other intellects. In the process of pushing the student to engage her intellect, as Sarah Galloway argues, a new teaching relation is formed, and this one is unambiguously predicated on an exercise of authority.¹⁹⁶ So

¹⁹⁰ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 18.

¹⁹¹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 10.

¹⁹² Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 33.

¹⁹³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 54-57.

¹⁹⁴ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 37.

¹⁹⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 62-65.

¹⁹⁶ Sarah Galloway, "Reconsidering Emancipatory Education: Staging a Conversation Between Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière," *Educational Theory* 62, no. 2 (2012): 176, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2012.00441.x>. Galloway goes so far as to call it a relation of domination.

compelling is Rancière's explication of this ethical form of authority that it can be said to lay a foundation for thinking about what ethical authority might look like beyond the walls of educational institutions, especially since he himself links the deleterious hierarchies that predominate in such institutions to those lurking in society at large. This promising possibility, however, is undercut by Rancière's treatment of authority and leadership in other parts of the same text, where he rather uncritically engages in polemic against authority as such, failing to differentiate it from ethical and necessary manifestations of authority.¹⁹⁷ In the section entitled "The Superior Inferiors," for instance, when discussing rhetoric and oratorical manipulation of the democratic process in the context of the question of the desirability of deliberative assemblies, he seems to equate domination with authority as such.¹⁹⁸ In the section entitled "The Philosopher King and the Sovereign People," to give another example, leadership as such is equated with subjugation.¹⁹⁹

This treatment of authority later in the book is consistent with the suspicion of authority embedded in other aspects of Rancière's thought. His reflections on critical theory, understood as an attempt to awaken a false consciousness to the realities of oppression, are inflected by a suspicion of the figure of the critical theorist, who appears to claim ultimate knowledge and by extension authority with regards to what constitutes reality, even if part of this knowledge consists of recognizing precisely that a transformation of the status quo is unlikely.²⁰⁰ In his

¹⁹⁷ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 88.

¹⁹⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 86-89

¹⁹⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 88.

²⁰⁰ This suspicion of the skeptical figure of the critical theorist, who Rancière takes to be positioning herself as the adjudicator of the status of reality and the prospects for political change, can be gleaned from his reflections on the nature of political art in *The Emancipated Spectator*. See Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2011). In an earlier essay Rancière is likewise at pains to identify the insidious tactics whereby critical theory, here explicitly identified with poststructuralist thought, which gained

explicitly political writings too Rancière privileges the subversion of authority in his understanding of emancipatory practice. Indeed, for him, subverting the authoritative representations and distributions of the sensible endemic to the police order are constitutive of the political as such. The introduction of new subjectivity into the social, what Rancière terms subjectification, presupposes a rupture in the hierarchies naturalized by and inside the police order, which itself essentially consists of the allocation of specific capacities to bodies in accordance with well-defined social roles.²⁰¹ As noted by Newman, subjectification is seen by Rancière as an inherently contingent accomplishment, one that can at most produce progressive “inscriptions” in the police order and is bound to be undone by this very order. I contend that Rancière’s skepticism about the importance of, and the possibility of attaining, truth ultimately reflects a poststructuralist bias. As does his apparent skepticism regarding the possibility of radical social transformation outside of contingent moments of subjectification through which the police order is momentarily unsettled. His tendentious treatment of authority and power throughout his writings is another instance of this bias, which precludes sustained engagement with the question of progressive authority and hierarchies. Nonetheless, his treatment of authority in parts of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* does afford us a glimpse into potentially progressive deployments of hierarchy, gesturing at the need for a more robust engagement with the question of ethical authority. A more nuanced approach to authority, as I hope to have shown here, is unlikely to be available within the poststructuralist canon, or within any form of

purchase in the wake of the student and worker revolt in France in May 1968, has situated itself as an ultimate authority on questions of power, truth, and political transformation. See Jacques Rancière, “The Philosophers’ Tale: Intellectuals and the Trajectory of *Gauchisme*,” in *The Intellectual and His People: Staging the People, Volume 2*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2012).

²⁰¹ See Jacques Rancière, Davide Panagia, and Rachel Bowlby, “Ten Theses on Politics,” *Theory & Event* 5, no. 3 (2001): Theses 5-8, doi:10.1353/tae.2001.0028.

theorizing that is beholden to poststructuralism. In the next two chapters, I make the case that traces of a more robust approach to the problem of authority can be found in the work of a marginalized figure within Critical Social Theory, Erich Fromm.

Chapter 3: Fromm, Marcuse, and the Problematic of Left Leadership

In the previous chapter I discussed the theoretical underpinnings of horizontalism, further exploring its shortcomings, through engagement with poststructuralist and radical democratic theory. I would now like to begin to attempt to articulate a theory of left leadership, which might serve an alternative to and supplant the academic and activist radical left's attachment to horizontalism. I turn to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School so as to retrieve original insights about authority, leadership, and the transition to socialism. It seems to me that the famous Fromm-Marcuse debate offers an excellent vantage point for contextualizing the problematic of leadership in relation to radical left theory and the question of transition in particular.

First, I situate the problematic of left leadership within the famous Fromm-Marcuse debate, arguing that while Marcuse's criticism of Fromm remains salient, his charge that Fromm is a revisionist neo-Freudian thinker is unduly harsh and that the attempt to discredit Fromm's contribution to critical theory on these grounds is questionable, not least because important insights about the transition from capitalism to socialism can be gleaned from Fromm's work.²⁰² Second, I adumbrate Fromm's theory of social character and ask what it can tell us about the social preconditions of mental health.²⁰³ I then enumerate and describe the characterological attributes presupposed by such a vision, building on Fromm's observation that implicit in Freud's investigation of the neuroses is a vision of psychological maturity and flourishing. Fromm dubs this stage of development productiveness, and it is clear that, at least with respect to its more critical articulation, this term denotes a certain way of being rather than mere work or

²⁰² Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 245-65.

²⁰³ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (London: Routledge, 2010), 78-120, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780203708996>.

efficiency.²⁰⁴ Third, I follow Fromm in linking these qualities to the Aristotelian conception of virtue and positing that psychological maturity and ethical individualism are bound up with one another.²⁰⁵ I then contend that Marcuse was right to question Fromm's use of the concept of productiveness because Fromm uses it inconsistently and at times in a way that lends itself to appropriation by conformist trends in society. Notwithstanding their criticisms of one another and hostility on either side, I suggest that ultimately Fromm and Marcuse's ideas are not that far apart and are in fact complementary. I proceed to use Fromm's exploration of the relationship between humanistic ethics and productiveness to support the claim that leadership that is ethical in character is not susceptible to exploitative hierarchies and the imperatives of domination; it eschews "power over" and valorizes "power to."²⁰⁶ I conclude by arguing that ethical leadership can be plausibly counterposed to authoritarian varieties of leadership, and that it lays the foundation for a theory of left leadership.

I. The Fromm-Marcuse Debate: Who Was Right and What Can We Learn from It?

The Fromm-Marcuse debate took place in the mid-1950s, unfolding, publicly, on the pages of *Dissent* magazine.²⁰⁷ As Neil McLaughlin points out, the debate had significant consequences for the reception of Fromm's thought in the Anglo-American academe and would shape attitudes toward him and his work within critical theory circles for several decades. His impassioned exchange with Marcuse led to the widespread perception that Fromm was a superficial thinker

²⁰⁴ Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1990), 89-113.

²⁰⁵ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 45.

²⁰⁶ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1994), 160-161.

²⁰⁷ The debate consists of three published articles. Herbert Marcuse, "The Social Implications of Freudian Revisionism"; Erich Fromm, "The Human Implications of Instinctivistic 'Radicalism'"; Herbert Marcuse, "A Reply to Erich Fromm." The first of these articles first appeared as the epilogue to Marcuse's book *Eros and Civilization*.

who merely recycled banal ideas about culture, ethics and individualism, which undercut a more radical critique of the status quo. Was Marcuse's characterization of Fromm accurate or fair? No, not entirely, but there was little doubt that in the minds of the critical theorists of the day that Fromm lost the debate. Fromm's ideas were attacked from other quarters as well. Ego psychologists in the United States, for instance, eagerly partook in the anti-Fromm crusade because of the animus he harbored toward them. Russell Jacoby's polemical and one-sided presentation of the Marcuse-Fromm debate, combined with a skillful misrepresentation of Fromm's ideas, also contributed to the view that he was a second-rate thinker, unworthy of the label critical theorist. In tracing Fromm's gradual marginalization in academic circles to the aforementioned factors, McLaughlin underlines that the reception of his work had little to do with the merit of his *ideas*. Moreover, McLaughlin insists that Fromm's unquestionably unwavering commitment to the radical left in terms of theory and activism calls for a frank re-evaluation of his ideas.²⁰⁸

Why is it important to re-examine Fromm's ideas? The answer, in fact, harks back to the Fromm-Marcuse debate. For one thing, the framework through which Marcuse articulates his utopia in texts such as *Eros and Civilization*, while certainly affirming the possibility and desirability of an alternative Reality Principle, to an extent undercuts his ability to meaningfully

²⁰⁸ Neil McLaughlin, "The Fromm-Marcuse Debate and the Future of Critical Theory," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. Michael J. Thompson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). See also Neil McLaughlin, "How to Become a Forgotten Intellectual: Intellectual Movements and the Rise and Fall of Erich Fromm," *Sociological Forum* 13, no. 2 (1998), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684883>. McLaughlin notes that the perception of who won the debate was, at least for a while, largely shaped by Russell Jacoby's take on the debate in his influential 1975 book *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology*. He argues that it was only in 1986, with the publication of John Rickert's article "The Fromm-Marcuse Debate Revisited," that serious cracks in Jacoby's narrative began to appear.

engage with questions pertaining to the *transition* from capitalism to socialism.²⁰⁹ It must be borne in mind, however, that Marcuse was not responsible for articulating such a theory of transition in theoretical works such as *Eros and Civilization*. The point that I will be making throughout this discussion is that there are *moments* in Marcuse's work that render him susceptible to the charge of not being sufficiently concerned with the question of transition. It must be recognized that interspersed throughout Marcuse's work are hints as to the kind of organization and practice that are presupposed in the transition to socialism. These need to be fleshed out and systematized, but they are indeed valuable. At any rate, as Marcuse himself admits, he does not have a compelling answer to the question of how false needs can be attenuated or eliminated given that they are not seen for what they are by the majority of the population and continue to be naturalized by the media, the high standard of living afforded by advanced industrial societies, repressive desublimation, and so on.²¹⁰ Although he foregrounds the need for a radical break with the status quo through his idea of the Great Refusal, and attempts to identify the social agents that are best positioned to challenge and expose the ruses employed by advanced capitalism, Marcuse is at times silent on the question of what concrete steps are likely to facilitate the transition in question. This silence is conspicuous in texts such as *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*.²¹¹ As we will see later on, Marcuse adds

²⁰⁹ Marcuse understands the Reality Principle to be historically variable. The reigning Reality Principle he associates with the Performance Principle, which has to do with the repressive organization of work and labour in society. *Eros and Civilization*, 35-54.

²¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, "The End of Utopia," in *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 80. The concept of repressive desublimation denotes the controlled and de-eroticized enjoyment of sexuality, which serves the interests of the one-dimensional and administered society. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 72-74.

²¹¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 256-257. For an elaboration of the concept of the Great Refusal, see, for example, Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). For discussion of the contemporary relevance of this concept, see, Terry Maley, ed., *One-*

nuance, complexity and a positive dimension to the concept of the Great Refusal in subsequent writings. At any rate, writing in the shadow of Stalinist communism, it seems that Marcuse *initially* prioritized reconceptualizing revolution along non-hierarchical, non-repressive lines and preserving negative thinking in his work.²¹²

Sadly, as Fred Alford points out, Marcuse's utopian vision in *Eros and Civilization* is not quite helpful for thinking about how to make the alternative society he and other radicals yearn for a reality. Even though it is true that it is not incumbent on Marcuse to put forth a revolutionary strategy in this text, I would like to suggest that the preoccupation with negative thinking in that work was representative of Marcuse's overall theoretical attitudes at the time. Inasmuch as his early theorizing naturalizes the separation between work and play, and rejects the notion that mastery of the world of things could serve as a principle of psychological maturity, it is unclear how the transition from a society anchored in work to one suffused by play can be realistically effected.²¹³ Alford's critique of Marcuse's views will be explored further below, but please note that Marcuse's initial insistence on associating ethics with guilt and the imperatives of work, on the one hand, and liberation with play and polymorphous perversity on the other, makes it very difficult for him to develop a compelling theory of transition in

Dimensional Man 50 Years On: The Struggle Continues (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2017).

²¹² Marcuse articulates the meaning of negative thinking with great clarity in *One-Dimensional Man*. For him, negative thinking, which is characteristic of critical theory, consists in the negation in thought of the existing reality, through, for instance, general concepts, in a manner that anticipates the reconciliation of potentiality and actuality, or the "is" and the "ought" as they pertain to the human world, or, in other words, freedom. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 123-143.

²¹³ Fred C. Alford, *Narcissism: Socrates, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytic Theory* (International Psychotherapy Institute, 2015), chap. 5, <https://www.freepsychotherapybooks.org/ebook/narcissismsocrates-the-frankfurt-school-and-psychoanalytic-theory/>.

Eros and Civilization.²¹⁴ This is where Fromm comes in, as his ideas help to draw out and develop the insights about transition and maturity offered elsewhere in Marcuse's work. Fromm's willingness to engage seriously with humanistic ethics allows him to identify its prefigurative dimension, making certain aspects of his thought more conducive to theorizing the process of transition from capitalism to socialism. Indeed, one aspect of the Marcuse-Fromm debate is arguably the divergence of the two thinkers on the question of prefiguration. In *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse is almost exclusively concerned with negative thinking.²¹⁵ The task of critical theory, these books suggest, is to offer a critique of the status quo while buttressing the utopian imagination, but nothing more concrete than that. Fromm, on the other hand, argues that traces of the socialist future can be discerned within capitalism. For him the possibility of human flourishing is not far from the surface even today.²¹⁶ Seeking to lay bare the differences between the two thinkers, Joan Braune argues that Marcuse's adherence to an

²¹⁴ In a recent lecture on *Eros and Civilization*, Andrew Feenberg makes the provocative and interesting claim that Marcuse did not reject the notion of maturity and valorize a regressive state of being but instead sought to dialectically incorporate the repressed aspects of civilization, which include components of narcissism and polymorphous sexuality, into traditional, individualistic conceptions of maturity. I accept this thesis, but it remains a reconstruction and an extrapolation. The fact remains that Marcuse does not clearly articulate a theory of maturity in his corpus, which is why his insights about authority and leadership need to be read alongside Fromm's explicit statements about psychological maturity and productiveness. See Andrew Feenberg, "Marcuse's Concept of Eros" (lecture, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2018). <https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/Marcuse%27s%20Concept.pdf>.

²¹⁵ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 125-127. Negative thinking has to do with the reflection in philosophical categories of the contradiction between people's existence and their essence, between historical realities and historical possibilities. Inasmuch they valorize this contradiction, with the aim of contributing to its overcoming, and hold out the possibility of a fundamentally difference mode of experience, the categories of thought can be said to have a negative function. My point is that in *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse's preoccupation with negative thinking commits him to the articulation of the contradictions between reality and possibility.

²¹⁶ Joan Braune, "Hope and Catastrophe: Messianism in Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse," in *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*, ed. Andrew Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter Funke (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), 293-295.

apocalyptic strain of Jewish messianism predisposes him to mistrust hope, reject constructive revolutionary programs, as evidenced by such key concepts as the Great Refusal, and yearn for catastrophe. Fromm, for his part, is indebted to a prophetic variety of messianism that centers hope and action in its vision of progress.²¹⁷ True, there are problems with invoking messianic tropes to elucidate either thinker's work. This is especially clear in Marcuse's case, as Braune's reduction of the concept of the Great Refusal to a brand of nihilism or to a longing for destructiveness undoubtedly obscures the complexity and fecundity of the concept, as well its elaboration in Marcuse's later work, as we shall see shortly. Braune also overstates Marcuse's hostility to hope as an important element in social transformation. Nonetheless, Braune's discussion does help us understand why Fromm's imagined socialism is more conducive to thinking about prefiguration, revolutionary praxis and transition than is some of Marcuse's early work.²¹⁸ The weight accorded to prefiguration in Fromm's work is illustrated in the following remarks of Amy Buzby's:

Fromm sees himself as using radical materialism to encourage emancipatory development in the present, which itself contains the elements for transcending our present condition of alienation, and sees Marcuse as drawing a simplistic Manichean alternative and cowering where reality demands engagement. To live otherwise, to

²¹⁷ Braune, "Hope and Catastrophe," 284-298.

²¹⁸ Another, not entirely unrelated, way of thinking about the tension between Fromm and the early Marcuse, is through the former's wish to popularize the revolutionary sensibility and the latter's unyielding emphasis on preserving spaces for critical thinking protected from the encroachment of one-dimensional, hegemonic tendencies. See Amy Buzby, *Subterranean Politics and Freud's Legacy: Critical Theory and Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 93-113, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=1431340>.

practice the values of a better world in the very fabric of an unjust social order, indeed, is “the most vital act of rebellion” from Fromm’s perspective, not the work of evangelizing adjustment to an unjust social reality.²¹⁹

Fromm’s concept of productiveness, coupled with insight into the difference between rational and irrational authority, is especially valuable with respect to prefiguration. Fromm not only describes the characteristics of what he terms productiveness but posits that one need not wait for socialism to find manifestations of it. Indeed, in what amounts to a restatement of the same observation, in some respects, the Marcuse-Fromm debate turns on the question of whether the productive character can materialize under capitalism.²²⁰ It is to the question of productiveness that I now turn, exploring the links between left leadership and ethics.

II. The Productive Orientation: What Is It?

A brief excursion into psychoanalytic theory will help us grasp the import of the idea of productiveness, which has to do with the ideal of psychological health. In what follows I outline key aspects of psychoanalytic theory, with an eye to making the nexus between productiveness and psychological health intelligible in psychoanalytic terms. The notion of *repression* is foundational to Freudian theory. On it rests the psychoanalyst’s ability to distinguish, however imperfectly, normal from impaired psychosexual development. Repression consists in a defensive reaction to forces that threaten the (human) organism from without. The basic impulse underlying repression is that of flight; repression is a form of inward retreat. One of Freud’s most

²¹⁹ Buzby, *Subterranean Politics*, 111.

²²⁰ But it also turns on the question of which understanding of productiveness we choose to subscribe to. For as Marcuse points out, Fromm is not always consistent in his treatment of the concept, and certain formulations of it, as we shall see below, certainly seem to lend themselves to distortion and vulgarization.

important discoveries is that of infantile sexuality, and it is in reference to infantile sexuality that the concept of repression assumes its full significance. In classical psychoanalytic theory (i.e., Freudian drive theory) repression most frequently denotes the self-imposed suppression of sexual impulses in early childhood in response to the hostility with which they are met by the outside world, i.e., the child's parents.²²¹ Repression is a key process in the unfolding of the Oedipal drama, in which the child's sexually charged affection for a parent is rebuked and the consequence of which is the withdrawal of said affection. The boy's affection for his mother and the concomitant murderous urges he experiences toward his father occasion what Freud terms the *Oedipus complex*, the nucleus of neurotic behaviour in adult men.²²²

The frustrations and prohibitions associated with the child's earliest expressions of sexuality come to define the *Reality Principle*, a psychological construct by means of which the developing child learns to label its impulses as either permissible or impermissible so as to avoid punishment. The emergence of the Reality Principle precedes the psyche's tripartite stratification as id, ego, and superego, with the ego serving as the foremost representative of the Reality Principle inasmuch as it inhibits impulsivity, mediating between the conflicting demands of the id and the superego. The chief imperative of the Reality Principle, tamer of pleasure-seeking impulses, is delayed gratification.²²³ The Reality Principle helps the child adapt to society's demands and restrictions by providing acceptable forms of indulgence, i.e., ones that do not invite punishment and further repression. Despite the emergence of the Reality Principle in the child's developing psyche, certain unresolved wishes and impulses persist and seek expression.

²²¹ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 30, 68.

²²² Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 278-282.

²²³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 12-13.

At the same time, the super ego, the Reality Principle's handmaiden, is at work trying to prevent these impulses and wishes from emerging in unadulterated form.

Beneath Freud's theory of neurosis lurks the ideal of psychological health. What exactly does psychological health entail, from Freud's perspective? As Paul Roazen points out, the psychoanalytic tradition is somewhat ambiguous on this score.²²⁴ One view is that psychic health consists of an individual's ability to carry on with their lives with minimal inner and interpersonal conflict in a given society. This is tantamount to saying that adjustment to prevailing norms and expectations is the yardstick of psychological health. Marcuse rejects this view in *Eros and Civilization*. Indeed, this constitutes the core of his critique of the neo-Freudian or cultural psychoanalysts.²²⁵ For him, the danger of equating psychological health with adjustment is acute because capitalist society stifles free development and self-expression, buttressing the very structures that necessitate repression in the first place. Marcuse's critique here (the book's epilogue) accentuates the significance of the hidden utopian trend in psychoanalysis he references earlier in the book. According to Marcuse, Freud's work contains a robust vision of psychological health, one linked with freedom, pleasure and fulfillment, over and beyond alignment with the imperatives of a given social order. Marcuse maintains that articulating it and exploring its implications is of the utmost importance for the socialist left. Yet his thematization of it centers on the prospect of instinctual liberation, which means that he can provide only a skeletal description of what the pervasiveness of these experiences implies for the structure of individual consciousness and, importantly, its relationship to sociality.

²²⁴ Paul Roazen, *Freud: Political & Social Thought*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 287, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9781351310802>.

²²⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 238-274. Fromm is adamant in *The Sane Society* (203) that his view of mental health depends not on social adjustment but on the criteria of "normative humanism."

Marcuse's reluctance to hazard a more complete picture of healthy individuality at this stage of his career can be attributed, at least in part, to his resistance to positive or affirmative thinking, which aligns him with the philosophical proclivities of his Frankfurt School collaborators Theodor Adorno and Marx Horkheimer. Since the substance of his utopian reflections derives from a negation of what he takes to be a thoroughly alienated status quo, only the broadest outline of a radically different society may be offered, albeit one forceful and compelling enough to indict the status quo and to hold up the possibility of a different kind of existence. Indeed, the sentiments underlying Marcuse's utopian reflections in *Eros and Civilization* are related to his arguments concerning the critical or negative function of art and literature in *One-Dimensional Man*. Anything other than negation and utopian imaginings would run the risk of exporting the qualities of alienated capitalist selfhood to the utopian imagination, the result of which would be a diminution of its critical force and an attendant affirmation of the distorted individualism anchored in capitalist alienation. Having said that, Marcuse's reticence on this score perhaps leads him to overemphasize the role of play under what he considers to be a new Reality Principle.²²⁶ And perhaps precisely because of his overemphasis on eros and play, Marcuse's concept of liberated individualism is somewhat one-sided. In a scathing critique, Chodorow takes Marcuse to task for failing to articulate a substantive vision of mature individualism and social relations in his utopian explorations in *Eros and Civilization*. Although the vision of a society in which eros has been liberated is quite attractive at first glance and is also compelling and helps sustain imaginings of freedom and fulfillment, Marcuse does not thematize the intersubjective components of the individual's experience that make life meaningful. Since Marcuse's vision is tethered to the prospect of instinctual gratification and an

²²⁶ Alford, *Narcissism*, chap. 5.

egoless existence, he downplays the importance of human relations, both developmentally and as indispensable aspects of mature fulfillment.²²⁷ Indeed, for all his attacks on Reich's simplistic identification of liberation from authoritarian social structures with uninhibited sexuality Marcuse's emancipatory imaginary suffers from the lack of a more robust approach to the question of intersubjectivity.²²⁸ Fred Alford chalks this up to Marcuse's tendentious reading of societal intervention as fundamentally inimical to the expression of eros; supposedly, the true potentialities of eros will unfold freely only once an ostensible regression in the human organism restores the supremacy of primary narcissism, wherein the boundaries between self, other, and the world are blurred and the entire body is eroticized, is effected. In a society that is truly free, maintains Marcuse, the individual's entire body will be cathected and her libido freely extend to the people and objects around her. Drawing on, complementing and extending Chodorow's critique, Alford contends that Marcuse valorizes a regressive form of enjoyment, one that precludes maturation, work, sociality, and results in the denigration of higher cultural pleasures and values.²²⁹ As a corrective, Alford deploys post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory to draw a distinction between regressive and progressive narcissism. Also drawing on Plato's theory of sublimation, he argues that eros is best understood as the handmaiden of narcissism and that eros contains a telos, which means that its truest and most fulfilling expression consists in the fulfillment of this telos. This presupposes redirection from immediate drive gratification toward

²²⁷ Nancy Chodorow, "Beyond Drive Theory: Object Relations and the Limits of Radical Individualism," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 3 (May 1985): 282-86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657117>. For a more recent feminist critique of Marcuse, see Meg Luxton, "Rethinking Social Reproduction Through the Multi-Dimensional Woman," in *One-Dimensional Man 50 Years On: The Struggle Continues*, ed. Terry Maley (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2017).

²²⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 239.

²²⁹ Alford, *Narcissism*, chap. 5.

higher social and cultural pursuits. Since the telos of eros consists in striving and creation, its fullest expression will be guaranteed by the individual's free exercise of their agency and creativity. On this reading of the relationship between eros and narcissism, narcissism—which is equated here with perfection, wholeness and self-sufficiency—and its facilitator, eros, need not be at odds with the maturing ego and even benefit from it since it encompasses and perfects the development of a great variety of capabilities and forms of self-expression.²³⁰ In other words, Alford seeks to substitute a mature notion of narcissism, grounded in mastery and work, for the regressive aspects of Marcuse's utopianism so as to prevent his utopian vision from being completely discredited. Moreover, Alford's ascription of positive narcissistic value to work helps bridge the gap between utopia and the means of effecting it:

But, unlike Marcuse's theory, the theory of narcissism does not idealize the most primitive expression of this utopia, in large measure because it views mature narcissism not merely as a detour from regressive narcissistic satisfaction, but in terms akin to the Platonic theory of sublimation, in which it is the higher pleasures that offer the greatest satisfaction, because they draw on a wider variety of human capabilities and talents, thereby promoting the perfection of the whole self. It is for this reason too that the theory of narcissism better connects utopia with efforts to realize it—namely, these talents can also be brought to bear in the discussion and creation of utopia.²³¹

Alford's theory of narcissism has a strong affinity with the prefigurative quality of Fromm's notion of productiveness and lends credence to the idea that psychoanalysis can make a

²³⁰ Alford, *Narcissism*, chap. 5.

²³¹ Alford, *Narcissism*, chap. 5.

significant contribution to theorizing and effecting the transition from capitalism to socialism, especially as it bears on the issue of leadership. Fromm points out that the critical literature of his day is conspicuously reluctant to articulate ideas about the good person and the good society: “The emphasis is on critical analysis of man and society, in which positive visions of what man ought to be are only implied.”²³² Like Marcuse, Fromm was attuned to the latent trend in psychoanalysis. Unlike Marcuse, however, he was willing to think through its implications for psychological health and maturity more explicitly and systematically. That said, it must be noted that Alford, Chodorow, and Fromm greatly underestimate the importance of Marcuse’s explosive utopianism for both revitalizing the transformative imaginary of the socialist left and offering a sense of just how at odds with the current Reality Principle is a society that is genuinely responsive to the imperatives of eros, that the individualism that would reign in such a society must entail a complete negation of “bourgeois individualism.” Moreover, the argument that Marcuse did not offer prefigurative concepts must be qualified, for, as we shall see below, his notion of the new sensibility, to the extent that it can be understood as prescribing practices that would help usher in a new kind of social existence, can be said to have a prefigurative dimension, at least implicitly. Another qualification concerns instincts and their relationship to maturity. It must be noted that although Marcuse does not explicitly elaborate a theory of maturity, by way of engagement with the possibility of liberated instinct in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse’s thought holds up an image of mature individuality and authentic human relationships. The very notion of eros, which is made so much of in this book, presupposes the creation and proliferation of social ties of various kinds. Indeed, it entails the creation and expansion of social

²³² Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 89-90.

unities and the work of culture building.²³³ The only thing that Marcuse can really be faulted for in connection with the questions of prefiguration and maturity, then, is that in his early work, and perhaps to an extent in his later work, he failed to *explicitly* articulate a theory of maturity and prefiguration, a failure that detracts from some of his contributions to the problematic of left strategy. But it must be noted that his contributions to this problematic are extremely valuable nonetheless. We shall see why later through a discussion of Marcuse's prescriptions around leadership. Below I also argue that Marcuse offers significant criticisms of Fromm's use of the concept of productiveness, ones that Fromm fails to rebut convincingly. I also argue that Fromm's insistence that productiveness should illuminate a pathway toward radical social change must ultimately be understood as complementing Marcuse's notion of the Great Refusal, so long as the latter is understood as a precondition of the former.

Before delving into Fromm's concept of productiveness, a few words about the relationship between productiveness and Fromm's ideal of a sane society are in order. The concept of productiveness, it must be noted, assumes its full significance in relation to the prospect of a qualitatively different form of social organization, that is, socialism. In *The Sane Society*, Fromm explores the issue of mental health, seeking to ascertain what conditions must obtain in society so that optimal mental health becomes realizable. In addition to productiveness (mature relatedness)—which animates and reinforces the other qualities required for human flourishing—Fromm identifies a sense of rootedness (solidarity and belonging), a sense of personal (as distinct from group) identity, transcendence (of our “creaturely” selves), and a frame of orientation (purposefulness) as existential needs.²³⁴ Fromm insists that the dominant social

²³³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 211-212.

²³⁴ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 28-59.

organization today is not conducive to mental health since it militates against productiveness. The social character endemic to this form of organization, which ensures its stability and perpetuation, consists of the marketing and receptive orientations,²³⁵ both of which are at odds with the productive orientation.²³⁶ That being so, the goal of psychoanalytic social theory is to analyze the dominant social character—which organizes individuals’ experiences and needs in a way that renders them serviceable to the social order—in advanced capitalist societies, and help chart a path that would lead to its transformation.²³⁷

Central to Fromm’s conception of mental health is *relatedness*. The weight accorded to this concept in his characterological typology helps differentiate it from that of Freud, who foregrounds the libido in his understanding of character formation. Fromm argues that each individual must relate to the world in some way, and that the ways they do this shapes their character.²³⁸ They can relate to the world productively or unproductively.²³⁹ Fromm identifies four distinct unproductive orientations: receptive, exploitative, hoarding, and marketing. Each of these is defined by a wayward form of relatedness, and therein lies the crux of their unproductiveness. The first two are manifestations of the symbiotic form of relatedness, while the latter two are characterized by withdrawal, a flight from relatedness.²⁴⁰ Love, the core of the productive orientation, is at odds with the other two types of relatedness.²⁴¹ For Fromm, as we

²³⁵ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 353.

²³⁶ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 185-201.

²³⁷ For an exploration of the relationship between the character structure of Americans and authoritarian trends in the United States, see Lauren Langman and George Lundskow, *God, Guns, Gold and Glory: American Character and its Discontents* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

²³⁸ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 66-67.

²³⁹ In *The Sane Society* (33-35), Fromm argues that failure to establish a relationship with the world results in narcissism, the most extreme manifestation of which is psychosis.

²⁴⁰ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 116. Fromm elaborates on the relevance of the concept of symbiosis in relation to perverse mutuality in *Escape from Freedom* (157-159).

²⁴¹ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 117.

have seen, productiveness is defined by the capacity for activeness as opposed to power as domination; he regards the latter as a perversion of the former.²⁴² Additionally, the productive individual's relationship to the world is *generative*, in the sense that their participation in and interaction with it occurs spontaneously and enriches it and their own experiences. They at once perceive it as it is and are able to conceive of it as enriched by their own activity. While the productive disposition is certainly conducive to the production of things that enhance the quality of human life, e.g., tools and art, productive individuals are notable for their attitude toward life, which entails the drive to excel in the art of being and to actualize their human potentialities.²⁴³ As such, the essence of productiveness is a specific attitude toward the world rather than mere doing. The most authentic emotional expression of productiveness is *love*. Love, for Fromm, is not merely a feeling but a mode of relatedness characterized by care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge:

Productive love always implies a syndrome of attitudes; that of *care, responsibility, respect* and *knowledge*. If I love, I care—that is, I am actively concerned with the other person's growth and happiness; I am not a spectator. I am responsible, that is, I respond to his needs, to those he can express and more so to those he cannot or does not express. I respect him, that is (according to the original meaning of *re-spicere*) I look at him as he is, objectively and not distorted by my wishes and fears. I know him, I have penetrated through his surface to the core of his being and related myself to him from my core, from the center, as against the periphery, of my being.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 160-161.

²⁴³ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 94-97.

²⁴⁴ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 31-32.

The ability to love is the foremost expression of one's vitality and is therefore the most accurate index of mental health. A society that fosters the individual's capacity for love is a truly sane one, and socialism, of course, is the chief candidate.

Ethics, too, figures prominently in Fromm's concept of productiveness. In *Man for Himself* Fromm makes it abundantly clear that productive individualism is inherently ethical. Focusing on the tradition of humanistic ethics, most notably the contributions of Aristotle and Spinoza, Fromm teases out the affinities between the humanistic interpretation of virtue (and happiness) and his own idea of productiveness.²⁴⁵ The possibility that a character trait that is *prima fasci* identified as humility, for instance, may, upon closer examination, be found to be rooted in, say, timidity—recall that motivation is integral to virtue ethics—points up the fact that judgements regarding virtue and vice must be based on a consideration of the individual's character structure. The following formulation captures the essence of this principle: “*The virtuous or the vicious character, rather than single virtues or vices, is the true subject matter of ethical inquiry.*”²⁴⁶ There is, in other words, a substantive relationship between virtue and the psychoanalytic valorization of the mature character structure. Both virtue and psychological maturity presuppose the development of people's capacity for activity, which consists in the ability to freely actualize one's inherent potentialities. Fromm makes the case that, although this was not made explicit by Freud, the concept of the genitality has a normative dimension.²⁴⁷ By

²⁴⁵ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 176-194.

²⁴⁶ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 42.

²⁴⁷ Karl Abraham, “Character-Formation on the Genital Level of the Libido,” in *Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglass Bryan and Alix Strachey (London: Routledge, 1988), 408, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780429479854>. Genitality, for Freud, is the highest stage of psychosexual development.

emphasizing uninhibited activity or vitality as the fullest expression of human potential. Fromm manages to unite humanistic ethics with the purpose or aim of psychoanalysis. His own idea of productiveness weaves together virtue and the formation of a mature character structure. “In discussing the *productive character*”, he emphasizes, “I venture beyond critical analysis and inquire into the nature of the fully developed character that is the aim of human development and simultaneously the ideal of humanistic ethics.”²⁴⁸

Humanistic ethics, as Fromm understands it, concerns the ability to freely develop those potentialities that are distinctively human. Happiness is attained when one’s vitality, which is the unifying essence of these potentialities, is allowed full, uninhibited expression. The ethical problems accompanying the hedonistic notion that pleasure is the highest good are obviated once it is recognized that, beyond the experience of relief that follows the satisfaction of basic physiological needs, the only other genuine form of pleasure is that derived from the *state* of being happy, which in turn derives from the actualization of one’s vitality through a range of human activities. “Happiness is an achievement brought about by man’s inner productiveness and not a gift of the gods. Happiness and joy are not the satisfaction of a need springing from a physiological or psychological lack; they are not the relief from tension but the accompaniment of all productive activity, in thought, feeling, and action,” posits Fromm.²⁴⁹ The implication is that pleasures that attend actions or attitudes that are generally deemed immoral (e.g., sadistic ideation rooted in a destructive form of relatedness), are not conducive to happiness and to the overall well-being of the individual and can undermine it in the long run. Such pleasures Fromm characterizes as neurotic or *irrational*. Happiness, indeed, is the only legitimate criterion of

²⁴⁸ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 80.

²⁴⁹ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 192.

“*excellence in the art of living*.”²⁵⁰ Interestingly, from the standpoint of humanistic ethics, there is no necessary conflict between self-interest and self-love, on the one hand, and loving others on the other. Productive individuals relate to themselves in as authentic and loving a manner as they do to others. Selfishness is an expression of the inability to love oneself and love others. On this view, contrary to the tendency to identify one with the other, self-interest and selfishness are actually opposites.²⁵¹

The foregoing explication, it must be stressed, relied on a particular understanding of Fromm’s notion of productiveness, that is, a critical one. What Marcuse points out in his initial critique of the “revisionist” concept of productiveness is that the way the revisionists speak of it at certain points lends itself to a less critical understanding and indeed to appropriation by the imperatives of adjustment:

For example, productiveness, proclaimed as the goal of the healthy individual under the performance principle must normally...show forth in good business, administration, service, with the reasonable expectation of recognized success.... This is the accepted, “realistic” meaning of productiveness and love. But the very same term also denotes the *free* realization of man, or the idea of such realization. The revisionist usage of these terms plays on this ambiguity, which designates both the unfree and the free, both the mutilated and the integral faculties of man, thus vesting the established reality principle with the grandeur of promises that can be redeemed only *beyond* this reality principle.

²⁵⁰ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 192.

²⁵¹ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 135-36.

Fromm is clearly one of the targets of this charge, and not without good cause. Although Fromm insists in one of his rebuttals to Marcuse in the course of their debate that productiveness is rare in our culture, as he does again in *The Art of Loving*, some of his formulations in *The Art of Loving* certainly contradict the critical spirit of the notion of productiveness. A case in point is the following claim: “A Salesman of a useless commodity, for instance, cannot function economically without lying; a skilled worker, a chemist, or a physician can. Similarly, a farmer, a worker, a teacher, and many a type of businessman can try to practice love without ceasing to function economically.”²⁵² Despite Fromm’s adamantness that productiveness must be quite rare under capitalism, the passage just quoted seems to be amenable to the notion that it need not in fact be so rare since many professions, even in the business world, do not preclude practicing love. In other words, Marcuse accurately observes that Fromm “wants it both ways”: he wants to maintain that productiveness is a force that is inherently opposed to capitalism, and must for that very reason be rare, while making room for the possibility that the reality of capitalism is sufficiently open-ended for the not-so-infrequent manifestation of productiveness. In fact, this latter sentiment seems to be presupposed in the very fact of Fromm’s decision to write *The Art of Loving*, which is a treatise on the ways the theory and practice of love can be of use to the “ordinary” person. If productiveness is indeed as rare as Fromm insists it is at times, what would be the point of writing such a treatise? How many people would realistically benefit from it? Unfortunately, subscribing to both views simultaneously is untenable. And it is the assumption that productiveness is rare, rather than its obverse, that can be easily squared with the critical spirit of most of Fromm’s discourses on productiveness in his writings. Thus, again, Marcuse’s contention that there is a certain ambiguity in the way Fromm uses the concept can be

²⁵² Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 131-132. PDF.

vindicated, and Fromm scholars must therefore take care to draw a distinction between the critical use of the term and conformist applications, and naturally should choose to valorize the former. Only if productiveness is understood as the very negation of the ethic of capitalism can it preserve its critical and prefigurative dimension.

Beyond the foregoing considerations, I would like to make the case that Marcuse's concept of the Great Refusal in fact complements Fromm's notion of productiveness, in the sense that both are essential to effecting radical social transformation, and that each presupposes and requires the other. Marcuse's Great Refusal, in its mature formulation, projects a positive dimension, one that Fromm's notion of productiveness can help provide with content, especially in terms of the transvaluation of values made so much of by Marcuse. Rather than interpreting the Great Refusal through a nihilistic lens, as Joan Braune does, it should be understood to designate the mass rejection of Establishment institutions and everything they stand for by way of preparation for the radical transformation of society, and the possibility of a happy, anxiety-less existence. Indeed, it is only through such a total rejection that productiveness can begin to germinate and spread across society and its institutions. Without such a total refusal, it is unlikely that productiveness, as envisioned by Fromm, can take root and become the dominant character structure.

Marcuse's first serious discussion of the Great Refusal can be found in *Eros and Civilization*. It is subsequently elaborated on in *One-Dimensional Man*. In the former work, Marcuse discusses the concept alongside the possibility of a new Reality Principle, which would be thoroughly eroticized.²⁵³ The Great Refusal is tantamount to the rejection of the existing Reality Principle, which Marcuse terms the Performance Principle. Therefore, the Great Refusal

²⁵³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 197-221. The argument concerning the complementarity of the concepts of the Great Refusal and productiveness is first introduced in a book chapter of mine entitled "Marcuse and Fromm: Friends Again?" See Maor Levitin, "Marcuse and Fromm: Friends Again?," in *The Marcusean Mind*, ed. Eduardo Altheman, Jina Fast, Nicole K. Mayberry, Sid Simpson (Routledge, forthcoming).

is to be understood primarily in negative terms. Certainly, in *One-Dimensional Man* as well his treatment of the concept is chiefly negative inasmuch it projects little more than the *en masse* rejection of the status quo, amounting to not much more than merely the refusal to go along. Inasmuch as his use of the concept here carries an artistic connotation, it is again primarily negative, to be interpreted as the artistic dimension's ability to say "no" to the status quo. Considered in isolation, Marcuse's use of the concept in this book is very much in the spirit of rejection and disavowal rather than being constructive. But a reading of the concept of the Great Refusal primarily through engagement with *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man* is bound to yield a limited and one-sided understanding of the concept, which is elaborated upon and expanded in Marcuse's subsequent work. For instance, Marcuse is adamant in *An Essay on Liberation* that the Great Refusal has to be thought alongside a new sensibility. Here it is made very clear that he wants to move beyond critical theory's preoccupation with negation and attempt to sketch a positive vision of socialism, something that he was perhaps himself reluctant to do until this point, in part perhaps because of the pervasive one-dimensionality of society prior to the appearance on the scene of the student and anti-war movements in the 1960s. At the outset he notes, "Marx and Engels refrained from developing concrete concepts of the possible forms of freedom in a socialist society; today, such restraint no longer seems justified. The growth of the productive forces suggests possibilities of human liberty very different from, and beyond those envisaged at the earlier stage."²⁵⁴ Marcuse then highlights the "affirmative" dimension of the Great Refusal: "The refusal with which the opposition confronts the existing society is affirmative in that it envisages a new culture which fulfills the humanistic promises betrayed by the old culture. Political Radicalism thus implies moral radicalism: the emergence of a morality

²⁵⁴ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 5.

which might precondition man for freedom.”²⁵⁵ He devotes much of the essay to providing an outline of such a new morality, which of course is bound up with a new sensibility. He notes, for instance, that the individuals who could populate a socialist society would have “a different sensitivity as well as consciousness: men who would speak a different language, have different gestures, follow different impulses; men who have developed an instinctual barrier against cruelty, brutality, ugliness.”²⁵⁶ This new sensibility in turn presupposes the construction of a new Reality Principle, which would be characterized by the melding of the intellectual faculties and the senses (i.e., the imagination) in the creation of a new sensitivity which would fulfill the function traditionally reserved for the aesthetic dimension: expressing the beautiful. This new universe of experience would be mediated by art. Additionally, the sensibility in question depends on the creation of a new language and a complete overhaul of existing values, which are bound up with the logic of domination.²⁵⁷ The new sensibility, if understood in connection with and is supplemented by a more concrete vision of radical strategizing, comes very close to being a form of prefiguration.

It should also be noted that although Marcuse does not thematize authority the way Fromm does, he does offer valuable reflections on authority in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Here, in a lucid analysis of the importance of organization for advancing the New Left’s myriad progressive agendas, Marcuse offers important insights about the relationship between leadership, authority and the struggle for liberation. In an instructive passage, Marcuse insists on the importance of leadership in relation to political education in a class divided society. He notes, “All Authentic education is political education, and in a class society, political education

²⁵⁵ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 10.

²⁵⁶ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 21.

²⁵⁷ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 23-48.

is unthinkable without leadership, educated and tested in the theory and practice of radical opposition. The ‘function’ of this leadership is to ‘translate’ spontaneous protest into organized action which has the chance to develop and to transcend immediate needs and aspirations toward the radical reconstruction of society: transformation of immediate into organized spontaneity.”²⁵⁸ But Marcuse’s argument goes further than that. He continues, “Spontaneity does not contradict authority: inasmuch as revolutionary practice is the explosion of vital needs...it is rooted in spontaneity—but this spontaneity can be *deceptive*: it can be the result of the introjection of social needs required by the established order but militating against the liberation of the human being.... The intensive indoctrination and management of people call for an intensive counter-education and organization. And this very necessity is confronted with the antiauthoritarian tendencies among the New Left.”²⁵⁹ This is Marcuse’s way of warning the New Left against understanding refusal in predominantly individual terms, and encouraging it to think of it instead in terms of collective, coordinated anti-Establishment actions. He spells this out more clearly when he says the following: “The first heroic period of the movement, the period of joyful and often spectacular action, has come to an end.... Pleasant immediate harmony of one’s own thing and the political thing was a token of the weakness of the New Left....”²⁶⁰ Although Marcuse does not elaborate on the significance of authority here, based on these passages, it is clear that he believes that a modicum of authority is necessary for enacting (collective) refusals on a large scale, that is, ones that can actually undermine existing institutions and pave the way for the construction of socialism. At the same time, it is clear that

²⁵⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 47.

²⁵⁹ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 47.

²⁶⁰ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 51.

what Marcuse has in mind in terms of political education and leadership is not the mass party.²⁶¹ He does provide a further clue as to what he has in mind: “The Historical heir of the authoritarian mass party (or rather, its self-perpetuating leadership) is not anarchy but a self-imposed discipline and authority—an authority which can only emerge in the struggle itself, recognized by those who wage the struggle.”²⁶² What Marcuse is advocating here is leadership from below. This idea needs to be fleshed out, but is arguably prefigurative of the concept of horizontal leadership that I introduce below with the aid of the Frommian concept of rational authority.

Before exploring the problematic of rational authority, I would like to note a further affinity between Fromm’s and Marcuse’s ideas. Both thinkers draw extensively on Marx’s famous *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In fact, both thinkers were early commentators on this text. Fromm devotes a whole book to an interpretation of it, *Marx’s Concept of Man*, and Marcuse published an important review of it in 1933.²⁶³ Beyond that, concepts from the *Manuscripts* appear in different guises in the work of both thinkers. One concept that figures centrally in Marx’s text is alienation. He devotes considerable space to a discussion of the different forms of alienation that prevail in capitalist society as well as the possibility of an unalienated social existence and what that might look like.²⁶⁴ With the added preoccupation with the estranging effects of technology, repressive sexuality, and consumerism, Marcuse’s contention that late capitalist society is pervaded by one-dimensionality, which, as the

²⁶¹ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 42-45.

²⁶² Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 45.

²⁶³ Erich Fromm and Karl Marx, *Marx’s Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1967). Translation by T. B. Bottomore; Herbert Marcuse, *The Foundation of Historical Materialism*, in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, trans. Joris De Bres (Boston, Beacon Press, 1973).

²⁶⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988), 69-84, 99-114.

title suggests, is a major component of *One-Dimensional Man*, is clearly indebted to Marx's concept of alienation. At the same time, the idea of a new sensibility is also a clear nod to Marx's sketch of the healthy, socially inclined individuality that would come to predominate under socialism. Marcuse's exploration of utopian possibilities in *Eros and Civilization* and the *Aesthetic Dimension* is also a clear homage to and an elaboration on Marx's portrayal of social life beyond capitalist alienation.²⁶⁵ Fromm, for his part, owes his idea of productiveness at least in part to Marx's outline of the humanistic qualities endemic to socialism in the *Manuscripts*. Recalling the indebtedness of both thinkers to the early Marx allows us to see with greater clarity their proximity to one another and buttresses the case for the complementarity of their ideas. Although Fromm takes up the questions of maturity, prefiguration, and authority more explicitly than does Marcuse, they certainly serve as the backdrop to Marcuse's articulation of the horizons of socialist society and the imperatives of leftist strategy.

III. Rational Authority: A Conceptual Underpinning of Ethical Leadership

Paying heed to Fromm's insight concerning the entwinement of humanistic ethics and productiveness, I would like to draw attention to the problematic of left leadership. In order to appreciate the transformative potential of leadership it behooves us to recall the crucial distinction Fromm draws in *Escape from Freedom* and elsewhere between rational and irrational authority. Irrational authority is characterized by the perpetuation of power for power's sake. It has little or no regard for the well-being of those over whom it is wielded. Indeed, it is in the interest of those who embrace it to maintain or even deepen the gap between themselves and their followers (in terms of knowledge, skill, etc.). Rational authority signifies the purposeful use

²⁶⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

of authority. It is exercised with the aim of empowering others in some way, and its scope is delimited by clearly defined functions. In contrast to irrational authority, it seeks to minimize or abolish any existing inequalities in knowledge, skill and ability as much as possible and steers clear of mystification.²⁶⁶ This distinction challenges the view that because all authority entails difference in status or ability, it is infused with oppressive power relations and inextricably bound up with domination. Power, this distinction suggests, ought not to be equated with repression or domination, and it is not inconceivable that some forms of power are conducive to emancipatory politics. Availing himself of Chantal Mouffe's interpretation of Gramsci, Erich J. Weiner—focusing on critical pedagogy—arrives at a similar conclusion. He writes:

His complex accounting of leadership's *necessary* relationship to the pedagogic and hegemonic constitute an important contribution to a theory of leadership by understanding that leadership is not only an element in the pedagogical project of forming a consensus of commonsense, but also is an important dimension of oppositional work. That is, leadership can provide a productive force for *breaking into* dominant formations of commonsense. His ideas concerning the link between leadership and hegemony provide an important theoretical referent for developing a theory of transformative leadership.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 163-165. It is important to note that this distinction is ideal in nature, for there are certainly elements of irrationality in rational authority and vice versa. What justifies the judgement that a particular instance of authority is either rational or irrational is the relative strength and influence of the rational and irrational elements involved. With regards to the psychology of individuals, as I argue below, this implies the predominance of either rationality or irrationality vis-à-vis the structuring of individuals' character.

²⁶⁷ Eric J. Weiner, "Secretary Paulo Freire and the Democratization of Power: Toward a Theory of Transformative Leadership," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 35, no. 1 (January 2003): 89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-5812.00007>. Elsewhere, Weiner draws on Fromm's thought to

I argue that, in conjunction with his theory of productiveness, Fromm's notion of rational authority lays the foundation for a robust theory of transformative leadership. In *The Sane Society*, Fromm says that in addition to being associated with the performance of specific functions and the ability and willingness to justify one's authority, rational authority invites identification. Fromm underscores its ethical character,²⁶⁸ and it is this aspect of rational leadership, which unfortunately remains underexplored in Fromm's work, that is most valuable for thinking through the problem of transition. For, given Fromm's identification of productiveness with humanistic ethics, it stands to reason that an ethical leader's character structure approximates the ideal of productiveness. Only leadership imbued with rational authority can help build up productiveness in others, for, by embodying productiveness (i.e., behaving authentically and forming mature relationships permeated by love and a sense of responsibility), it enables and invites identification, but more importantly, it fosters productiveness in others by virtue of relating to them in a productive manner. Why is it important that productiveness be embraced by activists as well as ever greater segments of the population at large? The answer, quite simply, is that the gradual spread of productiveness seems like one viable way to build a bridge between capitalism and socialism. Indeed, it would be a tall order to expect a populace within which the marketing orientation is ascendant to recognize the value, desirability, and possibility of a different social order. Importantly, the Frommian notion of ethical authority serves as a corrective to one of the dominant conceptions of leadership on the

make a case for ethical leadership. See Eric J. Weiner, "Paths from Erich Fromm: Thinking Authority Pedagogically," *The Journal of Educational Thought* 37, no. 1 (2003), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23767176>.

²⁶⁸ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 94.

left, namely, Leninist-style vanguardism. It is not a leap to argue that vanguardism implicitly valorizes irrational authority, ignoring the fact that attempts to usher in a socialist society through irrational authority are likely to result in its replication (in somewhat different form) in the society of the future, rendering the post-revolutionary order vulnerable to anti-democratic and authoritarian trends.

In fact, the idea of ethical leadership figures centrally in Fromm's sketch of a transformative movement that could potentially help "humanize" technology, end alienation, and inaugurate a qualitative change in individual psychology and social relations in *The Revolution of Hope*. One of the three organs of the movement would be a national council, which Fromm tellingly proposes to call Voice of American Conscience. This council, which could also have regional offshoots, would essentially consist of individuals with the utmost integrity and who possess various kinds of theoretical and technical knowledge. Although the council would have no formal power, either within the movement or in society at large, its recommendations regarding various aspects of social life, including everything from war to infrastructure, would carry real weight and sway public opinion. Its proposals would be heeded because of the character of the individuals who make up the council and their commitment to humanistic values.²⁶⁹ Fromm's Voice of American Conscience points up the possibilities inherent in ethical leadership and gestures toward its prefigurative potential. Yet his treatment of the issue barely scratches the surface, for it is clear that there is much more to the transformative potential of ethical leadership than Fromm's discussion here suggests. An exploration of the value of ethical leadership can be aided by the concept of productiveness. The latter can be useful in elucidating

²⁶⁹ Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 151-154.

the prefigurative qualities of ethical leadership, including: the ability to generate robust identifications that lend themselves to the development of virtue; exemplify, through interaction with others, an unalienated mode of relatedness; and introduce and normalize the principle of rational hierarchy.

I would like to suggest that fleshing out the concept of ethical leadership outlined above is especially timely today. Since recent years have seen a massive resurgence of right-wing populisms, it is clear that the left is in urgent need of something equal in force and reach.²⁷⁰ But the resistance of some segments of the left to non-horizontal forms of organization makes left leadership a hard sell. Thankfully, the idea of rational authority and its corollary, ethical leadership, lend credence to the notion that not all forms of leadership are inherently oppressive; in highlighting the qualitative difference between ethical leadership and a leadership geared to domination, this idea can help normalize leadership on the left while undercutting the dominance of crudely horizontal forms of organization.

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer some brief, cursory thoughts on how one might go about differentiating between right-wing and left-wing leadership. The ethical leader's defining character traits are diametrically opposed to those of the charismatic right-wing populist. As we will see in chapter 5, charisma could be helpful in but is not sufficient for generating ethical leadership. And it is certainly not the main component of ethical leadership. We might think of ethical leaders of the leftist variety as combining charisma with a strong sense of *responsibility*, or perhaps, as I do in chapter 5, treat their charisma as an outward expression of

²⁷⁰ For discussion of contemporary right-wing populism, and attempts to differentiate between left and right populism, see Jeremiah Morelock, ed., *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9hvtcf>.

their character. Echoing Adorno's psychoanalytically informed insights regarding the psychology of right-wing populism, Samir Gandesha posits that in order for the "collective identification" catalyzed by the (authoritarian) group's leader to retain its potency, it is imperative that the leader be completely narcissistic, "that is, someone who is *loved but does not love in turn*.... This is what explains the agitator's disinterest—in contrast to revolutionary and reformer alike—in presenting a positive political programme outlining concrete policy proposals."²⁷¹ It is precisely this style of leadership that is endemic to right-wing populism. By contrast, an ethical leader's ability to produce a positive transformative vision that is widely accepted is not merely rooted in their articulation of the possibility of a utopian future but also in their capacity to lead by example; they embody in their own disposition and attitudes the potentialities inherent in the productive character as well as rational authority. This leader's strength, in the final analysis, lies in their ability to concretize and thereby lend verisimilitude to the eventualities associated with socialism.

²⁷¹ Samir Gandesha, "A Composite of King Kong and a Suburban Barber": Adorno's "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *Spectres of Fascism: Historical, Theoretical and International Perspectives*, ed. Samir Gandesha (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 124, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.2307/j.ctvxrpzqv>. For an interesting, albeit critical, treatment of the Frankfurt School's attitude to authority, see Jessica Benjamin, "Authority and the Family Revisited: Or, a World without Fathers?," *New German Critique*, no. 13 (1978), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3115186>.

Chapter 4: The Question of Left Leadership

The previous chapters have made a case for the need, and helped lay the foundation, for a theory of ethical left leadership, with a critique of horizontalism in its various guises and Fromm's notions of rational authority and productiveness as the main building blocks. This chapter uses the insights offered in the preceding chapters to introduce a theory of ethical left leadership. My main argument here is that Erich Fromm makes an invaluable contribution to the question of ethical leadership. The argument proceeds in several steps. The chapter opens with an analysis of the mainstream, corporate/business view of leadership. I make the case that this view is generally inadequate because it is colored by ideology, even though it does offer some interesting insights into the nature of ethical leadership. As a prelude to my discussion of how Fromm's ideas around productiveness and rational authority might be of service to a robust conception of ethical identification, I delve into the psychoanalytic literature on identification. I then discuss the Frankfurt School's treatment of the subject via a critical analysis of their attitude to authority and the family, arguing, through an outline of Jessica Benjamin's critique of their valorization of paternal authority, that identification is a valuable psychoanalytic motif that ought to figure centrally in a theory of ethical left leadership. My overview of recent psychoanalytic discussions and debates about identification as well as of the views of the other members of the Frankfurt School will help lay the foundation for my claim that Fromm's ideas provide a framework for theorizing mature identification. Mature identification, I contend, is one of the dimensions of transformative, ethical leadership on the left. I then outline further moments in Fromm's work that hint at a lurking theory of ethical leadership.

The question of ethical leadership itself is not new in the academic world. Indeed, there is an entire academic journal, *The Leadership Quarterly*, devoted to the investigation of the various

dimensions of ethical leadership. This journal, it should be noted at the outset, has a clear business slant.²⁷² The purpose of the journal and the copious contributions it boasts is to naturalize the relationship between robust leadership and business interests. Many of the contributors to its issues develop explicitly ethical models of leadership, but always with the aim of furnishing the business community with a strategy to keep workers satisfied, presumably so as to maximize efficiency, enthusiasm in the workplace and, ultimately, profits. A further aim is to normalize the authority of corporate leaders. This attempt to instrumentalize ethical leadership is, of course, questionable from an ethical point of view. But I would like to suggest that the move to press theories of ethical leadership in the service of corporate interests is enabled by the contemporary left's uncomfortable relationship to, if not outright rejection of, leadership. The crystallization of a horizontal common sense on the left in the past few decades, as I have shown in chapter 1, has facilitated the decline of interest in theorizing leadership and the migration of theories of leadership to and their appropriation by the business world. At any rate, the scholarly work published in *The Leadership Quarterly*, for better or for worse, is reflective of trends in the field of leadership studies. In what follows I first offer a short review of trends in this field, relying on the literature published in *The Leadership Quarterly*. This review should make it clear that this journal, and the field at large, is preoccupied with questions of ethical leadership only so far as they pertain to business management. I conclude my brief review by suggesting that by confining its investigation of leadership to its salience to the business world, the literature under consideration implicitly undercuts the development of a more authentic and radical theory of ethical leadership, one that could potentially promote socialist objectives and meaningfully

²⁷² There are others like it. Examples include *Journal of Management Inquiry* and *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*.

contribute to the transformation of society.

Analyses of charismatic and transformative leadership are the lynchpin of the field of leadership studies. John Antonakis, a pioneer in the field, provides an overview of the evolution of approaches to the problem of charisma in the field. According to him, James Downton was the first to draw a clear distinction between transactional forms of leadership, which concern mutual exchanges between leaders and followers, and non-transactional forms of leadership, which entail inspirational and charismatic leadership. The former Downton links with a leader's coherent presentation of a relatable worldview or system of values to her followers while the latter he links with followers' emotional and psychological dependence on the leader and an attitude of credulity.²⁷³ Robert House, for his part, has contributed to the elaboration of the concept of charisma, wrestling with the question of how charisma generates devotion or identification in followers.²⁷⁴ James Burns' important innovation lay in distinguishing between transactional leadership and transformative leadership. This conceptual innovation influenced Bernard Bass, whose theorization of "transformational" leadership has been quite influential in the field.²⁷⁵ Burns and Bass understand charisma—that is, idealized influence—as a component of transformational leadership, while other thinkers of note in the field use the term charisma more loosely, identifying it with leaders' transformative powers.

Importantly, both Burns and Bass argue that *authentic* transformative leadership must be ethical in character, thus adding a normative dimension to considerations of charisma. Bass and Steidlmeier's 1999 article "Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership

²⁷³ John Antonakis, "Transformational and Charismatic Leadership," in *The Nature of Leadership*, 2nd ed., ed. David V. Day and John Antonakis (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2012), 260-262.

²⁷⁴ Antonakis, "Transformational and Charismatic Leadership," 262-263.

²⁷⁵ Antonakis, "Transformational and Charismatic Leadership," 263.

Behavior” offers lucid reflections on the nature of authentic transformative leadership, contrasting it with inauthentic, or “pseudotransformative,” forms of leadership.²⁷⁶ Authentic leadership is predicated on virtue and moral excellence. It has and is driven by, as it were, a moral core. This core manifests in the leader’s commitment to ethical and responsible conduct, the ethical and transformation-centric means they employ to inspire their followers, efforts to create an environment that underscores the open-ended and dynamic nature of the vision pursued and thereby facilitates follower engagement and contribution, as well as their promotion of individuality and the refusal to sacrifice the welfare of individuals in pursuit of a common good.²⁷⁷ All of this makes it clear that authentic transformative leaders, as they are conceptualized here, must be virtuous. Responding to the charge that transformative leadership tramples on individuals’ right to pursue their self-interest by working to align their interests with those of the organization, the authors maintain that organizations must balance individual interests with those of the community and point out that allowing oneself to be transformed fosters individuation in the context of an emerging common good. For instance, the libertarian, owing to her commitment to an atomistic understanding of individuality, can have no notion of the common good as transcendent in relation to the interests of the possessive individual. Even if one rejects communitarian notions of a transcendent common good, and their concomitant, civic virtue, and subscribes instead to a utilitarian understanding of it, however, authentic transformative leadership would still be of use in forging a vision of what might generate the

²⁷⁶ Bernard M. Bass and Paul Steidlmeier, “Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1999): 186.

²⁷⁷ Bass and Steidlmeier, “Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior,” 187-190.

greatest good for the greatest amount of people.²⁷⁸ In the authors' view, the authentic transformative leader is to be understood as a virtuous individual who serves as an agent of the people in a given organization by articulating a common vision and helping align followers' interests with it. So long as the leader is recognized as a leader and is regarded as trustworthy, there is no reason to question the legitimacy of this arrangement. Although authentic leadership can be participative, this is not necessary. Directive leadership can be more beneficial in certain contexts if it helps bring about consensus and interest alignment, and it must be stressed that directive leadership is not the same as, and is indeed at odds with, authoritarian forms of leadership. The former is generally able to supply reasons and justify its existence, and is certainly amenable to followers' creative self-expression, whereas the latter is chiefly concerned with power and is inherently anti-democratic.²⁷⁹ The authors also take aim at the horizontal rejection of leadership, mentioning some of the criticisms discussed in chapter 1. This article is very thorough and compelling. Many of the considerations that ought to inform a theory of ethical left leadership are set out here, including the importance of a virtuous disposition, identification, consensus building, and the generation and pursuit of a vision of the common good that transcends the aggregate of individuals interests. The blind spots, however, ultimately point up the need for a distinctively leftist theory of ethical and transformative leadership. What are these blind spots?

Let me begin my critique by posing a question: Should leadership that is genuinely ethical not be able to challenge the underlying aims of an organization if the case can be made

²⁷⁸ Bass and Steidlmeier, "Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leader Behavior," 203-205.

²⁷⁹ Bass and Steidlmeier, "Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leader Behavior," 205-208.

that these reinforce oppressive structures in society? In other words, can ethical leadership take root in and proliferate within organizations whose ends are questionable from an ethical point of view, and which ends the leaders in question are precluded from questioning? This question points to the fact that “authentic” transformative leadership, as understood by Bass and Steidlmeier, operates within the confines of pre-determined organizational goals over which leaders might, at least in certain situations, not have any real control. In fact, the freedom the authors project onto their ideal leader cannot be plausibly granted to them by businesses, which are essentially profit seeking entities. It is hard to conceive of a situation in the workplace where profits do not generally override considerations of workers’ well-being. In a business context, *a competent* leader can certainly help create a more comfortable, stimulating and welcoming work environment. But if all this is ultimately but a means of maximizing worker efficiency, i.e., extracting maximum labour and harnessing it to the imperatives of profit, there are good reasons to question the ethics of such leadership. I would argue that leaders who cling to the notion that it is possible to reconcile the interests of a profit-seeking company with the interests and welfare of workers, and that a non-coercive common good can be articulated and generated, are engaging in self-deception. Indeed, an important consideration neglected by the authors is the potential incompatibility of authentic charismatic leadership with nature and aim of certain organizations and enterprises. If Fromm is right in arguing that that the type of relatedness that is embedded in the capitalistic outlook impedes true authenticity and productiveness, then the needs of individuals who approximate the ideal of productiveness cannot be accommodated by organizations that promote and naturalize imperatives related to profit. An individual whose productiveness enables and encourages her to serve as a leader precludes conformity to the dictates of capital. The only transformation such a leader could embrace is that of capitalism

itself. Helping improve worker efficiency with an eye to maximizing profit is anathema to productive individuals as it conflicts with the underlying sensibility that advancing human flourishing ought to take precedence over everything else. It is only in the context of radical activism, on the other hand, where it is acceptable to challenge the social structure as a whole, that ethical and transformative leadership can materialize. The vision such leadership can offer is that of the transformation of society. It is unsurprising, then, that the authors of the article discussed above discuss organizations in very broad terms, for to consider them in their concreteness would mean raising the question of aims and goals, and the compatibility of these with authentic transformative leadership.

I. The Problem of Identification

It has been noted that the theory of transformative leadership outlined by Bass and Steidlmeier embraces virtue, democracy, civic virtue, and consensus building. In chapter 1 I argued that a theory of ethical, horizontal left leadership must also engage with the interrelated problems of prefiguration and identification so as to differentiate itself from existing, more mainstream theories of leadership, which are generally geared toward enhancing the conditions and quality of work in corporate environments and more generally toward the normalization of the status quo. To lay the groundwork for a conception of identification that can buttress my theory of ethical left leadership, it is necessary to first engage in some depth the recent discussions and debates taking place within the theoretical psychoanalytic literature. Let us now probe the problematic of identification as it is articulated and understood from various theoretical angles.

The term “identification” is often used very imprecisely in the psychoanalytic literature, even though its use is even more ambiguous outside the psychoanalytic register. In its most orthodox iteration, this term denotes a process at the culmination of the Oedipal stage, namely,

the unconscious internalization of parental norms, the concomitant of which is the formation of the aspect of the self known as the superego. While not rejecting the classical understanding of this concept and indeed building on it, the object relations school offers a much more robust and nuanced account of this process. The object relations model of identification consists of three stages. *Imitation* is the first, and most basic, form of object relating occurring in the “pre-self” stage of development. It neither extends beyond the mere emulation by the baby of the behaviour of those around her nor leaves anything new in its wake. In other words, imitation as such does not entail internalization. At the same time, though, it is certainly the case that the mimetic function is the underlying form of the psychic processes that inaugurate identification. The second kind of object relating that occurs in this early period of development is *incorporation*. The operative experience here is merging; the baby responds to the fear of losing the maternal object by attempting to become one with it psychologically. The next, conspicuously more involved stage is *introjection*. Here the infant internalizes some of the qualities or traits of the “object” she is intent on preserving in the form of representations. Although they are not experienced as parts of the self, they augment the introjector’s agency by “lending” her that of the parent.²⁸⁰ The difference between imitation and introjection can be summarized as follows: “While through incorporation there is an attempt to fuse the object with one’s mind/body self, through introjection one is bonded to the object by the *partial taking in* of some of its *qualities* but at the same time not attempting to make those qualities or the object part of herself.”²⁸¹ Introjection is not only the most advanced form of object relating during the pre-self period but

²⁸⁰ Howard Kamler, *Identification and Character: A Book on Psychological Development* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 43-49.

²⁸¹ Kalmer, *Identification and Character*, 44.

also the dominant one.²⁸² It must be noted that none of these forms or gradations of object relating are identification proper, because no self (i.e., self-representation) is present to effect identification. They can all be seen as precursors to identification, though. It is only when the pre-self becomes a “narcissistic grandiose self” that identification, if only in its most basic form, makes an appearance. Now, the developing child is capable of self-representations, and both wants and values as a rudimentary self; wants and ideals are, as it were, assimilated into her agency.²⁸³ Still later, that is, during the Oedipal period, when genital sexuality makes its first appearance on the psychological stage, the child begins to experience identification proper. What is distinctive of this newly acquired psychological agency is the developing child’s ability to recognize both herself and the parent as a distinct subject. This development has partially to do with the child’s need to find a way out of the destructive Oedipal triangle, and partially with her parents’ developing expectations with regards to the child’s comportment. Furthermore, identifications can be distinguished from their object-relating predecessor by virtue of the fact that “they are subject to active, ongoing reworking and revision that transforms...their nature into one that integrates them with one another and with a transcendent, superordinate, uniquely personal schema in which their roots as aspects of external agents eventually are much less recognizable.”²⁸⁴ It is clear, however, that during the Oedipal stage both introjection and imitation continue to play a constructive role and that identification, at least to some extent, is predicated on them. Indeed, introjection plays a key role in superego development: “Introjection

²⁸² Kamler, *Identification and Character*, 51.

²⁸³ Kamler, *Identification and Character*, 61-71.

²⁸⁴ Martin A. Silverman, “Identification in Healthy and Pathological Character Formation,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 67, no. 2 (1986): 188.
<https://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/identification-healthy-pathological-character/docview/1298197286/se-2>.

also is involved, as is especially evident in early superego identifications, which tend to lodge parental imagos within the ego in part as tyrannical, rule-enforcing foreign bodies or agents in their critical function alongside the more smoothly integrated, less noisily operative approving and loving, so-called ego ideal parental imagos.”²⁸⁵ Generally, there is agreement among those engaging object relations theory as to the nature and sequence of stages of the process of identification, the basic trajectory of which has been set out above. Yet there are several important lurking questions regarding the relationship between identification and character. If adult character is largely a choice driven existential affair, the traditional psychoanalytic notion that adult character is really the result of Oedipal identification seems incompatible with it.²⁸⁶ Kamler, insisting that the formation of adult character is indeed largely an agency laden process, responds to this theoretical complication by distinguishing between Oedipal identifications and character identifications. The former, in his view, rely on minimal agency, and are essentially responses to the child’s needs, while the latter are thoroughly agentic. While it is certainly true that early oedipal identifications provide the foundation for, and to some extent inform, later, mature character identifications, the two types of identification are essentially distinct and incompatible. Moreover, strictly speaking, there is no causal connection between Oedipal identifications and the mature ones that come to supplant them.²⁸⁷ Psychoanalysts, and those interested in bringing psychoanalysis to bear on philosophy or vice versa, should be mindful of these important conceptual distinctions. Louise Braddock shares Kamler’s ethical and existential concerns but focuses instead on the possible implications of a particular interpretation of the Freudian view that character identifications for the most part are driven by unconscious

²⁸⁵ Silverman, “Identification in Healthy and Pathological Character Formation,” 188.

²⁸⁶ Kamler, *Identification and Character*, 102.

²⁸⁷ Kamler, *Identification and Character*, 102-103.

motivations and are therefore shaped unconsciously. In order for character to be authentic, in the sense of being authored by the person possessing it, she argues, it must be available to the inspection of that person, so that it may be understood, modified, augmented, etc. The problematic in question of course also bears on the development and acquisition of a virtuous character, for in order for one to be ethical, which naturally entails self-reflection, she must be able to examine and understand the unconscious ideas or “identity-thoughts” that condition her identifications, and alter them.²⁸⁸ The above discussion indicates that in addition to being developmentally significant, identification also has considerable characterological, existential and ethical import. Before I proceed to discuss its political import, I would like to respond to the challenge posed by Kamler with respect to the need to square the traditional psychoanalytic view of identification with free choice in adulthood. I do not think that we must accept Kamler’s far-fetched claim that there is no causal connection between infantile identifications and mature or “character identifications” in order to salvage the notion that there is room for agentic character development in adulthood. His view is a consequence of his overemphasizing the formal characteristics of identifications and neglecting their substantive aspects. True, infants and young children may not be capable of complex judgements and evaluations, which seem like preconditions of character development. Nonetheless, it can be argued that at this stage they are very much capable of internalizing agency and viewing it as a core attribute of selfhood. Such agency need not entail evaluations or judgements but only recognition of the value of choice itself and of independence. This is the germ of what would later become a full-blown, existential self. One important inference that can be made from this counterhypothesis is that should one fail

²⁸⁸ Louise Braddock, “Character, Psychoanalytic Identification, and Numerical Identity,” *Ratio* 25, no. 1 (2012): 1–9, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1111/j.1467-9329.2011.00512.x>.

to internalize agency, i.e., the importance of choice-making as a basic constituent of one's self-orientation in the world, during this early period, she may be ill-equipped to critically appraise and reflect on the nature and desirability of the identifications formed during this stage of development as well as those formed later in life. Having established the importance of identification to the question of adult agency, and thus, implicitly, its political import, I would now like to discuss the political salience of identification more explicitly, specifically, its relevance to progressive activism oriented to radical social transformation. My ultimate aim is to demonstrate that bringing Erich Fromm's characterological insights to bear on the concept of identification can bolster our understanding of the transformative potentialities intrinsic to ethical left leadership. But this requires engagement with the insights, criticisms and debates surrounding the political role and value of identification within critical theory and beyond.

The Frankfurt School was from the very beginning preoccupied with the sociopolitical dimension of identification, namely, authority. One of Horkheimer's earliest essays deals with identification and authority, for instance, and Marcuse shared some of Horkheimer's attitudes to these twin problematics.²⁸⁹ Adorno, for his part, foregrounded the problems of identification and authority in some of his most provocative and compelling arguments, particularly in his analyses of the psychology of fascism.²⁹⁰ All three thinkers, though in varying degrees and not always consistently, subscribed to the view that the decline of the father's authority in the family, which

²⁸⁹ See Max Horkheimer, "Authority and the Family," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972); Herbert Marcuse, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man," in *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).

²⁹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/books/mono/10.4324/9781003071297/culture-industry-theodor-adorno-bernstein>.

is associated with his loss of prestige in society, has resulted in weaker Oedipal identification, or internalization, among children. A concomitant of this, which is lamented by all three thinkers, is a feebler ego. A weaker ego leaves the individual more susceptible to identification with nonparental authority, especially what Fromm terms “anonymous authority,”²⁹¹ and her unconscious more vulnerable to manipulation by the culture industry.²⁹² Their argument is something to the effect that while internalization, which entails the integration of parental moral imperatives into the self, leads to repression, it also invites rebellion against authority, i.e., the father, and thereby serves as a springboard for the development of individuality, which is predicated on the availability of space wherein concepts, social norms, etc. can be critically appraised, refined, and rejected. The assumption here is that the internalization of authority in effect kickstarts the development of individuality. Robust individuality in turn enables resistance to commodification, reification, one-dimensionality, as well as preserves the possibility of emancipation. Presumably, it bears traces of objective rationality and resists instrumental, or formal, rationality. At any rate, the foregoing discussion suggests that the main figures of the Frankfurt School saw identification not only as an important developmental process but also as indispensable from the point of view of social critique and transformation.

In two separate articles, feminist and psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin takes to task this view, arguing that it is predicated on an idealization of the patriarchal bourgeois family and paternal authority in particular.²⁹³ Later, in a seminal book that would lay the foundation for the

²⁹¹ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1994), 166.

²⁹² Marcuse, “The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man,” 47-52.

²⁹³ Jessica Benjamin, “Authority and the Family Revisited: Or, a World Without Fathers?” *New German Critique*, 13 (Winter 1978), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3115186>; Jessica Benjamin, “The End of Internalization: Adorno’s Social Psychology,” *Telos* 32 (1977), <http://journal.telospress.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/content/1977/32/42.full.pdf+html?sid=94ef7abe-a4f9-4123-af97-3512fff6f21e>.

intersubjective approach to psychoanalysis, *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin extends her critique, foregrounding the problem of individuation in relation to gender inequality and its implications for what she terms identificatory love and later, Oedipal identification. According to her, the possessive individualism that permeates the Western cultural common sense leads to the valorization of an understanding of individuation as complete independence and separation, and therefore to the celebration of the law-giving father, who is symbolically associated with self-sufficiency and outsideness, and the attendant denigration of the solicitous mother, who comes to be identified symbolically with the lure of regressive oneness.²⁹⁴ This symbolic constellation, which is buttressed by the gendered division of labour within the nuclear family, underlies the Frankfurt School's insistence on seeing the internal conflict attending the development of the superego as the road to individuation, and therefore as a bulwark against the influences of the outside world and groupthink.²⁹⁵ For the members for the Frankfurt School, it is the absence of a robust ego, which seems to be a consequence of the waning authority of the father in the family, that at least partially accounts for the narcissistic identification with strongmen that is the hallmark of fascism.²⁹⁶ Questioning this line of argument, Benjamin maintains that narcissism need not denote regression, for the stage of narcissistic grandiosity promotes independence and agency in its own way; the ego ideal, which accompanies the individual throughout her development and into and through adulthood, is one of the legacies of this stage. She also objects to the notion that narcissism is identical with the maternal and the separation effected through the Oedipus complex is identical with the paternal. Although this equation represents the symbolic

²⁹⁴ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 183-218.

²⁹⁵ Benjamin, "The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology," 42-46.

²⁹⁶ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 145.

truth of the unconscious, she contends, in reality the father plays no less important a role during the narcissistic stage than does the mother, and the mother is no less central than the father during the Oedipal stage.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, she suggests that it is more plausible that the identification with authoritarian leaders one witnesses in fascist movements can be traced to the narcissistic injury incurred as a result of the father's punitiveness and refusal to "mirror" the child's grandiose wishes:

This failure of identificatory love does not imply the absence of authority; it often comes about precisely when the father is authoritarian and punitive. It is the combination of narcissistic disappointment and fear of authority that produces the kind of admiration mingled with dread noted by observers of fascism in the mass love of the leader. The fascist leader satisfies the desire for ideal love, but this version of ideal love includes the oedipal components of hostility and authority. Again, it is not absence of a paternal authority—"fatherlessness"—but absence of paternal nurturance that engenders submission... Thus both narcissistic and oedipal currents contribute to the fearful love of authority. The image of the "good father," free of irrationality, is but one side of the father, an image that can only be produced by splitting. Indeed, in the most common version of the oedipal model, the existence of the archaic, dangerous father is completely obscured, and the split between good and bad father is instead formulated as the opposition between a progressive, oedipal father and a regressive, archaic mother.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 147-156.

²⁹⁸ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 146.

Though critical of Chasseguet-Smirgel's views on the mother's developmental role, Benjamin nonetheless relies on her argument concerning the importance of the ego ideal, which could be either regressive or progressive, in articulating her critique of the Frankfurt School here.

Benjamin's critical stance is predicated on the notion that the early, pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother, which unfolds through the playful, intersubjective space she provides following the baby's birth, and marks the beginning of the journey of the development of self through mutuality, is the real inception of the process of individuation, rather than the phase of superego development, which in fact only pushes the process of symbolically driven gender differentiation begun during the rapprochement (narcissism) phase to its logical conclusion and helps entrench the idea that separation and independence ultimately precludes togetherness.

Benjamin insists that the process of identification, which is a psychological response to the conflict and tension endemic to the rapprochement stage, during which the child develops a stronger sense of her own agency and capabilities, comes to replace the more immediate experience of otherness that is characteristic of earlier stages of development. She is also mindful of the fact that the psychoanalytic emphasis on separation as a more or less linear process of internalization obscures the importance, from a developmental point of view, of the continuing presence of the (maternal) other. The presence of the mother, which encourages playful exchanges in addition to a gradually unfolding struggle for self-assertion, is crucial for the eventual development of a sense of agency and selfhood in the toddler up until, throughout, and following rapprochement and Oedipal identification. She does acknowledge, however, that identification provides a way out of the intensifying, and to some extent debilitating, tensions between mother and infant during the rapprochement phase. It is an important step toward

differentiation. Yet because identificatory differentiation proceeds, in Western culture, through the denigration of the first caregiver, i.e., the mother, it is she who comes to represent the threat of archaic oneness.²⁹⁹ Perhaps the most interesting theoretical contribution of Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* is the notion that early, intersubjectively grounded exchanges between mother and infant can be ultimately credited with laying the foundation for the development of individuality, which suggests that individuality is consolidated against the backdrop of, and in tandem with, recognition of otherness. This insight bespeaks, moreover, that the identificatory move in the developmental process, as it unfolds in our culture, works to undercut differentiation by virtue of pushing the child to distance herself from the very proximity to alterity that is the precondition for a healthy sense of self. Identification, in this culture, is predicated on the psychic relegation of the maternal to the role of a feared archaic and regressive oneness and the refusal to acknowledge her as a full agent.³⁰⁰ Relatedly, Benjamin observes that if our culture were to begin valorizing the subjectivity-forming intersubjective spaces encountered by infants, which indeed can and should be provided by fathers as well as mothers, a solution to the dilemma of how a new Reality Principle might be pursued would come into view.³⁰¹

In any event, returning to Benjamin's critique of the Frankfurt School, their at times uncritical celebration of paternal authority as the foundation of the rational, self-legislating individual, does seem to conveniently ignore the menacing aspects of the Oedipal father, as well as the importance of the father's role in generating either healthy, realistic ideals or an unhealthy search for perfection—an apparent consequence of which is submissiveness in later life—during the narcissistic stage. Benjamin's focus on the developmental significance of narcissism and the

²⁹⁹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 159-181.

³⁰⁰ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 25-42.

³⁰¹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 217.

ego ideal anticipates Fred Alford's preoccupation with narcissism in his attempt to theorize the transition from a society whose structure is rooted in domination to a free one, i.e., socialism. Similarly to Benjamin, he accepts the Kohutian claim that narcissism has its own developmental trajectory, which interacts with but is not superseded by instincts and object love, and that it accompanies us throughout life. Chasseguet-Smirgel's arguments concerning the ego ideal, and mature and immature narcissism, are also taken up by Alford as he attempts to distinguish regressive narcissism from progressive narcissism. The latter, he argues, takes root when one's ego ideal "cooperates" with the super ego, in the sense that it successfully becomes subordinated to Freud's Reality Principle and seeks gratification through object mastery.³⁰² Paralleling Benjamin's view that the ego ideal can either contribute to independence or, through narcissistic injury, engender a submissive disposition, Alford posits that a "progressive" ego ideal is predicated on the acceptance of necessary restrictions to narcissistic impotence such that the individual is more accepting of imperfection and channels her narcissistic needs toward the adult mastery of objects, especially through labour or work.³⁰³

The above discussion brings us a step closer to making, through a kind of theoretical synthesis, a compelling case for the transformative import of identification. The affinities between Alford's and Benjamin's ideas about narcissism are no happenstance. Alford is aware of Benjamin's critique of the Frankfurt School's embrace of the traditional role of the father, citing

³⁰² Fred C. Alford, *Narcissism: Socrates, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytic Theory* (International Psychotherapy Institute, 2015), chap. 2, <https://www.freepsychotherapybooks.org/ebook/narcissismsocrates-the-frankfurt-school-and-psychoanalytic-theory/>.

³⁰³ Note that Alford discusses many prominent theorists of narcissism in this work and delves into nuanced debates between object relation theorists and drive theorists about the nature and function of narcissism. For our purposes, however, it suffices to engage with the arguments advanced by the thinkers mentioned here as these seem more salient to his contentions regarding the developmental significance of narcissism than those advanced by others in the tradition.

it in at least two separate publications, and his own reliance on object relations arguments about the importance of narcissism does seem to be informed to some extent by her views.³⁰⁴ The following passage is a case in point:

In making her case, Benjamin turns to the object relations theory of Fairbairn and Guntrip, arguing that the issues of separation from the mother and the building of a strong ego should not be confused with the later oedipal conflict. From this perspective, it is the quality of the relationship with the mother, not the oedipal conflict, that is central to the development of a strong ego and individual autonomy. The theory of narcissism and the psychological assumptions associated with it support the general outlines of Benjamin's analysis, including her argument that it is the quality of the child's earliest, pre-oedipal relationships to the parents that is the foundation of genuine autonomy. The key issue is thus not the internalization of the father's authority, but whether the young child's relationships with its parents are sufficiently satisfying emotionally so that the child is not tempted to retreat into a world of compensatory internal objects. For as Fairbairn and

³⁰⁴ In addition to *Narcissism: Socrates, The Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytic Theory*, Alford cites Benjamin extensively in a recent book chapter that deals with the import of psychoanalysis and authority in the work of the Frankfurt School. C. Fred Alford, "The Frankfurt School, Authority, and the Psychoanalysis of Utopia," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. Michael J. Thompson, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=4790239&pq-origsite=primo>. Alford does add nuance to Benjamin's analysis, though, by pointing out that Marcuse was not entirely unaware of the fact that it is a healthy family, rather than an authoritative father as such, that lays the foundation for healthy individuality ("The Frankfurt School, Authority, and the Psychoanalysis of Utopia," 430). This awareness, however, would seem to conflict with Marcuse's insistence that the ego is necessarily bound up with domination and the ego-less vision he advances in his utopian explorations in *Eros and Civilization*.

Guntrip argue, this retreat is accompanied by ego splitting, which generally renders the individual less autonomous and more dependent.³⁰⁵

The developmental import of healthy ego ideals is chiefly that they are essential to the development of a robust sense of self. It is manifest at the same time that a modicum of authority is necessary for the development of a healthy ego ideal, as it helps lay a foundation, through the restrictions it imposes and frustrations it causes, for the process of diverting the child's attention from the self-absorbed quest to possess the world to a more realistic attitude towards its objects through the creation of an internalized ideal. Such an ideal, of course, presupposes that the authority in question is largely ethical in character, i.e., imposes and enforces restrictions on the child only to the extent that this is required. I would like to suggest that ethical leadership on the left could constitute this kind of authority. Through its productiveness and ability to offer a transformative vision, it invites identification from its followers. Such healthy, mature identification in turn presupposes the internalization or reinforcement of a healthy ego ideal. This should in principle result in more robust egos and a productive character structure, both of which presuppose a strong sense of agency, including a stronger sense of one's human capabilities and the existential possibilities embedded in action. Moreover, a healthy ego ideal should lead individuals to channel their narcissism in a constructive direction, i.e., the progressive transformation of society, and undercut destructive, antisocial manifestations of narcissism. We can now proceed to consider what exactly ethical authority entails, in terms of the distinction between rational and irrational authority, among other things.

³⁰⁵ Alford, *Narcissism*, chap. 4.

II. Ethical Leadership, Not Horizontalism

Why does the left persist in its attachment to and valorization of horizontalism despite the potency of both Jo Freeman's classic critique of this form of organization and many contemporary iterations of it? The answer is simple enough: A robust alternative to traditional, top-down forms of activist and political organizing on the left capable at once of promoting democratic practices and obviating the problem of "structurelessness" has yet to emerge. To make headway in the struggle against capitalism, the left requires a novel form of organization, one that synthesizes the potential of leadership with the insights of the anarchist and poststructuralist detractors of hierarchy and centralization. The lynchpin of this new approach to radicalism is *ethical authority*. Ethical authority promises to provide structure, coherence, and unity to leftist struggles at the same time that it promotes accountability, responsibility, and egalitarianism.

The contours of what I call ethical authority can be found in the writings of the Frankfurt School and especially those of a neglected figure in critical theory, Erich Fromm. It was Fromm, let us not forget, who made psychoanalysis one of the pillars of critical theory.³⁰⁶ Frankfurt School enthusiasts need to be reminded of this and asked to heed Fromm's psychoanalytic insights. It is also noteworthy that it was Fromm who was most insistent about the importance of the distinction between rational and irrational authority. This distinction can assist the contemporary left in finding a way out of its organizational impasses, but its fecundity and importance is obscured by the cursory treatment of it by the founders of critical theory, including Fromm himself, though Fromm does engage with it and flesh out its implications more

³⁰⁶ See Erich Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

systematically than do the others. Further elaborating the principle of rational authority should help us discern its ethical dimension and understand how it might inform a theory of ethical authority. Indeed, the concept of rational authority lays the groundwork for and prefigures that of ethical authority. What, exactly, is rational authority, and what differentiates it from its irrational counterpart? How does it operate? What are its distinguishing characteristics? As I delve into these questions, it will become increasingly apparent that the notion of rational authority, though this was never made explicit by the first generation of critical theorists, has a *prescriptive* kernel.

It is certainly true Fromm was not the only one who was preoccupied with the question of rational authority among the members of the Frankfurt School. Both Horkheimer and Adorno also gestured at the importance of rational authority. Indeed, it seems to have been Horkheimer who first recognized the importance of rational authority with his seminal study “Authority and the Family.” Marcuse, for his part, mentions the concept in passing in *Eros and Civilization*. But Fromm was more attuned to the possibilities inherent in the notion of rational authority than the others. His reflections on the subject in works such as *Escape from Freedom* and *The Revolution of Hope* gesture toward the concrete ways rational authority might serve as a foundation for ethical authority. There are at least four moments in his work that point up the importance of ethical authority. The first of these moments, naturally, is the distinction between rational and irrational authority itself. Let us tease out the essential difference between the two kinds of authority and the implications of this for ethical authority.

A) The Scope of Rational Authority

This form of authority is constrained by the functions it serves or the tasks it performs. It is limited by adherence to specific, well-defined criteria associated with a particular form or field of expertise, set of capabilities, and so on. The opposite is true of irrational authority, as those

who wield it seek to exert influence in just about every domain. This aspect of irrational authority, of course, links up with the problem of power.

B) Power and Its Limits

Rational authority eschews the pursuit of power for power's sake. Whatever power it acquires as a by-product of the exercise of its functions (by way of respect, influence, etc.) it actively works to curtail and subvert. Indeed, it uses whatever power it comes to possess to affirm the limits of its own authority and encourage others to question it. By contrast, irrational authority is defined by a quest for power. Those who valorize this form of authority may at times superficially make use of rational authority, but only as a means of using the legitimacy thus acquired to bolster their standing in society and to earn admiration, with an eye to securing undue influence and further privileges. From the point of view of its wielders, the less people are able or inclined to question it, the better. Perhaps one could go so far as to say that power as such is not inherently corrupting, but only irrational manifestations of it, i.e., those rooted in domination.

C) Who Benefits?

Rational authority is authority exercised for the benefit of those over whom it is exercised. The intellectual growth of or acquisition of expertise by those to whom a specialist subscribing to the rational model of authority imparts knowledge, for instance, is her highest priority. Rational authority is concerned with the flourishing, however this might be construed and in whatever context, of those over whom it is wielded. Those who employ irrational authority, of course, do so with the aim of advancing their own interests, whatever they might be.

D) Transience Vs. Permanence

Rational authority tends, over time, to close the gap between itself and those over whom it is exercised. Where the aim is imparting knowledge, for instance, those who gain knowledge are

enabled and indeed encouraged to approximate the position of the master and become masters themselves. Rational authority, by its very nature, inches towards its own dissolution. It anticipates and welcomes it. The implication is clear enough: it is inherently *transient*.

E) Transparency, Transgression, and Responsibility

Wielders of rational authority make it a point to acknowledge openly/publicly the scope and purpose of their exercise of authority. They invite others to be cognizant of its limits, to question, in good faith, its legitimacy, and to note and seek redress for instances of transgression. Importantly, they demonstrate a willingness to be held accountable when such transgressions occur.

F) Authority and Relationships

Though intimations of the ethical dimension of rational authority abound in the preceding explications, what drives home the inextricability of ethics from the principle of rational authority are the kinds of relationship the latter fosters. Rational authority values, affirms, and encourages individuality and the right to flourish of those over whom it is exercised. It also cultivates skepticism and vigilance with respect to irrational manifestations of authority. The wielders of rational authority accomplish this by engaging people dialogically rather than from a top-down position; they position themselves as active participants in the process of learning, and present their knowledge, skills, etc. in a way that invites critical reflection, discussion, challenges, and so on. This point about the centrality of dialogue to rational authority calls to mind the Socratic mode of inquiry, in which one is called upon to engage with a social, political or ethical dilemma and critically examine their own assumptions in relation to a given subject by means of dialogue. Though particular Socratic dialogues do often lapse into a stultifying and other-denying form of pedagogy, the rational and dialogical kernel of Socratic dialogue is readily

identifiable. From a psychological point of view, it lays the foundation for independence and anti-dogmatism. It is not a stretch to argue, indeed, that it precludes domination and promotes authentic relationships. All this contrasts starkly with irrational authority, which stunts emotional development and valorizes dependence, submissiveness, and anti-intellectualism.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the attributes distinctive of rational authority.

Moreover, each of these can be unpacked further, and their interconnectedness made more explicit. These are tasks for another time. The takeaway here is that horizontalism is not the only way forward, and that authority as such is not necessarily irrational. But the tendentious conflation of irrational authority with rational authority certainly is.

III. Three Additional Moments of Ethical Leadership in Fromm's Work

Are there examples of ethical leadership, grounded in the criteria outlined above, in Fromm's work, in addition to the example of the Voice for American Conscience discussed in chapter 3? The answer is yes. There are at least three others. Let us look at each of these in turn, albeit briefly. The first of these concerns Fromm's notion of the prophet, and her antagonist, the priest. Priests, for Fromm, affirm the status quo, thereby serving as bearers of positive religion, whereas prophets question the necessity of the status quo and the suffering and emptiness embedded in it while pointing up the possibility of emancipation, of a radically different form of existence. One of the essential functions of the prophet is combatting irrational authority in all its guises, and that embedded in the institution of "priesthood" in particular. When speaking of prophets, it must be noted, Fromm does not necessarily have in mind the theologically-minded great individuals of old but rather their secular counterparts, as is evidenced, for instance, by Fromm's attribution of

the label “prophet” to Bertrand Russel in an essay written in his honor.³⁰⁷ Nonetheless, there is of course room for both religiosity and greatness in Fromm’s conception of the prophet. In the same essay Fromm provides one of the most comprehensive statements about prophets, and their antagonists, the priests. Fromm stresses that prophets essentially eschew power and become prophets out of a sense of responsibility. They do not seek greatness or leadership but are catapulted into it through their love of humanity and willingness to speak out against suffering and injustice.³⁰⁸ The threefold social purpose of prophets, along with Fromm’s interest in secular prophets, is discussed by Dustin Byrd with unusual clarity in “Fromm’s Notion of the Prophet and Priest.” Byrd succinctly summarizes the three functions of prophets identified by Fromm: 1) speaking truth to power and unapologetically identifying and critiquing oppressive social conditions; 2) articulating alternatives to the status quo; 3) warning people against historical trajectories that would lead to suffering and destruction. Byrd personally identifies two further prophetic functions omitted by Fromm.³⁰⁹ His analysis of Fromm’s interest in secular prophets, of why they are needed in instrumental and technological society, and of the problem of priests as well, is lucid and compelling. What remains to be done is draw a link between productiveness and rational authority, on the one hand, and the leadership of the prophets on the other. This is important, for it is undeniable that Fromm’s prophets are individuals whose love of life is reminiscent of the productive character and is indeed predicated on productiveness. Likewise, it is clear that prophets not only combat irrational authority, as Byrd points out, but that in so doing

³⁰⁷ Erich Fromm, “Prophets and Priests,” in *Bertrand Russel: Philosopher of the Century*, ed. Ralph Schoenman (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967).

³⁰⁸ Fromm, “Prophets and Priests,” 68.

³⁰⁹ Dustin J. Byrd, “Fromm’s Notion of the Prophet and Priest: Ancient Antagonisms, Modern Manifestations,” in *Reclaiming the Sane Society*, ed. Seyed Javad Miri, Robert Lake, and Tricia M. Kress (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014), 151-154. <https://books-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks3/springer/2014-09-10/1/9789462096073>.

they in fact exemplify rational authority.³¹⁰ It is by representing rational authority, i.e., by delivering moral lessons to people through deeds, personal example, and the rejection of power, that prophets are able to sway people and make them receptive to new truths and attuned to the realities of injustice and suffering in society.

The second moment has to do with Fromm's own leadership style. In other words, Fromm himself, in his activist work, exemplified ethical, horizontal leadership. The question of Fromm's leadership has been raised in recent literature on Fromm, but only rather obliquely. For instance, Fromm's leadership role as a prominent public intellectual is foregrounded in recent discussions of Fromm's activism.³¹¹ Less attention is paid to Fromm's leadership and accomplishments in the capacity of a political organizer, the exception being Nick Braune's article on the issue, in which he convincingly argues that Fromm's organizing work should be taken seriously and that he was a successful and competent organizer and indeed a political leader. Braune's treatment of Fromm's political accomplishments in part one of "Erich Fromm's Socialist Program and Prophetic Messianism" explicitly situates Fromm as a socialist leader who was equipped with a transformative vision and organizational prowess, contesting the frequently held view that Fromm was a popularizer, naively eclectic in his thought, and an impractical thinker. Braune insists that in the late 1950s and 1960s Fromm pursued organizing activities in earnest. This came on the heels of his helping found the peace movement SANE.

³¹⁰ Byrd, "Fromm's Notion of the Prophet and Priest," 154.

³¹¹ Neil McLaughlin, *Erich Fromm and Global Public Sociology* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021), 146. Neil McLaughlin highlights that Fromm preceded Noam Chomsky as the most important critic of American imperialism. At the same time, McLaughlin questions Fromm's abilities as a political organizer, especially in the context of party politics, 169. McLaughlin may be right that Fromm was not adept at navigating the world of party politics, but as Nick Braune's treatment of the issue implies, perhaps it can be argued that Fromm was a savvy political organizer, nonetheless.

According to Braune, Fromm's socialist manifesto, *Let Man Prevail*, "was to provide a rallying cry to all leftists to come out of the 1950s hole and to try something different than repeating the ineffectual 'party-building' ('recruitment') and sectarian proclivities of the left's recent past. He was hoping to involve the masses in wide-ranging socialist planning, with discussions on educational reform, critiques of bureaucracy, etc."³¹² Braune reads organizational prowess into even Fromm's discussion of prophetic messianism in *Let Man Prevail*, a discussion which, as Braune notes, might at first glance appear arcane and impractical:

Fromm may have been trying to awaken some layers of the Jewish population who had previously drawn back to their homes and personal lives for safety during the "dog days" of the 1950s. Fromm was trying to make sure those people did not have to choose between political life and reflective religious life. By using terminology like "prophetic messianism," he identified himself to the community as a fellow Jew, although he always made it clear that he himself was not a "believer," and he was urging them to come forward with their reflective personal lives to a socialist alternative.³¹³

³¹² Nick Braune and Joan Braune, "Erich Fromm's Socialist Program and Prophetic Messianism, in Two Parts," in *Reclaiming the Sane Society*, ed. Seyed Javad Miri, Robert Lake, and Tricia M. Kress (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014), 62, <https://books-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks3/springer/2014-09-10/1/9789462096073>.

³¹³ Braune and Braune, "Erich Fromm's Socialist Program and Prophetic Messianism, in Two Parts," 65.

While some view *Let Man Prevail* as an attempt to impose an impractical conception of socialism on the Socialist Party,³¹⁴ Braune, in a highly provocative and original interpretation of this document, sees it as a brilliant instance of organizing of a piece with Fromm's broader organizational vision that included SANE, the important volume *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, which featured many prominent intellectuals of the left, and the expanded version of *Let Man Prevail, The Revolution of Hope*, which outlines concrete steps and strategies for radical transformation. Braune's discussion of Fromm's leadership in this article implicitly points to the unique blending of intellectualism, popular appeal, and political and organizational vision in Fromm's leadership style.³¹⁵ That Fromm was an ethical leader is borne out by his principled and consistent critiques of irrational authority. The distinction he draws between rational and irrational authority in his work is but one instance of this critique. It notably also includes his criticism of both psychoanalytic and Marxist orthodoxy,³¹⁶ staunch opposition to Stalinism, spearheading the nuclear disarmament movement, resistance to the war in Vietnam, and more.

The third moment in Fromm's work that touches on the issue of ethical authority centers on Fromm's discussion of the revolutionary character. "The revolutionary character" seems to amount to a characterization of what the productive character looks like under pre-socialist or domination laden societies, where true human fulfilment is unreachable. The revolutionary character is the individual who refuses to accept the dogmas that allow for the perpetuation of

³¹⁴ McLaughlin, *Erich Fromm and Global Public Sociology*, 160.

³¹⁵ Braune and Braune, "Erich Fromm's Socialist Program and Prophetic Messianism, in Two Parts," 61-70.

³¹⁶ See David Norman Smith, "Anti-Authoritarian Marxism Erich Fromm, Hilde Weiss, and the Politics of Radical Humanism," in Erich Fromm's *Critical Theory: Hope, Humanism, and the Future*, ed. Kieran Durkin and Joan Braune (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 131-135.

this oppressive system by virtue of her humanistic conscience. Fromm puts it this way: “My assertion is that the sane person in an insane world, the fully developed human being in a crippled world, the fully awake person in a half a sleep world—is precisely the revolutionary character.”³¹⁷ This point is straightforward enough. Yet what can also be obliquely gleaned from this essay is Fromm’s attempt to link the revolutionary character to the spearheading of an oppositional movement, that is, a movement for a better future. One thing worth noting here is that for Fromm the individuals possessing a revolutionary character structure are few. The other noteworthy thing in this connection is that Fromm seems to associate the revolutionary character type with the psychological make up of prophets.³¹⁸ Fromm’s brief reflections in this essay therefore seem to bear traces of the notion that the productive character, or the revolutionary character, could form the basis for ethical leadership.

IV. The Core Qualities of Productive Leadership and What Productive Leaders Do

Compelling though these examples may be, it must be stressed that there are better examples of ethical, horizontal leadership to draw on. Two notable examples, those of Errico Malatesta and Herbert Marcuse, will be discussed in chapter 5 in connection with the problematic of ethical charisma. It will be suggested that these two compelling figures exemplify productiveness. Marcuse’s multifarious activities as a leader of the New Left are especially exemplary of the range of possibilities open to ethical leaders on the left. But all three cases, Fromm, Marcuse and Malatesta, demonstrate that the crux of horizontal leadership consists of the following: 1) the possession of specific characterological traits, united by Fromm under the umbrella term “productiveness,” which find concrete expression in the 6 qualities/proclivities set out above; 2)

³¹⁷ Erich Fromm, “The Revolutionary Character,” in *The Dogma of Christ: And Other Essays on Religion, Psychology, and Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 138-139.

³¹⁸ Fromm, “The Revolutionary Character,” 139.

a commitment to radical social transformation; and 3) a willingness and an ability to provide and maintain a compelling and inspiring transformative vision for the socialist cause. The latter two criteria are ethical only indirectly, since they are essentially grounded in the first—which is therefore a more crucial—criterion of ethical leadership. In other words, it is by virtue of their productiveness that certain individuals both make a commitment to socialism—which, of course, is a humanism, as Fromm reminds us—and are able to generate a transformative vision. The transformative visions produced by ethical leaders can involve and be rooted in different kinds of activities, such as being a public intellectual and engaging in organizational work, as we will see in chapter 5. These three criteria help us understand what is essential to productive leadership. The first two criteria are of course necessary for productive leadership but certainly not sufficient. Productive leadership requires the additional characteristic of being able to generate and project a socialist vision. Fromm's leadership, on my interpretation of it, consisted not merely of his writings or his work as an organizer or a public intellectual. Rather, it consisted of the overarching humanistic vision that he offered to his readers and followers, through all of these activities, as well as through his very person, although that vision was also presented in “localized” form through specific writings. It must be understood that transformative visions on the left must at the very least offer glimpses of a different reality, but often also entail concrete steps for attaining that reality. Fromm, for instance, offered a transformative vision through his socialist manifesto, *Let Man Prevail*, which outlines the principles of his understanding of socialism—these are also broadly intimated through the humanistic sensibility that permeates all of Fromm's work. He also offers some ideas as to concrete steps that can be taken toward the attainment of socialism here, both “intermediate” and short-term, while a more thorough description of the steps through which the principles set out in *Let Man Prevail* are to be

implemented are outlined in *The Revolution of Hope*. Fromm's vision, concretely, consists in his advocating the establishment of democratic socialism, to be underpinned by humanistic principles, which he sees as being the most desirable social and political alternative. He contrasts it with both industry and management led capitalism and communism.³¹⁹ In chapter 5 of *Let Man Prevail* Fromm lays out the principles of this humanistic, democratic socialism. While he mentions 17 principles in total, a few of them encapsulate the spirit and basic premises of Fromm's vision. These are principles 2, 6, 7, 13, and 15. I shall quote each of these in turn.

Principle 2:

2) The supreme value in all social and economic arrangements is man: the goal of society is to offer the conditions for the full development of man's potentialities, his reason, his love, his creativity; all social arrangements must be conducive to overcoming the alienation and crippledness of man, and to enable him to achieve real freedom and individuality. The aim of socialism is an association in which the full development of each is the condition for the full development of all.³²⁰

Principle 6:

6) Humanistic socialism is radically opposed to war and violence in all and any forms. It considers any attempt to solve political and social problems by force and violence not only as futile, but as immoral and inhuman. Hence it is uncompromisingly opposed to any policy that tries to achieve security by armament. It considers peace to be not only

³¹⁹ Erich Fromm, *Let Man Prevail* (New York: The Call Association, 1960), 18-19.

³²⁰ Fromm, *Let Man Prevail*, 20.

the absence of war, but a positive principle of human relations based on free cooperation of all men for the common good.³²¹

Principle 7:

7) From socialist principles it follows not only that each member of society feels responsible for his fellow citizens, but for all citizen of the world. The injustice which lets two-thirds of the human race live in abysmal poverty must be removed by an effort far beyond the ones hitherto made by wealthy nations to help the under-developed nations to arrive at a humanly satisfactory economic level.³²²

Principle 13:

13) Humanist socialism is the extension of the democratic process beyond the purely political realm, into the economic sphere; it is political *and* industrial democracy. It is the restoration of political democracy to its original meaning: the true participation of informed citizens in all decisions affecting them.³²³

Principle 15:

15) The aim of humanist socialism can be attained only by the introduction of a maximum of decentralization compatible with a minimum of centralization necessary for the coordinated functioning of an industrial society. The functions of a centralized state

³²¹ Fromm, *Let Man Prevail*, 21.

³²² Fromm, *Let Man Prevail*, 21.

³²³ Fromm, *Let Man Prevail*, 22.

must be reduced to a minimum, while the voluntary activity of freely cooperating citizens constitutes the central mechanism of social life.³²⁴

Instructive with regards to the claim that the visions of ethical leaders are rooted in a productive character structure is Fromm's essay on the revolutionary character, where he contends that convictions differ from opinions in that convictions are rooted (organically) in one's character structure.³²⁵ It can be plausibly argued, following Fromm's framing of the relationship between character and conviction, that criteria 2 and 3 concern commitments, beliefs and visions that are rooted in and are organically derived from individuals' underlying character.³²⁶ While the first of these criteria is more or less invariable, the other two will be expressed differently depending on historical and social context, and the kind of leadership position occupied by the individuals in question. They could, for instance, lead as public intellectuals and academic experts, as political organizers, or as a combination of the two (which Marcuse and Fromm exemplified, in varying degrees) along with other leadership positions. In chapter 5 we will have a glimpse of the different social and historical contexts in which Malatesta and Marcuse served as leaders in social movements respectively, as well as of the different leadership *positions* they occupied, and how this may have affected certain aspects of

³²⁴ Fromm, *Let Man Prevail*, 22.

³²⁵ Fromm, "The Revolutionary Character," 123.

³²⁶ Nick Braune's article "Revolutionary Civics: Cultivating the Virtue of Disobedience" offers an interesting analysis of "The Revolutionary Character." He teases out six characterological traits and proclivities from Fromm's discussion of the distinctiveness of this character type and comparison of it to the rebellious character, which, he argues, resembles the revolutionary character only superficially. See Nick Braune, "Revolutionary Civics: Cultivating the Virtue of Disobedience," *Fromm Forum* (English Edition), no. 14 (2010), <https://www.fromm-gesellschaft.eu/index.php/en/publications/fromm-forum-english/459-fromm-forum-14-2010>.

their leadership style and placed a unique set of demands on each, possibly generating surface level differences in charismatic appeal. Nonetheless, the fact that it is relatively easy to identify all three constituents of ethical leadership in these figures leaves little doubt as to their status as ethical leaders.

Chapter 5: Identifying Left Countercultural Charisma

In the first two chapters I explored the shortcomings of horizontalism, laying the foundation for a critique as well as the introduction of an alternative political approach, namely, ethical leadership. Chapters 3 and 4 sketched the contours of a novel theory of ethical leadership for the left. This chapter further engages the question of ethical leadership, offering two case studies, Herbert Marcuse and Errico Malatesta, through a consideration of the elusive phenomenon of charisma. I delve into the recent literature on charisma in order to trace new developments in the field and with an eye to advancing a new typology of charisma. I also argue that in addition to exemplifying ethical leadership, Marcuse and Malatesta offer us a glimpse into the undertheorized phenomenon of ethical, or progressive, countercultural charisma. I conclude by analyzing the dynamics that obtain in the emergence of ethical leadership and charisma.

The past few decades have seen an explosion of scholarly interest in charisma, continuing Weber's contested legacy. Contemporary work on charisma is multifaceted, offering different interpretations of the concept, augmentations, as well as criticisms, with some authors emphasizing tensions and inconsistencies in Weber's treatment of it. Some use the concept functionally,³²⁷ while others argue for, or attempt to recover, its explicitly normative, political, and revolutionary tenor. Political and normative applications of the concept of charisma serve as a springboard for the argument that I advance in this chapter regarding countercultural and left charisma. But before taking up the question of countercultural charisma, a brief overview of recent trends in the secondary literature on charisma is in order as this will shed light on

³²⁷ Robert C. Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership," in *Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership*, ed. Dankwart A. Rustow (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 72. Robert Tucker defines the functional approach to charisma here.

important conceptual innovations and inquiries with regards to the concept of charisma and help set up my claims about the distinctive character of countercultural left charisma.

I. What Is Charisma?

David E. Apter's arguments in "Nkrumah, Charisma, and the Coup" exemplify the functional understanding of charisma, as defined by Robert C. Tucker, wherein charisma is seen as serving a particular social function. Apter posits that in the case of Ghana, for instance, Nkrumah, who ruled the country immediately following its attainment of independence, enjoyed a certain charismatic appeal because of the role he was able to play in helping the country transition to a new social and political reality throughout the process of decolonization.³²⁸ Apter's functionalist formulation and application of the concept of charisma relies on the Weberian notion that charisma facilitates the transition from traditional forms of authority to legal-rational ones, which, for Weber, are endemic to modernity.³²⁹ Apter's use of the concept of charisma, as we shall see, is fairly conservative, sticking close to certain components of Weber's definition and steering clear of normative questions.³³⁰ A noteworthy aspect of Apter's treatment of charisma in this text, however, is the emphasis he places on its volatility, since the rule of Nkrumah, he posits, while initially colored by charisma, ultimately degenerated into authoritarianism.³³¹ The theme of volatility recurs in the more recent literature on charisma. Aristotle Kallis is adamant, in a seminal article on charisma and 20th century European fascism, that the force and appeal of

³²⁸ David Apter, "Nkrumah, Charisma, and the Coup," in *Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership*, ed. Dankwart A. Rustow (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 112-143.

³²⁹ Apter, "Nkrumah, Charisma, and the Coup," 117-122.

³³⁰ To the extent that normativity itself is not incorporated into the problematic of social function, that is. Weber's definition is discussed (118) by Apter but he downplays the aspect of it that stresses the uniqueness of the persona of the charismatic individual and her ability to produce a transformative vision, focusing, through the case of Nkrumah, on its functional dimension instead.

³³¹ Apter, "Nkrumah, Charisma, and the Coup," 128-142.

charisma can fluctuate over time, owing in part to factors that transcend the personal qualities of leaders—he labels this temporal quality of charisma “charismatisation.”³³² Tracy Whalen’s analysis of the temporality of charisma in her work on charisma and gender draws on the concept of charismatisation.³³³ Another important theme in the literature is the relational quality of charisma. Far from being reducible to the illustriousness of the leader, charisma only develops in a social context where a given community is receptive to the leadership offered by exceptional individuals and is usually bound up with crisis.³³⁴ Indeed, the consensus among charisma scholars seems to be that charismatic leadership depends on the continued devotion of at least a small group of followers, serving as an affirmation of the essentially relational quality of charisma. Robert C. Tucker concisely articulates the collective and relational components of charisma:

It is presumably necessary to possess extraordinary qualities in order to be widely perceived over a period of time as the bearer of them. Yet Weber stresses the response of the followers as the crucial test of charisma. To *be* a charismatic leader is essentially to *be perceived* as such.... Furthermore, such recognition on the part of the followers must be reinforced from time to time by the leader’s demonstration of charismatic powers. He must furnish “signs” or “proof” of the exceptional abilities or qualities for the sake of

³³² Aristotle A. Kallis, “Fascism, ‘charisma’ and ‘Charsimatisation’: Weber’s Model of ‘Charismatic Domination’ and Interwar European Fascism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7, no. 1 (March 2006): 28-31, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1080/14690760500503185>.

³³³ Tracy Whalen, “Engendering Charisma: k.d. lang and the Comic Frame,” *Intertexts* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 12, https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/article/554320#info_wrap.

³³⁴ Tucker, “The Theory of Charismatic Leadership,” 81. Robert C. Tucker, for instance, identifies the frequent dependence of charisma on crisis as its situational component, which concerns the followers’ need for and openness to charismatic leadership.

which his followers render him their personal devotion; if he fails to do so over a long period, his charismatic authority may disappear.³³⁵

Indeed, it is this characteristic of charisma that accounts for its vicissitudes and inherent instability. Randall Collins' recent book-length study of charisma offers perhaps what is the most important and compelling iteration of this aspect of charisma by drawing upon and elaborating on the notion of "emotional energy" (EE). EE can be understood as the flow of positive and empowering emotions within individuals and depends on the success or failure of one's "Interaction Rituals" or social encounters and interactions.³³⁶ Collins' argument is as follows:

Persons with high EE make their way into the top levels of organizations, in business and finance, in politics and political and religious movements. Election campaigns tend to be about the EE levels of the candidates; boards of directors appoint executives who impress them with their EE. Stratification by EE also operates in intellectual and cultural worlds, where persons who are most energized by their work as cultural producers get themselves into the center of attention and reputation. Further down are persons who have enough EE to stay in the action; others find a routine area where modest amounts of EE will make do. Still others have crises of confidence, mini-scandals of local alienation, incidents of failed network ties that leave them among the depressed dropouts of social

³³⁵ Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership," 75.

³³⁶ Randall Collins, *Charisma: Micro-sociology of Power and Influence* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 114.

life. Money, power and status flow through successful IRs at the top end, and their lack is correlated with the proportion of failed IRs in one's life.³³⁷

Collins proceeds to argue that much of the time success in, say, the business world is determined by emotional domination, which is the mobilization of emotional energy in a way that preys on its absence in others or stifles it in them. Juxtaposing emotional domination with charisma showcases the crux of charisma. Charisma essentially consists in individuals' ability to build up emotional energy in others (crowds, employees, etc.) and derives its force from one's ability to energize others and draw on that energy to empower oneself emotionally in turn.³³⁸ Collins, in his discussion of the difference between charisma and emotional domination, gestures towards a normative understanding of charisma, which seems to be eschewed by the functional approach.

Despite the unabashed celebration of charisma in the business world, and perhaps the world of celebrities as well, given its potential for destructiveness, there is a very good reason to be wary of it and approach it with caution. Given the re-emergence of right-wing populisms across the globe in recent years, one is justified in looking on charisma with suspicion and doubt. Special attention in this connection has been granted to the American right-wing populist Donald Trump, whose approach to politics exhibits narcissistic and authoritarian proclivities.³³⁹ Other notable examples of narcissistic and authoritarian populism à la Donald Trump include Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Pierre Poilievre in Canada.³⁴⁰ Trump's

³³⁷ Collins, *Charisma*, 115.

³³⁸ Collins, *Charisma*, 116-118.

³³⁹ Douglas Kellner, "Donald Trump as Authoritarian Populist: A Frommian Analysis," in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, ed. Jeremiah Morelock (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018), 71-79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9hvtcf>.

³⁴⁰ Jack Nicas and Carly Olson, "Who is Jair Bolsonaro?," *The New York Times*, January 8, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/americas/jair-bolsonaro-brazil.html>; Patrick

unexpected presidency left many social scientists wondering about the role charisma played in his election and social influence. Although interpretations of the extent and nature of Trump's charisma differ, academic commentators do seem to agree in their assessment that charisma was at play in the construction of Trump's political persona and in his success. Steven Lukes, for example, argues that Trump seems to have met, at least to a certain degree, Weber's criteria for charisma, which include personal devotion on the part of followers (orbiting around the leader's personal qualities), perpetual reanimation (of charisma), temporariness, and irrationality.³⁴¹ Adding psychological nuance to Weber's understanding of charisma by drawing on Freud's notion of group psychology, Eli Zaretsky similarly affirms that Trump has indeed enjoyed a certain kind of charisma, and that refusing to recognize its import for his popularity could prove costly for those seeking to contain the Trump threat. Grasping the psychological processes underlying Trump's relationship to his followers, and "unfulfilled narcissism" in particular, is key to understanding and combatting his charisma.³⁴² Paul Joosse, for his part, offers a compelling analysis of the Trump phenomenon from a revisionist Weberian standpoint, deploying the notion of "counter-roles" to explain Trump's charismatic appeal.³⁴³ Pursuing the

Kingsley, "How Viktor Orbán Bends Hungarian Society to His Will," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/27/world/europe/viktor-orban-hungary.html>; Frank Graves and Stephen Maher, "Pierre Poilievre: The Secret to His Success," *The Walrus*, December 14, 2022, <https://thewalrus.ca/pierre-poilievre-the-secret-to-his-success/>.

³⁴¹ Steven Lukes, "Trump's Charisma," in *Antidemocracy in America: Truth, Power, and the Republic at Risk*, ed. Eric Klinenberg, Sharon Marcus, and Caitlin Zaloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 200-201, <https://books-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks6/degruyter6/2021-09-14/6/9780231548724>.

³⁴² Eli Zaretsky, "Trump's Charisma," *London Review of Books*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2019/june/trump-s-charisma>.

³⁴³ Paul Joosse, "Countering Trump: Toward a Theory of Charismatic Counter-Roles," *Social Forces* 97, no. 2 (January 2019): 927-937, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1093/sf/soy036>. By "counter-roles," Joosse means figures or personae who serve as foils, in various ways, to the charismatic individual, help define the social field within which she operates, and help legitimize her charisma (923-924).

question of Trump's charisma further would take us too far afield, but we will return to it shortly. Suffice it to note that the charismatic appeal of Trump and similar leaders, however tenuous and unstable, merits serious scholarly reflection. This brief discussion does raise the question, though, of how "ethical charisma," if it does indeed exist and is to serve as a progressive political force, differs from more insidious and destructive forms of charisma.

I would now like to turn my attention to a more explicitly political register. Terry Maley explores the various facets of Weber's theory of charisma, especially as it is articulated in the famous lecture entitled "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," while contextualizing it in terms of Weber's social and political backdrop and pointing up important tensions within it. For one thing, Maley situates Weber's ideas about charisma in relation to the broader theoretical enterprise of describing and critiquing social phenomena endemic to Western modernity, including bureaucratic rationalization, disenchantment, and value pluralism.³⁴⁴ Additionally, Maley argues that Weber's notion of the charismatic hero in this lecture is a response to the idiosyncratic political and social troubles besetting Germany following World War I. Weber's heroic leader is meant to help facilitate the functioning of parliamentary democracy in this tumultuous period, on the one hand, and help "contain it," on the other, by preventing popular displays of disaffection on streets, revolutionary activity, and so on.³⁴⁵ No wonder, then, that Weber's advocacy for plebiscitarian leadership is essentially tantamount to a call for *aristocratic* leadership.³⁴⁶ In his discussion Maley highlights the elitist and essentially classist character of Weber's notion of the charismatic hero, noting that for him, it is ultimately a person of means

³⁴⁴ Terry Maley, *Democracy and the Political in Max Weber's Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 111-113.

³⁴⁵ Maley, *Democracy*, 94-101.

³⁴⁶ Maley, *Democracy*, 102-104.

who is best suited for such a role since she is allegedly best able to reconcile the ethic of responsibility, which consists in the ability to maintain (an emotional) distance and exercise judgement, with the ethic of conviction, which concerns the emotions. In other words, this individual is uniquely capable of balancing the conflicting demands of reason and emotion.³⁴⁷ The leader in question is expected to make risky political decisions, which are to be judged through their consequences, and for which the leader has to take responsibility.³⁴⁸ To be sure, such a leader would not, and importantly, could not, attain the epic status of, say, biblical prophets. Nonetheless, only uniquely qualified individuals, endowed with aristocratic character traits and maturity, can hope to occupy this role:

Politics requires both passion and distance. It requires commitment to a cause and the ability to dispassionately weigh alternatives and take consequences into account. For Weber, the precarious, delicate balance between passion and distance, emotion and reason, can in the end only be sustained by exemplary figures. In modernity, this balance now must be sustained by the politician himself, as a heroic figure, since an actual aristocratic tradition has receded into the irretrievable past and no longer provides a template. In the absence of an aristocratic or even a middle-class tradition of leadership, and with the establishment of parliamentary democracy actively challenged by forces on the right and the left, it is up to the exemplary few to reconstitute a future *political* in the world of modern democratic politics.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Maley, *Democracy*, 114.

³⁴⁸ Maley, *Democracy*, 90.

³⁴⁹ Maley, *Democracy*, 110-111.

Maley argues that while Weber may not be calling for actual aristocrats to take on this role, he certainly has an aristocratic *type* in mind. The ideal aristocratic type constructed by Weber through his discussion in the lecture of heroes such as Pericles and Gladstone, moreover, is meant to preserve the possibility of the political while projecting its potentialities into the future.³⁵⁰ Toward the end of his reflections on the heroic politician discussed in “The Profession and Vocation of Politics,” Maley points to the need for a more democratic understanding of political agency, that is, an understanding of it that foregrounds egalitarianism, encouraging the agency of and empowering ordinary citizens.³⁵¹ In addition to this, Maley highlights the hypocrisy of Weber’s uncompromising rejection of charismatic leadership that did not conform to his view of what politics ought to look like. His hostility toward the revolutionary charismatic vision of Rosa Luxemburg is a case in point.³⁵² Maley’s discussion here ends somewhat ambiguously, with his closing remarks serving as both an invitation to envision a leaderless politics and a reminder that certain forms of charismatic leadership (Luxemburg’s, for instance) can help sustain the fight for radical visions of the future. This, again, begs the question, does charisma have a place in radical politics and can it promote emancipatory agendas?

Andreas Kalyvas answers this question in the affirmative. Kalyvas, like Maley, takes up the problematic of charisma in a political register, and his focus is the potentially instituting, revolutionary, and democratising power of charisma.³⁵³ In the chapter on Weber and charisma in his book *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, Kalyvas makes much of the relationship between charisma and revolution. He argues that it is precisely because Weber had

³⁵⁰ Maley, *Democracy*, 105-109.

³⁵¹ Maley, *Democracy*, 117-118.

³⁵² Maley, *Democracy*, 118-119.

³⁵³ Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65-78.

come to associate charismatic movements with revolutionary activity as such as well as with radical egalitarianism that he had grown suspicious of them, or, more specifically, of their destabilizing social effect.³⁵⁴ Weber himself recognized the radically democratic character of historical charismatic movements, such as Puritan sects, which insisted on practicing direct democracy.³⁵⁵ Kalyvas asks, why was Weber so adamant that charisma has faded away in modernity, when there was no compelling evidence to support this view? The answer, argues Kalyvas, is that Weber was suspicious of the alleged rejection on the part of revolutionary charismatic movements of a sense of responsibility, judgement, etc.—as per Maley’s exposition, all the qualities Weber associated with reason—and, in the case of the syndicalists in particular, of politics as such. Because Weber saw no way out of the iron cage of bureaucracy and law, as well as because of his suspicion of the “masses,” he was wary of movements that were liable to disrupt the political status quo and usher in disorder and potentially reactionary politics. In the end, precisely because of his awareness of the revolutionary character of charisma, he opted for a deradicalized conception of charisma, first by increasingly thinking about charisma in terms of individual heroics rather than collective manifestations of it, and then by stripping even the heroic individual of rupture oriented charismatic appeal and reducing her to the “cool headed” plebiscitarian leader tasked with managing the politics of the everyday.³⁵⁶

Kalyvas’ interest in democratizing charisma and “collectivizing” it is echoed in Chris Garces’ article on Occupy Wall Street, where he argues that the people’s mic practice, a crucial component of the general assemblies that served as the encampments’ deliberative forum,

³⁵⁴ Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 74-78.

³⁵⁵ Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 71.

³⁵⁶ Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 66-78.

exemplified not only a radically democratic impulse but also leaderfulness and charisma.³⁵⁷ This supposed charisma he seems to associate with each participant's identification with the "flow" of the movement as well as with speakers' subordination and accountability to the group.³⁵⁸ In effect, Garces seems to be saying that, in this context, charisma derived from the radical democratic and horizontal impulse that had become entrenched in the spirit of the encampments.³⁵⁹ Like Kalyvas, he emphasizes the egalitarian dimension of the revolutionary dynamism of charisma and charismatic movements, noting Weber's insistence that crowds are the natural register of charisma.³⁶⁰ Though Garces' argument seems unjustifiably sanguine, and the claim that what transpired in Zuccotti Park was essentially charismatic in character calls for a defense that is considerably more robust, the attempt to link charisma with democratic practices, as opposed to traditional authority, is interesting. In sum, Maley, Kalyvas and Garces' respective arguments call attention, in idiosyncratic ways, to the need to take theories of charisma in a more democratic direction, i.e., beyond the preoccupation with the heroics of idealized aristocratic types.

Perhaps the most fascinating discussion of the democratic potential of charisma, though, can be found in Paul Joosse and Robin Willey's seminal article, "Gender and Charismatic Power." Their argument here proceeds in several steps. First, the authors argue that Weber's understanding of charisma was informed by and often veered into masculinist tropes about the

³⁵⁷ Chris Garces, "People's Mic and Democratic Charisma: Occupy Wall Street's Frontier Assemblies," *Focaal*, no. 66 (Summer 2013): 96-98, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.3167/fcl.2013.66010>.

³⁵⁸ Garces, "People's Mic and Democratic Charisma," 96-98.

³⁵⁹ Garces, "People's Mic and Democratic Charisma," 91.

³⁶⁰ Garces, "People's Mic and Democratic Charisma," 97.

beast-like heroics of singular men.³⁶¹ Second, seeking to read Weber's notion of charisma against his own tendentious use of the concept (as it pertains to the aforementioned tropes), the authors acknowledge the cultural dimension of Weber's understanding of charisma—at times overshadowed by his romanticising of masculinist heroics—which militates against an overly biologicistic interpretation of it, that is, as primordial masculinity.³⁶² They caution, however, against veering towards cultural determinism, that is, determinism in the other direction. Such a misstep runs the risk of blunting the force of two aspects of Weber's conception of charisma that are indeed worth preserving, namely, “personal eccentricity” and “cultural antinomianism.”³⁶³ As they put it, “That is, the constitutive elements of ‘shared culture’—repertoires, expectations, values, a sense of precedent—are in themselves insufficient for capturing the ways in which charisma draws on the idiosyncrasies of ‘the personal’ as a means of disrupting enculturated expectations.”³⁶⁴ First of all, such a move would involve a fundamental conceptual error, for charismatic authority, as contrasted with traditional and legal forms of authority, is by definition revolutionary and effects a rupture with extant laws and values.³⁶⁵ It is predicated on the force of the unexpected, and therefore cannot be reduced to that with which charisma tends to be associated in the cultural imaginary. Cultural readings of charisma that lack nuance, in other words, risk conflating charisma with traditional forms of authority.³⁶⁶ Theoretically, since heroic

³⁶¹ Paul Joosse and Robin Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” *Theory and Society* 49, no. 4 (May 2020): 536-540, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1007/s11186-020-09392-3>. For an analysis of the gendered assumptions underlying Weber's notion of charisma, see Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* (Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988).

³⁶² Joosse and Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” 544-546. By “cultural,” the authors mean the concept's determination by social forces, tendencies, and perceptions.

³⁶³ Joosse and Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” 546-549.

³⁶⁴ Joosse and Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” 546.

³⁶⁵ Joosse and Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” 547.

³⁶⁶ Joosse and Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” 547.

masculinism is entrenched as a cultural and social norm, the notion of charisma entails the possibility of, and perhaps even invites, challenges to this norm. But the authors seem to be arguing that the effort to salvage the notion of charisma from cultural determinism is significant in a more practical and political sense. Because Trump's success can be largely attributed to charisma—attained not so much through traditional masculine heroics as through a cartoonish performance of them—there is an immediate need for charismatic figures who would enjoy a similar appeal—by virtue of a transgressive relationship to political mores, for instance—but in a manner that is essentially progressive.³⁶⁷ In other words, the emergence of progressive counter-charismatics is desirable as this would help contain the threat posed by Trump and others like him. They write, “If Trump is to be defeated, then it seems that it will not be by an overtly ‘establishment candidate,’ who may only prove to be a structural foil that serves to reinvigorate Trump's charismatic support. Rather, the person who bests Trump will most likely be someone who can, on their own account, cause shifts in the emotional-energetic economy that are truly challenging for Trump.”³⁶⁸ In addition to making the important point that the notion of charisma can be decoupled from masculinist biases—inclined though Weber himself was to indulge in such biases in his reflections on charisma—this article serves to remind us that charisma need not be an unwelcome phenomenon, and can indeed occur on the progressive end of the political spectrum. Openness to progressive manifestations of charisma might provide progressives with invaluable tools for combatting demagoguery. More than that, charisma, understood specifically in relation to personal eccentricity/non-conformity and shifts in social and cultural values, is not only not intrinsically masculinist but to an extent even invites challenges to masculinist norms

³⁶⁷ Joosse and Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” 549-556.

³⁶⁸ Joosse and Willey, “Gender and Charismatic Power,” 556.

and lends itself to redefinitions of the cultural field. This article reminds us that charisma has the potential to be a *progressive* countercultural force.

The ideas considered in these last few pages indicate that charisma could have a democratizing function, implicitly raising the question of what progressive charisma might look like. What *does* progressive charisma look like? If it is predicated on the possession of exceptional personal qualities by leaders, what is its relationship to collectives? Does progressive charisma develop through the same dynamics as those underlying the charismatic appeal of reactionaries and demagogues? Towards the end of this chapter, I consider the possibility that countercultural charisma from the left may constitute a distinct form of charisma and provide historical examples to support this thesis, incorporating conceptual innovations gleaned from the foregoing discussion of contemporary trends in the academic study of charisma, including concepts such as charismatisation, collective charisma, and democratic charisma. The two radical charismatic leaders I discuss approximate Fromm's ideal of productiveness, the chief characteristic of which is authenticity, which indeed seems to be the source of their charisma. The visions they offer are compelling precisely because they are supported by the personalities and character of those holding them up. The essentially humanistic content of their visions consists in the projection of the possibility of non-oppressive forms of social relatedness, where society provides the conditions and sustenance for individual authenticity. I would like to stress, however, that the thesis of radical countercultural charisma is quite speculative—though, as we shall see momentarily, not unfounded—and that the arguments outlined in previous chapters concerning ethical leadership do not depend on the validity of this hypothesis. In effect, my aim in proffering this argument is to make leftist thinkers and activists more receptive to charisma as a possible weapon against oppressive social structures and as an element of radical social

transformation. Before turning to an in-depth discussion of countercultural left charisma, I would like to further explore manifestations of charisma on the right and, using the insights of the Frankfurt School regarding the culture industry, its comingling with ubiquitous celebrity culture. This should make it possible to lay the groundwork for a new typology of charisma.

II. Towards A New Typology of Charisma

As we shall shortly see, charisma need not be fascistic, and left-wing charisma, or what I call ethical charisma, is diametrically opposed to fascistic charisma. It is clear enough that these two types of charisma constitute opposing poles on a spectrum and that there are many shades in between. Classical examples of charismatics on the fascistic end of the spectrum are, of course, Hitler and Mussolini, whereas, as we shall see, Malatesta and Marcuse are exemplars of ethical charisma. These two very different types of charisma can certainly be thought of as ideal types. Yet we are still left with the task of coming up with a more nuanced taxonomy of charisma, one that perhaps addresses *levels* of charisma in addition to types. For one thing, the charisma of Marcuse and Malatesta, though essentially rooted in productiveness, may also have partially derived from the respective forms of leadership they were enacting, as well as have been colored by the specificity of the characteristics of the audiences to which they addressed themselves.³⁶⁹ The fact that Marcuse was an academic and frequently addressed himself and mingled with the intelligentsia, broadly construed, whether through his addresses to the student movement, his personal relationships with students (i.e., Angela Davis), or his debates with other prominent thinkers and theorists, must have influenced the nature of Marcuse's charismatic appeal. His

³⁶⁹ Productiveness, of course, always presupposes a kind of relatedness, as has been made clear in the preceding chapters. What I have in mind here is not the characterological underpinnings of the relationship between leader and followers but their relationship as viewed through the lens of the social context in which the leader and followers find themselves and which to some extent shapes their interactions.

activities as a public intellectual position him as a kind of educational leader. Similarly, Malatesta's organizational proclivities and prowess suggest that the charismatic appeal he enjoyed had a slightly different coloring. Much more can be said about these differences, and, again, it would make sense to construct a typology of charisma with due regard to such differences, but that is a task for another time. Such a typology, though, would simply be a typology of charisma of the ethical or horizontal variety, but concerning, again, a different, secondary, and more superficial level of charismatic appeal.

What we must also touch on here, albeit briefly, because of the critical-theoretical quality of my arguments, is the issue of *celebrity* charisma, which cannot be ignored today given the ubiquity of celebrity culture, and necessarily adds a further layer of nuance to the classification of charisma proposed above. As far as the primary plane of charisma is concerned, in addition to ethical charisma, which exemplifies forms of leadership desirable on and reflective of the values of the radical left, and right-wing charisma, endemic to the style of leadership celebrated within far right political formations, which are anchored in diametrically opposed character types, namely, productive/democratic on the one hand and narcissistic and authoritarian on the other, an entirely different form of charisma seems to have begun to take shape through the mechanisms of the contemporary culture industry.³⁷⁰ This type of charisma may be thought of as *manufactured* charisma. It is a pervasive aspect of contemporary celebrity culture, rooted in the media attention and hype generated around celebrities, but seems to be especially pernicious and deleterious in contexts where the celebrities in question mediate people's understanding or perception of reality.

³⁷⁰ As I argue below, although this form of charisma seems to fit on the primary plane of charisma, it might be better to conceptualize it as blurring the boundaries between "primary" and "secondary" charisma.

If there is such a thing as celebrity charisma, we would do well to ask how it arises and what defines it.³⁷¹ We might postulate, by way of a preliminary answer, that celebrity charisma operates and ensconces itself through relatability, i.e., people's ability to identify with celebrities. In other words, it may work through its "just like us" quality. As Lauren A. Wright points out, in the case of celebrities who seek to enter the political arena, such as Donald Trump, this quality contributes to their "outsider" status: "Outsider status is closely linked to relatability because a lack of political experience is a key attribute celebrities have on the campaign trail that politicians do not."³⁷² This status in turn seems to encourage the perception that unlike seasoned politicians they are not mired in controversy and perhaps sordidness.³⁷³ Eric Cornelis Hendriks likewise speaks to the fact that a part of makes celebrities so appealing to the average person is her ability to identify with them.³⁷⁴ If relatability can be understood as at least partially grounding celebrity charisma, it can also be argued that it has a conformist function, for identification with celebrity charisma amounts to not much more than identification with the status quo and consequently to conformity. Hendriks recognizes the conformist implications of celebrity, noting that unlike Weberian charismatics, celebrities are not trail blazers or revolutionaries but mere ordinary humans who facilitate social integration. Indeed, according to

³⁷¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (Boston: Mariner Book, 2019), 182. It must be noted that Walter Benjamin demonstrated awareness of the emerging phenomenon of celebrity charisma in his famous work "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," though he notes its existence here only in passing.

³⁷² Lauren A. Wright, *Star Power: American Democracy in the Age of the Celebrity Candidate* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 82, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780429468797>

³⁷³ Wright, *Star Power*, 82-85.

³⁷⁴ Erich Cornelis Hendriks, "Breaking Away from Charisma? The Celebrity Industry's Contradictory Connection to Charismatic Authority," *Communication Theory* 27, no. 4 (November 2017): 357, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1111/comt.12120>.

him, this is one of the distinguishing marks of celebrity, which helps differentiate it from charisma.³⁷⁵ Hendriks categorically rejects the notion that celebrities are charismatics—outlining no less than 9 points of divergence while nonetheless noting affinities and overlaps—on the basis that what generates celebrity following is quite different from how the relationship of charismatics to their followers is formed, among other things.³⁷⁶ In addition to the conformist function noted above, for instance, unlike Weberian charismatics, who claim to possess extraordinary knowledge or skills, he posits that what makes celebrities prominent is the inordinate media attention they receive.³⁷⁷ Yet rather than adopting Hendriks’ view of the relationship between charisma and celebrity, perhaps ultimately it makes more sense to subscribe to the view, outlined by Turner, that celebrity charisma has ushered in a *new*, more *mundane* form of charisma.³⁷⁸

One of the reasons why this position is more compelling than Hendriks’ is that one of the major attributes Hendriks links with celebrity, psychological identification, is in fact shared with charismatics, if these are understood as revolutionaries, originators of new value systems, or simply those, like Trump, who promise to undermine the status quo. I have already indicated in my discussion of ethical charismatics that followers identify with ethical charisma because it speaks to values that they themselves hold or would like to hold. In a sense, such identification also presupposes relatability, the key distinction being perhaps that this type of identification is essentially *non-conformist*. It might be wise to attempt to nuance Hendriks’ claims, then, by adding to them the insight that identification with celebrities, on the one hand, and that with

³⁷⁵ Hendriks, “Breaking Away from Charisma?,” 357.

³⁷⁶ Hendriks, “Breaking away from Charisma?,” 361.

³⁷⁷ Hendriks, “Breaking away from Charisma?,” 361.

³⁷⁸ Stephen Turner, “Charisma Reconsidered,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3, no. 1 (March 2003): 23-25, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1177/1468795X03003001692>.

charismatics, on the other, presuppose and are anchored in different qualities. If in the case of authoritarian charisma, what people identify with is aggression and destructiveness, seeking to establish a symbiotic relationship with the leader,³⁷⁹ identification with celebrities is inherently conformist, though it certainly does not share authoritarian charisma's destructiveness, the exception being cases where celebrity and authoritarianism intersect—an example of which will be provided shortly. Of course, these conceptual distinctions are predicated on a new taxonomy of charisma, one wherein authoritarian charismatics are clearly differentiated from their ethical counterparts on the left on a continuum of productiveness. In any event, I contend that, contrary to Hendriks' claims, celebrity does constitute a kind of charisma, albeit in the more qualified, mundane, non-heroic sense spoken of by Turner. The danger of mundane, celebrity charisma consists precisely in the fact that it invites conformity with the status quo and entrenches its values, thereby undermining critical thinking and audiences' ability to imagine a different society.³⁸⁰ A good example of celebrity charisma and its negative ramifications are news anchors or "talking heads" whose celebrity personae seem to be accompanied by a kind of charisma, not least because of the authority given to them to comment on serious political issues and the fact that their audiences are silent—that is, they are not given the chance to question or respond to potential biases, etc., in the reports being presented. A subgenre of news reporting and

³⁷⁹ Fromm seems to link authoritarian charisma with conformism in *Escape from Freedom* (140-177). This is not a misstep, because conformism does constitute a part of the symbiotic relationship established between leader and followers. But this is a more hidden current of authoritarian charisma, or a secondary quality. On the surface, its representatives promise meaningful change and the overhaul of the status quo, but this is of course geared towards destructive ends. Hitler is a case in point.

³⁸⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). In effect, it can be approached as a cultural commodity manufactured by the "culture industry," first theorized by Horkheimer and Adorno in chapter 3 of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

commentary on television is the popular comedy-news blend, in which prominent tv show hosts meld comedy and satire with serious news reporting and commentary, such as *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. What is unique to this style of news reporting is that it relies on the charismatic appeal of the reporters or hosts in question to generate audience interest. But the charisma in question is almost entirely manufactured. It seems to be carefully managed inasmuch as the personae of the hosts are constructed and cultivated with an eye to generating certain kinds of reactions and emotions in the audience. These personas are almost a perfect blend of seriousness and humor, producing maximum entertainment value. Regrettably, the news consumption of the viewers of these programs is mediated by these entertaining personae. Through the sense of comfort and familiarity afforded by these charismatic personae the audience allows its judgements and conclusions about their news reports to be “guided” while their critical faculties are suppressed.

Another, more pernicious, example of manufactured, celebrity charisma is Donald Trump. Trump rode his success as an actor and a real estate mogul all the way to the White House and seems to have used the charismatic appeal of his celebrity to generate a political following.³⁸¹ As noted above, a few commentators have pointed out that Trump possesses charisma and that this may have helped him generate a following. But Trump seems to represent a novel kind of charismatic, standing apart from simple cases of celebrity charisma that include actors, musicians, as well as the news anchors and pundits mentioned above. Douglas Kellner, in a fascinating study of the Trump phenomenon, engages the problematics of authoritarianism

³⁸¹ Lauren A. Wright, “Trump’s Celebrity Status Helped Him Win the White House. Now it May Help Him Get Reelected,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/trump-celebrity-president-20190725.html#loaded>.

and celebrity separately in relation to Trump and his success. He offers an excellent analysis of the way a supine media buttressed Trump's success by enabling him to enact a "spectacle."³⁸² At the same time, he also brings a psychosocial, Frommian perspective to bear on the narcissistic and authoritarian trends exhibited by Trump.³⁸³ The concern that Trump has been using his celebrity influence to cover up or downplay misdeeds is clearly articulated by Lauren A. Wright. She argues that Trump's celebrity status has served as an alibi for his multifarious transgressions and that it has enabled him to feign ignorance on numerous occasions. Trump already had an air of celebrity about him prior to the presidential elections, which contributed to his popularity, but one could argue, as I think Wright does, that his celebrity persona has also been self-consciously exploited by him as he used it to make very serious political and social issues appear less consequential than they really are. His celebrity persona also allowed him to say and do outrageous things without having to face serious consequences.³⁸⁴ It generally enabled him to, and allowed him to get away with, acting cartoonish and silly during his tenure as president, qualities deriving in some measure from a kind of performativity that he seems to have mastered as a celebrity and which probably played no small role in his ascent to power.³⁸⁵ These analyses lay the foundation for what I would like to propose here regarding Trump's charisma, namely, that it consists of the *blending* of Trump's celebrity and authoritarian features. Trump's charisma combines celebrity with authoritarian qualities, containing both elements. One of the

³⁸² Douglas Kellner, *American Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), 3-12.

³⁸³ Douglas Kellner, *American Nightmare*, 29-39.

³⁸⁴ Wright, "Trump's Celebrity Status Helped Him Win the White House."

³⁸⁵ For an excellent analysis of how Trump's buffoonery interacted with his authoritarian proclivities, see Roger Southall, "Donald Trump and Jacob Zuma as Charismatic Buffoons," *Safundi* 21, no. 4 (October 2020): 382-393, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1080/17533171.2020.1832799>. This analysis, though insightful and intriguing, overlooks the implications of Trump's celebrity status for his charisma.

consequences of this blended charisma is that his authoritarian features appear less menacing and consequential than they actually are, obscuring the hostility Trump is intent on, and has at least partially succeeded in, stirring up in his followers. As such, it may well be that Trump represents a new type of charismatic, one who fuses the manufactured culture of celebrity charisma with authoritarian charisma.³⁸⁶ Arguably, this type of charisma is especially dangerous because the very real narcissistic and authoritarian qualities of the individuals involved are obscured and downplayed, potentially appearing less consequential and damaging than they are. In conclusion, I would like to note that it is not exactly clear to which continuum of charisma celebrity charisma (of the “purer” variety) belongs, the first, deeper and characterological level of charisma or the more superficial level that concerns the life context of the charismatic as well as the audiences they address and exhort. Perhaps what is peculiar to celebrity charisma is that it blurs the boundaries between character and context, which would imply that the obscuring of Trump’s authoritarian character has not been incidental to the celebrity charisma with which it mingled but is in fact a quality endemic to celebrity charisma. Although a solution to this conundrum concerning celebrity charisma cannot be offered here, it certainly constitutes fertile ground for future research and inquiry.

Let us now explore two examples of leaders who seem to approximate Fromm’s ideal of productiveness, as outlined in broad strokes in chapter 3, and the psychological foundations of which have been taken up in the previous chapter. The two examples are: one of the leaders of the New Left, Herbert Marcuse, whose ideas we encountered in chapter 3 and Errico Malatesta,

³⁸⁶ For an analysis of Trump’s authoritarian character structure that makes use of Frommian categories, see Douglas Kellner, “Donald Trump as Authoritarian Populist: A Frommian Analysis,” in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, ed. Jeremiah Morelock (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018), 71-79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9hvtcf>.

an anarchist figure from early 20th-century Italy who appears to have wielded considerable influence on the radical left at the time.

III. Errico Malatesta: Anarchist Leader

In his study of Malatesta's influence on the Italian left over a period of 3 decades (1890-1920), and especially during 1919 and 1920, since his charismatic appeal seems to have intensified during this period of radical agitation, Carl Levy maintains that Malatesta's charisma derived not so much from Malatesta himself as from the need generated by this radical moment for direction, guidance, and perhaps unity. Since Malatesta was not as compelling an orator as others on the radical left, he himself rejected the cult of personality that had been built around him, and, perhaps most importantly, he seems to have had limited influence over the direction and outcomes of radical activities and mobilizations, there are good reasons for thinking that Malatesta's charismatic appeal during the period of radical efflorescence known as *biennio rosso* was an expression of radicals' need for a symbol to rally around.³⁸⁷ That is the message conveyed by the following reflections of Levy's: "Why then was Malatesta such an attraction? A review of newspaper reports shows that Malatesta's charisma preceded his appearance at the podium. His person had become a symbol so that he did not have to say a word in the spring of 1920 to draw wildly enthusiastic crowds. In this respect his march through the anarchist heartlands of North and Central Italy were similar to Garibaldi's triumphal march in London in 1864."³⁸⁸ Given the evidence, perhaps Levy is right to argue that Malatesta's charismatic appeal was both fleeting and led to few tangible accomplishments. This position should not be taken to

³⁸⁷ Carl Levy, "Charisma and Social Movements: Errico Malatesta and Italian Anarchism," *Modern Italy* 3, no. 2 (November 1, 1998): 211-215, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1080/13532949808454804>.

³⁸⁸ Levy, "Charisma and Social Movements," 212.

mean, however, that Malatesta's *leadership* was not real or meaningful. For one thing, it seems clear that Malatesta's clandestine plans to return to Italy in 1919, despite the Italian government's refusal to grant him entry, were at least in part a response to the demand among fellow radicals that he be allowed to return to Italy. Even if Malatesta's presence was largely of symbolic value at the time, it should not be overlooked that he did indeed agree to accept that symbolic role, and at considerable personal risk to boot.³⁸⁹ Moreover, there is no question that Malatesta's history of leadership and commitment to anarchism figured prominently in the popular imaginary that sustained his symbolically grounded charisma.³⁹⁰ The decision to return to Italy in 1919, then, can be plausibly interpreted through the lens of the dialectic of countercultural left charisma that I will outline later in the chapter.

Malatesta was wary of the cult of personality that formed around him.³⁹¹ But he nevertheless did not shrink from his constituency's call for leadership when the need for it arose and confidently stepped into action, energized no doubt by Italian radicals' receptiveness to his leadership. Indeed, at this juncture, we would do well to ask, what qualities account for Malatesta's emergence as a leader of the radical left in the first place, if charisma in the classical Weberian sense was not a factor? Why did he occupy such a prominent position in the radical imaginary? This is where the notion that Malatesta availed himself of Socratic skills and methods assumes its full significance.

Levy notes that "Malatesta demonstrated an ability to create generations of cadres,

³⁸⁹ Levy, "Charisma and Social Movements," 208.

³⁹⁰ Luigi Fabbri, *Life of Malatesta* (1936), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-life-of-malatesta>; Errico Malatesta and Vernon Richards, *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1965), especially 201-240; Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1964-1982* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially chapter 12.

³⁹¹ Levy, "Charisma and Social Movements," 212.

through rational, Socratic dialogues” and suggests that he helped recruit anarchists to the cause through his educational approach.³⁹² He seems to have occupied a kind of pedagogical role through his leadership, enacting the principles of dialogical pedagogy with crowds, as an orator, as well as in his written work. As a speaker, Malatesta never sought to impress his audience with bombastic rhetoric or impassioned speeches, nor did he seek to manipulate his audience into accepting his positions by employing academic jargon; he was articulate, but his ideas were made accessible to all by the simplicity of his style.³⁹³ He sought to *persuade* his audience through calm and reasoned explanations. Malatesta’s Socratic approach to politics is exemplified in his famous pamphlet, *Between Peasants: A Dialogue on Anarchy*, which consists of a dialogue between two characters named Bert and George. Bert is uninformed about the key positions associated with socialism and anarchism, and George, Malatesta’s mouthpiece, sets himself the task of educating Bert on the subject. As he advances his arguments and explanations in support of socialism, Bert resists his interlocutor’s logic and pushes back against the desirability of the abolition of private property. Through patient argumentation and reasoning, however, George manages to convince Bert of the merits of socialism.³⁹⁴

Based on the commentary of some of his biographers, it is hard to treat his dialogical approach to oratory and politics merely as a stylistic choice and not to connect it to his character. Some of the comments of Luigi Fabbri, who appears to have been an intimate of Malatesta’s, in his biography, *Life of Malatesta*, are worth dwelling on as they shed light on Malatesta the person. For one thing, Fabbri notes the warmth of Malatesta’s personality and his kindness,

³⁹² Levy, “Charisma and Social Movements”, 213.

³⁹³ Fabbri, the section entitled “The Orator and the Writer.”

³⁹⁴ Errico Malatesta, *Between Peasants: A Dialogue on Anarchy* (Catania: Elephant Editions, 1981), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/errico-malatesta-between-peasants.pdf>.

suggesting that these personal qualities made his oratory more effective than his written words.³⁹⁵ Fabbri also notes that Malatesta was not one to indulge “wickedness” and was even capable of experiencing and expressing hatred when it was called for: “He hated the bad as much as he loved the good; hate, he used to say, is often an expression of love, though love and not hate is the true *factor* of human liberation.”³⁹⁶ So kind and sincere was Malatesta, apparently, that even his persecutors (guards, police officers) were affected by his presence.³⁹⁷ Fabbri further recounts several episodes indicative of Malatesta’s identification with the suffering of the socially marginalized and refusal to condescend to anyone.³⁹⁸ His rhetorical style was colored by the serenity of sincere conviction and an utter absence of pretentiousness: “His ideas and their exposition, the reasoning, flowed from the lips of the orator; the sentiment that animated him was communicated to his listeners through his words, his steady gesture, and above all the expression in his lively eyes. The auditorium sat riveted by that calm word, spontaneous, like the conversation of friends, with neither pseudoscientific pretensions, empty paradoxes, verbal attacks, invectives, nor barks of hate, and distant from all political rhetoric.”³⁹⁹ Malatesta’s sincerity and unpretentiousness shine through in the dialogical mode of engagement characteristic of his writing:

A professional or pedantic attitude is never to be found in Malatesta’s prose; no studied literary effects, no doctrinaire abstruseness, nor learned ostentations; no “difficult” words in scientific or philosophical jargon, nor citations of authors. Maybe this prejudiced it a

³⁹⁵ Fabbri, the section entitled “His Goodness/*Kindness*.”

³⁹⁶ Fabbri, “His Goodness/*Kindness*.”

³⁹⁷ Fabbri, “His Goodness/*Kindness*.”

³⁹⁸ Fabbri, “His Goodness/*Kindness*.”

³⁹⁹ Fabbri, “The Orator and the Writer.”

bit among that special category of readers who might understand what they read quickly and well — and conclude that the author must have no depth or originality, and who discover originality and depth only in what they can't understand, or only understand laboriously, when within there is no more substance than a few common banalities or the most utter vacuity masked by the most grandiloquent phraseology. But Malatesta's intention was also to react against this trend towards an obscurity of language in propaganda; and on the other hand his success in penetrating into new environments and in making converts among workers of the simplest tastes and the least rotted by an intellectualism that is as false as it is cheap, compensated him with interest for the failure to please a few lovers of beautiful, incomprehensible writing.⁴⁰⁰

As far as Malatesta's character is concerned, instructive is the short letter written by Malatesta shortly after his arrival in Italy in 1920, pointedly entitled "Thank You, But Enough Already" (*"Grazie, ma besta"*).⁴⁰¹ In the letter Malatesta criticizes the cult of personality built around him and encouraged by many of his anarchist comrades in Italy. If one is inclined to question the accuracy of Fabbri's account of Malatesta's character because of its unabashed celebration of Malatesta and because of Fabbri's proximity to him, the accounts offered by other biographers, though certainly more tempered, seem to corroborate Fabbri's general observations. Vernon Richards' (scattered and somewhat inchoate) biographical notes are a case in point.⁴⁰² Richards' notes highlight Malatesta's sincerity, humility, and commitment to producing conviction through calm persuasion. He writes, "Malatesta, as I see him, was neither a romantic nor a martyr type.

⁴⁰⁰ Fabbri, "The Orator and the Writer."

⁴⁰¹ Levy, "Charisma and Social Movements", 212.

⁴⁰² Malatesta and Richards, *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, 201-242.

But neither did he lack a sense of humour, or underestimate his worth as a political thinker and personality; but he was never an exhibitionist, nor a poseur. He obviously sought approval and a following but always on the strength of his arguments and never by compromising them or by encouraging the cult of *his personality*.”⁴⁰³ Like Fabbri, in addition to the unmistakable sincerity shining through his oratory, Richards also emphasizes Malatesta’s simplicity, warmth, love for humanity, strong sense of fraternity with his comrades, and complete identification with the people:

This is why it is wrong to portray Malatesta as the professional agitator and revolutionary, in fact, as well as in the interest of the anarchist movement. For if his life is as important to the anarchist movement as are his ideas, it is just because he was neither the professional revolutionary nor “the saint,” neither the “prophet” nor the “man of destiny.” Malatesta was always a comrade among comrades, ever seeking to forward his point of view but never seeking to dominate an argument with the weight of his personality. In this connection it is significant that as a speaker he never used oratorical tricks, just as in his writings he was always concerned with convincing readers by the clarity, the logic, and sheer commonsense of his arguments. And because of this approach, rather than in spite of it, all his writings, and I am sure his speeches too, are full of real human warmth for they are based on understanding of the problems (as well as the difficulties in overcoming them) that face all those who are willing and anxious to do something to radically change society.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Malatesta and Richards, *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, 212-213.

⁴⁰⁴ Malatesta and Richards, *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, 239.

The foregoing discussion of Malatesta's character suggests that he indeed possessed the core qualities associated with productiveness, including authenticity, sincerity, integrity, responsibility, love of life (expressed, for instance, in his refusal to take unnecessary risks for the sake of heroism), love for humanity (expressed, for instance, in his identification with the socially marginalized), kindness, and, perhaps most importantly, a categorical rejection of domination, exemplified in his insistence on being seen and treated as an equal among his friends and comrades. Although Levy insists that Malatesta's charisma played only a limited role in galvanizing crowds, we would do well to consider the possibility that Malatesta did indeed possess a certain kind of charisma, a charisma emanating from his productive qualities and being a manifestation in part of his non-authoritarian relationship to his followers. The irony of suggesting that an anarchist figure might serve as an example of ethical, and possibly charismatic, leadership on the left is not lost on the author.

Malatesta's style of leadership, it must be added, should be understood primarily in political and organizational terms, unlike, as we shall see in a moment, that of Marcuse, whose leadership consisted primarily in his acting as a public intellectual, an academic disseminator of socialist ideas, and a mentor to many prominent activists involved in the student movements associated with the New Left, some of whom would go on to become famous public intellectuals in their own right. Angela Davis is a case in point. These differences in leadership style may have resulted in a unique charismatic appeal in either case. But I would argue that this does not fundamentally alter the source or essence of these figures' charisma, which is the same in both cases: productiveness. Productiveness accounts for the way productive leaders relate to their followers, and it is this form of relatedness that is the wellspring of their charisma. At the same

time, it may well be that the more superficial components of their charisma, those associated with the vision they offer and their style of leadership, rather than with their underlying character structure, do result in some variations with respect to charismatic appeal. In any event, while their respective visions and styles of leadership differed, of course, they were equally robust and successful in energizing existing followers and galvanizing new ones. Both successfully roused an enervated left, Malatesta in Italy and beyond, and Marcuse mostly in the United States but wielding considerable influence elsewhere in the world as well. Both leaders managed to put forth powerful transformative visions in myriad ways, in some measure, as I have suggested earlier, through their own person (i.e., through their productive proclivities) but also by articulating the tenets of a future socialist society.

While Malatesta's activities as an anarchist leader in exile are too numerous to detail here, a glimpse of his multifarious activities is provided in Nunzio Pernicone's book on Italian anarchism, where he delves into Malatesta's fecund organizing work in exile. Pernicone traces Malatesta's various contributions to anarchist insurrection over an 8-year period.⁴⁰⁵ Upon arriving in Argentina, Malatesta emerged as an important labour organizer. Pernicone notes: "In his spare time, Malatesta organized an anarchist social-studies group, established ties with Spanish, French, and Belgian anarchist groups, *published La Questione Sociale* (1885-1886) in Italian and Spanish, and served as an active propagandist for the local workers' movement, especially the bakers among whom the anarchists were strongly represented."⁴⁰⁶ Pernicone goes on to note: "When Ettore Mattei, founder of an Italian anarchist circle in Buenos Aires in 1884, organized the bakers into a society for economic resistance, he asked Malatesta to write the

⁴⁰⁵ Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 244-257.

⁴⁰⁶ Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 244.

program. Malatesta's text served as the model for programs adopted later by the shoemakers, zinc workers, mechanics, and carpenters.”⁴⁰⁷ The two later went on to lead a bakers’ strike together that precipitated a series of work stoppages in other industries. Beyond this, Malatesta’s thought and advocacy seem to have had a considerable impact on the organization of Argentinian labour at large. While in Nice, which is where he and some comrades settled for a while after leaving Argentina, they launched a socialist newspaper called *L'Associazione*. Incidentally, Malatesta’s political thought seems to have reached maturity at around 1899-1890, when he began to call for the formation of an anarchist party and on anarchists to form a vanguard that would lead the revolution. This vision was, as Pernicone points out, quite unique among anarchists at that time. Following these activities, Malatesta also successfully mobilized anarchists and other socialists in a campaign against parliamentarianism (i.e., participation in electoral politics) in Italy, which also led to discussion of and assent from many prominent socialists to the formation of a revolutionary anarchist party.⁴⁰⁸ Malatesta’s leadership, as we can see, consisted of such diverse activities as the production of revolutionary pamphlets, delivering speeches, organizing strikes, the establishment of revolutionary newspapers, and spearheading antiparliamentary campaigns.

IV. Herbert Marcuse: Reluctant Prophet

I would now like to turn my attention to another figure on the radical left whose style of leadership, essentially democratic, and immense influence within the New Left lend credence to the argument that he wielded countercultural charismatic power of the leftist variety: Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse, along with his Frankfurt School colleagues, emigrated to the United States

⁴⁰⁷ Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 244.

⁴⁰⁸ Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 244-257.

from Germany as Nazism was gaining momentum. The core members of the Frankfurt School initially settled in New York, in 1933, and found a new home for the Institute for Social Research at Columbia University.⁴⁰⁹ Marcuse and his colleagues moved to California in 1942, and shortly thereafter Marcuse decided to explore new professional and intellectual avenues, at least in part due to differences of opinion with Adorno and Horkheimer, the other two leading members of the Institute. Marcuse would go on to work for the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), the forerunner of the CIA, in hopes of helping devise policies that would contribute to the denazification of Germany, and then for the State Department.⁴¹⁰ He subsequently worked at Columbia University's Russian Institute and then at Harvard.⁴¹¹ He taught at Brandeis University next, which is where he first met Angela Davis.⁴¹² Clearly, at this point in his career, Marcuse's thought was highly politicized. His masterpiece, which unequivocally rejected the political status quo and capitalism in particular, *One-Dimensional Man*, was published in 1964, while Marcuse was still at Brandeis.⁴¹³ The book ended on a pessimistic note. Having concluded that the working class had been integrated into consumerist society Marcuse was unable to identify a revolutionary subject and suggested that only those experiencing the utmost marginalization in society, namely, people of color, could perhaps be counted on to challenge established norms and institutions.⁴¹⁴ Just as the book was published, however, the civil rights and the antiwar movements were gaining steam. Despite the pessimism of *One-Dimensional*

⁴⁰⁹ Nick Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia; A Graphic Biography*, ed. Paul Buhle and Andrew T. Lamas (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2019), 29-31. Part of the argument that follows about Marcuse's unique style of leadership is introduced in a forthcoming book chapter of mine. See Maor Levitin, "Marcuse and Fromm: Friends Again?," in *The Marcusean Mind*, ed. Eduardo Altheman, Jina Fast, Nicole K. Mayberry, Sid Simpson (Routledge, forthcoming).

⁴¹⁰ Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia*, 41-45.

⁴¹¹ Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia*, 46.

⁴¹² Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia* 56-60.

⁴¹³ Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia*, 61-64.

⁴¹⁴ Douglas Kellner, introduction to *Herbert Marcuse: The New Left and the 1960s*, by Herbert Marcuse, ed. Douglas Kellner, vol. 3, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse* (London: Routledge, 2005), 8-9, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780203646007>.

Man, many radicals active in these movements looked to that book for guidance, in particular the arguments regarding the need to overhaul the institutions and norms of the existing social order. Perhaps more interestingly, Marcuse himself seems to have been energized by the emergent social justice movements at the time since he quickly abandoned the pessimism of *ODM* and set out to find, in an intellectually productive period from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, a new revolutionary subject.⁴¹⁵ Galvanized by the students' enthusiasm for his work, it was during this period as well that Marcuse came into his own as a leader of the student movement.⁴¹⁶ At this time, he served as a mentor to many young radicals, perhaps most notably Angela Davis,⁴¹⁷ as well as a public intellectual and an activist. Marcuse's activities during his New Left period were numerous. During his New Left period, he was frequently interviewed, addressing various political questions and issues in relation to his political outlook. His antiwar activism, for instance, consisted of articles and conferences in which he denounced the Vietnam war.⁴¹⁸ He supported the student uprising of 1968 in Paris, and was in fact asked by students to deliver a talk as he happened to be in Paris at the time.⁴¹⁹ He actively supported students on campus in various social justice initiatives, including the effort, spearheaded by Davis, to compel the administration of University of California San Diego to create a new college that would be more hospitable to students of color.⁴²⁰ Marcuse was also one of the prominent speakers at the legendary Dialectics of Liberation conference alongside R. D. Laing and Stokely Carmichael,

⁴¹⁵ Kellner, introduction, 3:10-11.

⁴¹⁶ Kellner, introduction, 3:10-12.

⁴¹⁷ Angela Davis, "Angela Davis on Protest, 1968, and Her Old Teacher, Herbert Marcuse," *Literary Hub*, April 3, 2019, <https://lithub.com/angela-davis-on-protest-1968-and-her-old-teacher-herbert-marcuse/>.

⁴¹⁸ Kellner, introduction, 3:16-17.

⁴¹⁹ Davis, "Angela Davis on Protest, 1968, and Her Old Teacher, Herbert Marcuse," *Literary Hub*.

⁴²⁰ Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia*, 79.

among others.⁴²¹ Another one of Marcuse's students, George Katsiaficas, recalls with enthusiasm that Marcuse's commitment to the student rebellion was concurrent with his activist work as well as his engagements as a public intellectual:

A lesser man would have been seduced (or broken) by his worldwide notoriety, yet through it all, Marcuse's inner sense of self prevailed. His confidence in his convictions remained unswerving, and although he was denied scheduled classes, he participated in a series of activist study groups, accepted as many of the constant speaking invitations as his time allowed, and, to my good fortune, worked individually (in my case on a regular basis) with selected students who sought him out. Behind closed doors, he was an active participant on campus and in community groups. Not only was he a public spokesperson for us, twice drawing over a thousand people at Socialist Forum lectures, conducting a seminar of sorts with 35 community activists on the need for utopian vision at the Left Bank (an alternative bookstore/craft center), hosting a fundraiser with Fred Jameson there, and debating Kate Millet at Stanford, he also involved himself in our struggles and dilemmas – or perhaps I should say that he let us drag him into some of our less than refreshing personal acrimony, recriminations, and crises.⁴²²

The writings produced by Marcuse during the New Left period were a response to the various movements of the day,⁴²³ and arguably were at the same time meant to provide them with

⁴²¹ Douglas Kellner, introduction to *Herbert Marcuse: The New Left and the 1960s*, 3: 32.

⁴²² George Katsiaficas, afterword to *Herbert Marcuse: The New Left and the 1960s*, by Herbert Marcuse, ed. Douglas Kellner, vol. 3, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse* (London: Routledge, 2005), 193, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780203646007>.

⁴²³ Kellner, introduction, 3: 11-12.

guidance and direction. This series of writings, which includes, for instance, the famous essay “Repressive Tolerance,” *An Essay on Liberation*, and *Counterrevolution and Revolt*,⁴²⁴ can therefore be at once characterized as activist and pedagogical. Marcuse’s attentiveness and responsiveness to the needs of and challenges faced by the emergent movements is evidenced by the fact that his positions and attitudes during this period were constantly in flux.⁴²⁵ As Douglas Kellner points out, Marcuse initially embraced confrontation tactics and “defensive violence” but later became wary of and rejected these, and the new focus of his thought, articulated forcefully in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, was political education and a United Front strategy, the latter being in effect a call for the mobilization of, and cooperation among, different progressive agendas (antiracist, feminist, ecological, etc.) in pursuit of a common cause.⁴²⁶ Kellner notes:

During the 1970s, Marcuse became open to and involved with a variety of social movements, connecting with the ecology movement, feminism, and other progressive perspectives which he attempted to link with the New Left and socialism. In a symposium on “Ecology and Revolution” in Paris in 1972, some of which we include in this volume, Marcuse argued that the most militant groups of the period were fighting “against the war crimes being committed against the Vietnamese people.” Yet he saw ecology as an important component of that struggle, arguing that “the violation of the earth is a vital aspect of the counterrevolution.”⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Kellner, introduction, 3: 12-30.

⁴²⁵ Kellner, introduction, 3: 12.

⁴²⁶ Kellner, introduction, 3: 12-16, 28-32.

⁴²⁷ Kellner, introduction, 3: 32. For a discussion of Marcuse’s engagement with ecological questions, see Timothy W. Luke, “Marcuse and Ecology,” in *Marcuse: From the New Left to the Next Left*, ed. John Bokina and Timothy J. Lukes (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 189-207, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1p2gksc.1>.

Kellner goes on to note that “Marcuse also became involved in the early 1970s in the women’s movement and in 1974 lectured at Stanford and then in Europe on ‘Marxism and Feminism.’”⁴²⁸ Indeed, at this time, rather than simply turning his newfound interest in the emergent women’s rights and the ecological movements, for instance, into an intellectual curiosity, Marcuse sought to engage them much more deeply and concretely.⁴²⁹ At any rate, the degree of correspondence between Marcuse’s thought, as manifested in various writings during his New Left period, and the trajectory of the radical movements of the day is remarkable:

In a sense, Marcuse’s political writings from 1964 to 1979 articulate successive theories and practices of the New Left. The individualistic “Great Refusal” advocated at the end of *One-Dimensional Man* corresponds to revolt that was fermenting within advanced capitalist societies, and its concluding pages valorize the civil rights struggles.

“Repressive Tolerance” and his late 1960s essays and lectures justify the confrontation politics that were emerging in the antiwar movement as a response to the Vietnam war.

An Essay on Liberation expresses the moment of revolutionary euphoria during the spectacular struggles of 1968, and *Counterrevolution and Revolt* articulates the political realism of a movement which saw in the early 1970s that it was facing a long and difficult struggle to transform the existing society.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ Kellner, introduction, 3: 33.

⁴²⁹ Kellner, introduction, 3: 32-33.

⁴³⁰ Kellner, introduction, 3: 34.

Marcuse insisted during a 1977 BBC interview with Bryan Magee that he rejects the notion that he is the father of the New Left—a moniker assigned to him by some from the student movement.⁴³¹ He did so again during another interview, the transcribed and published version of which is entitled “Marcuse Defines His New Left Line.” Here he affirms that he does not consider himself the student movement’s spokesperson, and that there is no more than “a point of contact” between his work and the movement.⁴³² But it is undeniable that Marcuse had indeed already exercised considerable influence over the student movement at this point, having been warmly received by the leaders of the student movement in Germany in 1967 and invited to deliver a talk by the students in France during the uprisings of May 1968.⁴³³ Of course, he was also already mentoring Davis at this point and teaching her about the importance of applying philosophical insights to the political realm.⁴³⁴ He would continue to have considerable sway over the New Left into the early 1970s through his writings, lectures, and activist work. Since it is indisputable that Marcuse was a leader of the New Left, it is worth asking, what was Marcuse like, from a characterological point of view? What made him so popular among the students? These questions are relevant because it seems obvious that Marcuse’s leadership and appeal cannot be separated from the kind of person that he was—his character, specifically.

Marcuse made himself available to the students around him, not only as a teacher, but also as a mentor and a friend. As Angela Davis notes in her autobiography, Marcuse almost

⁴³¹ Herbert Marcuse, interview by Bryan Magee, *Men of Ideas*, BBC, 1977, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KqC1lTAJx4>.

⁴³² Herbert Marcuse, “Marcuse Defines His New Left Line,” in *Herbert Marcuse: The New Left and the 1960s*, ed. Douglas Kellner, vol. 3, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse* (London: Routledge, 2005), 101, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9780203646007>.

⁴³³ Kellner, introduction, 3: 17-18.

⁴³⁴ Davis, “Angela Davis on Protest, 1968, and Her Old Teacher, Herbert Marcuse,” *Literary Hub*.

immediately agreed to tutor her in philosophy upon her arrival at Brandeis.⁴³⁵ So impressed was she with Marcuse's teaching style and mentorship that she decided to pursue her doctoral studies with him at UCSC when he joined the faculty there.⁴³⁶ Moreover, unlike Adorno, with whom she had studied in Frankfurt, Marcuse encouraged her activist work.⁴³⁷ He not only supported Angela Davis's radicalism, which included affiliation with the communist party,⁴³⁸ but in fact came to her defense and supported her when she was (wrongly) accused of a crime.⁴³⁹ He visited her in prison, for instance, while she was awaiting trial,⁴⁴⁰ and also exchanged letters with her.⁴⁴¹ He also publicly insisted, as part of his involvement in the "Free Angela" campaign, that Davis was incapable of committing the crimes with which she was charged.⁴⁴² His staunch support of Davis earned him the animus of Governor Ronald Reagan and UCSD's administration, which eventually forced Marcuse into retirement.⁴⁴³ That the appeal of Marcuse's radicalism consisted in large part of his camaraderie and solidarity with his students is evidenced by the commentary provided by some other notable students of Marcuse's, Andrew Feenberg and George Katsiaficas. Feenberg recalls with fondness his friendship with Marcuse, discussing their conversations and

⁴³⁵ Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1974): 134-35, <https://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/publication/2053859?accountid=15182>.

⁴³⁶ Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 145.

⁴³⁷ Angela Davis, preface to *Herbert Marcuse: The New Left and the 1960s*, ed. Douglas Kellner, vol. 3, *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse* (London: Routledge, 2005), xi.

⁴³⁸ Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia*, 88.

⁴³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, "Angela Davis and Herbert Marcuse," in *Herbert Marcuse: Marxism, Revolution and Utopia*, ed. Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce (London: Routledge, 2014), vol. 6, chap. 23, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4324/9781315814797>.

⁴⁴⁰ Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 307.

⁴⁴¹ Thorkelson, *Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of Utopia*, 90-91.

⁴⁴² Herbert Marcuse, "Angela Davis and Herbert Marcuse," 6. His remarks to that effect are part of what appears to be one of his talks for the "Free Angela" campaign. Notes from this talk are reproduced in volume 6 of *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*.

⁴⁴³ Andrew Feenberg, "Marcuse and the Rise of the New Left—With Andrew Feenberg," *Below the Radar*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dws3FT1h3OY>.

debates about important philosophical texts, for instance, as well as recounting their shared adventures in Paris in 1968 during the student uprisings of May.⁴⁴⁴ Kastiaficas' remarks about his relationship with Marcuse, however, are much more vivid and evocative. Discussing his and Marcuse's involvement in protesting the CIA's presence on campus, which catalyzed the development of a short-lived anti-CIA movement, he recalls the following episode:

Less than a year after it was founded, the Anti-C.I.A. Coalition was dissolved by a majority vote of its members. Internal differences and mistrust had compounded our problems. Around the same time, a coup was accomplished within *Natty Dread*, the campus newspaper which had been the movement's voice (Marcuse never liked the name), and the new editors refused to print any part of an article I wrote (with Herbert's help) summing up the legacy of the year's political struggles. Needless to say, I was crushed. Once again, it was Herbert's insight and wit which helped me get through a difficult time. "What's become of your article?" he asked with a sheepish grin on his face and a copy of the *New Indicator*, as the paper was renamed, in his hand. "That newspaper is the organ of one fraction of the movement," I replied, "if indeed we can still speak of a movement." Disgusted and depressed, I went on: "What's the point of putting all this energy into creating organizations when they don't last?" In one of those rare moments when Herbert answered me directly rather than asking another question, he said quite plainly: "Marx never created a lasting organization. Besides, organizations which last

⁴⁴⁴ Andrew Feenberg, "Marcuse and the Rise of the New Left—With Andrew Feenberg," *Below the Radar*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dws3FT1h3OY>.

seldom remain revolutionary. Political experience and education are cumulative, and with enough time, their quantity produces qualitative leaps.”

However struck I was by his logic, I remained unconvinced. “What of us?” I demanded. “Without a unifying organization, how do we help each other move ahead personally and politically?” I reminded him of the animosity one of our most active members faced from her family because, in their eyes, her political involvement had hurt her education and career. I questioned whether or not her political involvement had been a positive force in her life. Neither of us spoke. Finally, Herbert relit his cigar, and as he puffed on it, we let our minds wander. Some questions apparently have no answers, some concerns are not easily put to rest, although I am happy to report twenty years later that the person we discussed is teaching and writing in the field of mass communications at a major university.⁴⁴⁵

Indeed, it seems that an important part of his relationship to his students consisted of teaching them to question and challenge authority in addition to teaching them to recognize oppressive social structures. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he taught them, not only as an intellectual but through his person and his activist work, to recognize irrational authority as being inextricably bound up with domination, and to actively resist it. His anti-authoritarian attitude to teaching and mentorship, alongside his refusal to position himself as the father or “guru” of the New Left—which of course also speaks to his humility—distinguished Marcuse’s leadership. Marcuse’s authority within the ranks of the New Left derived from his willingness to challenge *established* authority. Like Malatesta, he insisted on an egalitarian relationship with his

⁴⁴⁵ George Katsiaficas, afterword to *Herbert Marcuse: The New Left and the 1960s*, 3:196-197.

followers. In the final analysis, then, Marcuse's insistence on challenging authority and treating his students and other radicals as equals seems to have constituted the core of his charisma. He projected, through his person, the potentialities of a new sensibility, and the possibility of a non-repressive form of authority was an essential part of that radical, transformative horizon. And the more "authority points" he had accrued as a result, the more closely he identified himself with the movement and the more insistent he was on his equality with members of the New Left and the students in particular. His students' accounts of their relationships and interactions with him, which suggest that he was invested not only in their political work and education but in their personal growth and success as well, in conjunction with his well-documented willingness to put his career on the line, among other things, to help secure Davis' acquittal, intimate that it would not be a stretch of the imagination to think that Marcuse was extremely kind, compassionate and caring.

These characterological qualities, with anti-authoritarianism serving as the lynchpin, point to a productive character orientation, and seem to have been amplified over time as Marcuse settled into his role as a leader of the student movement, making him the bearer of left countercultural charisma. Douglas Kellner's insistence that Marcuse was energized by the student movement, in conjunction with recognition of the undeniable energizing effect Marcuse had on his students in turn, suggests that a kind of feedback loop was generated within this relationship that contributed to Marcuse's authority and charisma. This hypothesis seems to bear out Randall Collins' argument regarding the centrality of emotional energy to charisma. Collins' discussion of emotional energy obscures, however, the importance of leaders' characterological make up for how they acquire emotional energy from their followers and return it to them, in other words, how they relate to their followers, and for what they do, and are capable of doing,

with their authority once they become charismatic. The lack of psychological nuance in Collins' concept of emotional energy results in an inadequate understanding of the different social trajectories of charisma. A charismatic leader's character will determine whether the emotional energy they generate in their followers deepens emotional dependence and immaturity over the long term or encourages independence and maturity, whether, in other words, it is psychological maturity that will be promoted in the followers or its opposite. The lack of psychological nuance in Collins' discussion of course also obscures the importance of identification for the relationship between leaders and followers. Charismatic leaders like Hitler and Trump, by virtue of their character structure, can only offer identifications that encourage psychologically regressive qualities, such as conformism, dogmatism, aggressiveness, an inability to distinguish between reality and illusion, paranoia, and so on. Countercultural charismatic leaders on the left, like Marcuse and Malatesta, on the other hand, promote productive qualities such as kindness, nonconformity, intellectual openness, receptiveness to alterity, and suspicion of irrational authority, which of course is linked to a distaste for manipulation and abuses of power.⁴⁴⁶ Character and identification should be expected to determine, in the final analysis, whether a charismatic leader's influence will have a democratizing, anti-authoritarian effect in terms of how the group relates to itself and the world at large or lead to and buttress authoritarian and

⁴⁴⁶ For an insightful analysis of why Bernie Sanders might be considered an ethical leader in accordance with some of the criteria set out here, see Tomas Havranek, "Leader Evaluation Report: Bernie Sanders as a Transformational Leader," *ivmehareketi.com* November 16, 2022, <https://www.ivmehareketi.com/2022/11/16/leader-evaluation-report-bernie-sanders-as-a-transformational-leader-tomas-havranek/>. Other potential examples of ethical leaders are Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, and Angela Davis, to name only a few. Elaborating on and substantiating this claim is a task for another time.

anti-democratic tendencies.⁴⁴⁷

The insistence of even some of Marcuse's students, like Andrew Feenberg, who has stated on at least two separate occasions that Marcuse was not and should not be seen a leader of the New Left, should not be accepted uncritically.⁴⁴⁸ It is precisely Marcuse's commitment to engaging with his students and others on the New Left as equals that distinguished his leadership, but at the same time perhaps made it difficult to *recognize* him as a leader. His unapologetic rejection of irrational authority, which seems to have been anchored characterologically, positioned him as a challenger of authority and leadership rather than as leader. But this was, of course, part of his style of leadership—a very important and progressive style, one that the left could greatly benefit from today as it could help promote a “general will” among radical activists along with a sense of solidarity and of course one that potentially constitutes a response to the threat of right-wing populism and fascism.⁴⁴⁹

V. The Leadership-Community Dialectic: The Evolution of Left Countercultural Charisma

Our two case studies can guide the formulation of three general, and somewhat speculative, ideas about the nature and specificity of countercultural charisma on the left. First, if there is such a

⁴⁴⁷ Fascist and authoritarian charismatic leaders generate a regressive, individuality-suppressing sense of belonging whereas their counterparts on the left promote a form of belonging wherein individuality is acknowledged and nurtured.

⁴⁴⁸ Andrew Feenberg, “Marcuse and the Rise of the New Left—With Andrew Feenberg,” *Below the Radar*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dws3FT1h3OY>; Andrew Feenberg, “The Essential Marcuse,” (lecture, D.G. Wills Books, San Diego, California, January 11, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFbypIr4RmQ>).

⁴⁴⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, in *Jean Jacques Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 147-149. For a recent application of Rousseau's concept of the general will, see Peter Hallward, “The Will of the People: Notes Towards a Dialectical Voluntarism,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 155 (Summer 2009): 17–29, <https://www-radicalphilosophy-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/article/the-will-of-the-people>.

thing, it likely derives from the thoroughly reciprocal quality of the relationship that obtains between productive, radical leaders and their followers. With regards to the leadership in question, a developmental trajectory that draws sustenance from its relational moorings unfolds. In fact, its emergence and development is marked by a *dialectical* quality.⁴⁵⁰ Its evolution roughly follows the following trajectory: A given community provides an opening for the emergence of ethical-democratic leadership. This opening can, in line with Weber's formulation of charisma, be broadly conceptualized as a moment of crisis associated with a lack of direction, consistency, purpose, and unity around or agreement on values in a progressive community or communities.⁴⁵¹ These lacks manifest concretely as a weak or altogether absent general will (a weak sense of community, solidarity, etc.), an absence of organization, and may entail infighting and strife. Individuals may decide to step into a leadership role because they are attuned to the existence of such a value vacuum. The community, then, can be said to call out to someone capable of giving it guidance and direction, someone capable of serving as a leader. This call of the progressive community manifests itself concretely in its *receptiveness* to leadership. The community welcomes the individual in question, entering into a relationship of sorts with her. Being called upon to represent, articulate and develop the will of the community carries with it a great deal of responsibility and requires responsiveness.

Second, the countercultural left charismatic leader has to approximate Fromm's ideal of

⁴⁵⁰ In this context, what I mean by "dialectical" is a reciprocal, mutually augmenting movement between two ends or poles.

⁴⁵¹ As we have seen, Marcuse's leadership helped give form and direction to the values articulated by the New Left as it sought to differentiate itself from the traditional left. In the case of Malatesta, his leadership offered unity and direction to the otherwise fragmented Italian anarchist movement.

productiveness, which has been discussed in some detail in the previous chapters.⁴⁵² Only productive leaders can relate to their followers in the egalitarian manner described above. If the individual or individuals who step into this value vacuum as leaders are ethical and more or less productive, embodying progressive values, left countercultural charisma should become a possibility. Incidentally, accepting the call and entering this relationship should lead to the development and amplification of those qualities of the emerging leader's that helped her generate a following in the first place. Another concomitant of ethical or productive leadership is the ongoing transformation of members of the community itself, as they are rendered more productive, identifying with and taking on, if only gradually, certain characteristics of the leader, specifically, those relating to her productive character structure and enactment of rational hierarchy. As we can see, then, ultimately both the leader and the community are transformed in this dialectical process of leadership formation. And indeed, the more productive the members of the community become, the less need there is for leadership. The more productive everyone in the community becomes, the more conducive to democratic practices is their character structure. As they internalize the leader's productiveness,⁴⁵³ the followers themselves become leaders, in

⁴⁵² I say approximates because productiveness exists in degrees rather than as a character structure that one either does or does not possess; those whose character structure is productive to a relatively high degree, such that their relationships with others stand out as qualitatively distinct and idiosyncratic, can be thought of as productive. This is so at least in our contemporary capitalist context, since once productiveness becomes the dominant character structure in society, or the social character, the qualitative difference in question can be expected to become the social glue, as it were, of the new society. For a discussion of Fromm's concept of social character, see Lauren Langman and George Lundskow, "Social Character, Social Change, and the Social Future," in *Erich Fromm's Critical Theory: Hope, Humanism, and the Future*, ed. Kieran Durkin and Joan Braune (Dublin: Bloomsbury, 2021).

⁴⁵³ It must be reiterated here that at issue is not identification with static characteristics of the leader's, but rather with their ability to have certain kinds of relationships with people. Productiveness, again, is not a bundle of emotions and predispositions, but an active form of relatedness. What the leader's followers internalize or assimilate here is precisely this capacity for a mature form of relatedness, which can occur only through entering into a mature

the sense of being capable of relating to others in the community in a responsible and creative, rather than destructive, manner. If this change were to take root on a large scale, which can only happen through the efforts of many leaders in different places and communities, capitalism, and other structures of domination, will have been significantly undermined. At any rate, the distinguishing mark of charismatic left leadership, which is equivalent to countercultural left leadership, is this mutually determining transformation undergone by leader and followers. Importantly, traces of this dynamic of the evolution of left charisma should be discernable in the leader's style of leadership once they have come into their own as leaders. Since it would be difficult to trace with precision the complex process of the development of the form of leadership under consideration here, the dialectic in question can be extrapolated from the fact that charismatic left leaders continue to exhibit a high degree of responsiveness to their constituencies throughout their career as leaders.

Third, such charisma differs fundamentally from the charisma of right-wing strongmen, whether countercultural or not, not only in content but with respect to developmental trajectory. Naturally, no such dialectic exists in the relationship between leaders of the right and their followers, though right-wing leadership too no doubt works through and promotes a certain kind of relatedness. This relationship seems to embody the dynamic of what Fromm terms symbiosis in *Escape from Freedom*. In the symbiotic relationship, the leader and her followers reinforce dependence in one another, each hindering personal growth and development in the other.⁴⁵⁴

relationship with the leader. Identification here denotes not the ingestion of certain qualities but the experience and assimilation of a different way of relating to others.

⁴⁵⁴ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1994), 156-157.

Conclusion

This dissertation covered a wide range of interdisciplinary themes and ideas, all centering on a critique of horizontalism, the question of ethical leadership, and the revitalization of key Frommian ideas, especially those of productiveness and rational authority. It is simultaneously meant as a contribution to political theory, social psychology, sociological theory, charisma studies, and leadership studies. It proceeded in several steps in working towards the articulation of a novel theory of left leadership, with the ideas of Erich Fromm and the Frankfurt School in the foreground. Each of the five chapters served a particular function towards this end.

Chapter 1 delved into the problematic of horizontalism, outlining several criticisms of this approach to politics and organizing among activists on the radical left, which over the past few decades has emerged as a kind of new political common sense. The focus of these criticisms was Occupy Wall Street, whose organizers, self-identified horizontalists such as David Graeber, steered the movement in a horizontalist direction. Anticipating ideas explored in chapter 2, this discussion was followed by the argument that anarchism, which is one of the theoretical pillars of horizontalism, has a problematic attitude to authority, one that merits critical analysis, not least because it can be identified as one of the main factors in Occupy's withering. It then provided an overview of recent trends in leftist scholarship that pertain to the question of leadership. It was noted that although there are radical scholars who are not hostile to leadership, and even some who hint at the need for some kind of leadership on the left, their explorations of the subject generally fall short of developing a robust and comprehensive theory of leadership. This includes some of the main representatives of "socialism from below," a brand of socialism that centers a dual power approach to social change with a strong emphasis on grassroots movements and activism as a way of empowering workers and other marginalized groups. Some

of them seem to acknowledge the need for leadership but leadership is not thematized in their writings. The only (notable) exceptions, perhaps, are Slavoj Žižek and Jodi Dean, who appear to espouse a more traditional, Leninist conception of leadership, which is flawed for many reasons, not least of which are its neglect of prefiguration and a conservative acceptance and valorization of political hierarchies. At the same time, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, through their work on populist leadership, have helped normalize leadership as a potential avenue for radical social change.

Chapter 2 approached the problem of horizontalism from a different vantage point, offering critiques of the theoretical assumptions that underlie it by engaging with the thought of representatives from radical democratic theory and poststructuralism, namely Sheldon Wolin and Michel Foucault, in turn. Both Wolin and Foucault, it was argued, fail to differentiate between power and domination, despite the fact that there are moments in the work of both that gesture at the need to do so. It was then suggested that Amy Allen comes the closest in contemporary critical political theory to articulating a nuanced and compelling theory of authority owing to her efforts to distinguish between power and domination. Although her work helps lay the groundwork for a more sustained treatment of the issue, she herself does not explicitly develop a theory of ethical authority. Towards the end of the chapter, Jacques Rancière's promising ideas about authority, and the possibility that they might serve as a foundation for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between authority and ethics, were discussed. It was concluded that although these ideas do constitute an advance over radical democratic theory and poststructuralism's attitudes to authority, they ultimately fall short owing to Rancière's inconsistent approach to authority and failure to think through the implications of the notion of ethical authority systematically. In a word, the case was made in this chapter that a more robust approach to the question of ethical authority is needed.

Chapter 3 attempted to demonstrate that Erich Fromm, a neglected figure in the Critical Theory canon, helps address and remedy this lacuna through his concept of rational authority. Although this concept is also discussed by some of the other members of the Frankfurt School, it is foregrounded in Fromm's thought and elaborated upon in a few of his writings. The chapter delved into the famously divisive Fromm-Marcuse debate to make the case that Fromm's thought, with the concept of productiveness, which is inextricably bound up with psychological maturity, in the forefront, is generally more conducive to the articulation of a robust theory of transition in connection with the problematic of radical social transformation. At the same time, it was argued that apart from this difference, Marcuse's and Fromm's ideas should be understood as complementary. The Great Refusal in particular complements Fromm's notion of productiveness, providing a theory of the rejectionist social backdrop against which productiveness can take root and proliferate. It was further argued that Marcuse, in works such as *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, offered important criticisms of a nascent horizontalism on the New Left, which peaked in the late 1960s and began to lose steam in the early 1970s, had interesting, albeit very sketchy, ideas about the importance of leadership for an organized and effective radical left. Although Marcuse can perhaps be faulted for not articulating a theory of prefiguration and psychological maturity as explicitly as did Fromm, there are certainly hints of the desirability and possibility of psychological maturity, as well as of the need for a prefigurative politics, in his work, ones that serve as valuable complements to Fromm's ideal of productiveness. His call for a "new sensibility" in particular has clear affinities with the prefigurative quality of Fromm's concept of productiveness. Either way, his ideas are invaluable for sustaining and nourishing the radical imagination. One of the implications of this discussion

is that overcoming the animosity surrounding the Fromm-Marcuse debate is key to the articulation of a robust and compelling theory of transition. At any rate, the chapter concluded with a consideration of why Fromm's concept of rational authority, in conjunction with that of productiveness, might serve as a foundation for a theory of ethical authority and, in turn, ethical leadership.

Chapter 4 provided an overview of trends in the recent business ethics literature around leadership, arguing that although this literature has many interesting insights to offer about ethical and authentic leadership, its ideological character prevents it from recognizing that corporate settings are inhospitable to leadership that is genuinely ethical given the overriding preoccupation with profit in such settings. Individuals who are genuinely productive can neither flourish nor lead in corporate milieus. Ethical leaders must be able to question and give their assent to the goals they encourage their followers to internalize, and this is simply not possible in the corporate world. In other words, authentic ethical leadership can only exist on the radical left owing to its commitment to the elimination of class oppression, i.e., those conditions that militate against the proliferation of productiveness in society and impede human flourishing. It was then argued, via a detour into the Frankfurt School's ideas about paternal authority and identification, and Jessica Benjamin's critique of them, that identification is indeed one of the phenomena that can and should be normalized by ethical leadership, albeit in a very specific, mature form, which is buttressed by the ethical leader's productive character structure. She can supply a healthy ego ideal and thereby sustain a healthy form of identification, one that promotes individuation, open-mindedness, and a healthy relationship to the community. In an attempt to flesh out the political implications of the concept of rational authority, I then outlined its core assumptions around power, responsibility, and relationships. This outline was followed by a discussion of three

examples, grounded partially in Fromm's writings and partially in his work as an activist and a public intellectual, that point to a lurking theory of ethical authority. These are his notion of the prophet, the concept of the revolutionary character, and Fromm's own outlooks and attributes as a political leader. I then outlined the core constituents of ethical leadership on the left, articulating and focusing on three specific criteria. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of Fromm's transformative vision, which, alongside his productive character structure (expressed in his ethical political outlook, among other things) and commitment to the radical transformation of society, positions him as an ethical leader alongside Marcuse and Malatesta.

Chapter 5 provided an overview of recent literature in the field of charisma studies, which helped me set up the claim that ethical charisma is distinct from fascistic charisma and that the former might serve as a progressive countercultural force. It was noted that ethical charisma presupposes productiveness and engenders mature identification. Before proceeding to discuss two examples of ethical charisma, I examined the phenomenon of celebrity charisma and a hybrid form of charisma in which celebrity charisma blends with authoritarian charisma, listing Donald Trump as an example. I then proposed a new typology of charisma, suggesting that character structure is a deeper and more constant source of the charismatic appeal of charismatics, whether on the left or on the right, while superficial manifestations of charisma have to do with more contingent factors, such as the audiences charismatics interact with and the milieux in which they find themselves. On a surface level, the charisma of a political organizer on the left may differ from that of a leftist public intellectual, but the deeper and less variable source of their charisma is the same, i.e., productive character structure. My two case studies for ethical charisma were Herbert Marcuse and Errico Malatesta; both had a productive character structure and, by virtue of their tendency to decenter themselves within the respective social

movements they helped lead, exemplified a unique form of leadership, that is, a horizontal one. Chapter 5 concluded with a discussion of what I term that leader-community dialectic, in which I sketch the conditions that encourage the emergence of ethical and charismatic leadership on the left, with a focus on the dynamics that make followers in this configuration receptive to leadership and necessitate responsiveness and responsibility on the part of leaders. I would now like to offer a few broad reflections on ethical leadership as well as future directions for research by way of conclusion.

The model of leadership I have attempted to articulate here constitutes a marked departure from traditional understandings of and approaches to leadership on the left, including the Leninist one. It distances itself from hierarchical modes of organization, valorizing participatory and democratic forms of socialist activism.⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, it should be understood that the model of leadership I have sketched throughout these pages places a strong emphasis on prefiguration, that is, the principle that socialist activism ought to reflect the values and commitments of the society it seeks to usher in. I have also sought to contest the assumption that leadership must be understood in relation to or somehow restricted to the sphere of party politics or organizing. Ethical leaders on the left, as I envision them, run the gamut from public intellectuals or educators, like Herbert Marcuse, to staunch organizers of labour, like Errico Malatesta. Arguably, Bernie Sanders represents a more narrowly political form of left leadership given his relationship to party politics. He falls short of ethical left leadership as I define it in that he does not embrace socialism, assuming that this is indeed the case. He also lacks a

⁴⁵⁵ For an interesting discussion of Lenin's intent to valorize centralization rather than and at the expense of direct democracy, as manifested in his idea of the professional revolutionary, see Robert Mayer, "Lenin and the Concept of the Professional Revolutionary," *History of Political Thought* 14, no. 2 (1993), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26214357>.

transformative vision. After all, as outlined in chapter 4, what distinguishes the leadership of ethical leaders on the left is their productive character structure, their ability to produce a transformative vision, and their commitment to socialism. The latter two criteria of ethical leadership are closely connected. A further potential marker of ethical leadership is charisma, but, unlike the three criteria just mentioned, it is not a necessary feature of ethical leadership. And when it does accompany ethical leadership, it is present as an outgrowth of productive character structure. It must also be understood that the theory of ethical left leadership I have sketched here is chiefly concerned with identifying the qualities that make ethical leaders on the left ethical, making ethical leadership more readily identifiable, making radical activists and scholars more receptive to it, and delineating the specificity of ethical leadership in relation to other forms of leadership. A more developed theory of left ethical leadership would entail concrete ideas as to what leadership in social justice movements ought to look like, foregrounding the three criteria of ethical leadership mentioned above, and how leaders should relate to their followers, though it should be understood that the dynamics between leaders and followers in the context of ethical leadership as I envision it would look very different from traditional dynamics of leadership and followership. As was the case with Marcuse and Malatesta, ethical leaders are eminently adept at decentring themselves, so much so that they are hardly recognizable as leaders. A more fully developed prescriptive theory of ethical leadership is one avenue to explore in connection with the ideas presented here.

Another avenue is charisma studies. Further engagement with the problematic of ethical charisma is needed to fully understand its implications for the study of charisma as well as its political import. It is also appropriate to reiterate at this point that my model of leadership is not predicated on the existence of ethical charisma. The thesis of ethical charisma is, at best,

speculative. Ethical charisma, even if it does exist, should not be interpreted as a constituent of ethical left leadership. It is rather to be seen as a potential outgrowth of it that is expressive of ethical leaders' underlying characterological qualities. Its importance to left leadership lies in its being a potential marker of ethical leadership, making it easier to recognize it and distinguish it from both fascistic charisma and manufactured, or otherwise inauthentic, charisma.⁴⁵⁶

Unfortunately, because these forms of charisma are much more frequent, the very concept of charisma tends to be associated either with authoritarian qualities or inauthenticity and fakeness.

While I have briefly sketched the dynamics that give rise to and sustain the authority of charismatic ethical leaders in chapter 5, a similar analysis is needed of how authority emerges on the far right and how it relates to the phenomenon of fascistic or authoritarian charisma. In fact, the emergence and role of authority on the far right is undertheorized and merits closer investigation. Future analyses of far-right authority should take care not to overemphasize the importance of charisma to understanding how authority emerges, operates, and entrenches itself there. Although charisma is certainly often at play in fascistic movements, it is not the only

⁴⁵⁶ Charisma can be manufactured in different ways. Hugo Chávez's, charisma, for instance, was clearly manufactured. It was manufactured in the sense that it was knowingly constructed and perpetuated. Caitlin Andrews-Lee makes a compelling case in support of this claim. She argues that he constructed his charisma by positioning himself as a hero to his followers in Venezuela, by strategically implementing some successful or apparently successful reforms, and by constructing a symbolic narrative in which he glorified himself and vilified his enemies. See Caitlin Andrews-Lee, "The Power of Charisma: Investigating the Neglected Citizen-Politician Linkage in Hugo Chávez," *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 11, no. 3 (2019): 302-304, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X19891472>. In chapter 5 I showed that Donald Trump's charisma is also manufactured, but in his case it has been manufactured and propped up by the celebrity culture in which Trump participates. In any event, Trump's case is complicated by the fact that his celebrity charisma is intertwined with and contains elements of authoritarian charisma. It should be clear at this point that I am contrasting manufactured charisma with authentic, or productive, charisma. I would further venture that all charismatics who seek power tend to construct their charisma in one way or another. In other words, their charismatic appeal is nothing more than a ruse.

salient quality for understanding the dynamics of authority in them. We can speculate at this juncture that authority on the far right, as is the case with left-wing counterpart, entrenches itself through a given community's receptiveness to leadership, which is precipitated by some kind of crisis. In contrast to left-wing authority, however, fascistic authority perpetuates itself through relations of dependence and works through domination rather than relations of mutuality. Indeed, domination becomes both means and ends, one implication of which is that true individuation becomes impossible in this context. Moreover, a sense of responsibility and obligation is altogether absent from fascistic leadership. Given the rise of authoritarian leaders across the globe today, the delineation of left ethical leadership is all the more relevant. I hope that this study can contribute to that goal.

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